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BETTER PHOTOGRAPHY

#116

WINTER 2024



Cover photo by Pedro Jarque Krebs.
See article on page 22.

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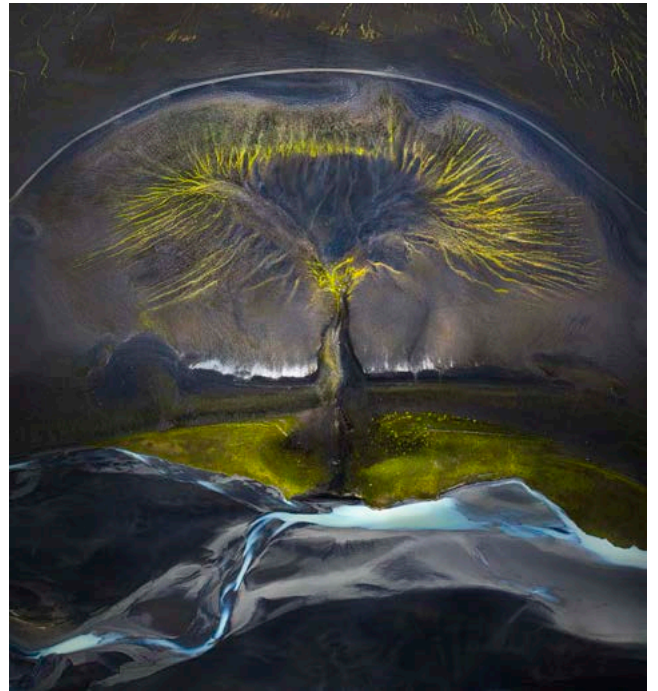


Photo by Isabella Tabacchi - ILPOTY 2023B



Photo by Nick Melidonis

KEEPERS

PHOTOGRAPHER: Alph Leydon

LOCATION: Una Peaks, Antarctica

CAMERA: Nikon Z7 Mark II with Nikkor Z 24-120mm at 66mm.

EXPOSURE: 1/1000 second @ f8, ISO 64

SITUATION: Photographed from the deck of Aurora Expedition's Sylvia Earle, we had just finished a BBQ dinner (yes, they do strange things like this in Antarctica) as we sailed north from the Lemaire Channel. Storm clouds were approaching, but when the sun broke through, everyone ran for their cameras as we passed the magnificent Una Peaks (which have another colloquial name that shall not be published in a family magazine like this).





KEEPERS

PHOTOGRAPHER: Tony Burslem

LOCATION: Gold Harbour, South Georgia

CAMERA: Nikon Z8 with Nikkor Z 100-400mm at 100mm

EXPOSURE: 1/2000 second @ f11, ISO 280

SITUATION: Strong winds and too much swell meant we weren't able to launch the Zodiacs for an afternoon session, so our captain took us out into an ocean playground full of massive icebergs. Then, when we turned around to look back to shore, the setting sun and a fierce mountain storm created an incredibly atmospheric backdrop. Note the line of light along the horizon (windswept spray backlit by the sun) and how it separates the icebergs from the background.





Sigma 15mm f1.4 DG DN Diagonal Fisheye

Do we all go through a wide-angle phase? Or once you've used a wide-angle lens, are you hooked for life? The latter is probably the more common experience and once you've tried one wide-angle lens, invariably you're interested in something a little wider for the next one!

A fisheye is sort of the ultimate wide-angle lens, featuring a 180-degree angle-of-view when measured diagonally (from top left to bottom right). However, to achieve this incredible angle, there are some compromises, mainly the curvature of the subject in order to fit everything in. If you hold the camera level, the horizon will be straight enough, but everything else will be curved. And usually, the telltale sign of a fisheye is when the camera is pointed up or down to produce that wonderful curved horizon.

So, if this is you and you're using a Sony or Leica camera, you can grab Sigma's latest 15 mm fisheye lens with a remarkable maximum aperture of f1.4. No, Sigma isn't looking for a shallow depth-of-field effect, rather it's allowing astrophotographers to shoot with shorter exposure times and capture the full curvature of the night sky.

At around \$3795, this is not a cheap optic, but reports of its optical performance are very complimentary. The lens includes a high-response linear actuator AF system, a lens comprised



of FLD, SLD and aspherical elements, a rounded 11-blade diaphragm and a removable, rotating tripod foot – as often you'll mount the lens with the camera attached, rather than mounting the camera. At 1400 g, this is no lightweight optic and will be a specialist purchase.

Interestingly, while Sigma makes no mention of filters (which will be challenging to put on the front, but no doubt NiSi has a solution), there is a slot on the rear element for dropping in something, so we're figuring if you want to use filters, it's certainly an option.

Phase One XC

Although announced way back last year, we've still to see the smallest Phase One camera in the flesh, although it is believed there is one currently in captivity in Australia! Most readers will read about the XC like car lovers read about the latest Ferrari or Rolls Royce, and while prices for the digital backs aren't currently on the Specular website, the XC body with a 23 mm lens (and no digital back) is around \$35k. Add in the digital back and you're well on your way to a dream camera.

So why the XC? Currently, you can purchase an XF SLR design and the XT technical model, which is very similar to the XC, but it offers shift camera movements. And the XT is a bit bigger, so if you want to shoot with a 'compact' camera, the Phase One XC is it!

The XC seamlessly integrates shutter controls with the digital back and without the need for external accessories or cables. The shutter and aperture controls are integrated into the IQ4 touch screen, so really the only button on the XC is the dual-action shutter button. Half a touch activates the camera and LCD viewing screen, while full push captures the photo. At the heart of the system is the X-Shutter. The X-Shutter is an intelligently integrated and electronically controlled shutter, born out of Phase One's Geospatial applications and experience. The X-Shutter is purpose-built for Phase



One's cameras – and due to Copal no longer making the old mechanical shutters, something had to be invented!

Key to the camera's amazing image quality is the digital back (your choice) and the optical design of the Rodenstock HR 23 mm. There's no doubt that, even with Phase One's 150-megapixel IQ4 back, the image quality is in the Rolls Royce league!

If you're in the market, you already know who to call.

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Fujifilm X100VI

As good as the X100V is, the Fujifilm X100VI is even better! In the hand, the X100VI is beautiful to hold. It feels substantial. The finish is actually very beautiful. If the model V was a cult camera, we can see no reason why the model VI won't continue the trend. People obviously love the way you turn a physical dial to set the camera's settings and despite modern automation, nothing has changed a photographer's requirement to deftly control the aperture, shutter speed, ISO and exposure compensation, all available externally on the X100VI.

So, where this small camera (521 g) with its 23 mm f2.0 lens (approximately 35 mm equivalent on a full-frame sensor) fits in with our smartphones comes down to a simple requirement: image quality. As good as smartphones are, a proper camera is better and if the focus of your activities is photography, why wouldn't you carry a small camera like Fujifilm's X100VI?

So, what's new? First up, Fujifilm's latest 40.2-megapixel sensor is making an appearance. Fujifilm claims the X-Trans CMOS 5 HR sensor has an enhanced image-processing algorithm that boosts resolution without compromising signal-to-noise ratio. Second, there's a new in-body image stabilisation (IBIS) system to keep images sharp and videos stable. The five-axis IBIS mechanism offers up to 6.0 stops of



compensation. And third, it's easier to connect the camera to your smartphone with the new Fujifilm XApp, so transferring and sharing your images is a snack.

The camera also features AI autofocus subject detection and eye tracking, so even when shooting from the hip you're going to nail the focus. And if you like to get your exposures exactly right in-camera, there are 20 film simulations based on Fujifilm's legendary film emulsions to help you. The asking price for the new Fujifilm X100VI is \$2899.

Nikon on the Moon

Apart from purchasing RED video cameras recently, Nikon has been wining and dining NASA as well, with an agreement surrounding its Z9 cameras.

Technically, Nikon has entered into a Space Act Agreement with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to support the agency's Artemis campaign with the development of a Handheld Universal Lunar Camera (HULC). And that camera is the Z9 which will be used on the upcoming Artemis III mission by the crew on the surface of the Moon.

Reports Nikon, the Moon surface and lunar environment is a harsh and unforgiving vacuum, which poses multiple technological and engineering challenges. The surface is subject to massive temperature swings, with constant bombardment of cosmic radiation that can damage electrical components.

Sounds pretty straightforward to a magazine writer, but no doubt there are lots of things to think about. For instance, in order for astronauts to comfortably and easily use the Z9 when wearing the thick gloves of a spacesuit, a custom grip is being developed by NASA, which includes common controls such as a shutter release, playback and still/video capture switching.

To protect the camera, lens and housing during EVA (extravehicular activities), a special 'thermal blanket' will be created by NASA, which is similar to those currently used during exterior spacewalks by International Space Station astronauts. A selection of NIKKOR Z lenses will also be used for the mission and those that will be actively used on the Moon will be modified to withstand the harsh lunar environment.



Like the cameras used by the Space Station crew, the firmware will also be specially modified for this mission. These modifications include accounting for the different circuitry and expanding noise reduction to lower shutter speeds to account for the effects of constant bombardment of cosmic radiation that the crew and gear encounter.

Okay, so not so straightforward!

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Canon imagePROGRAF Printers

Canon has released three new inkjet printers featuring an 11-colour inkset with a Chroma Optimiser. They are the imagePROGRAF 60-inch PRO-6600, 44-inch PRO-4600 and 24-inch PRO-2600. None of them will sit on a desktop, even the 2600 coming with an elegant stand, so this is not seen as a disadvantage unless you live in a very small apartment.

And these new printers are designed with photographers in mind. The newly developed LUCIA PRO II pigment inks are claimed to offer better resistance to light fading, up to 200 years (depending on the paper you're printing on as well, of course). The printers have also improved black density by using low reflectance pigments, so by changing the formulation and material of matte black ink, the colour gamut of the dark region was expanded by the adoption of a newly designed image table. The new inkset can also work to help produce and preserve prints as a crystalline wax has been added to the ink, giving the printed surface better resistance to abrasion-caused scratches on glossy and semi-glossy media. And the reformulated Chroma Optimiser is designed to give the surface a clear coat of transparent ink that helps suppress bronze phenomena and reduce uneven glossiness. (This is something you can see when you look at the prints at an angle – and it's definitely a great thing to fix, especially if you print on glossy papers.)

Inside the new printers, a newly developed ink sensing system periodically monitors the accuracy of the ink ejection and automatically maintains optimal ink placement position



on the page to ensure high image quality. The intelligent media handling function automatically detects the paper type, width and estimated remaining amount of paper, plus it completes the paper feeding process in a shorter time than previous models. All in all, Canon appears to have done a great job in taking the craft of printing to a new level.

Canson Arches Papers

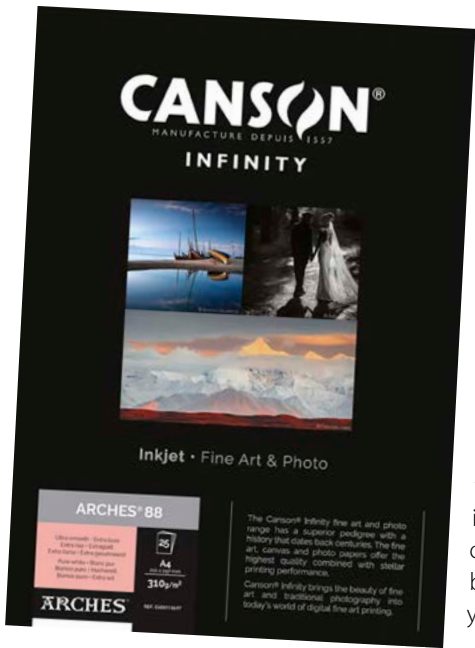
When you look at the range of Canson Infinity printing papers, you'll notice a few of them are marked as being Arches. Arches has been known as a papermaker since before photography was invented, in fact, since 1492 and today is the only paper mill in France using a traditional cylinder mould process for all its papers, including Arches 88. Made of 100% cotton, it offers an ultra-smooth surface finish and a soft and supple feel to the touch. It has a pure white tone and is completely free of any optical brighteners (OBAs).

Canson suggests it produces prints with superb colour rendition, deep blacks and natural whites, offering photographers the opportunity to create images with a superb tonal range, excellent highlights and mid tones. Mind you, it says something similar about all its papers!

So what else is available? BFK Rives Pure White is also a 100% cotton

paper with a beautifully balanced soft grain that brings out the detail in every image. The printmaking paper base is also manufactured on a traditional cylinder mould press at the Arches paper mill and the paper has a very soft and supple feel, a pure white tone and is completely free of any optical brighteners (OBAs). In comparison, the 'standard' BFK Rives White (not Pure White) has a 'natural' white paper base and is considered slightly warmer. It might be more suitable for some portraiture, for example.

Which paper do you choose? This is the problem, isn't it? If you can visit a Kayell showroom in Sydney or Melbourne, they have a display of all the different papers for close and artistic inspection. Chances are there's more than one paper that will suit your purposes – but at least you'll see the differences in your choice.



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IS 102MP WORTH IT?

We shoot with Fujifilm's GFX100 II and some of the newer lenses...

Is this the type of image quality that would make you happy?

In March, we were lent a Fujifilm GFX100 II camera with three lenses to play with – and as in the past, we were very impressed. So, the question becomes, do you need 102-megapixel photographs and if so, why? And can you afford it?

Price Issues

There's no doubt the GFX100 II is expensive, the body retailing at \$12,599 in Australia. Add in the lenses that we were sent

for review – the GF 32-64 mm f4 R LM WR (on special as this is written for \$2749), the GF 30 mm f5.6 T/S (the tilt-shift lens at \$6799) and the GF 80 mm f1.7 R WR (also on special for \$2749) – and the kit price is around \$25k.

Let's compare this with a 50-megapixel Sony A1 (\$8,999) with a FE 24-70 mm F2.8 G Master Lens (\$2799), an FE 85 mm F1.4 G (\$1899) and a let's say a nice wide-angle zoom as Sony doesn't have a tilt-shift lens, the FE 12-24 mm F2.8 GM (\$4849) and we're spending \$18k or so. We can do similar numbers for Canon and Nikon and there's no doubt that the larger format Fujifilm GFX100 II is 25% to 33% more expensive than a high-end, full-frame mirrorless camera system.

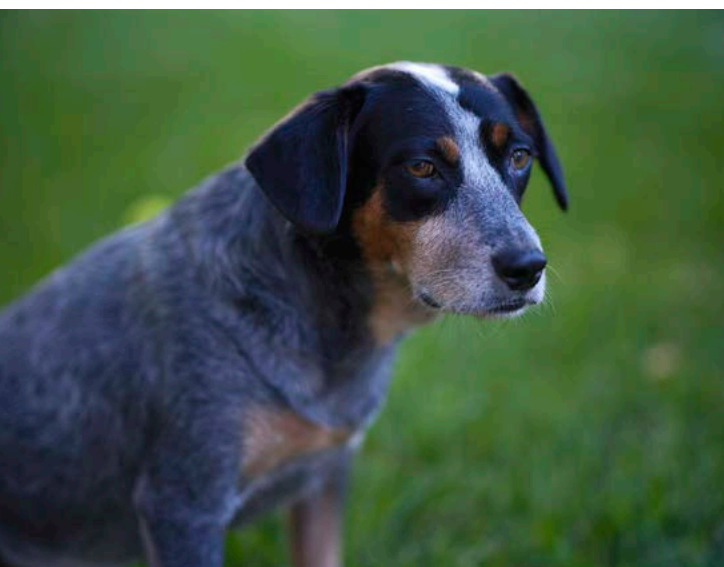
Still, when you're spending this sort of money, you're quite likely to extend yourself to get the camera you really want. And if you really want that larger sensor, perhaps it's not out of reach after all.

Replacement Issues

So, let's say we've purchased a GFX100 II outfit. What are you going to do with your existing, smaller format camera system?

When it comes to medium format systems like Phase One and the dearly departed Hasselblad, there was a significant performance difference. The simple fact is you don't carry a Phase One XF or XT to the football/netball match on a Saturday morning to photograph the kids – it's not designed for that type of photography. Yes, you could use it, but there are other cameras that will make the job a whole lot easier, including the GFX100 II.

This is where the Fujifilm equation is a little different to the medium format alternatives. The GFX100 II has most of the creature comforts you find on smaller mirrorless models, so



If you're not sure what a 102-megapixel sensor can do, check out the detail in this file and compare it to the uncropped image. This image is straight out of the camera with no processing, apart from being turned into a JPG using Capture One.



it really can replace your other camera. You're very unlikely to take both the Fujifilm and a Sony/Nikon/Canon outfit to the Saturday morning game, it would be one or the other. But if you're a keen sport, wildlife or nature photographer who needs fast frame rates and super-fast autofocus, you may choose to keep your other camera system because while the GFX100 II will hose down your subject at eight $\frac{1}{2}$ frames per second, this doesn't match the 15 to 30 fps available elsewhere. The GFX100 II isn't a replacement for some specialist applications.

If you were travelling to Africa, for example, would you take a GFX100 II or a Sony/Nikon/Canon? I think it depends on the outcomes you're after. If you're a keen wildlife photographer, then a 50-megapixel image with a 600 mm on a full-frame camera is going to produce a closer result than the GFX100 II with a 250 mm lens, a 1.4x converter and cropping the file. Having said that, even if the Fujifilm couldn't get quite as close, would this be a problem if you used Topaz Gigapixel AI to up-rez your file afterwards? Of course, the whole idea of shooting with a large sensor is not having to up-rez a file, but if you had to, is there another way of solving your long lens issue – and these days I think there is.

In my limited experience, the GFX100 II's autofocus is very fast and accurate, but the AF on my Fujifilm X-H2 is faster still, being mindful that the X-H2 is working with smaller lenses which perhaps require less effort to focus. And the subject focus on the GFX100 II is also very fast and accurate, but perhaps not quite as accurate as the X-H2 or X-T5. Then again, I'm comparing a 102-megapixel image with a 40-megapixel image and that's not fair, because the 102-megapixel file is going to show any focusing deficiencies much more clearly. The actual focusing systems could be identically specified and so the differences come down to the formats themselves.

Which brings us back to the replacement issue. Yes, the GFX100 II can easily replace your full-frame camera, but what is it about the larger format files that would make you want to? We'll look at this shortly, but first, what about size and weight?

Physical Issues

A large number of GFX users are possibly part of the older generation and, as we get older (not that I am, of course), we are a little more concerned about loading up our camera bag with too much gear.

Size and weight were always an issue in the film days and while digital cameras are generally much smaller these days, there's no doubt the GFX100 II is larger than a top of the line Sony, Nikon or Canon. This much is obvious. The camera has to be larger because it has a larger format sensor. Similarly,



Fujifilm GFX100 II

the lenses have to be larger because they need to cover a larger sensor.

Our question is, how much larger? How much heavier?

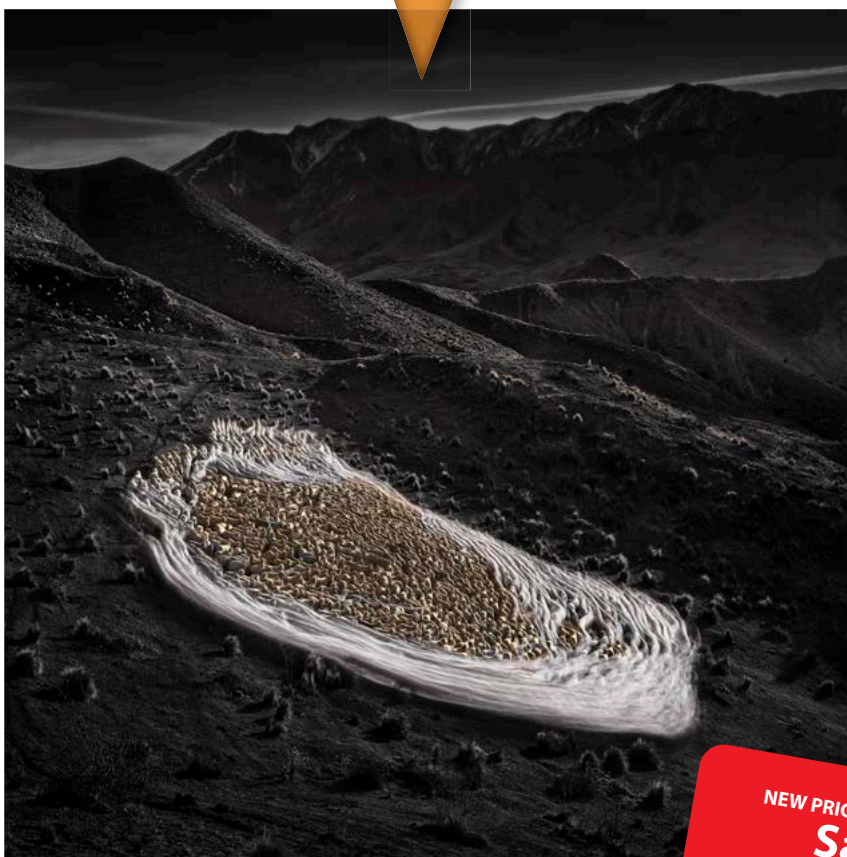
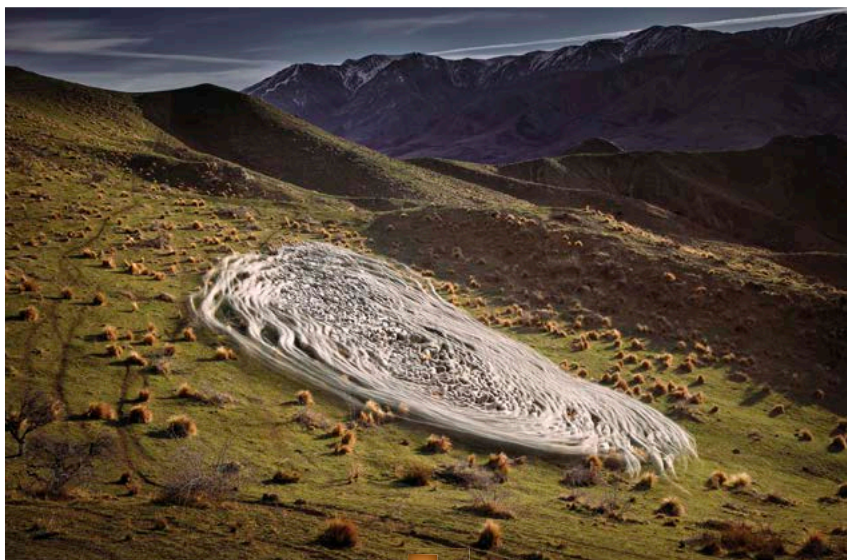
The GFX100 II measures 152x117x99 mm and weighs 1030 g. The Sony A1 measures 129x97x81 mm and weighs 737 g, so a useful size saving and a very good weight saving. However, the Nikon Z8 measures 144x119x83 mm (so only a smidgen smaller) and weighs 910 g. And if we look at Canon's professional R3, it weighs 1015 g and measures 150x142x87 mm, so much of a muchness.

When it comes to lenses, most of the GFX glass is physically larger than a full-frame lens and that's just physics. You need a larger lens to throw a larger image circle to cover the larger sensor. And a larger lens with more glass means a heavier lens.

The correct answer is that, if you need a lightweight camera, then Sony, Nikon, Canon and Fujifilm all provide much smaller camera systems that will make you happy and do a great job. However, given the larger sensor size, Fujifilm has done a remarkable job to keep the GFX100 II as small as it is and for most of us, throwing a GFX outfit into a camera bag might not be any larger or heavier than what we are carrying now.

Why A Larger Format?

So, why do some photographers have a preference for larger format cameras? Is it just a matter of bigger is better and they are showing off?



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GF 80mm f1.7 R WR – ultra shallow depth-of-field.

For me, the most obvious physical difference is depth-of-field. The larger the sensor, the more apparent depth-of-field becomes. It's shallower which means the background can be more 'yummy' than a smaller format sensor. And yes, 'yummy' is a technical term.

Think of the sensor on your phone – it's tiny and when you look at the photos it takes, depth-of-field seems to extend throughout the image most of the time. When the first digital SLR cameras were released, they used a 'cropped' sensor to keep the expense down, but in time we were all told that a 'full-frame' sensor is bigger and better. I'm not so sure I can see a huge difference between a cropped sensor and a full-frame sensor, but technically it is there.

So, when you shoot with the Fujifilm GFX100 II, you have a sensor that is 1.7 times larger than a full-frame sensor – 43.9x32.9 mm compared to 36x24 mm, so it's 68 per cent larger. Depth-of-field is noticeably shallower in many situations, but of course, when you put on the beautiful 23mm ultra wide-angle, you still have the wonderful front-to-back depth-of-field as you would expect.

Larger formats have a slightly different look and many photographers enjoy this. It can give their work a point of difference.

But do you need the larger file size? Possibly not, depending on what you're planning to do with your photos.

I've been shooting with larger format cameras for 20 years and I still get a buzz

opening up a file, zooming in to 100 per cent and marvelling at the image detail and clarity (assuming I've focused it correctly, of course). There's an enjoyment factor that continues as I process the file. I don't need to share this with anyone, it's enough to experience it on my own.

However, a more practical magazine editor would write that if you want to make some large prints, then you can't go past a large pixel image that is native to the sensor. I agree with this most of the time; software corrections can only go so far, whereas a beautifully crafted lens on a large sensor creates an image quality second to none.

I remember an advert for a Porsche Turbo. It went like this: "If you can't work out why you need 460 bhp to pick up the kids after school, you haven't given the matter your full attention." Perhaps it's the same with large format cameras!

Great Lenses

Fujifilm is obviously interested in pushing larger format photography in many directions. For instance, that GF 80 mm f1.7 R WR lens is pushing the shallowness of depth-of-field. Remember, larger formats already have shallower depth-of-field, so taking the standard 80 mm f2.8 lens and opening it up to f1.7 is very close to shooting with a 50 mm f1.2 on a full-frame sensor. And it's the lens used to photograph our dog for the article!

The other lens of special interest is the GF 30 mm f5.6 T/S. This is a wide-angle, manual focus perspective control lens, offering both shift and tilt movements. Shift allows you to keep vertical buildings vertical, while the tilt can be used to produce extended depth-of-field throughout the frame. These are the techniques that large format view camera photographers used to use and great to see it being embraced on the GFX100 II.

The Fujifilm GFX100 II was a pleasure to use, especially considering the larger format and the beautiful file quality. I might have to write a separate article on the colour and tonality in Fujifilm's files, but that will have to wait for another issue.



GF 30mm f5.6 T/S tilt-shift lens



LEADING LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY TOURS AROUND THE WORLD

John is an award winning freelance photographer based in Pennsylvania, USA, who is passionate about his photography and a reknown workshop leader.

John is also an inspirational speaker, sharing his programs and his photographic insights to audiences around the World.

DREAM
BELIEVE
CREATE

JOIN JOHN ON ONE OF HIS ADVENTURES IN 2025 AND BEYOND



CONTEMPLATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY RETREAT

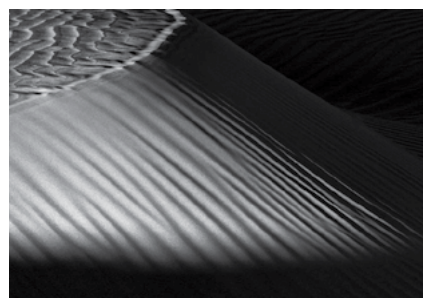
An invitation to consider photography as a spiritual practice. Join Flint Sparks (Zen Priest) and myself, to explore how we make deeper connections through our photography.

Based on the island of Molokai in Hawaii.



TUSCANY, ITALY

An experienced based offering in the heart of Tuscany where we visit charming hill towns and photograph the sumptuous rolling landscape.



DEATH VALLEY AND THE ALABAMA HILLS

Experience these two iconic locations with my co-leader and brilliant B&W photographer Cole Thompson. Our goal on this offering is to encourage you to honor your vision and make images that are uniquely yours.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ALL HIS TOURS CONTACT US TODAY

E-mail: john@barclayphoto.com

WWW.JOHNBARCLAYPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/WORKSHOPS



NATURE

After winning so many awards in our competitions, Better Photography thought it was high time to ask nature photographer Pedro Jarque Krebs exactly how he does it!

Pedro Jarque Krebs has made a name for himself with a striking approach to wildlife photography. In nature circles, he may not have received quite the acclamation he deserves because some of his photographs include too much post-production or his subjects were photographed in captivity. This is their loss and one of the reasons our *Better Photography* competition encourages all genres of photography without such restrictions.

Pedro's work has been seen regularly in our winners' circles with his distinctive wildlife portraits: beautiful light, black background and, most importantly, a nuance of pose or expression that takes his work into the extraordinary.

Insight

"I learnt to develop my negatives at the age of 15 and animals were already my passion. At that time I photographed mainly frogs and tadpoles. Then I became more interested in photographing people in a studio for a while, only to return to animal photography again.

"My university education is in philosophy, so my interest in animals is not only from an aesthetic point of view, but also philosophical.

"I take my time to observe the gestures of animals with a double interest. Each species has its own time and I could say that it is proportional to the complexity of the apparent degree of consciousness of each species, always of course



— WITH
A TWIST



from our human perspective. To put it graphically, a gorilla, for example, takes much more time to study than a crocodile, in my experience. Animals with a more developed degree of awareness interact with the photographer in a more evident way.

"But in any case, the gestures and postures of the animals depend to a great extent on the time you give them and above all on the patience of the photographer. In animal

photography, it is necessary to have almost infinite patience and a very good tolerance to frustration, because animals will not do what you want them to do, nor can you tell them how to pose. You have to wait with your camera and be very attentive, sometimes for a long time without any guarantee.

"There's a little luck factor too. So it's best to take photographs as often as possible to give 'luck' a better chance to show up. I have spent many hours in front of an animal without results. And on other occasions, I have immediately obtained something that exceeded my expectations."

Approach

Pedro's animal portraiture is distinctive, something that evolved from an early desire he had to work with animals in a photographic studio.

"The initial idea was simple: put the animal in the studio, with a dark/black background and work with studio lights, as one does with portraits of people. At that time, digital equipment did not exist so the logistics for carrying out this idea were extremely complicated, especially in the case of wild, dangerous or large animals. For example, getting an elephant or a lion into a photo studio was practically impossible, at least for me.

"So initially I was limited to working with small animals such as amphibians or reptiles. For the other animals, I had to park the project, but when digital technology came along, it opened up a new window of possibilities for realising my idea."







"I began to experiment with making animal portraits, either in captivity or in semi-freedom and darkening the background in post-production to get the result I wanted."

There are three approaches Pedro can take. "The first may be to have the animal located in front of a cave or against a naturally dark background, but this is not very common. The second method is to use an artificial light source, such as one or several flashes in a bank and use the camera's exposure settings to achieve the dark background. The third method is to darken the background or 'burn' it in post-production.

"When I started editing the photo to darken the backgrounds, I discovered that I liked the result much better, because when you are not in a real photo studio, the animal behaves naturally, without fear and without stress. And here again an important ethical consideration is consolidated: that of not disturbing or upsetting the animal. I began to get more interesting poses and interactions between the same animals that would be unthinkable in a studio."

Pedro explains that there are many situations where a black background could conceivably be natural, so he is quite comfortable making the changes to his files. "In this sense, I believe that my photography is creative more than documentary, but without altering the essence of the subject. The technique merely highlights the essence of the animal as it is presented to me, with its own complete freedom of movement.

"Photos with animals in a real studio usually show a frightened subject. My way of working avoids this and produces more interesting and spontaneous results."

Technique

Pedro explains that his approach requires him to be quite close to the animal. "That's why I prefer to work with animals in

captivity. These can be zoos, but I have also worked in nature reserves, rescue centres and sanctuaries. Sometimes I have had the opportunity to work with animals in their natural habitat, but that makes the work too complicated for me."

And Pedro takes lots of photographs. As explained, he doesn't just show up and the perfect pose is presented to him, it's a matter of capturing first and reviewing later. "The selection phase can take a long time as you have to examine hundreds of photos thoroughly and I generally choose only one to work with. Not all photos lend themselves to this style, so before I start working, I have to visualise how they would look when finished.

"Once I choose the photo, the work will depend on the characteristics of the subject and the location. Sometimes I am lucky to have a naturally dark background and the post-production work is minimal. In other cases, I have to "burn" the background and carefully darken it so that the result does not look artificial. My intention is that there is no apparent difference between a photo taken in a studio and a photo taken in a natural environment with my applied technique.

"I believe that editing in photography is a resource that, used in the right way, enhances the message and the story you want to communicate. I try to convey a feeling, to get closer to the non-human animal, to create empathy. Except in photojournalism, I believe that a photographer should have absolute freedom to choose the means to express his or her creativity. At the end of the day, it is the public who will judge the result.

"I currently use Sony equipment. I used to work with other well known equipment. All these brands have exceptional products, but I have become more accustomed to Sony equipment because it offers me several technical advantages. In particular, I use a Sony A7R3, which offers a resolution of





42.4MP and is mirrorless, i.e. it is lighter and with a higher resolution that allows me to make bigger crops without losing too much quality. As for the lens, I most often use a Sony FE 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6 GM OSS and sometimes for larger subjects that are more distant, with a 1.4x teleconverter. To carry this equipment, I usually use a monopod which is more practical than a tripod."

Will Pedro's approach change with the introduction of AI? Will he even need a camera?

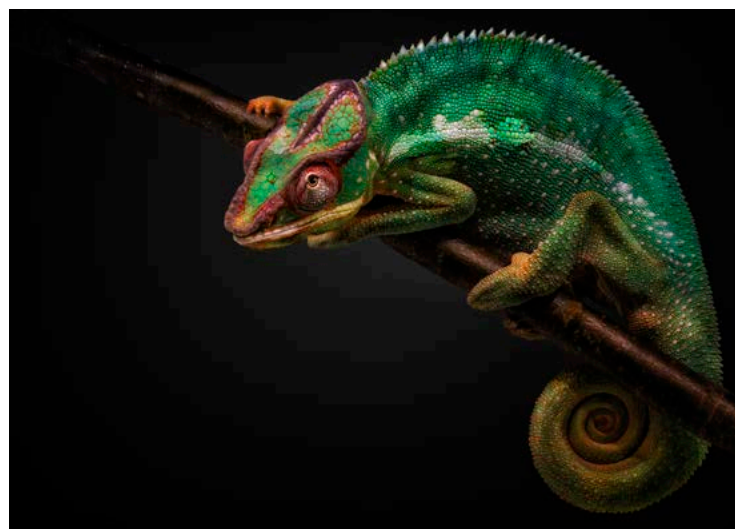
"The advent of AI has generated a lot of debate about the limits of its application, but I like photography and so personally I don't use AI. I don't like it because it's not real and I want to work with real, live animals. I want their expressions to be authentic.

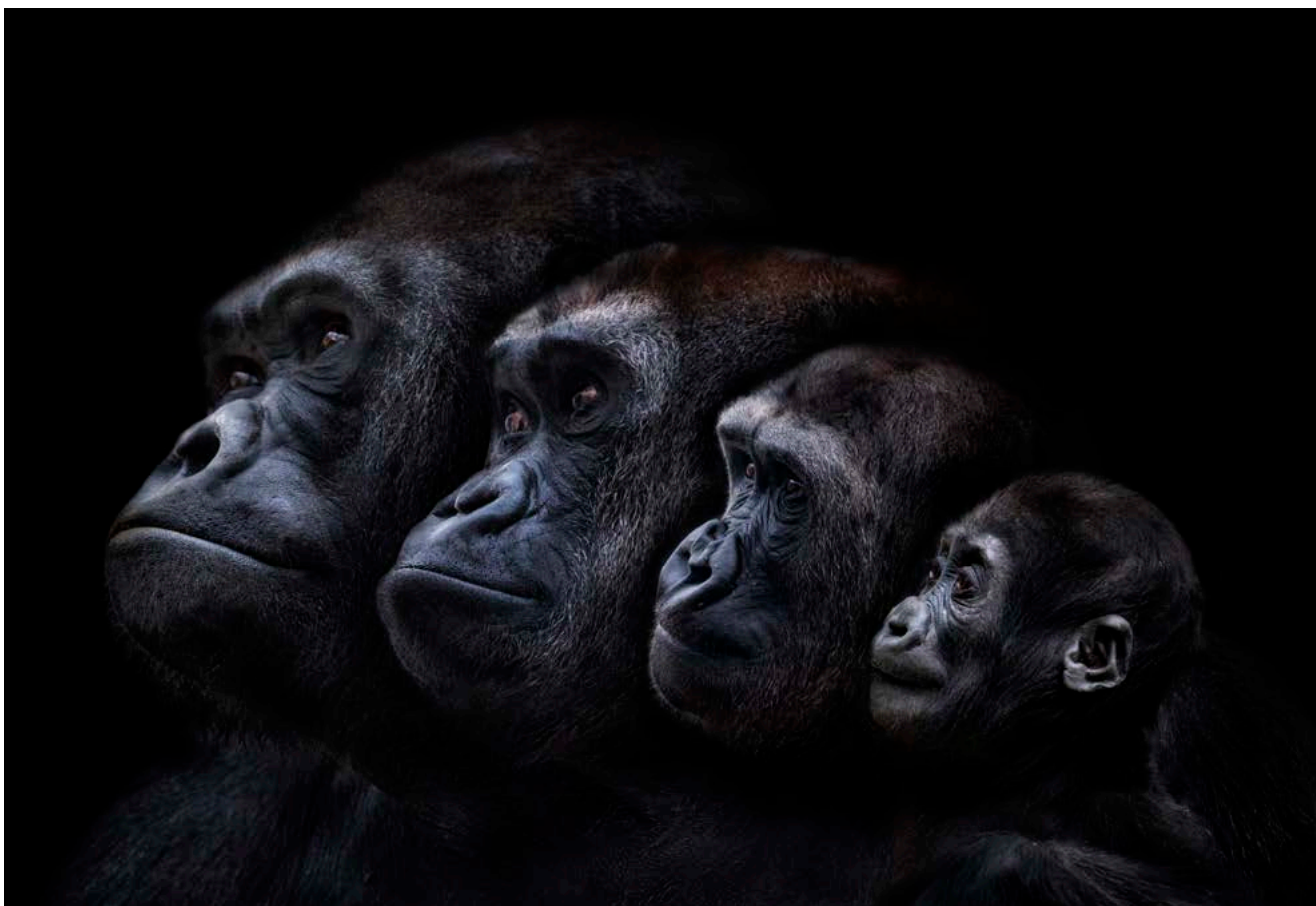
"So, I'm not interested in generating any artificial elements or using the new AI tools for my work. I want to remain limited to what I can achieve with my camera and my interpretation of the scene with my personal style. I respect that other people may find AI attractive and I believe that artistic creation should not be limited, but for me, personally, I like the real rather than the artificial.

"On the other hand, capturing the image as raw file inevitably requires post-production. What you get out of the camera does not always reflect what you see with your eyes. It is necessary to process or 'develop' the photo so that it reflects what we have in our memory and in our personal perception. For me, the photo should reflect what I am feeling in a scene. It is a personal interpretation of reality. But for me, it is reality that must prevail."

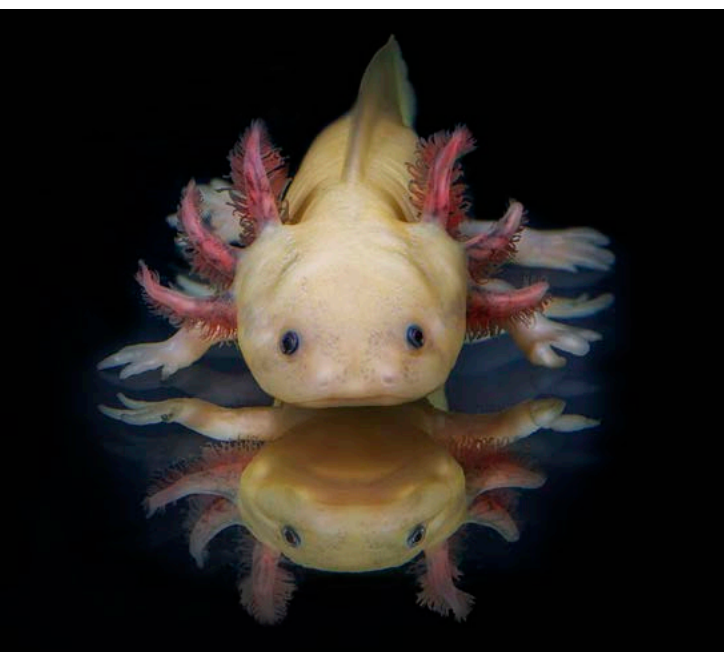
Underlying Purpose

Pedro adds that his prime influences are not other wildlife photographers, but classical painters! "My sources of inspiration have always been the great masters of chiaroscuro, such as Rembrandt and Caravaggio. I like the drama of the darkness and the strokes of light that burst through the shadows. There's a whole technique for achieving this balance, because it's not enough to place a subject on a black background. There has to be an interaction between the highlights and the shadows for that drama to





have a positive effect. Whenever I can, I visit museums which have collections of the most famous representatives of this technique. I have a special predilection for the work of José de Ribera, a classic of the Spanish Baroque, a representative of the so-called ‘tenebrism’, which is chiaroscuro taken to an extreme.



“However, I also like the work of contemporary photographers, especially studio portraits, such as those made by Irving Penn.”

Pedro is quite clear that his work has a purpose. “My message tries to be clear: this is the beauty we are about to lose. Most people love animals and I am sure no one would like to live in a world without them. And without them, we wouldn’t survive either. We are at a crucial moment. If we do not react, it may soon be too late.”

Pedro has already had one magnificent book published, *Fragile*, and is currently working on a second.

“The intention of my photographs was initially to focus on all kinds of animals, not just those that were in danger of extinction. Thirty years ago, there was not so much talk about this problem. However, as I prepared the photos for *Fragile* and learned more about each species, I discovered that there were actually many more animals threatened than I had suspected. In fact, almost all the animals in the book.

“Usually, when we think of endangered animals, we think of rhinos, elephants, polar bears or Bengal tigers, but the reality is much more alarming, because most wild animal populations have fallen sharply in recent decades – by 60% according to the WWF. Today, only 4% of the world’s animals are wild. The majority, 96%, are humans and the animals we consume. Of birds, for example, only 30% are wild, the rest are chickens or poultry.

“So when I put the title to the book, *Fragile’s* meaning became evident. All wild animals without exception are in an





extremely fragile situation. In a few decades we could lose up to 1 million living species. The most iconic may be the most easily recognised, but the entire ecosystem may be affected in unpredictable ways, even by the disappearance of species that at first sight seem irrelevant.

"Ultimately, even if we limit ourselves to a purely anthropocentric point of view, it is our own survival that is at stake.

"What I want to show with my photography is the soul of the animal. My intention is to show the beauty of that rich biodiversity with which we share the world, but which in our developed civilisations we no longer see, much less live with. I think that in a dramatic moment like the one we are living at present, it is essential to create awareness of this, because you can only defend what you love and you can only love what you know. There are people who have thanked me for making them recover their amazement and love for animals. And this is what really stimulates me to continue this work.

"Ultimately, I seek a reconciliation with the origins, with the primal and the archetypal. We have forgotten that we are also animals. We have forgotten our wild roots, in the good sense. We have forgotten our natural bond. We have created an insurmountable gap with the rest of the natural world that is leading us straight to the abyss. And we're only just beginning to realise it.

"Sometimes I use a metaphor: in our modern civilisation, it is as if we are travelling on a luxury train, with all the comforts,

completely ignoring that this train is running at full speed towards an abyss. I think we have a lot of challenges to solve as a species, but now there is only one really fundamental one for us: our own survival. That survival is intrinsically linked to the fate of every other living species on the planet. And that destiny is in our hands, exclusively.

"Our intellectual development and above all our moral conscience, have made us responsible for the destiny of all living beings on this planet. And according to the experts, we only have a window of two or three decades to reverse the destructive trend. So my job is to contribute to that reconciliation."

Is Pedro's message more effective when using popular subjects, rather than those that might be more obscure? Does this have an impact on what he photographs?

"I like all animals. Even the less popular ones. They all have a certain beauty and mystery. But it's true that the portraits that people like the most are usually of animals that are evolutionarily closer to us. If we see a pair of eyes, a nose and a mouth, then there is more chance of making a connection.

"There are hundreds of animals that I would like to work with, but because of their rarity, they are difficult to access. Many times I travel especially to photograph an animal that is only found in a specific place, such as the golden snub-nosed monkey, which is only found in China. Or when they are part of international breeding programs, like the Panda bear. In Madrid a pair of twins were born and I was lucky enough to



do a photo shoot with them. Also, the snow leopard is a rare specimen and I had to travel to photograph it. In Peru there is a great diversity of rare animals and I hope to be able to travel to the Amazon jungle soon."

Reading Pedro's thoughts, it's clear that his brilliant photography is not only the result of excellent craft, but of a deep passion for a cause he believes in. And it is this passion that shows through in his style – was this intentional?

"Having a personal stamp or style, I don't think it's something you plan. I think it's something that emerges as you perfect your work and refine it with your personal sensibility. Style is the fruit of your whole life, all your learning, your successes and your failures. Even your readings, your travels, your reflections and your way of seeing the world."

You can see more of Pedro's work on his website at <https://www.pedrojarque.com/>. You can purchase his existing book *Fragile* and when his new book is available, we'll let you know!



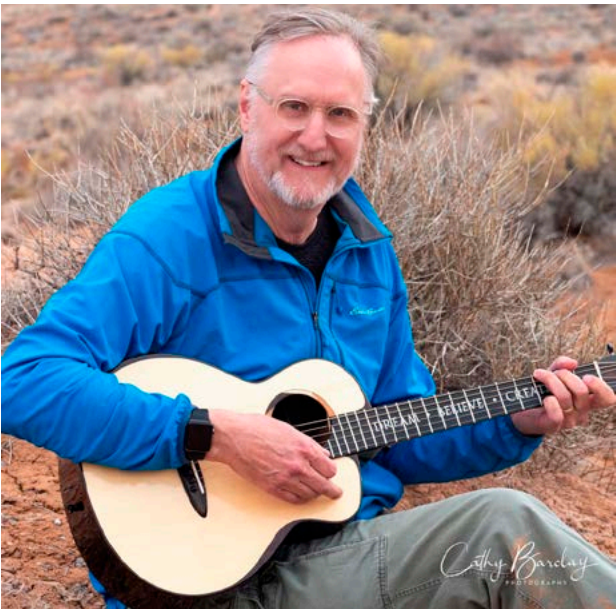
ON BEING TAKEN BY PHOTOGRAPHY







Photographs of Death Valley by John Barclay



John Barclay

**Peter Eastway interviews American
photographer and tour leader John Barclay
about his approach to photography –
and being taken!**

Regular readers of *Better Photography* will know our focus is on ideas. While we can make specific suggestions, we believe it's much better to provide you with concepts or experiences that will inform your own ideas. And with that in mind, I touched base with American photographer and tour leader, John Barclay.

With similar interests and approaches, what follows is a series of topics that lead to a different way of approaching our photography. Rather than us taking photographs, John suggests it is we who are taken. We'll come to that shortly, but first, how did John become a photo tour leader?

Insight

"I come from 35 years of sales and marketing in the medical device space. Let's call it plastic tubing.

"You can buy this plastic tubing from many different suppliers and the expectation is that it should be round. I mean, it's tubing, so it has to be round, but the question I tried



to answer in my own mind was, how do I differentiate myself from all the other people who make round tubing as well?

"The challenge is no different when you're teaching photography, except that we're not just teaching photography, we're providing a great experience. Just like people expect tubing to be round, the people who travel on a photo tour are expecting some photography education. Some need more help than others, but ultimately, what's going to differentiate one workshop from another isn't only the education, it's the experience and how that education is delivered.

"The fact a tour leader is a good photographer is a given. Participants have probably looked at your website and already decided you're an 'adequate' photographer, so what they're looking for is to come home with some great experiences."

Interestingly for a photographer who lives in the north-east of the USA, John leads regular workshops to New Zealand. Yes, he's a good photographer, but he suggests that people travel with him (often multiple times) because of the great experiences he provides.

"The workshop participants say, 'You know what, not only did John take us to Milford Sound and all the iconic locations on the South Island, he added in an airplane flight and we landed on a glacier. Then we went to Doubtful Sound for an overnight cruise...'

"So for me, the reason people keep coming back is twofold. One, they trust that I know what I'm doing and that I can operate a tour properly and second, they are able to come home and talk about the experiences that they had.

"I was very fortunate to have a mentor, Nancy Rotenberg. Nancy was a brilliant Canadian photographer and one of the best human beings I've met. Her book, *Photography and the Creative Life* is by far my favourite photography book ever published. You can still buy it on her website – I did a Kickstarter with her daughter to republish it because Nancy passed in 2011 (<https://naturaltapestries.ws/store/>).

"One day, Nancy said to me, 'John, you're going to take over a workshop for me up in the Poconos'. And I said, 'No, I've got my own sales career and I don't have time.' To which she replied, 'Oh, sorry, I've already told them you're going to do it. You don't have a choice!'

"She added, 'John, you're an adequate photographer,' which I thought was an hysterically funny thing to say to someone she'd just asked to lead a photo tour, but back in 2004 it was true enough. But then she said the most important thing to me: 'John, you were born to do this, you just don't know it yet.'"

Nancy had picked up on John's people skills, which may or may not have been developed over his years in sales and



marketing, yet when it comes to teaching of any kind, how your students relate to you is fundamental to your success as a mentor.

"People expect all photography instructors to be able to teach them about depth-of-field, focus stacking or whatever else they need to improve their photography, but ultimately, the better they like me as a human, the more open they are to learning.

"Nancy made another great observation about people signing up for a photo tour or a workshop: 'Remember, they are giving themselves a gift. It's your job to make sure that they're giving themselves the best gift that they could give themselves.' So that's the mindset I always try to have when I'm leading groups."

Life-Changing

There's a lot of discussion about what a photography leader is supposed to do – and to not do!

"Early on, I thought it was heresy to be photographing alongside my paying customers. I didn't think it was an appropriate thing to do, but with feedback from my core group, they have changed my mind. They very much want to watch how I see and are interested in my processes."

However, more fundamental to the workshop program than the nuts and bolts of photography protocol, is the way participants are introduced to photography itself. And it was a participant who transformed John's own approach not only for his teaching, but for the way he photographs personally as well.

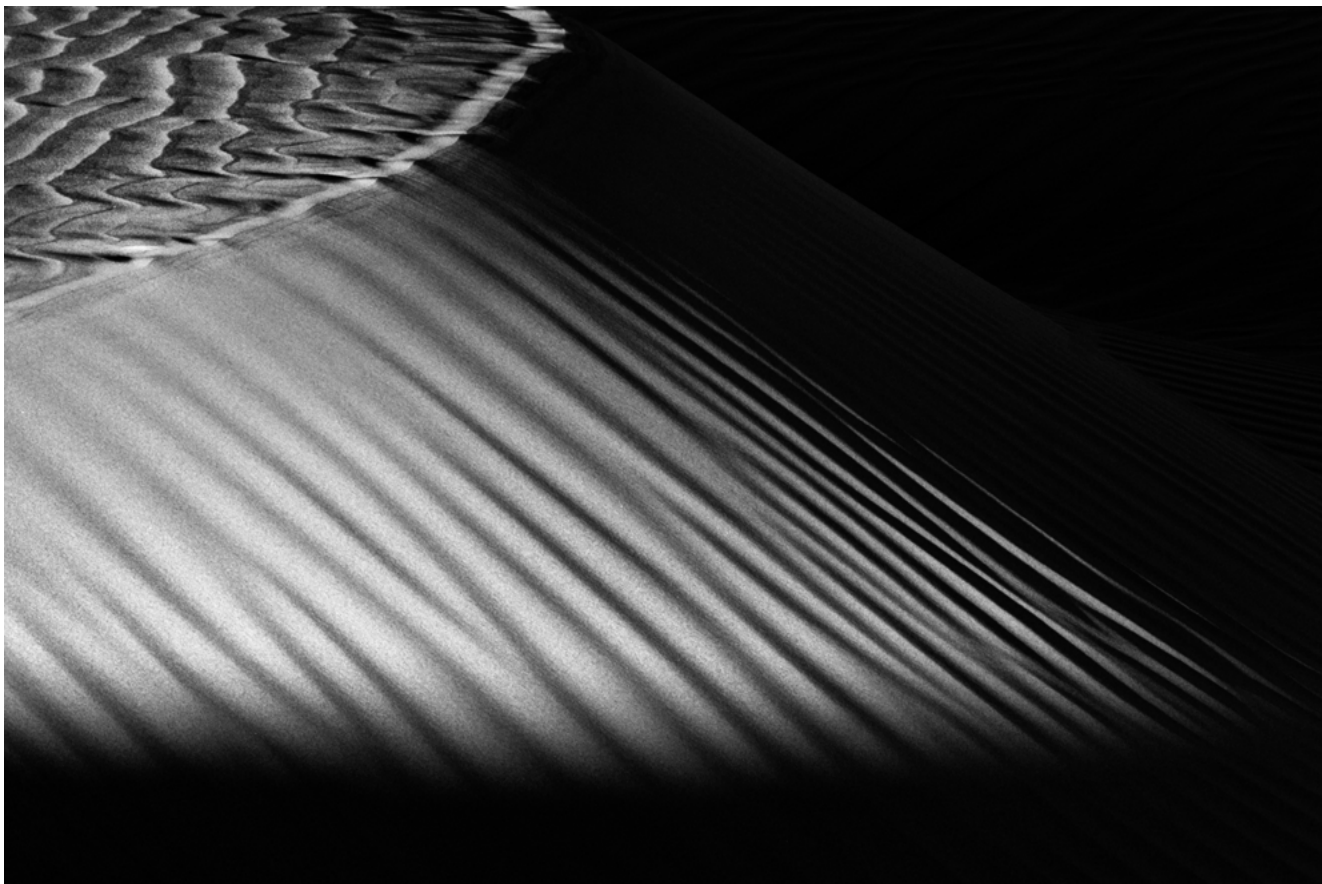
"You know, sometimes you can pinpoint a moment when things really change in your personal work and for me, it was when I met Flint Sparks. Flint was a participant at a workshop I was presenting with National Geographic photographer, Dewitt Jones. On the first night, all the participants are invited to show their work. Flint walked up to us and confessed he was scared to death to show us his 10 images because everyone else on the workshop was a photographer, but he was a Zen priest. 'I teach meditation and I've only had a camera for six months,' he confessed.

"We started the presentation and after seeing the work of two or three participants, Flint's first image comes up on the screen and there is an audible gasp. With his second image, there's a louder gasp from the audience and by the third image, everybody's overwhelmed by these amazing photographs from a guy who's had a camera for only six freaking months.

"Over the next few days, the program included 'porch sharing circle' sessions, where participants are invited to have a dialogue with the group about why they photograph. Why are you even picking up a camera? What is it that draws you to photography? When it's Flint's turn, he references Mary Oliver and David Whyte poems – and suddenly this beginner is blowing my mind in the way he is approaching his photography.

"At the end of the workshop, I walked up to him, shook him by his shirt collar and said, 'We need to work together'. I realised that all my life, I had been approaching photography backwards and I believe this to be true for most people. Flint





arrived at photography because he had learnt how to become mindful and present in the world, so when he picked up a camera, he'd already done all the hard work."

"Most instructors want to talk about the aperture or how to set the ISO. We worry about too much noise or using the Rule of Thirds, but this is the wrong approach!

"What we need to be doing is learning how 'to be' – learning how to be still, how to be present and how to pay attention. I'm now a firm believer that we don't take pictures, we are taken. If you really think about it and distil the process down, we're the ones being captured by what we see in front of our cameras. We're all being taken by something when we photograph, so now my job is to help our participants figure out what that is. It might be rhythm, grace, sadness, happiness, texture, colour, form, shape; it's going to be different for everyone.

"As an educator, it now makes me cringe when I hear people saying workshop leaders told them to do this or that. 'You should come over here'. 'You need to stand right there'. 'The light is really good now'. 'The composition is best over here'. I don't know if this is as helpful as helping them to find and honour their own unique vision.

"Of course, at a really elementary level, you might need this type of instruction and that's fine if that's what you feel you need, but the audience Cole Thompson (see *Better Photography* Issue 114) and I are reaching out to with our YouTube channel or on workshops is more interested in what we like to call 'expressive photography.'

John does a Contemplative Photography Retreat in Hawaii with Flint Sparks each year – you can see the 2024 details at <https://johnbarclayphotography.com/contemplative-photography-retreat/>.

Maintaining Technique

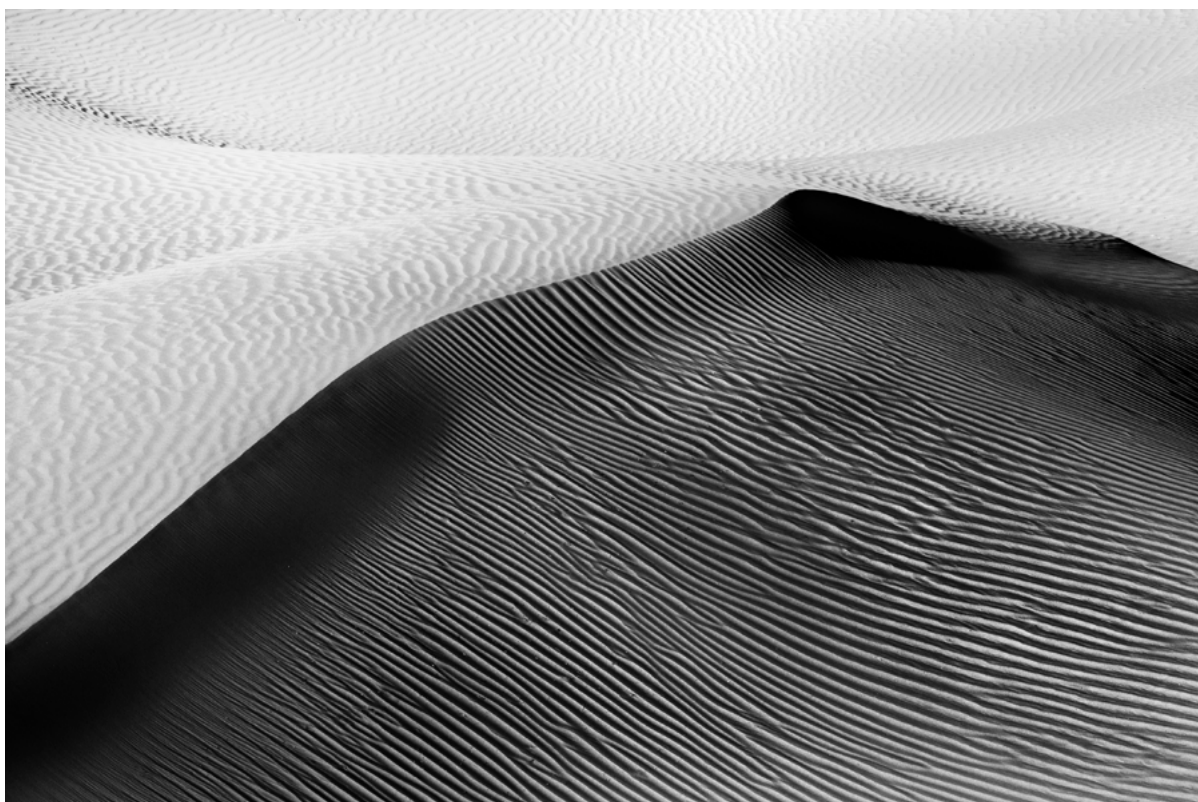
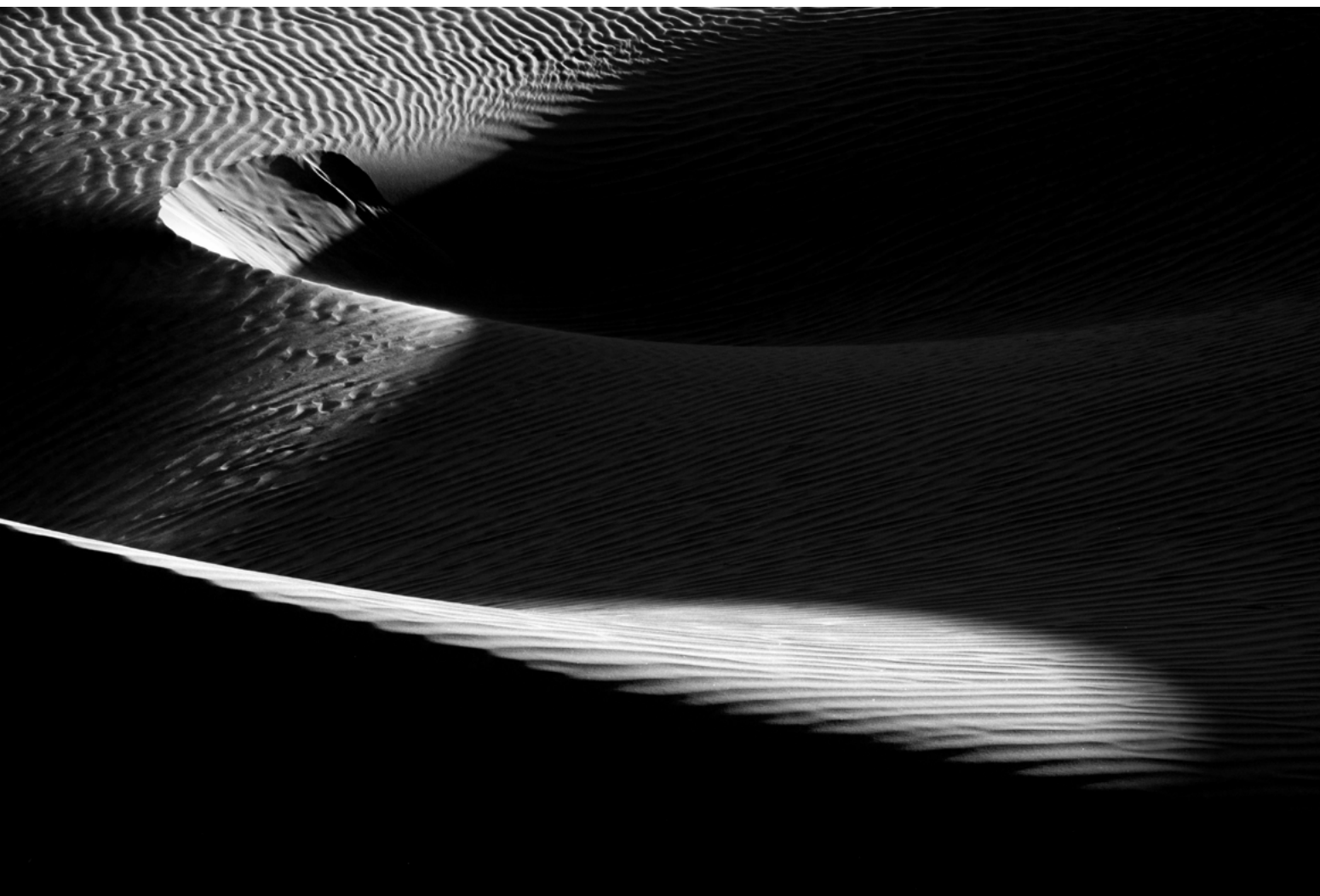
"Now when people come on a workshop, my job is to be intimately aware of what they are trying to do with their photography and then help them achieve that."

So, where does technique fit into photographic instruction if we're mainly interested in being expressive?

"That's where Cole Thompson and I diverge. Cole would say when it comes to needing a technique, you'll figure it out, whereas generally I'd refer to my own experiences and how I solved a similar situation. Remember, most of the people who come on my workshops already have a good foundation of technical skills which will help them execute their vision, but I don't think it hurts if we're in a workshop environment and the teacher says, 'This is how I would do it'.

"However, there's a caveat here. It's easy to go down a rabbit hole searching for a new technique that's going to make you a better photographer. This is our point: techniques or equipment on their own are not going to make you a better photographer. Techniques are only going to allow you to better execute your vision. The vision is the driving force behind what makes your images uniquely yours.

"One of my photography heroes, Freeman Patterson, said he winces when people say Lightroom and Photoshop





are creative tools. He says that's wrong, you are the creative tool. The creativity comes from you, while Lightroom and Photoshop are simply tools.

"Of course I think it's okay to learn techniques so that we can execute our vision, but thinking that a new technique will produce a good image is not the right approach."

So what makes a John Barclay photograph? What takes him?

"One of the quotes I'm known for is, 'Photograph what makes your heart sing!' That's what I want people to do. Don't photograph what somebody else is doing or what you think you should be doing.

"Of course, what makes my heart sing, is going to vary over time. I used to say I was a landscape photographer primarily. I just call myself a photographer now, because I don't want to be categorised or pigeonholed into something.

"People ask me what's my favourite place? Well, the South Island in New Zealand is certainly a place that I would rank right up there, but I also love Death Valley and the Palouse. These are areas that make my heart sing. And what's interesting is, even though I've been to these locations 10 or 20 times before, I always fall in love with them again, every single time.

"I'm not a grand landscape guy, I'm more into intimate landscapes, such as my dune studies in Death Valley. And I'm primarily into black and white. My dad built me a darkroom when I was in high school, so I fell in love with black and white photography as a kid. And that's still what I absolutely love.

Death Valley speaks to me in black and white, so I don't do many things in colour there."

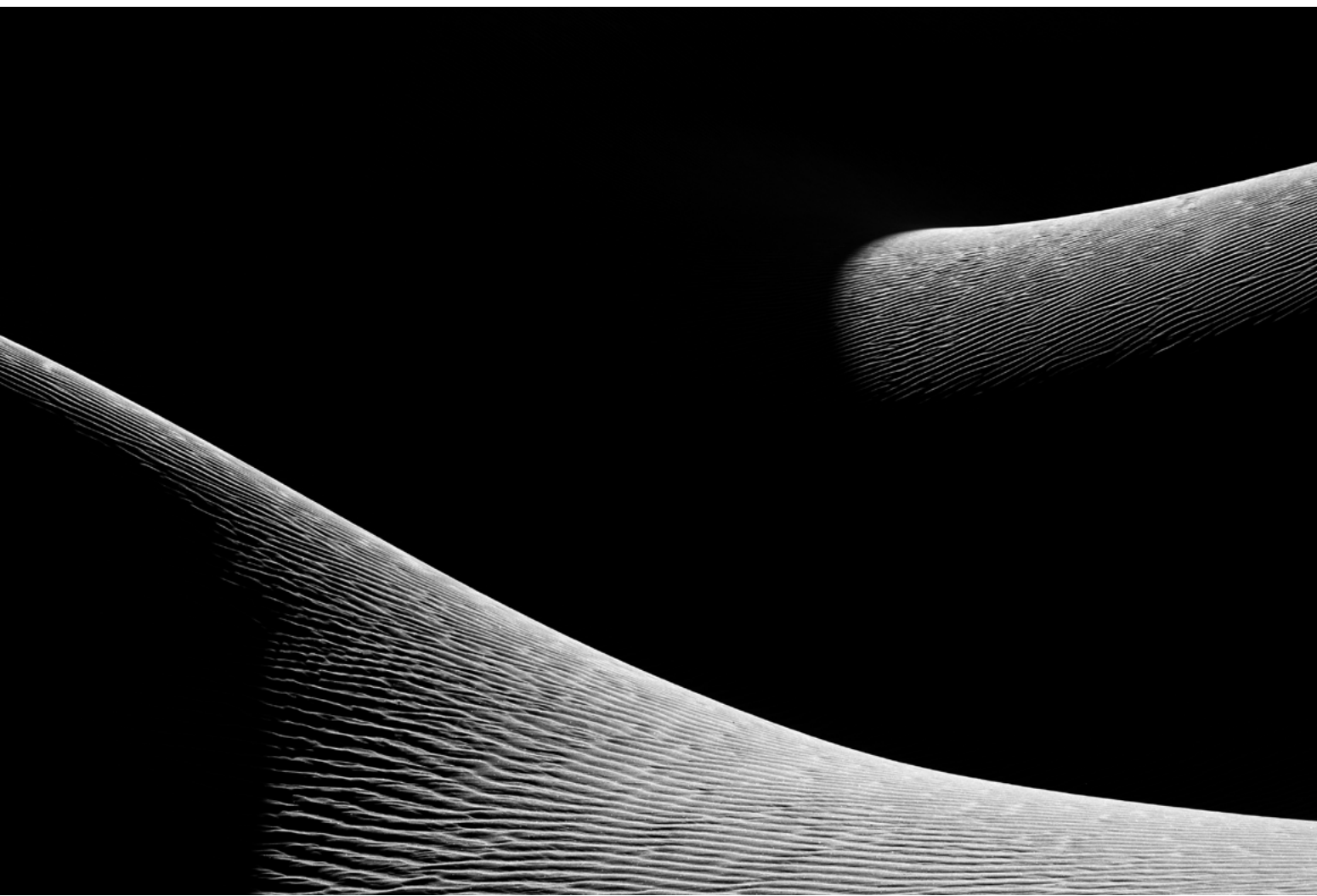
Black and White

"Colour can be so visceral, it gets in the way of what I'm feeling at that moment of connection – or when I'm being taken. Black and white removes what can be a domineering element of the composition, allowing me to show the viewer more clearly what I'm falling in love with. If I'm out in the dunes, I'm seeing repeating patterns of light and shadow creating beautiful, sharp edges and geometric shapes that I can organise into a composition that may even be a little abstract.

"I'm not showing you what was there in a literal sense. That's not as interesting to me as what I was connecting to, what I was being taken by.

"I remember being with Freeman Patterson in South Africa. I asked him why we were going out to take photos at 11 in the morning when the light was so harsh. Freeman looked at me as only a master could and said, 'I never thought about it that way. It's just light. What are you going to do with it? Stop qualifying it. Stop labelling it as the right time or the wrong time of day. It's just light and your job is to do something with it.'

"So I find myself being taken at all times of the day. I mean, there are still times of the day that you aim to go to Zabriskie Point, for example. We all like it as a location for a sunrise, but it doesn't mean this is the only time we can be there. I was there



a month or so ago and it wasn't at sunrise, but it was the most incredible weather I have ever experienced there."

When John talks about images 'taking us', rather than us taking or making the image, how does that fit into a real world approach to photography?

"Being taken is a bumper sticker, that's all. Let me clarify.

"What I really want to focus on at a workshop is how do you show up? Are you open to being taken? I want my audience to dig a bit deeper than just making 'pretty' pictures. I want them to figure out what they are being taken by. The next step is to ask how do I, as an artist, represent where I am and what I am being taken by? How do I accomplish that?"

Maturing Photographically

"What I was getting at, is that I don't like the language that says, 'I'm going to go out and make images today', or 'I'm going to go out and take pictures today.' I think there's value in changing that a little bit and saying, 'What will I be taken by today?'

"Once you've made this subtle change, you start to notice other things. Is it rhythm, shape, form, light – whatever? From here we move into the crafting part of the equation. Craft doesn't go away, but before we get to that point, I believe it is important to understand what is it that is taking you?

"I think as we mature, so does our photography. My dear friend Dan Sniffin and I did 40 tours together as co-leaders. On one trip, we photographed Black Valley in Ireland, where there's this old ruin with a big tree. It's iconic. We compared one of his images from 20 years earlier with what he had photographed that day and he said, 'Look at the difference, John. This is a much more mature photograph.' Twenty years of living his life, maturing as a human being and as a photographer had allowed him to add more space to the old ruin, giving it more room to breathe. A more mature photograph if you will.

"I don't know how you come up to photographic maturity other than by living your life. Living your life, studying, reading and analysing your own work is how you improve – or not improve.

"How do you quantify whether you've improved or not, or what's a good photo or a bad photo? All this stuff drives me crazy. Ultimately, I want to make photographs that I love and if somebody else likes one, then that's icing on the cake."

For more information, you can visit John's website at <https://johnbarclayphotography.com/>

THE LOCALS

Advertising photographer Simon Harsent challenges us all with his portfolio of atmospheric pub portraits – created with Midjourney.

Interview with Peter Eastway.

What's going to happen to photography as AI takes hold? One thing we can't do is ignore it and Simon Harsent is one of the first to suggest that while there are ethical and social issues we all have to work through, as artists AI is simply another tool for us to play with.



Simon is a high-end advertising photographer, although he says most of his work these days is directing television commercials. It's not an unusual career development – and often he'll shoot the stills for the campaign as well. However, in his heart he's driven by creating images with a camera.

Or perhaps now with Midjourney?

Insight

Every now and then, Simon releases a PDF portfolio titled *Blast*. (You can subscribe to his portfolios on his website at <https://www.simonharsent.com/blast>.) Issue 7 featured a series of brilliant pub portraits; grainy, moody, atmospheric, beautiful lighting – reminiscent of Simon's distinctive black and white style for which art directors would hire him.

Interestingly, the accompanying email introduced his portfolio as representing a fictitious pub. I thought he meant the photographs were shot in a number of different locations and he just tied them together for the portfolio. But no, the pub was completely fictitious, the written introduction was created in ChatGPT and the photographs initially created in Midjourney.

It was an AI portfolio that looked incredibly realistic.

Did I feel fooled, bummed or disenchanted? Hell, no! I figured if this is what Midjourney can do, then it's something I have to know more about. In *Better Photography*, we've already run several articles on AI, but the technology is advancing so quickly that by the time you read this, a lot of what we report from Simon could be out of date.

However, what hasn't changed, what will never change, is that to create art or photography, you need to start with an idea.

Explained Simon, "My history as an advertising photographer taught me the importance of the idea. The





photography I did was all about interpreting an idea and learning how to tell a story in picture form.”

In many ways, it is this skill that has allowed Simon to morph into a TVC director, but directing can be very full on and Simon found he had been letting his personal work lapse, so he dusted off some of his old film cameras and went to work!

“I’ve been shooting with the Mamiya 7, a Leica M6 and some 4x5” cameras. And it’s so freeing being able to shoot with film again – because of the limitations. Essentially, I like working with one camera, one lens and one film stock. There are too many choices with digital, so it’s actually freeing to have a really stringent way of working. The restrictions dictate the work to a certain extent, so you start being quite formulated about how you produce a project.”

Embracing Technology

While shooting film, Simon is still having the negatives scanned and using a digital workflow to produce his prints. He enjoys blending the old with the new and so his film work would end up on his website and featuring in his electronic communications – like *Blast*.

“*Blast* is purely personal. I mean, from a commercial point of view, I want to keep attracting people to my website. I find Instagram really tough to manage. It’s quite narcissistic and I guess the Englishman in me is a bit reserved for that sort of constant self-promotion – although I know I work in advertising!

“So the idea behind *Blast* is to showcase my personal work.”

When Simon first played with Midjourney, the AI image creator, he was a bit underwhelmed. “Everything looked very cartoony or airbrushed, so I would take the images into Photoshop which made them more interesting. It wasn’t

what Midjourney gave you, rather what you could do with it afterwards.

“Then I didn’t do anything with Midjourney for six months until one afternoon, I thought I’d see if it could be of any use in preparing a treatment for a job I was working on. Well, the images it produced were so much more advanced and had me thinking, this is crazy. It was amazing how far Midjourney had advanced in such a short time.”

Another six months passed. Simon’s wife Lida was overseas in Europe and Simon started reminiscing about England. “You know, those beautiful old pubs that I’d love to have a drink in? I started thinking, what sort of people would be there, who could I have a drink with and there was the idea for my project, *The Locals*.

“A few weeks later, I opened up Midjourney and started typing in commands. I’d done an online workshop about using prompts in Midjourney which gave me a hand in understanding the Midjourney language. I started getting some very cool results. So I went with it. I spent maybe three days, just making images and looking at what Midjourney provided.

“I’d see the variations and refine my choices, gradually building a library of images from which I selected the ones that spoke to me in some way.

“I think there’s a big misconception that you just type what’s in your head and that’s exactly what you get, but that’s not correct. There’s an interpretation of your text and sometimes the results are nothing like what you wanted, but on other occasions Midjourney will present you with something quite surprising – and you think, that’s pretty cool.

“It’s almost like our normal picture taking process with a camera. You have an image in your mind, but then suddenly the light isn’t working as you expected and there’s no obvious







explanation. Over the years as photographers, we've learnt to embrace these unexpected moments because sometimes they produce results of pure brilliance! And so it is with Midjourney when it presents something you didn't necessarily pre-visualise yourself.

"Using Midjourney, I wanted the results to have my signature on them. I wanted them to look like they were photographed by me, so I'd prompt Midjourney to create images that were shot on a large format camera, that used window light and so on. In this way, using Midjourney is very much how I would approach any other photography project. However, as I had discovered earlier, the image out of Midjourney doesn't need to be the final result.

"I did a selection of the images I wanted to work with and took them into Photoshop, converted them to black and white, then opened them in Nik Analog Efex. Then I started playing with light leaks, scratches, dust marks and borders – I imagined I was using an old 4x5-inch camera that had a few problems with it!

"It's interesting, because as a film photographer we'd run away from cameras like this in our search for some kind of perfection. Then digital arrived and perfection was easy, so now we're looking at ways to embrace analogue imperfections – you know, bad processing, light leaks, negatives covered in dust because you processed the film in a hotel bathroom!

"I think my style was born out of the way I handled the camera. I had a Zenith E1 when I was thirteen and it had two aperture rings, one to set the aperture and the other to open up the aperture so you could see through the viewfinder. Then just before you took the photo, you were supposed to close that ring down – it wasn't automatic.

"Well, I'd always forget to close it and my first five or six rolls of film were wildly overexposed and completely ruined. Rather than remembering to stop the lens down, my solution was to only shoot with the lens wide-open so I didn't have to stop it down and then that just became a part of my shooting style. It became my thing because I made a mistake!"

Recognition

"In digital, I never really understood histograms. I'd be on set and my digital techs would say, 'Oh, your histogram is clipping' or 'The blacks are really black' and I'd just say, 'Does it look good on-screen?' If they said yes, I'd just say, 'Great' and leave it!

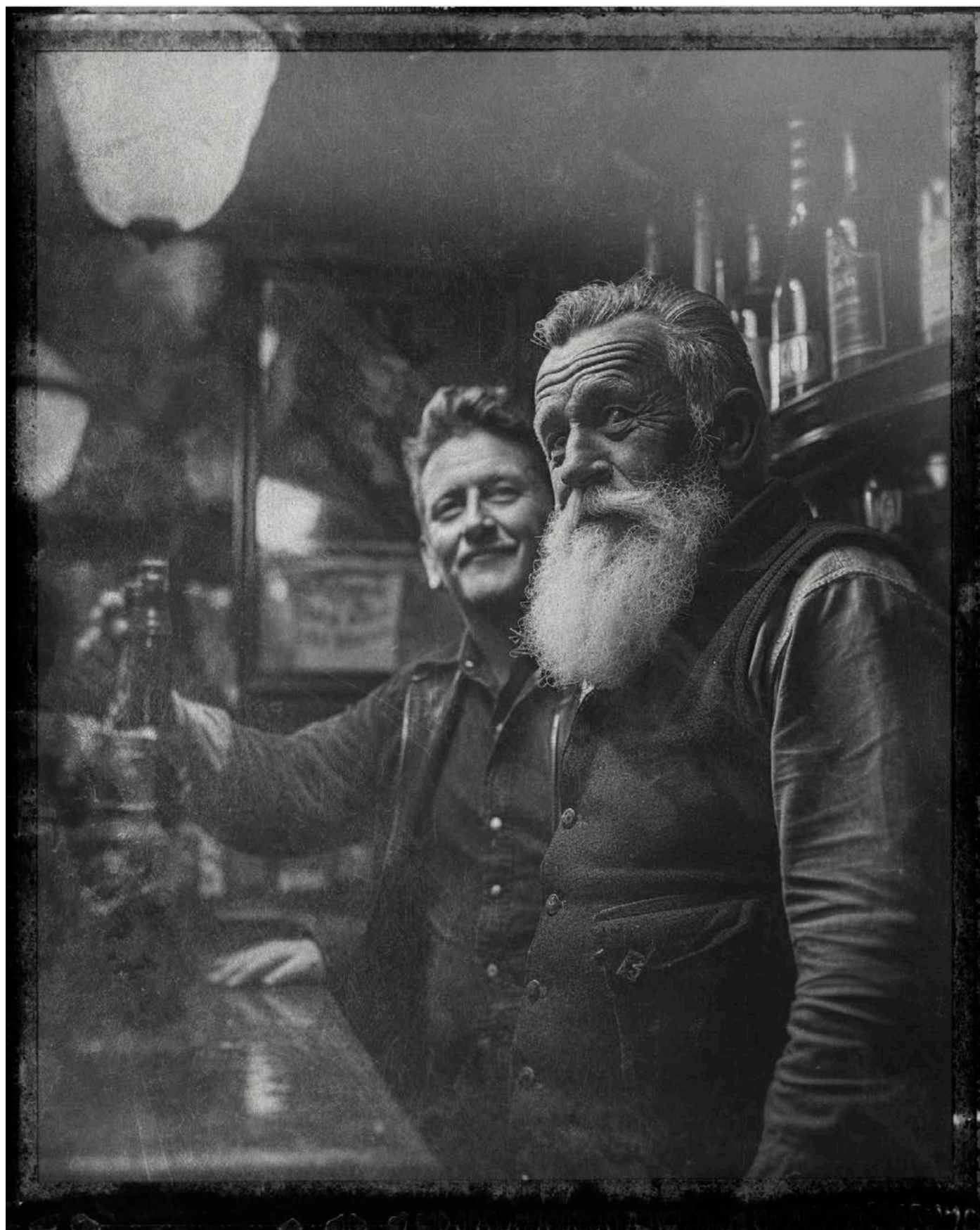
"I've never been technical. I've always worked on the basis of, does it look beautiful? Does it look good? Does it evoke an emotion?"

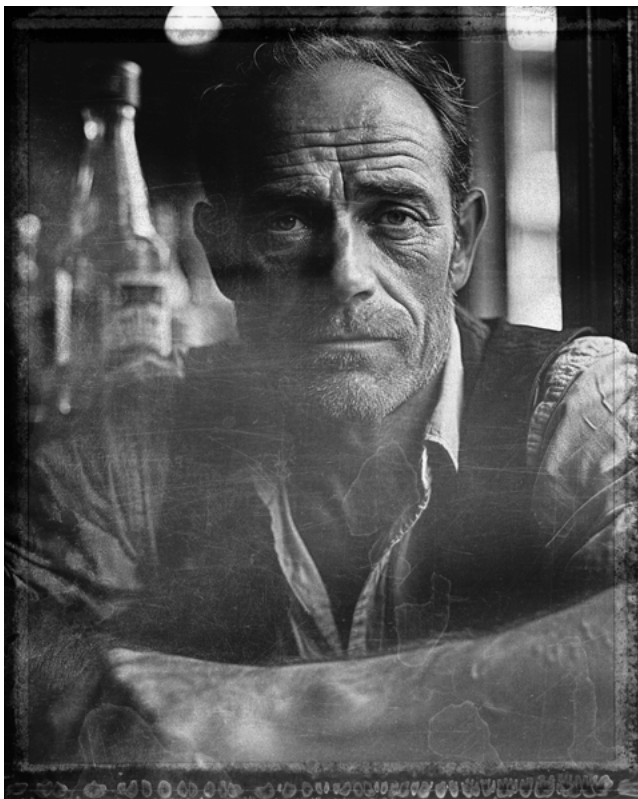
And this is how Simon approaches Midjourney. He types in his prompts and looks at the results. "It's all about what the image invokes in me, how it makes me feel.

"When I see the initial four images in Midjourney, there may be one that I'm strongly drawn to. Other people might make a different selection. You can put four different photographers in a room, all with the same camera and they will come back with different pictures because they have different sensibilities. They are different in the way they think and feel about stuff, so when it comes to using Midjourney, we're naturally impressing our sensibilities onto the result.

"The overall theme of the project was to create the kind of people I would like to have a beer with at a pub that I would like to have a drink in. That's the idea. That's the starting point, whether they are a writer, an actor or, a businessman. I'm not typing this into Midjourney, it's usually done by age – e.g., a woman in her 20s, an old punk rocker in his 50s."







I suggested to Simon that photography has always been a process of recognition. When we hold the camera up to our eye, we press the shutter button when we recognise something we like. When we edit a photo, we use a preset or adjust a curve until we recognise something we like. And when it comes to AI, it's the same thing – we're recognising something we like. So, if all that matters is the final print on the wall, can you use AI to generate it or are you missing out on something yourself? Isn't AI just the ultimate in automation? We've gradually embraced automatic exposure, autofocus and automatic processing with software, why shouldn't we embrace automatic image creation as well?

Simon likens his use of Midjourney to a curatorial role. "It all depends on what you select. People think that anyone who uses Midjourney can create a great image, but that's the same with modern cameras. Today, anyone can create one great image, but I think photography is more than that.

"I remember looking at some contact sheets at a Robert Frank exhibition in New York and thinking that some of the images he didn't print were better! His work that we know is all about the choices he made from the thousands of images he shot. So whether we've captured images with a camera or we're looking at AI output, we're all curating.

"An exhibition or a portfolio of work is cohesive because of the way it's edited and the story that it tells, from cover to back cover. Some people just want to tell stories, others want to make political statements, but that's the beauty of photography. It is so many different things and no one thing is better than another."

Truth Telling

"When digital arrived, it was a big democratisation in that anyone could take a photograph. Prior to that, you had

to know your stuff and to a certain extent, to the layman, photographers were like magicians pulling rabbits out of their hats. Suddenly, digital made photography very, very easy and everyone could do it.

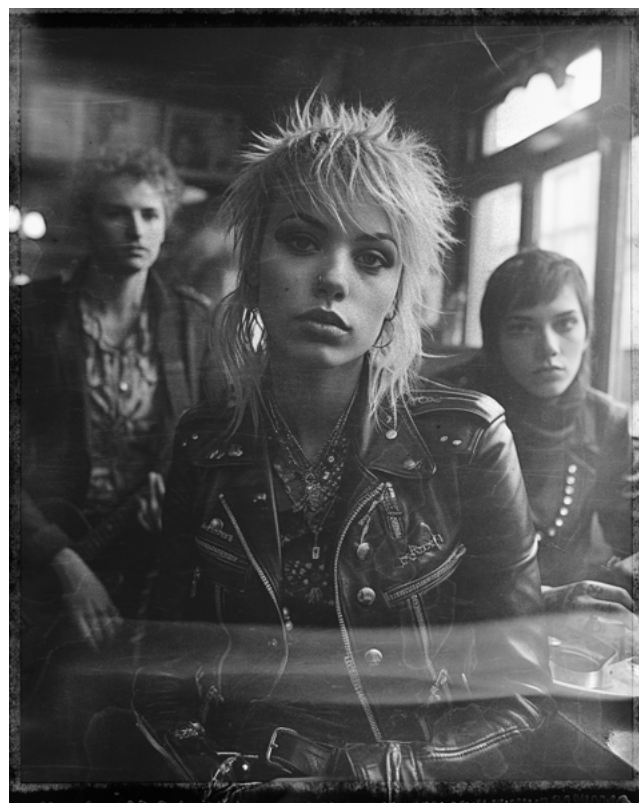
"The difference with the introduction of AI is that, up until now, the general public have associated photography with telling the truth. This is an obvious proposition when it comes to reportage work, but even a highly stylised nude in a field by Bob Carlos Clarke was based on a real person, no matter how much processing and selenium toning he did in the darkroom.

"Today, you might add in a sky or change the background. The photograph may even have a surrealistic vibe, but you believe that at some point, the interaction between the photographer and the model really happened. There's an element of truth.

"Where AI becomes an issue is that it looks like something we perceive to be the truth, but it's not. It's just an amalgamation of millions of different references that the algorithms jumbled together and spat out! There are all kinds of ethical questions, such as whether this is stealing work from other creators, but I don't think it is.

"AI doesn't steal just one artist's work, it draws inspiration from everywhere. You could argue that as photographers, we're already doing this on a daily basis because of all the photos we see, the movies we watch and the books we read. Photographers have always bought photographic monographs and this filters into our head and can't but help show itself in our work at some point.

"We don't yet know the full implications of AI. It's a big, big discussion we're going to have, not just for photographers, but for society as a whole. There's no doubt some people will really abuse this and some people will lose their jobs because AI can







do their work more efficiently, but there are lots of really good ways it can be used too."

AI Ownership

"Most artists are inquisitive people. We don't necessarily want to live in the real world or want a normal life, so AI provides an escape for us. I can see a lot of us chasing that excitement.

"However, I was very conscious that when I put out the AI portfolio, I could cop some flack!

"I remember when digital started, some photographers said that if this is what photography has become, I'm giving up. They felt digital was opening a very accessible door for untalented people to walk through. I think the same issue will arise with AI, but I don't think we can solve the problem by ignoring it. It's here to stay. And it will bring a lot of pleasure for a lot of people."

But will it give people the same sense of ownership we have today? And does that sense of ownership really matter? How does Simon feel about *The Locals* portfolio he created with Midjourney – does he own it?

"Absolutely I do! Intellectual property is a big thing. If you have an idea, then your way of realising that idea is yours.

"Could someone replicate my shots? Absolutely, but that is plagiarism because you've made a conscious decision to rip off one person's work. I'm not sure using Midjourney is plagiarism, it's more like drawing inspiration from all over the place, but it still relies on you to have the initial idea. So, yes, I feel I have ownership of *The Locals* because I had the initial idea, I put it together and I've also changed the Midjourney images afterwards to suit my approach – in the same way that I'd walk into a real pub and say, 'Oh, he's / she's an interesting character, I'll photograph him.'"

"When Midjourney provides the initial images, I look at them and decide if I like one. If I do, I might ask for more variations or I'll zoom in or zoom out. I'll adjust things to suit my idea.

"But I understand the argument. People say, you don't own it because you didn't create it. But yes, I did! I was the one who typed on the keyboard. As an advertising photographer, you wouldn't always be the one to set up the lights or even the camera, but you're giving the directions, you're still the photographer."

I felt that Simon and I were on the same page. In a way, Midjourney is just automating the creating process, based on our ideas. We've accepted automation in many other areas, why not this as well? Yet still, there's definitely a difference. It feels different.

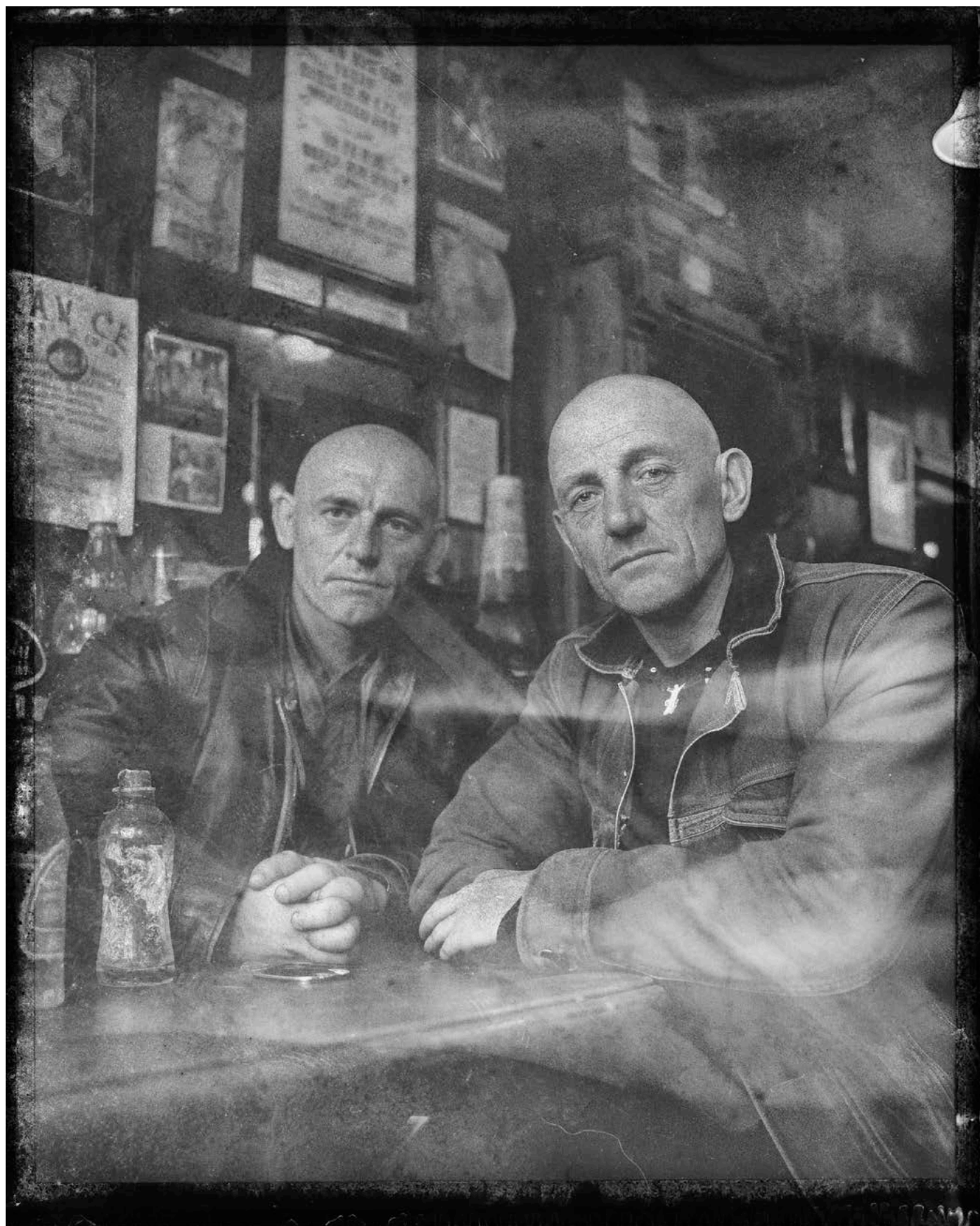
"You start with an initial idea, you make a selection of images, you sequence them and then you decide how to post-produce them so they work together. So when it comes to the final publication, absolutely I have ownership."

While we're all grappling with what Midjourney presents to us and our ownership of it, Simon made a very good point: "What about the photographers and curators who are using 'found images', incorporated into their work? Really, how is that different to finding images on Midjourney?"

And this is why we both find photography so fascinating. What appears on the face of it to be an abrogation of the creative process isn't. We're still calling the shots, making the decisions, but when it comes to our craft, well, there's a huge difference between working with glass plates and selecting frames in Midjourney. On that we can all agree.

You can see more of Simon's work on his website and click on through to his Blast publications and sign up for future episodes as well: <https://www.simonharsent.com/blast>.





WHY DO YOU TAKE PHOTOS?

In keeping with our theme on ideas this issue, Julie Pallant challenges us in a practical way to set ourselves a project and follow it through.

As photographers, whether amateur or professional, the reasons we take photos are as varied as the images we create. Some of us are drawn to photography as a way of preserving memories – capturing fleeting moments that we wish to remember for years to come. Others see it as an art form, a means to create and share beauty or to express their unique vision of the world. Many photographers are storytellers, using their cameras to narrate stories, highlight truths, or provide new perspectives on everyday life. Then there are those who use photography to connect with others, sharing experiences and fostering understanding across different cultures and communities.

This is what I love about photography – there is something for everyone. While our motivations may differ, one thing we share is the potential to impact others. Portrait, family and wedding photographers capture images that last a lifetime and beyond. Images taken by commercial photographers have the power to determine the success or failure of an advertising campaign and the long-term future of businesses.

The power of photography can also be harnessed for the greater good. By turning our lenses towards groups in the community that need help or support, photographers can raise public awareness and understanding of their plights. Images can evoke emotions, stimulate thought and inspire action in ways that words alone cannot. They can shine a light on issues that are overlooked or misunderstood, giving a voice to those who are often unheard.

Have you ever stopped and considered why you take photos – what motivates you? What are you trying to achieve when you press the shutter button? Have you considered other ways that you could apply your photography skills? Could your images be used to help others?

These are some of the questions that I have had to ask myself recently. I am in the final stages of a Diploma of Photography and Photo Imaging at Torrens University and

throughout the course, I have been challenged to define what photography means to me and how I intend to use it in the future. I have been 'forced' to experiment with genres of photography that up until now, had not been of any real interest. Documentary photography was one such application of photography that was new to me.

Photo-essay "Age of Loneliness"

For my documentary photography photo-essay assessment piece, titled "The Age of Loneliness", I chose to explore the issue of loneliness of the elderly in our community. According to the World Health Organisation, an estimated one in four older people experience social isolation. Feelings of isolation and loneliness have been linked to reduced quality of life and a variety of adverse psychological and physical health outcomes.

The aim of my photo-essay was to communicate the lived experience of one woman, as an example of what is experienced by many in the community. I hoped to highlight the hidden epidemic of loneliness among our elderly citizens and to inspire viewers to reach out, connect and to make a meaningful difference in the lives of their family members, friends and neighbours.

To communicate my message, I chose to document a day in the life of my 88-year-old neighbour, Gloria, who lives alone following the death of her husband five years ago after 60 or more years of marriage. Through a series of images, I wanted to show what it is like for her living alone – and lonely.

I met with Gloria over a period of weeks, getting to know her, her life and experiences. This project was a collaboration between the two of us, with Gloria participating in the planning of the shoot and the images that I would capture to tell her story. I prepared mood boards and shot lists to guide the shoot to ensure I was as efficient as possible. I did not want to put too much demand on Gloria's time or energy. As a psychologist, I was also very sensitive to the

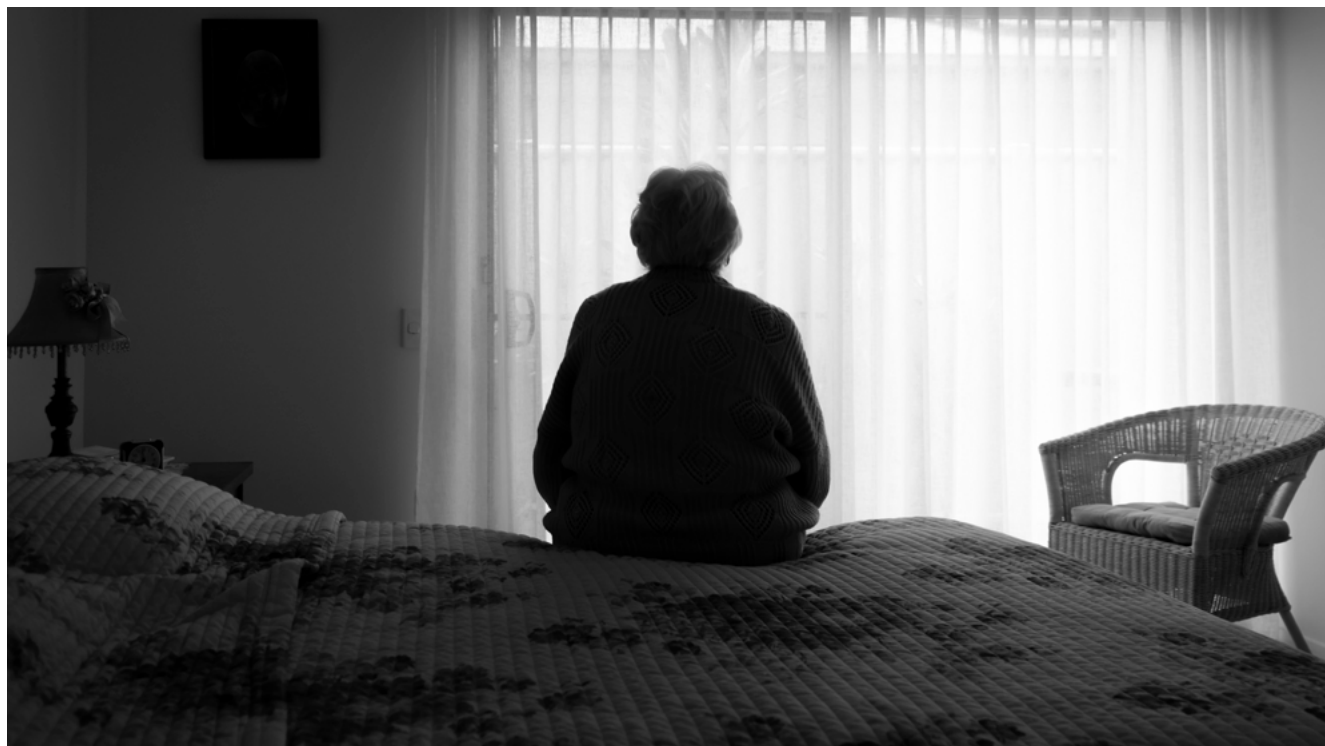


Image 1: Another day...



Image 2: Thinking about the day ahead



Image 3: Preparing the facade to face the world

potential emotional impact on Gloria, as we were discussing some deeply personal experiences and perceptions. There were certainly times when we stopped shooting to have a therapeutic cup of tea and a cupcake!

Creating the Images

I wanted the images to appear as natural as possible, as if I were a fly on the wall while Gloria went about her normal day. For this reason, the images were shot using natural light on my Canon EOS R5, which has a reasonable tolerance of low light (some denoising was needed using Topaz Denoise). In keeping with the sombre tone of the story, I chose to underexpose many of the images and to present them in black and white. For variety, I used different focal lengths throughout the shoot. For some images, I shot wide-angle (focal length = 30mm) as this helped to provide the viewer with information

about Gloria’s environment (see Images 1 and 6). Other images were shot close-up (for example, Image 10 of her hands resting on the Bible) using a macro lens (focal length = 100mm) to highlight details of her hand and wedding ring. Two of the images (Image 2 and Image 5) were shot from outside through the window, creating interesting reflections. This was also done to convey the impression that Gloria was trapped inside, isolated from the outside world.

I wanted the viewer to feel connected to Gloria and her emotions, so in Images 7 and 8 I chose to shoot very close to Gloria, looking over her shoulder at a photo of her husband and at photos of herself as a young woman. For these images, I used a wide aperture (f4), resulting in shallow depth-of-field and a blurring of the background. This approach helps to focus the viewer’s full attention on the objects that she is looking at – replicating Gloria’s experience in that moment.



Image 4: Is there anybody out there?



Image 5: Tea for one



Image 6: Happy Birthday to me

The image of Gloria celebrating her birthday by herself was not in the original shot list. I had rung Gloria one day to organise to catch up and she mentioned it was her birthday. I asked her what she had planned to celebrate the day – the answer was nothing. I couldn't bear the thought of her alone

on her birthday, so I rounded up some friends and we took her out for lunch to mark her special day.
It got me thinking, how many elderly people spend their special day alone? How could I capture this in an image? I made Gloria a cupcake (yes – homemade!), bought a candle and set



Image 7: Memories of days long gone



Image 9: Re-reading love letters from the past



Image 8: I miss you



Image 10: Looking for answers



Image 11: Who is that old woman in the mirror?

up the image of her sitting at the table reading a birthday card, with photos of her loved ones blurred in the background.

Participating in this project was a very positive experience for Gloria – I think it was empowering for her to feel that someone was interested in her story. Gloria and her children were very excited to see the final images and the video I produced – a movie star in the family!

If you would like to check out the video of the images, set to music, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0wU7g5YWCM>. Please share this link with anyone you think might be interested – it is an important message that needs to be communicated.

Over to You

I hope that by sharing my project with you, I have encouraged you to think about different ways your photography skills could be used to tell a story that needs communicating. You might like to consider some of the following activities:

- **Documenting Community Projects:** Volunteer to document the work of local charities or community groups. The images can help these organisations in their fundraising efforts, showcase their impact and attract more volunteers.
- **Collaborative Projects:** Engage with community groups to create collaborative photography projects. This could involve photographing events, creating photo stories that document their experiences, or even teaching members of the group photography skills.
- **Highlighting Social Issues:** Use your photography to highlight social issues within your community, such as homelessness, poverty, isolation, or the impact of natural disasters. By sharing these images on social media or in exhibitions, you can help bring these issues to the forefront of public consciousness.



Image 12: Is that a visitor at the door – how exciting!



Image 13: Finishing the day with a TV Dinner

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Partner with not-for-profit organisations or advocacy groups to create compelling visual campaigns that support their causes. Well crafted images can significantly enhance the reach and impact of their messages.

The beauty of using photography in these ways is that it benefits both the photographer and the community. Photographers gain a deeper connection to the world around them, often finding new purpose and inspiration in their work. Meanwhile, the subjects of their photographs receive attention, support and understanding, which can lead to tangible improvements in their lives.

Photography is more than just a hobby or profession, it's a powerful tool for social change. By focusing our cameras on the stories that matter, we can illuminate the unseen, challenge perceptions and drive action. I encourage you to embrace the opportunity to use your photography for the good of all, making a positive impact on the world, one image at a time.

Resources

If you are looking for further inspiration, check out some of the back issues of *Better Photography* – there are lots of good examples of documentary-style articles, aimed at raising awareness of important issues.

One article that I loved was in Issue 105, Spring 2021 by Jennifer Blau titled "Patricia's Room". Jennifer focused on a topic that meant a lot to her: "How we dismiss older people as they decline, told through a documentary series of my mother-in-

law at 90" (p. 26). She described, in detail, the thought process behind the creation of the beautiful images of Patricia which have been collated into a book and were featured in a number of photographic exhibitions and competitions. Check out more of Jennifer's work at: <https://www.jenniferblau.com/>

Another article you might like to take a look at is by Bruce Usher: "Sydney Homeless Connect" in Issue 108, Winter 2022. He describes an ongoing project where various photographers (coincidentally including Jennifer Blau), took studio portrait shots of Sydney's homeless. These images and the associated stories have been exhibited in the State Library of NSW.

A third set of articles are those by Ken Spence about photographing a football club – see Issues 104 and 114.

Julie Pallant is a retired psychologist, turned passionate photographer, based in Ballina, NSW. Having recently discovered a love of documentary photography, she is keen to use the images created as part of her Age of Loneliness project to raise awareness of the epidemic of loneliness among our older citizens. Check out the video of these images at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0wU7g5YWCM> and share it with friends and family.

Please contact Julie at jfpallant@gmail.com if you are interested in using these images (or video) for any activities that promote the wellbeing of our often-forgotten older citizens.

To see more of Julie's work visit her website at: <https://juliepallant.myportfolio.com/> or follow her on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/julie.pallant.6/> or Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/julie.pallant/>

A TIME FOR REFLECTION

Murray White takes a slightly different tack this issue, searching for a subject that invariably draws on our heart strings and piques our interest!



There lies a visual paradox when we look into a natural landscape and notice its reflection in a foreground lake or river – what we see is not always what was there! How can that be? Not only is the original subject in clear sight, we also have a mirror image to confirm what we saw! And in many instances that beautiful view is just so mesmerising that it assumes a life of its own; but herein lies the mystery, a reflective view can also play tricks with our minds and an apparently simple scene may not be as transparent as we initially thought.

Without doubt that hypnotic combination of visual authenticity and its reflected inversion is actually there, but what we see is very much influenced by our spontaneous recognition of it as a complete package, not by its assessment as individual players on the same stage. The irony is that were it not for the seducing symmetry of its juxtaposition, we may not have been persuaded to give it a second glance. The original subject material (those landscape elements collectively responsible for the reflection) may on their own offer less than convincing aesthetic possibilities, but are often vastly more appealing when seen in concert with their mirror image.

THE GATHERING

Reflective surfaces in the natural world are not limited to open bodies of water, but as this image illustrates, can be found in many other elements. These black rocks coated by a film of seawater exhibit localised specular characteristics, with their curved form unable to provide for a broad undistorted view, instead focusing attention on the light source alone. Reflections of this type often emphasise a subject's form and depth because of an inherently smoother tonal transition compared with that typically achieved on a drier surface.



COME TO ORDER

Too much complexity can detract from an effective print and chaotic reflection can be seen to feed into this problem. However, simplicity in an image is not necessarily the limitation of numerous elemental structures in themselves, but a reduction of competing structures more broadly. In a capture such as this, visual competition is restricted to one type of structure (this stand of redgums), and it is their generic multiplicity and visual asymmetry, not a clash of liberal diversity, that defines the composition.



A DIVINING LIGHT

Sometimes the reflective surface alone can offer sufficient interest without a defined mirror image being visible. Here I have used a localised highlight on the water to feed into its apparent relationship with a fallen tree. A combination of leading lines and similar tonal values has elevated the relative status of this otherwise non-descript sky reflection.

Conditioned Symmetry

As a viewer, you can confirm this phenomenon by cropping with your hand the reflection from any photograph of this genre to gauge the aesthetic merit of its parent material only. As a photographer, we can do likewise prior to the capture of such a subject. I guess the reasons for this subject and setting mismatch are somewhat irrelevant if the resulting photograph lives up to expectations. On the other hand, perhaps a deeper understanding of why reflection works for you can help in your formulation of a more strategic response to its visual influence.

It would seem that the human eye is conditioned to look for views of symmetry, or indeed to identify any pattern in the landscape at all. Such uniform manifestations of visual data suggest our desire for order, to recognise familiar arrangements and to understand their place in our lives. Order implies a greater purpose for Nature's architecture and faulty or random misshapen structures may be seen as the unwanted exception rather than the natural rule of existence.

Features of vertical symmetry seem to hold a higher status in this visual pecking order, perhaps because we associate bilateral balance with living things. Our human form, for example, is the epitome of bilateral symmetry when seen standing square on from the front or back, but of course many other animals, trees and indeed much of the plant kingdom in general, also possess a vertical symmetry to at least some degree.

The reflections of Nature, however, are more typically appreciated as symmetrical in a horizontal plane. A classic example would be a sunset cloud formation, where a precise impression of the evening sky is inverted onto a body of water and the less the separation between these two components of

the image, the greater is its immediate appeal. Lakes, rivers and even puddles provide a platform for natural symmetry, but from an alternative perspective in both their authenticity (we are looking at a mercurial image, not the real thing) and in the lateral, rather than vertical dissection of those matching structures.

Dynamic Depth

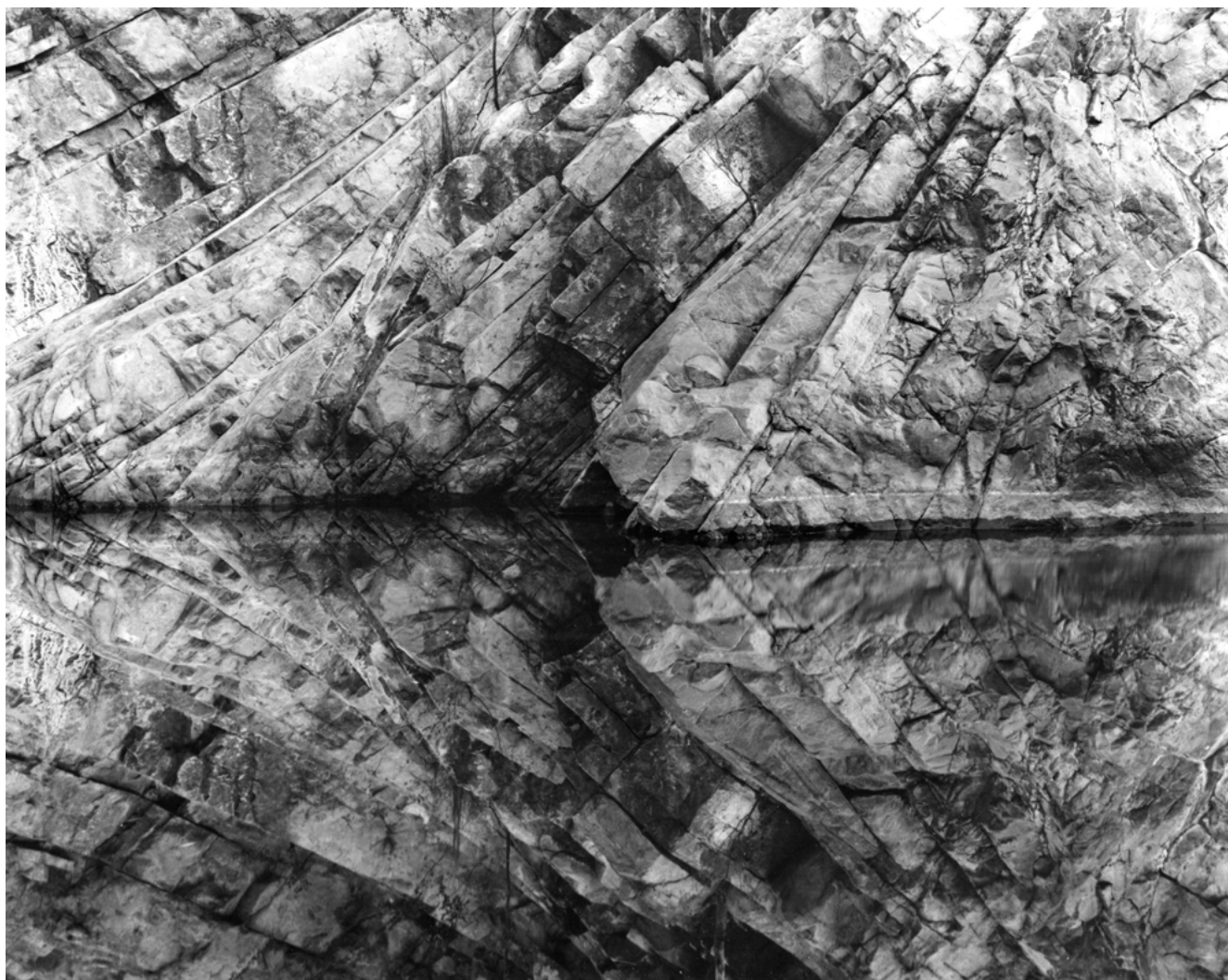
I think that to a large degree, our brains accept both of these characteristics as if looking at a bilaterally symmetrical 'living' structure. Despite the ephemeral nature of the reflection, we tend to consider both subject and its mirror image as a unified identity. It is more than just a visual connection, it becomes an entity in its own right, with a presence that separates it from any surrounding country that does not form part of the reflective package.

However, the horizontal symmetry of a reflection is tempered somewhat by those vertical elements (typically trees and other vegetation) that afford perpendicular connection between both facets of the image. These vertical structures often provide a more satisfying bilateral symmetry within



ELECTRIC CURRENT

Saturated forms reflect light with uncompromising clarity, allowing us to appreciate those textures less obvious on a drier surface. This image expresses a range of tonal values directly proportional to the reflective qualities of those elements across the print; a relationship driven in part by the amount of water involved, the angle of the sunlight and the camera's relative position to both. Each of these factors can help redefine our concept of reflection and how we may choose to interpret it.



FRACTURED

Still waters provide almost mirror perfect reflections, but should be approached with visual caution. Too much symmetry may be hypnotic, but its beauty is often superficial. This image disturbs that potential simplicity with a step in the 'horizon' line that questions the concept of its pure symmetry. One of the tests that I apply to a reflected image is: Does the parent material exhibit aesthetic merit alone? And if not, then what structural influence will the reflection bring to my concept?

the reflection and are perhaps responsible for us finding immediate aesthetic interest in a scene, where there is greater value to be found in the captivating package than the individual parts.

Of further interest to us photographers is the pictorial significance of this reality. I believe that unmitigated landscape reflections, especially grandiose compositions that speak only of the phenomenon itself, have limited capacity to convey a meaningful concept. While often experienced as harmonious and elegant visual echoes at the moment of capture, these potentially sterile images can dissolve into weaker or even boring compositions if we later study them for any length of time. Their beauty is more a function of static spectacle than dynamic depth.

The impact of colour plays into that initial attraction as well. Who doesn't react with a sense of wonder to that kaleidoscopic mix of contrasting colour and repetition? Even complementary colours can form a remarkable union, quite simply because no matter how random their presence is in reality, there will always be symmetry in the reflection.

Sustained Response

Regardless of the glitter, too much symmetry can harness little more visual agency than basic pattern alone; we can be deprived of a photographic narrative (other than a simple statement of the obvious) and even our emotional connection to the photograph may prove to be ambivalent. While feelings of balance or serene expression can be stirred by an orderly capture, any sustained viewer response may be better encouraged by the inclusion of more nuanced subject matter.

Fortunately, pure symmetry (outside of reflection) is rare in Nature and choosing to compose with asymmetric elements will almost certainly help to create a more compelling and visually durable image. Indeed, it is only the suggestion of symmetry that arouses our interest, not its strict presentation. So those wind-blown trees will still exude a generic bilateral stability, but exist with a far more interesting form in reality. Mountain peaks, rocky outcrops and other similar features each provide for more variety and their clinical symmetry is only seen in a reflected mirror image beneath them.



ABOVE US ONLY LIGHT

Your viewpoint relative to the reflective surface and its subject or lighting source has a kinetic influence on the visual outcome. This image partly illustrates that point by the difference in surface reflection over two different water levels seen from the same viewpoint. While the lower body of water reflects the cloud action with clarity, the higher water surface, seen at a different angle, has been reduced to glare alone – an outcome not necessarily detrimental if used with intentional understanding.

Further restriction of symmetrical dominance can be achieved by looking for variation within the reflective surface itself. Water-plants, protruding stones, fallen branches and similar elements can obstruct part of the mirror image and provide a less structured, more dynamic face to the capture. Alternatively, that area of the image responsible for the reflection could be partially obscured (or even completely hidden) by peripheral sections of the composition.

Identifying Sources

Decisions of visual interference should be made on the basis of what level of complexity you wish to apply to your image. The inclusion of too little material can maintain a sense of bland indifference, while incorporating too many visual elements runs the risk of capturing an incoherent visual message. There is no one size fits all, of course, but as photographers we should at least be able to explain our course of action and why we chose to capture our image as we did.

Reflection as part of Nature exists beyond waterways alone; we can find more subtle examples in the form of saturated tree trunks, wet rocks and many other moisture impacted surfaces. Part of the pleasure in identifying these

alternative sources of interest lies in how we may incorporate them into our broader landscape, or even how we might expose their own intimate qualities.

I find considerable satisfaction in locating and effectively utilising those examples of reflection that are less stereotypical in content. Specular highlights and tonal variations that only imply a reflective surface, rather than reveal everything, are capable vectors to infuse a sense of mystery within the image. Sometimes the understated influence of a quieter narrative conveys more power in a visual sense, because as a viewer we must imagine what is possible, not simply be witness to something expressed explicitly.

As a consequence, my particular approach to reflections is largely one of considered awareness, rather than strategic planning, although there are a few things to keep in mind when assessing the possibilities. Some people with wide-angle lenses choose to move close to the body of water to emphasise its dominance, or use a polarising filter to regulate the reflection's impact. I rarely use any filter or non-standard lens, but would always recommend assessing many alternative viewpoints to see how the reflections and their juxtaposition may be impacted. Even very minor changes to where you



LET US PRAY

The symmetry of pure reflection can prompt assessment of the entire image as a single integral feature, rather than be seen as subject and its mirror image. I have rotated this capture 90 degrees to suggest a subject blessed with bilateral symmetry and the potential for some viewers to apply that quality we see as very human (or at least, living) to this otherwise random jumble of rocks.



THICKER THAN AIR

Images of reflection alone can bring with them an impression of fantasy by virtue of their curious estrangement from reality. Rippled water will extend that transition further, by the altered sense of shape and tonal constitution that is a by-product of movement over time. In this example I have also inverted the image to help disguise its reflective heritage and hint instead at a potential atmospheric deficiency.

stand in relation to the reflective surface can have a significant visual impact.

Pay close attention to your depth-of-field capability too; images made close to the water and its surrounding elements, together with the reflected subject and other features on the horizon can be tricky, as we usually need to keep both parts of the composition in focus. There are other considerations to be made in post-production as well. The reflected image is often about one stop darker than its subject material and may need compensation for the final image to appear realistic to our eye.

Capturing reflection is a rite of passage for all landscape photographers and without doubt some of the best work utilises this phenomenon in very effective ways. We can all look in wonder at that stunning spectacle Nature hosts from

TESTING THE WATERS

Reflection need not be a substantive part of your image in the sense of how much area it occupies to attract a viewer's attention. In this instance, other reflective elements have been visually absorbed by the density of its composition, leaving a solitary reed to become the obvious hero. While a single bent reed without a reflection would still provide a point of emphasis, the inclusion of its mirror image has now helped complete a geometric shape, and the orderly intrigue that may provoke.

time to time, but consider too the other possibilities that mirror images may present. Perhaps reflection beyond mere likeness can help us all see with more clarity.



Is Photojournalism A Laughing Matter?

After criticising the art world last issue, Michael Coyne challenges us with another thought that is just not funny!

Recently, I attended the opening of a photography exhibition. The gallery official launching the exhibition spoke about the images in lively and glowing terms. Partway through the speech, she suddenly launched into a mock tirade about photojournalism, which included her performing a 'silly walk'. Her rant was basically about the irrelevance of journalistic style photography and its constant use of black and white images. Attending the exhibition were a few known journalistic photographers who'd spent a lifetime documenting the

changing environment and culture of Australia. They had produced some iconic images of the Australian lifestyle.

Perhaps if the gallery official had been aware of who was in her audience, she would have been more respectful of these talented photographers, though I doubt it. During her long tenure as the head of a photography gallery, she only once showed journalistic work and that was because it was a sponsored collection.

Photojournalism, when practised professionally, is a powerful tool for recording, informing and educating viewers about what is happening in the world around us and on distant shores.

Every day news is fed to us by newspapers, magazines or social media in its various guises. What leads these articles, profiles or opinions is photography, more than likely, photojournalism.

Photojournalists are everywhere, trying to make visual sense of events, daily life, celebrations, wars and revolutions. Their job is to capture the moment and tell a story in a way that attracts, interests, connects and challenges the viewer to understand the situation that the photographer is documenting. At the same time, they are juggling the aesthetics of the image by considering the light, composition and content in conditions that are often stressful and can be dangerous.

Luis Ascui was covering an anti-lockdown protest while on assignment in Melbourne for the Nine Media organisation. As Ascui photographed some demonstrators being pepper



A member of the transvestite community in Pakistan where these people are ostracised, beaten or killed.



A brick kiln worker covered in red brick dust. Pakistan has an estimated 1.8 million brick makers, who are forced to work on a bonded basis that condemns them to slavery. Under the paishgi system, the brick makers, or bhatta mazdoor, are given an advance by the owner of the kiln which they must repay. It is a debt that is often carried on for generations.

sprayed, the police turned and drenched him with capsicum spray. Two other photographers, Jay Kogler and Michael Currie, working at the demonstration, were also sprayed. Kogler and Currie were manhandled and arrested by the police. This is despite all three photographers displaying their media passes. Photojournalists in some countries risk their lives and freedom by documenting what is happening when citizens gather to protest against governments. In Myanmar, for example, photographers cannot attach their names to photographs due to safety concerns. These governments are well aware of the power of images and ban photography, confiscate cameras and may arrest the photographer.

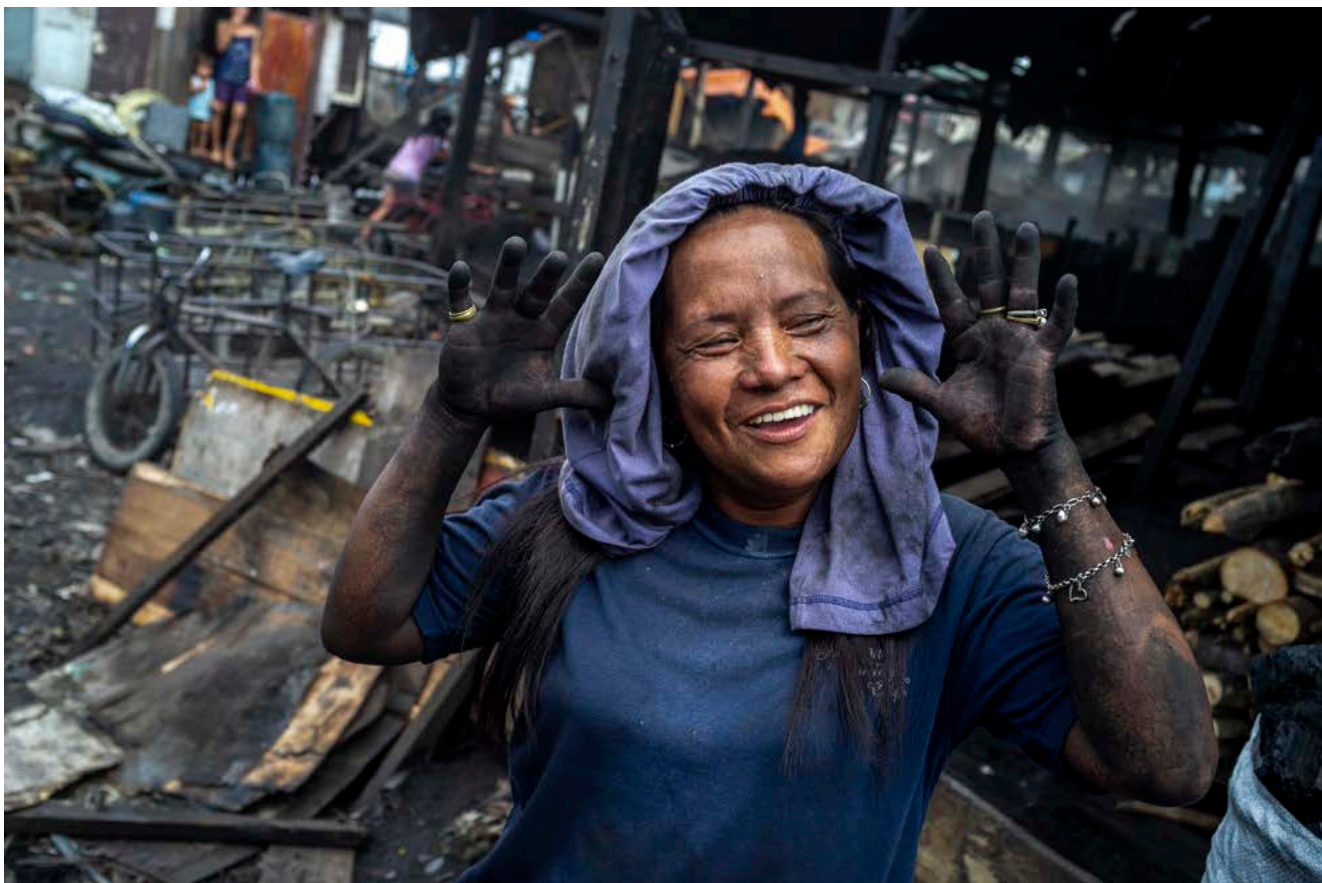
In the Gaza Strip, local photographers like Saher Alghorra are risking their lives documenting daily events as Israeli bombs, rockets and soldiers destroy their homeland and even kill members of their own families. Over 126 media personnel have been killed so far in this conflict which makes it one of the most dangerous places in the world for a photojournalist to work.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, it has become another place where photojournalists risk their lives on the frontline, trying to capture images that will help us

understand life in a war-torn country. Lynsey Addario was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for work she produced while under fire in Ukraine.



A young man suffering from mental illness has been tied up by his parents because they have no other way of dealing with his health problems in their village in Indonesia.



At a charcoal-burning pit, a woman cleans her face after sifting through the charcoal for scrap metal. The 300 families living in this squatter community depend on charcoal burning for their livelihood. Manila, Philippines.

Robin Hammond is a New Zealand photographer who has devoted his life to producing long-term photographic projects about people who are marginalised or suffer with mental health issues and also LGBTQI+ individuals living in countries where they could be incarcerated or executed. Hammond has won many awards including the W. Eugene Smith Award and has also addressed the United Nations which I think shows that photojournalism has the power to challenge and to get people thinking about the issues that we deal with in today's world. His projects are produced in colour or black and white, depending on which method he feels works for his topic.

Ed Kashi, one of the busiest photojournalists in the world today, shifts frequently from black and white to colour depending on the project or book he's working on. He has produced series such as *Too Hot To Work*, *Paradox Nation / Pakistan Encountered* and also books including *Curse of the Black Gold* and *Madagascar: A Land Out of Balance*.

Most contemporary photojournalists work mainly in colour as you can see in the publications that reproduce their images. There are notable exceptions, such as the American photojournalist Mark Peterson who frequently shoots American political events and personalities in black and white. Also of course, Sebastião Salgado who only shoots in black and white for his epic projects and Matt Black who documents issues like



Right: A truck driver bathes in a flooded area of Bangladesh while he waits for the waters to subside.



A villager cleans his teeth on the banks of a river which runs past his house. Some villages in parts of China don't have running water and toilet facilities in their homes.

migration, poverty and the environment in harsh black and white tones.

There is no one way of seeing topics or making images and certainly not every photojournalist envisions their work in black and white. Robert Capa carried two cameras, one for black and white and another camera body which he used for shooting his thousands of colour images. Even Henri Cartier-Bresson, the master of black and white photography, shot colour photographs. One of his major assignments in which he shot colour was a four-month project in China for *LIFE Magazine*. The type of film he used was irrelevant, what was important to Cartier-Bresson was capturing the 'decisive moment', in either black and white or colour.

Many photojournalists risk their lives and see the extremes of humanity. They are witness to events and situations that are funny, endearing, warm, challenging and dangerous. When on assignments, these photographers are sometimes injured, killed or watch their colleagues die while trying to feed the daily/weekly news cycle.

Perhaps the gallery official was right to perform her version of the Monty Python Ministry of Silly Walks while mocking photojournalists. Like many of my colleagues, I have used the same walk when carrying a lot of photo equipment, struggled through rough terrain and walked cautiously across minefields.

In fact, I think the 'silly walk' is a sign of those who can do and have no time for those who mock but can't do!



Right: A tribal woman in Papua New Guinea.

UPON REFLECTION

REFLECTIVE ART WITH WATER

**Nick Melidonis provides us with yet another way of
approaching reflections in our photography.**

Last September, I introduced old friend Tony Hewitt to Greece and he and I led a small group through the Peloponnese and some islands like Hydra and Spetse. After 25 years of leading tours to the Greek Islands, I decided I am taking 'Long Service Leave' and passed my Greek tours over to Tony.

While we were in the old Greek capital of Nafplion (a beautifully preserved Byzantine city with cobbled streets, castles and a vibrant port where the rich and famous parked their superyachts), we stayed at a waterside hotel in the old port.

We decided to see who could capture some striking images of the old port and city and went about seeking some creative viewpoints along the waterfront. It wasn't long before I found myself walking along the water's edge and then noticed some beautiful reflections of the fishing boats and yachts. These views were constantly changing as the water moved, so I could capture numerous versions of the same scene from basically one spot. The difference between capturing these stunning images and my methods this time and my technique from over a decade ago, is that I only had a Samsung S22 Ultra phone with me, which I believe has some extraordinary lenses and processors built in.

I wrote an article in this fine magazine over 10 years ago on creative reflections in fishing ports which I will now revisit by using a simple mobile phone's camera.

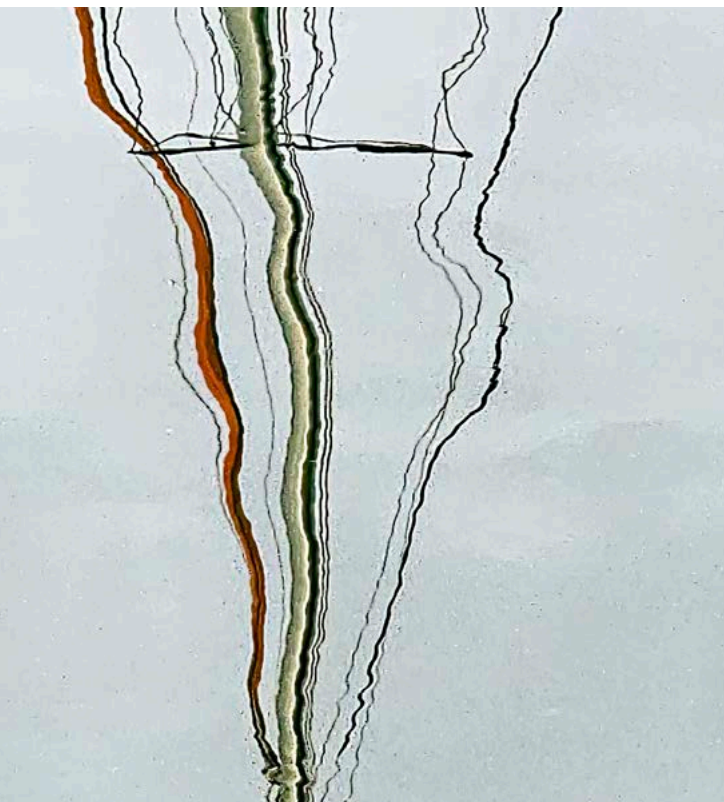
Landscape and travel photographers have always sought images of water reflections on their journeys and many examples adorn magazine covers and exhibition walls. There is something inherently beautiful and peaceful about a striking scene reflected in calm water.

Left: Photo with a Samsung S22 Ultra phone of fishing boat reflections taken in the harbour of Milos. Some post-processing was done in Lightroom to produce the vibrant colours. The camera phone images are hand-held and composed by looking at the Samsung's screen.

Opposite: Greek Fishing Boat in the Island of Milos showing the reflections produced in the water of the boat which is the subject of most of the photos in this article.







Reflection of a yacht moored in the old capital of Greece, Nafplion taken with Samsung S22 Ultra.

In previous articles for *Better Photography*, I talked about setting myself 'projects of passion' as a body of work and one of mine has been water reflections, especially those in enclosed fishing harbours. It started many years ago on my Greek Island Tours when I first noticed the most amazing abstract patterns formed by the brightly painted Greek fishing boats or Caiques. My early attempts to capture them were not totally successful, but perseverance soon produced a formula that captured great images with nearly every shot, (in those days, I was shooting with Canon DSLRs and lenses).

I also found that if you are a photographer who likes to experiment with postcapture finishing techniques in Photoshop, you can enhance the photos further with textures and collages to produce abstract fine art prints.

Being visually ready to 'see' and seek reflections and knowing what conditions are needed for success are important. It was interesting to note that on many of my Greek trips, most photographers would walk past potentially great reflection shots, but after a workshop and increased awareness of what to look for, their ability to see and capture these images increased dramatically.

Firstly, let me outline how I went about capturing these reflections with traditional DSLR and mirrorless cameras and lenses and what has changed by using simple phone cameras today.

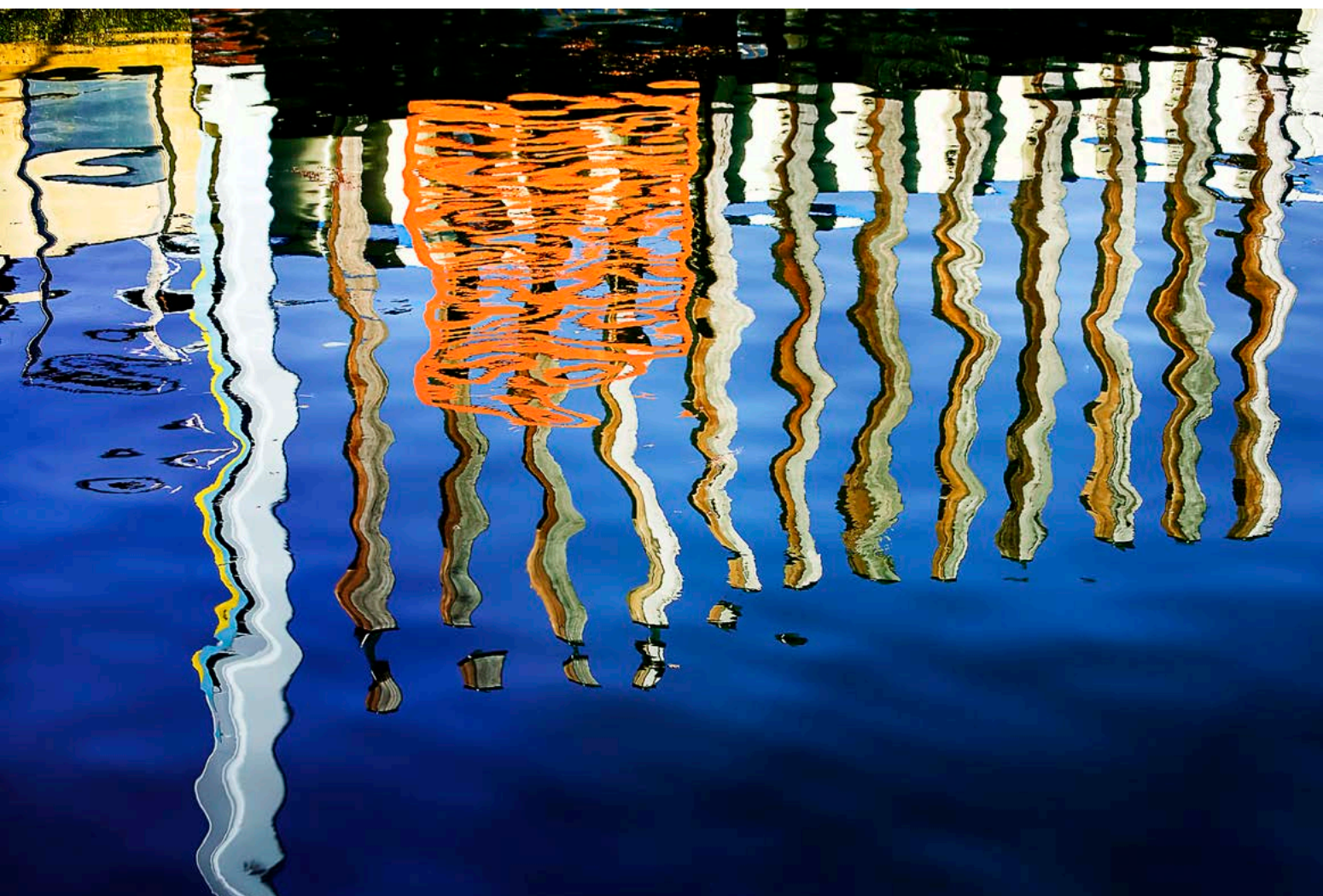
Traditional Capture

Success in capturing good reflections with mirrorless cameras and DSLRs requires conditions that must be near ideal. Here are some tips when you want to capture just the reflection of an object because you think it has potential to be a fine abstract. The conditions required are:

- **Sheltered Water.** This can be a fishing harbour, river, pond or even a puddle.
- **Very Little Wind.** I find the best times are early morning and late afternoon. Often after a storm or front goes through, you will get periods of calm weather the next morning. If the water is rough or there is a high wind, the reflections break up very quickly.
- **Great Light** on the reflected subject matter. Reflections look great when the colours are strong and so the best conditions require clear, bright sunlight on the subject matter. Early morning or late evening with the strong, warm colours on the subject are excellent. Having said that, I shot some very interesting patterns of the multi-coloured neon lights reflected in rain puddles in Hong Kong.
- **Access to the Water's Edge.** Not mandatory, but certainly helpful to give you the greatest opportunity to find your vantage point and set up.
- **Just Enough Water Motion** to create abstract patterns. These subtle changes in the reflections are very fast and to freeze the motion with traditional cameras can be tricky.



Reflection photo of Greek fishing boat taken with a Samsung S22 Ultra phone, post-processed in Photoshop for effect and finished with a border produced by NIK Color Efex PRO 4.



Reflections taken in Fremantle, Western Australia of Fishing Boat Harbour jetty with Canon EOS 5D Mk IV camera and 100mm lens.

- **Vibrant Colours** for the strongest and most pleasing images. Again, fewer colours with strong patterns can lead to successful images.

Successful water reflections can be technically challenging and a 'happy snap' approach rarely works effectively. Let me outline the approach I found worked best for me with traditional cameras if the primary objective is to capture just the reflection for an abstract photograph.

When you first see a good reflection of a fishing boat or harbour scene, chances are you are probably ten or more metres away from the subject. As you move closer to the subject, the reflection moves as well, until when you get close to your subject, it is reduced to a small area just beneath the subject – which is not what you want. So, you need to be a reasonable distance away from the subject; exactly where depends on how wide you want your reflection. Often, the wider the reflection, the better it looks.

This means you are now shooting at a shallow angle and to get right into the reflection and eliminate the subject itself, you would need a telephoto lens. I shoot most of my traditional camera harbourside abstracts with focal lengths of around 200 – 400mm.

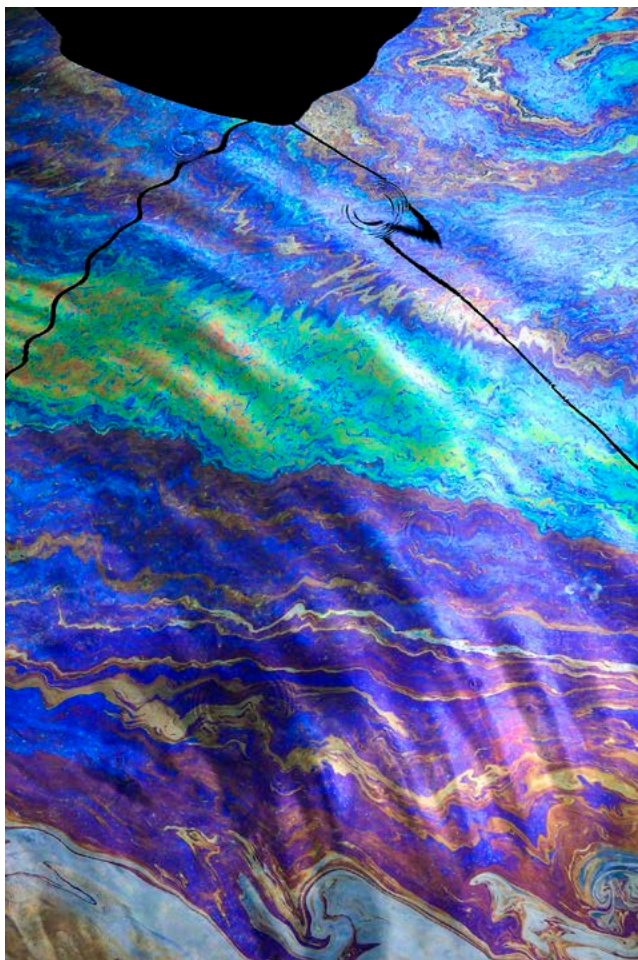
Next, some reflections move very quickly and as they work best when you freeze the movement, you will need a fast

shutter speed, especially as you are shooting with a telephoto lens. I find that the shutter speeds that give me the best results are more than 1/250 second. At the 400 mm end, I play safe and shoot at around 1/500 second with the camera mounted on a firm tripod and using a cable release. I have also had reasonable success with my 100-400mm telephoto lens hand-held and using an image stabiliser.

Another problem you will encounter is the limited depth-of-field. As a rule, successful reflections need to be sharp throughout. The shallow shooting angle required, the distance between the reflection and the subject, together with the fact that telephoto lenses inherently have shallow depth-of-field, mean that keeping everything sharp is challenging. Now, add in the fact you need a fast shutter speed to keep everything sharp and a small aperture to get as much depth-of-field as possible.

Experiment with apertures to taste, but you will probably find you need to choose an f-number of f8 or smaller. How is all this going to work?

To obtain the desired shutter speed and apertures, you will now find you need to set a high ISO for your camera. I find I generally have to use an ISO of around 400, sometimes higher if the light is not as bright. High ISO settings in digital cameras can produce noise in your file (although modern cameras can



Reflections of the shadow of a Greek fishing boat and its mooring lines with a thin film of oil from a leaky outboard providing iridescent colours on the harbour waters. Canon EOS 5D Mk IV with 35mm lens shot in the harbour of Hydra Island.

handle noise up to ISO 1600 quite well) and you may need to remove the noise in post-production using AI noise reduction in Lightroom or programs such as Topaz De Noise AI.

Water Reflections in Landscapes

Looking for an opportunity to add a reflection into a landscape can often turn an ordinary image into an extraordinary one. I always seek out isolated puddles in rocky coastlines, inland canyons and Australian Gorges.

On our recent Greek trip with Tony, we tried and produced some very creative photos by holding wide-angle lenses on our cameras very low over a puddle.

Other opportunities include reflections of mountain peaks or highlands in rivers or lakes when the early morning sun or last light illuminates them. The effect of bright dawn or dusk colours in the water, contrasting with the more subdued, colder colours of the surrounding rocks, is quite striking. This is especially true in countries where the landscape can include snow in shadow with brightly coloured peaks reflected in the surrounding water.

Using Phone Cameras

Using traditional cameras can produce large files of reflections, very useful if we are planning an exhibition. However, we

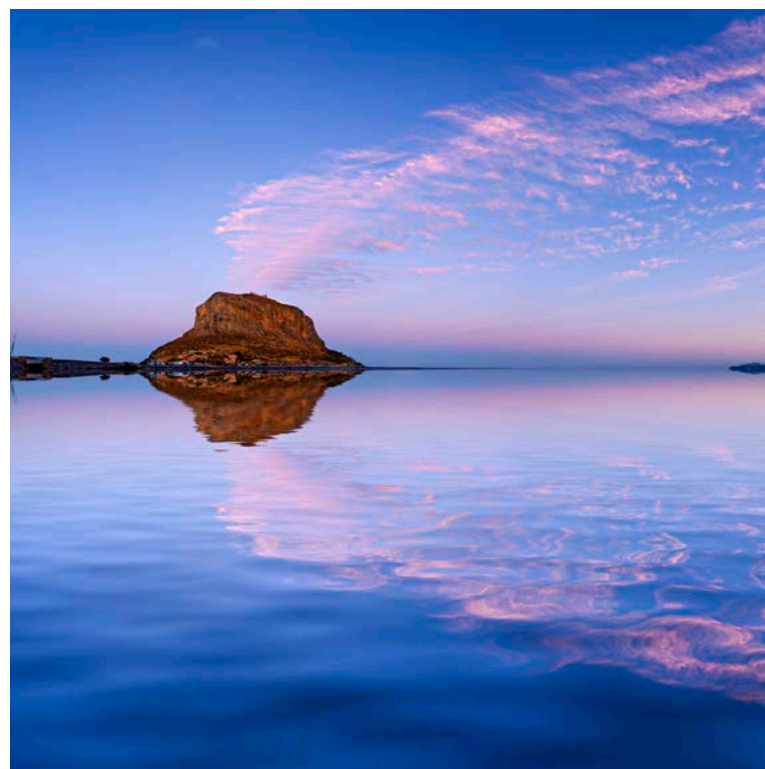
had to be aware of using fast shutter speeds to freeze the reflections, shallow angles to see the reflections, small apertures to get a reasonable depth of field and high ISOs so we get the right exposure, all of which can present challenges.

What I found is that because phone cameras have much smaller sensors, the depth-of-field needed for reflections is already there and the way in which phone cameras process their digital images, the freezing of the motion and the high ISO problem did not seem to prevent me getting a very usable digital file.

I was able to hand-hold the phone and get image after image until I was satisfied I had enough variations of a particular reflection, then I'd move onto the next one. No large telephoto lenses to carry, no tripods, no fiddling with camera controls and although the files were smaller, they still produced A3 prints easily. What's there not to like?

The photos in this article were taken with my Samsung S22 Ultra phone which has some amazing lenses built in. I hope these tips are useful to you in capturing reflections. Master these techniques, seek out the right conditions outlined above and you will be rewarded with some striking images.

Nick Melidonis and Tony Hewitt will be conducting an amazing tour to Borneo in April 2025 to experience and photograph wildlife in the National Parks, the vibrant cities of Kuching, Kota Kinabalu etc., and with expert guides that service BBC film units. It's all done in sheer comfort, staying in luxury hotels and eco-resorts and driven in aircon vehicles. A tour not to be missed. Tony Hewitt will be continuing with Nick's adventures in the fabled Greek Peleponese in September 2025.



If you want to have a bit of fun producing reflections at home, try a piece of software called 'Flood' produced by company 'Flaming Pear'. You can set where your horizon is and then dial in the amount of 'waves' you want with lots of other parameters. I used Flood on a photo of the ancient town of Monemvasia on the Southern tip of the Peleponese on my last tour with Tony Hewitt.



ICONIC BORNEO

TONY HEWITT AND NICK MELIDONIS - APRIL 2025

An amazing adventure in complete comfort with exotic wildlife, Dayak tribes, longhouses, National Parks and support crews that guide BBC film units, luxury hotels and eco-resorts, a tour not to be missed

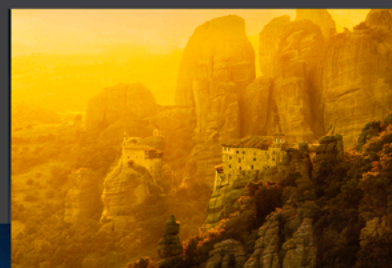
ICONIC GREECE

Sept 2025

Join Tony Hewitt and Nick Melidonis

Monasteries, Kings and Castles

Delphi, Meteora, Thermopylae, Nafplion, Epidaurus, Mystras, Monemvasia, Spetses and Hydra



For over two decades, **Nick Melidonis**, one of Australia's foremost photographers has been introducing Greece and the Greek islands to hundreds of travellers. Now the adventure continues with renowned photographer **Tony Hewitt and Nick** on a special Iconic Greece Tour in Sept 2025. This boutique tour includes stunning photography, culture, history and amazing cuisine with workshops and demonstrations to photographers and non-photographers alike; all in relaxing comfort. Join Tony and Nick and many local identities in a trip of a lifetime on this special tour in **Sept 2025**

'ICONIC GREECE 2025' WILL TAKE YOU TO SOME OF THE MOST VIBRANT AND PHOTOGENIC PLACES ON THE GREEK MAINLAND WITH A VISIT TO THE SPECTACULAR ISLANDS OF SPETSE AND HYDRA
For a full itinerary, see Tony's website, tony@tonyhewitt.com or nick@nickmelidonis.com

The Problem With White.

The Beauty of White.

In photography circles, pure white is sometimes considered a heinous crime, the hallmark of an incorrectly captured or processed file.

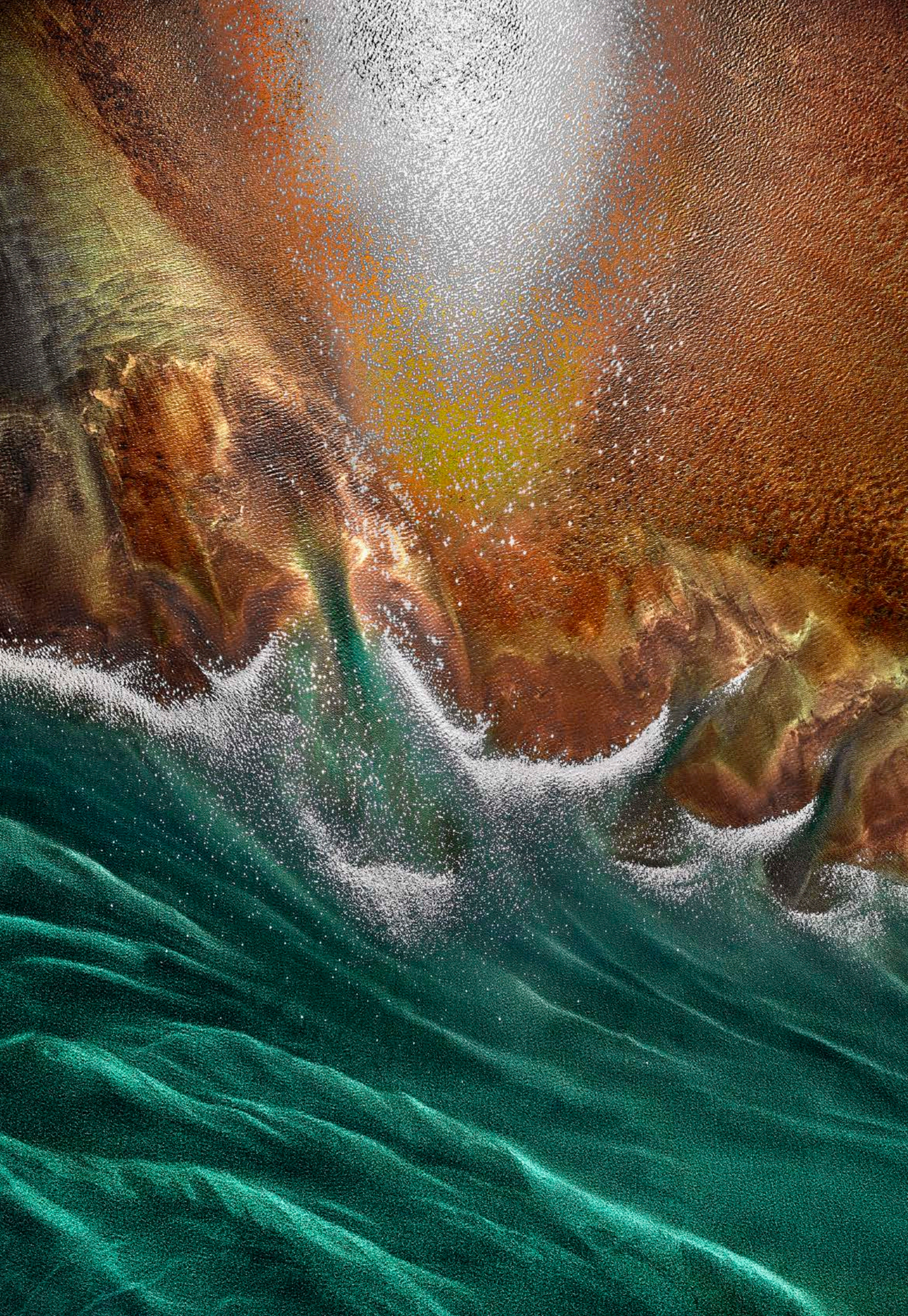
Not always, of course. Think about a high key portrait where the subject is dressed in white and all the tones are intentionally very light – and often pure white in the background. In fact, if that white background had even a tint of tone about it, the desired effect would be lost.

Similarly, a landscape which includes the sun (or the indirect reflection of the sun off a water surface), or a night shot with street lamps are excused if there are areas of 100 per cent white because, well, that's what they are.

However, in the majority of situations, pure white simply means a loss of control over your highlights. In the film days, it meant a poor exposure either in-camera or in the darkroom. In our digital days, it means much the same, except there is a plethora of techniques that can remedy the situation. If you don't want to have pure white in your photograph, you don't have to.

Opposite: Far Shore, Faure Island, Shark Bay

The sun is reflected directly off the shallow sand bars and also the tiny breaking waves below. And being reflections, their tonal rendition has been allowed to burn out to paper white.



My Background

For over thirty years, I attended the annual AIPP Australian Professional Photography Awards judging, first as an entrant, then as a judge and even for a few years as the chairman. I would spend hours watching prints being assessed and listening to comments by the expert judging panels. And I wasn't only watching my four prints being assessed each year, I was watching hundreds of prints over the course of a weekend.

One of the criticisms I heard a lot was about paper white. Judges would look at a portrait, notice a highlight on the forehead or cheeks and criticise that the highlights were not controlled because the paper on which the image was printed was pure white – paper white. In other words, there was no tone or detail and the judges preferred at least a hint of tone to no tone.

Of course, now that I'm also a judge, I can understand that often you're looking for little suggestions that can help the entrant. Overall, a photograph might not have much going for it (the subject could be bland, the lighting too strong, the background intrusive), but rather than listing a litany of errors, it's better to concentrate on just one or two aspects that could make an immediate improvement. And certainly, controlling your exposure – and hence the highlights in your image – is a good starting point.

This approach towards paper white is so ingrained in me that I intentionally underexpose most of my images by at least 0.67EV, sometimes by as much as 2.0EV. When photographing a landscape, the histogram on the camera can report all is good, but when you enlarge the image on the back of the camera's LCD screen, you can find the 'blinkies' going wild on tree branches where the sun is being reflected off bare wood. For me, there's a huge difference in the final print if I can control the exposure at the point of capture.

Art Lesson

I wonder if anyone is still reading? When I was at school, I painted a 'photo-realistic' canvas depicting a couple of broken eggs. I can still hear my mum complaining about wasted food, but then again, the painted canvas is still in my garage some 50 years later, although it is on the ground, against the concrete brick wall and stops my car door from being chipped.

As it was a photo-realistic painting, I started by taking a photo of the broken eggs and making a print. From here, I managed to sketch out the image onto the canvas, I painted in the background and then started on the eggs. I struggled to get a really good highlight along the edge of the broken egg-shell. I'd use lots of white paint, but by the time I brushed it into place, it was contaminated with black and so the highlight became a 'dull light'.

My teacher, Neil Brown, walked up to me and showed me how to do it. He squeezed out some pure white paint onto the palette, grabbed a spatula (not a brush) and placed the highlights deftly into place. Pure white.

It was miraculous. I should have been a better student and paid more attention to my teachers more often, but it was to be many years later before I could apply this lesson to photography.

Breaking the Rules

Around 10 years ago, I started working with Dr Les Walkling. Some readers might read 'Dr' and think Les is a psychiatrist and that he'd have his work cut out helping me, but fortunately the doctorate is photography based.

Les and I are members of Ninety Degrees Five, a collaboration of five image makers including Tony Hewitt, Christian and Michael Fletcher (twin brothers, not partners). While we haven't worked together for several years now (although hopefully we have a project slated for 2025), the collaboration has impacted all of us in different ways.

Now, I might be putting words into Les's mouth that he would prefer more eloquently expressed, but one of the many takeaways from the time I spent with him is that there are no rules. There are techniques and approaches that can help us

achieve a particular result, but the idea that a print shouldn't have paper white on it is, well, a ridiculous rule!

This isn't to say that prints don't look better without paper white, rather that to ban any paper white anywhere at any time is a stupid rule. It all depends on what you're trying to achieve, so an anti 'paper white' bias is not a reasonable position to take.

People often ask me what's my favourite photograph, something that I find impossible to answer. However, one of Les's prints has greatly impressed me and it's still hanging up in Denman as part of the Shark Bay – Inscription exhibition.

I was with Les when he took the photograph over Dirk Hartog Island. We were doing an ND5 project and Christian and Tony said they had had enough for the day and left Les and me to mop up the crumbs on an afternoon flight. We figured they were going to the pub or maybe Christian was going to look for an abandoned gold mine, so Les and I decided we'd make the most of available plane time and did a long circuit around the Island. (Mind you, when we arrived back shortly after sunset, both Christian and Tony were stomping around the airfield, demanding to know where we had been and why we took so long – Les and I felt like naughty schoolboys, except we were more than happy with the images we had taken.)

At one stage, we were doing orbits around the southern tip of Dirk Hartog Island. I was looking at the lines of swell cresting and breaking on the shallow sand bars, but Les was shooting much tighter, concentrating on a watery cauldron of activity directly below the plane. It's a wonderful abstract, I'm sure you'll agree.

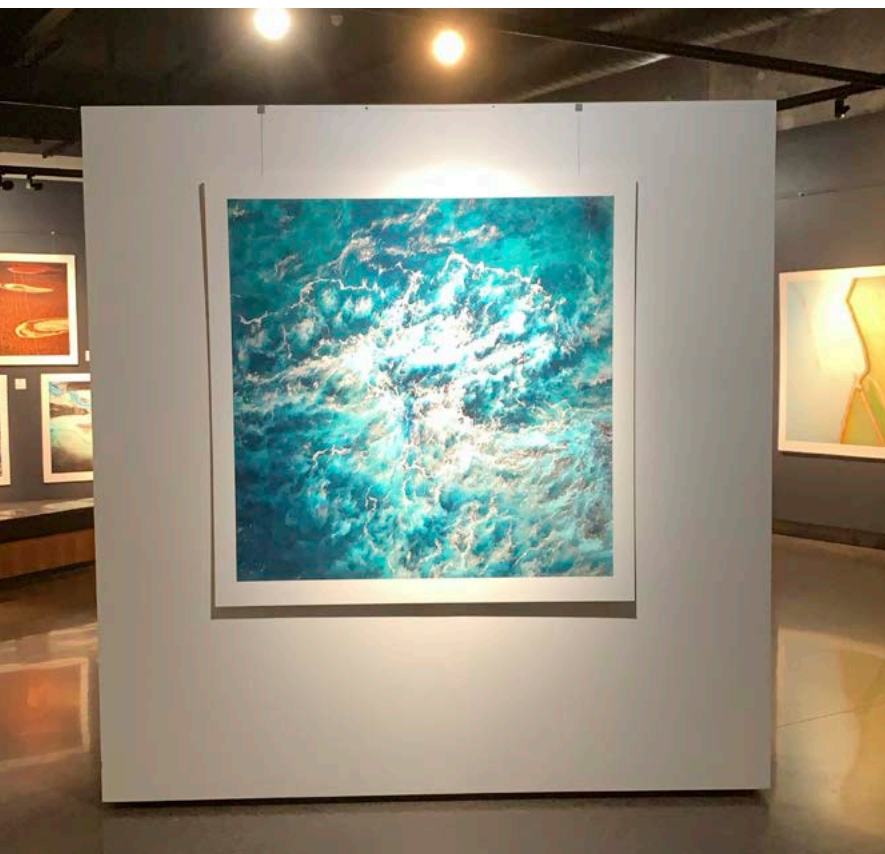
The epiphany for me is that when I looked more closely at Les's magnificent two-metre square print, the highlights are pure white. Paper white.

Now, I might be putting words into Les's mouth that he would prefer more eloquently expressed, but one of the many takeaways from the time I spent with him is that there are no rules. There are techniques and approaches that can help us achieve a particular result, but the idea that a print shouldn't have paper white on it is, well, a ridiculous rule!

The white paint applied by teacher Neil Brown.



Broken Egg
This is my 50-year-old photo-realistic painting of a cracked egg and the lesson of how pure white in art (and photography) can be a good thing.



And did I say the print is simply magnificent? On the one hand, a simple pattern shot, on the other an image with depth, clarity and complexity. When you engage with the physical print, there is a myriad of blue and aqua hues describing a jumbled and disjointed body of water, the accent being broken white water and foam, bubbling away on the surface and being tossed and aligned by the wind and swell.

And did I say the print is simply magnificent? On the one hand, a simple pattern shot, on the other an image with depth, clarity and complexity. When you engage with the physical print, there is a myriad of blue and aqua hues describing a jumbled and disjointed body of water, the accent being broken white water and foam, bubbling away on the surface and being tossed and aligned by the wind and swell.

When I asked Les for permission to run his photo, he added in another throw-away comment (as he often does) that is so important. He noted that not only were his whites and brightest highlights, white, they had been desaturated. On this occasion, I don't have to rely on my memory to repeat what Les said, here's a direct quote:

"And while the cyan-blues are within our printer's gamut and Adobe RGB, but are well outside of sRGB, it can be tricky to reproduce in CMYK. But the point you will be using it for is not about overall gamut, so that might not matter. Also, the 'trick' in this image is desaturation of the brightest highlights to 'remove' them from their atmospheric surroundings (sky/water), which adds the VaVaVoom."

Break the Rules

This print gave me permission to break not just one rule, but all the rules. When I judge photo competitions, it also allows me to give higher scores to images that I think other judges struggle with (or maybe I'm just plain wrong). It allowed me to leave the world of photography competitions and awards when I wanted to or needed to. I still love competitions, don't get me wrong, but I now have another life, another personality where I can do things the way I want to, whether others like them or not.

So, when you look at my photograph of Shark Bay which leads this article, I hope you noticed the paper whites! And I hope the file I have provided the printer exhibits those paper whites or something very close.

Flying over the far shore of Faure Island in Shark Bay, there are lots of sandy shoals which are shallow enough to catch the wind chop as it pushes up the inlet. As the tiny swells break, the white water reflects the overhead sunshine, providing a series of shiny crescents that separate the blues of the deeper water with the oranges and yellows of the much shallower sands.

Over the years, I've photographed these shoals many times, but as the plane continued its orbit on this occasion, the sun itself created a reflection off the wet sands – but not a perfect reflection, rather one that is characterised by the ripples of the water and sands below.

Looking back at other aerial photographs over mud and sand flats, I am often drawn to the reflections. They give the flat abstract patterns a hint of three dimensions, if only a tenuous bas-relief. The trick is to underexpose the image so you keep some detail in the highlight reflections. If your exposure is too light, then there's nothing to drag back when you process the raw file.

And then once in your raw processor of choice (generally Lightroom or Capture One for me), I start with the highlights, setting the exposure so I can see the textures. This might not be the final exposure (I might darken the reflections down further with adjustment layers), but I find it better to start here, rather than setting the exposure for everything else and struggling to return some detail to the highlights.

So, forgive me readers if I have sinned, but I believe Dr Les is right when he says there are no rules in art.



Les Walking's Shark Bay 3, 2013

This is the print that changed my approach to white in a photograph. The furious white lines highlighting the broken water are pure white – as they should be. Obvious for some, a revelation for me!

VISUAL FLOW

Why is it that some photos ‘just work’? Perhaps the answer is visual flow

and who better to help us understand this concept than Len Metcalf!

In my past articles, I have discussed the importance of balance throughout an artwork or photograph. Sometimes a metaphor for how a concept or idea works and sometimes it doesn't. As an experienced teacher with a life time of facilitating experience, one can never have too many metaphors. This is because one works with one person and a different one works for another.

Stop for a moment and consider how your attention wanders around an image. This is called ‘visual flow’ in the art world. Composition is an interesting thing to be teaching

people. We could go down the route of rules, or we could just as easily go down the path of visual language.

Visual flow is about how your mind travels around an image. It doesn't refer to actually how your eye scans an image and it isn't your physical eye movements.

We know this, because when we track an eye on an artwork, there are thousands of trackable movements and they don't necessarily follow one particular path. Instead, they track things such as the area of greatest contrast, subjects that we are interested in or by the dominant objects in the artwork.

More than Leading

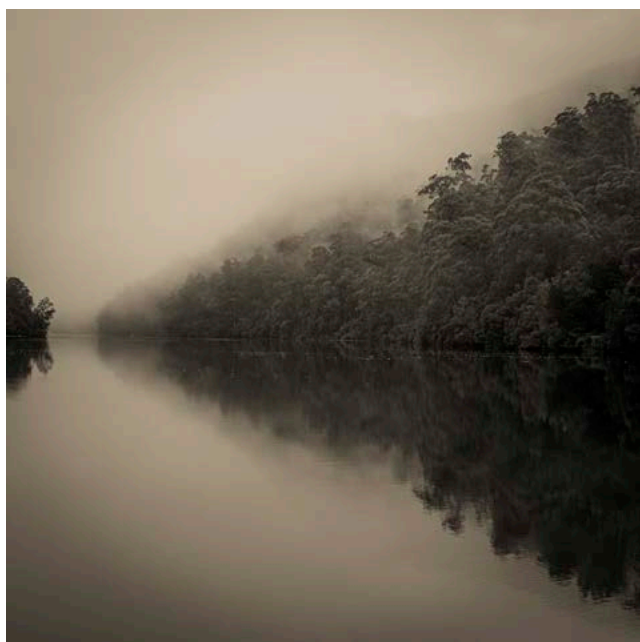
When we look at an artwork, our eye may be guided by lines, edges, contrasts, colours, objects, ideas and pathways. As photographers, we often get told to look for leading lines. With visual flow, we are going to be considering more than just leading lines.

Let's consider how our attention flows around an image.

What we are looking for is a satisfying visual flow, rather than one that stops and starts haphazardly, or one that allows our attention to get stuck somewhere in the image. The more great artworks you see and analyse how your attention is circulating around the artwork, the more you will get an idea of what you are looking for.

Personally, I have found doing this with other artists and photographers is a great way to learn about visual flow.

Visual flow doesn't have to be smooth, it can be jerky and syncopated. It can be messy. But what we don't want is to get stuck. We really want a rather consistent flow throughout the image. Let's look at some things to avoid.





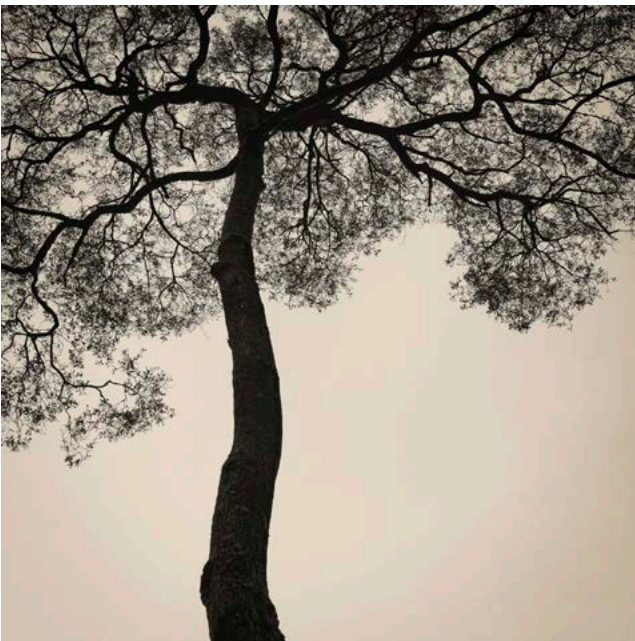
The Tarkine, in the North Western corner of Tasmania, is an incredible Gondwana Remnant Rainforest. It is endangered as it has little protection from logging and mining. It is of World Heritage significance and meets five of the seven criteria for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage listing. Most sites are listed with only two or three criteria. Many of us hope that one day mining and logging will stop in this incredible area and that it gets added to the great south west world heritage area of Tasmania.

When looking at the accompanying images, consider and contemplate the visual flow around them. Where does your attention go, what is it drawn to? What intrigues you? How do the quiet areas work? Are there any white or black areas and how do they work?



Visual White Holes

One of the things that we teach in typographical layout, in particular book design (the layout of images and text), is to avoid having areas of trapped white space. You are probably very unfamiliar with them, because nearly all of the books, magazines and posters we read, avoid this as it is one of the fundamentals of graphic design. Imagine a huge headline that parades itself across the top of a page, then imagine two columns of text on the sides of each page, with a large white space in the middle. Now drop in an image at the very middle of the page, with white space above it and below it. Between the heading and the columns. When your eye hits this white space, it doesn't know where to go. Your eye



is likely to fall into this white space, get bored and become stuck. In the boredom, the eye will then leave the page. You fell into a hole.

The moral of this illustration is to avoid including white and light toned visual holes in your artwork. A hole is a reasonably-sized area of singular tone, often white space that traps the viewer's eye on its journey through the artwork.

One of these that is very common in photography is the inclusion of a blown out sun or sky in a landscape. It is one of the first things we learn, to hold the exposure to avoid blown areas in the artwork. This is why sky replacement is so common. As is moon replacement or adding a tone into white sun holes.

You can get away with whites in your artwork. This is something I explore very regularly in my own work. Instead of having one white hole, I often include many white holes so that they become inconsequential as they are accepted as part of the composition. I personally find white paper in an artwork incredibly beautiful as it reminds me of drawing.

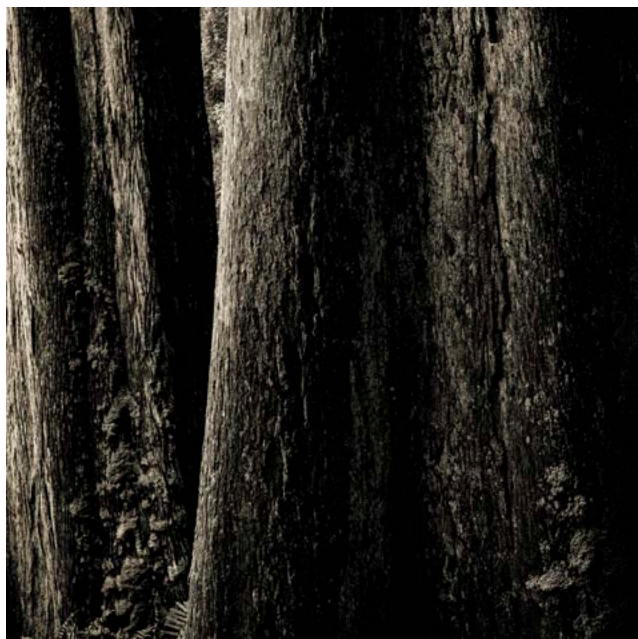
Remember, the goal is to create an artwork that doesn't have a white distracting hole for the viewer to fall into and get stuck in.

Black Holes

Another is an unwieldly area of black that doesn't invite the viewer in with hints of story. Often I hear judges say to people that their photographs have no details in their blacks. What is usually happening here, is that the big black blob in the artwork is a huge visual hole that the viewer falls into in their journey around the artwork. This big black hole interrupts the visual flow. It interrupts the viewer's journey around the artwork.

Like whites, if they are interesting shapes and help reveal the subject, then they are an integral component of the visual flow and are welcomed into the composition. Avoid that big black uninteresting hole. Instead, think of how the blacks can invite the viewer with a story and mystery. How can you invite the viewer to explore and use their imagination, or join





multiple interesting blacks together as a cohesive part of the visual journey for the viewer's imagination.

Only One

Having one element that takes over the image, when it isn't the main subject, can also be a source of interrupting the visual flow. Whilst having a dominant mass (remember William Mortensen) is a very effective compositional device, it works best when the object dominates the whole image. Otherwise, we need to include relevant story in the rest of the artwork to support its inclusion. When we go with only one main subject, we must consider the negative space and how it supports this main subject.

When there is only one main subject and it dominates the space, the visual flow is around and in that object. This is where we need something that is beautifully interesting and has its own visual flow in the object. Look for visual flow in the objects you are photographing.

Spots of Colour

Spots of colour are a very important consideration for visual flow. Putting patches of the same or similar hue on distant parts of the artwork may help the viewer get to the edges and create a beautiful visual flow.

It may also create a discord and destroy the visual flow in the artwork. Consider reinforcing colours with similar hues in the artwork to increase this connection of elements – and therefore increasing the visual flow around the artwork.

Of course, we can use discords and colour contrasts to create visual flow as well. Think of red flowers in a green field, our eyes dancing around the beautiful reds. In this scenario, we are still considering the visual flow, how our attention is drawn to various red flowers, based on their size, sharpness, clarity, brightness, saturation and intensity.

Directing with Lines

It would be remiss of me not to mention the use of actual lines, as this is the most common way we are taught as



photographers to direct the attention of the viewer on their visual journey. They are very obvious things to follow. When using lines, consider how you will bring the viewer back to the front or to a quieter part of the image.

Consider the speed of visual flow too. Is it fast and hectic, or slow and meandering? Is it a mixture of both?

Directing with Tones

I find tones incredibly fascinating to consider as tools for leading and controlling visual flow. I often use tones to hold and attract the viewer's attention.

I love to lead the attention to the edge of the frame and back again. I love to describe the importance of components





with visual weight and brightness to control the visual flow.

I find myself trying to create a beautiful visual flow that is elegant and meandering. Occasionally, I will use a quick and deliberate approach, but more often I allow them to slow down. I personally love large areas of nothingness to give the viewer time to rest and contemplate between points of interest.

Learning from Photographs that You Love

With practice and intent, you will get better at considering the visual flow over the whole image.



I love to examine and explore how my attention wanders over a beautiful and inspiring artwork, especially ones that stop me in my tracks.

I often sit with a book of photographs by a master photographer or artist and consider how they have created an incredible visual flow.

The usual suspects arise here. Larry Fink for crowds of people, Michael Kenna for nature and peaceful scenes, Ralph Gibson for fascinating blacks that dance around the page. Peter Dombrovskis for his sweeping natural visual flow that takes us from an intricate detail in the wilderness landscape off into the distant vista and back again. Sally Mann for her arresting portraits of her children. Olive Cotton for her light that dances across a wall in her bedroom. The list goes on and on.

Study the visual flow and consider how it works in your art.

Find Your Visual Flow

Lastly, I wish to remind you that it isn't so much about the best visual flow, but rather finding one that is appropriate to the artwork or photograph.

Search for approaches that connect with you, rather than what works for others.

Consider visual flows as another compositional tool in your quiver of things to consider, contemplate and experiment with.

Len Metcalf is a lens-based artist living in Sydney. He uses photographic processes to explore the landscape. He runs an incredibly inspiring photography school. His most recognised course is his year long masterclass that takes the advanced beginner and intermediate photographer and helps them blossom into confident and creative photographers. His latest version is conducted online and is available to anyone anywhere around the world with an internet connection. Join Len in his next intake that starts in September 2024.



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MASTERING PHOTOGRAPHIC REDUCTION

By Mike Langford

A JOURNEY TO VISUAL SIMPLICITY

In the realm of photography, the art of reduction is not about shrinking images, but rather streamlining them to enhance strength and clarity. Let's explore this concept, drawing inspiration from various artistic mediums.

The Idea

Most artists start with nothing apart from an idea. Only then do they select the medium through which they feel they can best express that idea.

Painters, for instance, start with a blank canvas and only put onto it what they feel is important to what they wish to communicate. Everything else is just left out and not painted.

We as photographers, however, start with a full canvas, the viewfinder image of our camera at the time of photographing.

Landscapes are probably the most difficult of subjects to

deal with, as in their pure form, they include everything at the start – the sky, the land and everything on it, much of which isn't part of your thinking at the time. How many times have you included the sky without it being part of your story? But it's there, nonetheless, just out of habit. Many times it makes up as much as one-third of your image, without it even being considered.

Less is More

The most important start when making any photograph is to understand what it is you want to communicate. What is the subject? Only after establishing what the subject of your photograph is, can you then begin the process of reduction.

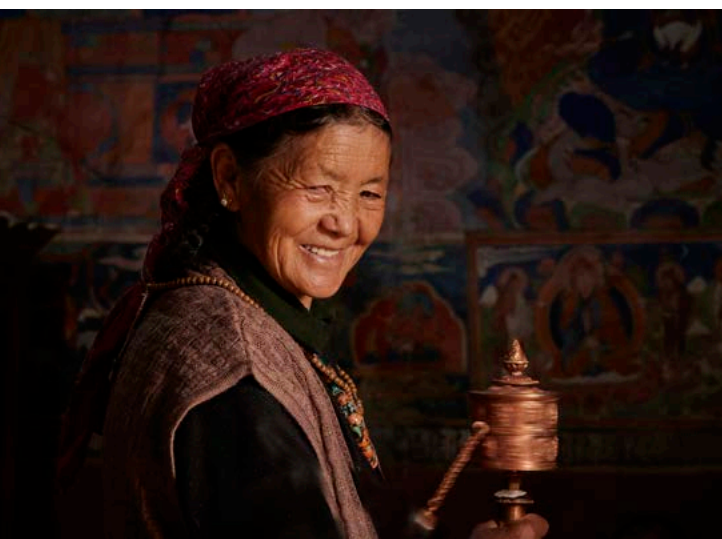
Reducing the clutter in your image will always make it stronger – a 'less is more' approach. When reducing the content in your frame to a mere minimum, you should leave yourself with just enough to show the subject of your image and possibly a little more for the context for that subject. Allowing what we refer to as negative space around our subject adds strength to it. By 'negative space', I mean relatively empty, unimportant areas within the frame that support the subject instead of competing with it. If you go too far in the reduction process, you may end up where the painters start – with a blank canvas!

Obvious

Our photographic process starts with our question of subject – is it obvious? Does it need a context for it to be communicated clearly or is it okay all by itself?

REVERSE CREPUSCULAR 1 & 2

With the reverse crepuscular sky image, the sky was initially the subject, but it lacked a foreground to hang off and contained many distracting elements such as the road and canal. So, I walked around, looking for a subject to place in the foreground and found a roadside post that was reflecting light from the sunset behind me. This post then became the subject and the crepuscular sky the background. The post now dominates the frame and gives greater interest to the sky that by itself was interesting, but not visually exciting. So reduction isn't only about removing things, but thinking a concept through.



TIBETAN PILGRIM

The strength of this image is both the emotion and exposure. Exposing for the light on the pilgrim's face has left the background darker, forcing the viewer's eye to focus more on the portrait, but still allowing just enough detail in the background to give the photograph some context of where she is. Had the background exposure been the same as the face, the photograph would have been very cluttered and much less successful.





Tekapo Snow

The strength of this image is the lack of detail anywhere except in the man-made marks on the land. Without the snow covering this landscape, the photograph would have been very busy and the telegraph poles very hard to see.

To make the subject obvious, it needs to be the largest part of the image, the sharpest part of the image, the correctly exposed part of the image – or possibly all the above.

The methods by which we achieve this are many and varied, depending on the subject we are wanting to communicate.

Always ask yourself, 'What doesn't need to be left in the frame and how can I best remove it?' This could be a matter of just changing your camera angle or moving your feet and getting closer to the subject, thereby making it larger, or moving your feet to the left or the right. Perhaps it is a matter of moving unwanted objects out of the frame before you make your exposure.

Changing your lens from a wide-angle to a telephoto lens can reduce the number of elements that can be seen through the viewfinder and so directs the viewers' focus to something more specific. Combined with this, selective focus also helps in the reduction of information, leaving everything you don't wish to talk about out-of-focus and the subject of your image in focus. The combination of a telephoto lens, being physically close to your subject and using a fully open aperture, gives you the maximum selective focus effect possible.

Isolating Techniques

Selective lighting also helps in the quest for reduction. By selecting a time of the day when fewer things are lit, you are effectively focusing the eye onto things that are brighter than others. Low late or early light is very effective at achieving photographic reduction.

Sometimes it is just a matter of exposure, as with the portrait of the Tibetan woman made in Ladakh. In this image, the exposure has isolated her from the background through exposure, making her correctly exposed while the background still has just enough light to give the portrait context, but without it competing with her.

Weather is another very good way of reducing what is visible in the landscape. For instance, heavy fog and rain reduces what can be seen in the background, while snow eliminates a clutter that is usually everywhere on the ground, as can be seen in the Tekapo Snow image.

Moving away from the capture side of photography, where you do everything you can to remove unwanted objects at the time of making your photograph, there is also the post-production process.

Photoshop is the post-production tool of choice. Here you can re-crop your photograph, making the subject more obvious. You can also use the clone tool, the eraser tool and a myriad of other tools to remove everything that you don't wish to leave in your photograph. If you really wish to delete everything else in the frame, you can just create a layer mask and delete everything in the background.

Through these actions, you are becoming very much like a painter, except in reverse.

Whichever approach you decide to use, be aware that less is more and that a photograph that contains everything is much less eye appealing than one that is more singular in its communication.

Reducing the Flue

To illustrate the idea of reduction, I have just made some photos of next door's chimney flue from my studio window, as I had become distracted by the bright light reflecting off it and thought it could make a good series of photographs to illustrate this story.



Flue 1 This is a wide photograph made with a 24mm lens on a full-frame sensor (Canon R5 and RF 24-105mm lens). This image shows everything, including the window frame, but none of this tells you anything about what I was thinking. Sure, it shows you where I am and what I can see from my studio, but it doesn't tell you what I'm looking at or thinking about.



Flue 2 So, I went outside and photographed the flue again, this time at 30mm, but still this framing doesn't tell you what my subject is.

Looking closer at the flue, I realised that I was potentially looking at a piece of 'Dada' art where common objects can become pieces of art if firstly described as 'ART' and secondly, placed in a situation where it would be viewed as such – like in an art gallery.

I started my photographic process in reverse as it was the chimney flue and the light reflecting off it that first captured my attention and then my imagination and so that's where I started and not where I ended. The other photographs show what was in the wider picture, offering more context to the subject.

The flue itself looked very much like a modern industrial design piece from the early 20th century and so that had instantly become my subject.

I can't say I had ever noticed it ever before until this time! The background was a very broody looking sky that had both dark and light patches in it.



Flue 3 I then changed my lens to a Canon RF 100-500mm and made another photo at 100mm, including the tree and the roof. Now the photograph is looking a little more balanced and allows the tree to have a visual conversation with the flue. The trouble is that the tree isn't part of my conversation and so it needs to go.



Flue 4 By using the 100-500mm lens at 300mm, the roof, the chimney and flue all give the flue its context, but photographically I don't need the roof or the chimney as the only thing in my mind the flue. This is always the question facing us – how far do we go before we have destroyed our original idea?



Flue 5 So here we are, back where I started which was the flue at 500mm. The colouring, as can be seen in the previous images, was a slightly insipid blue, which if anything detracted from the subject's strength. So, I decided to use the camera's monochrome picture style, reducing the image down further to a more graphic and industrial looking image, which is what I was after. I have also done a little bit of post-processing massaging to make the image look more like a piece of photographic Dada art.

The EDITOR'S CUT

**A Selection of Amazing Photographs from the 2024 International
Landscape Photographer of the Year Awards.**

Writes International Landscape Photographer of the Year judge David Burnett, "One of the great joys of being asked to be on the judging panel for the ILPOTY is the expectation that you, as both a judge and a photographer, will see images that you never could have imagined. For me, when pictures incorporate a combination of both elegance and surprise, they will nearly always rise to the top. While the camera is a great tool for expanding our view of the world, Tony Hewitt's images combine this with a wonderful sense of composition and a nod to the abstract. More than anything, his pictures ask a question relevant to all landscape photographers: What have I missed in my own little world and how can I tune my vision to see more than what simply lies in front of me?"

"Personally, this year's entries were surprising, inventive and the product of the endless hard work that occurs to get our cameras into the right position. Once more it has motivated me to get out there and find that next great picture."

In the tenth year of the awards, 4035 entries were received and the threshold for inclusion in the book (a Top 101 entry) was a score of 85.4%.

Adds ILPOTY chairman Peter Eastway, "Perhaps the aspect I love most when running a photography award is watching the results unfold. And one of the reasons we reward the Top 101 landscape photographs every year is because, once you reach a certain level of brilliance, is it really possible to definitively say one photograph is better than another?"

"I'm never going to second guess a judging panel and I'm more than pleased with the Top 101 entries this year. Mind you, we publish the Top 202 entries on the website because, really, the next top 100 are every bit as good! We have some remarkably talented photographers out there!"

So what is it about some of the entries that inspired the judges? Peter Eastway selects some of his favourites and explains why!

Winter Story photographed by Takahashi Hiroto, Japan

Location Details: Yamagatapref, Yamagatashi, Senami, Japan

I spend a fortune in planes and helicopters looking for abstract compositions like this. It's a message to myself that photographs are everywhere, even at your feet. Strong framing, nothing distracting, simple colour palette with a hint of warmth from the frozen foliage.





**Turned to Stone photographed by
Ciaran Willmore, Ireland**

Location Details: *Tjornuvik, Streymoy Island, Faroe Islands*

That strong horizontal waterline is incredibly powerful, isn't it? And look at the beautiful soft tones and colours, yet there's a real sense of reflected light bouncing off the water in the foreground, extending to the headland behind. It's not your standard composition, but it works and I like the strong vignetting for this subject.

**Strait Waterfall photographed by
Javier Enjuto Garcia, Spain**

Location Details: *Ordesa y Monte Perdido National Park, northeast of Spain*

We see hundreds of waterfall photographs and most fail because of the camera angle chosen – there's always something distracting in the composition. Here, whether it's the perfect angle or assisted in post-production, the photographer clearly understands how the eye is to be taken through the frame, from top to bottom and back up again. I find the framing and tonal control masterful.

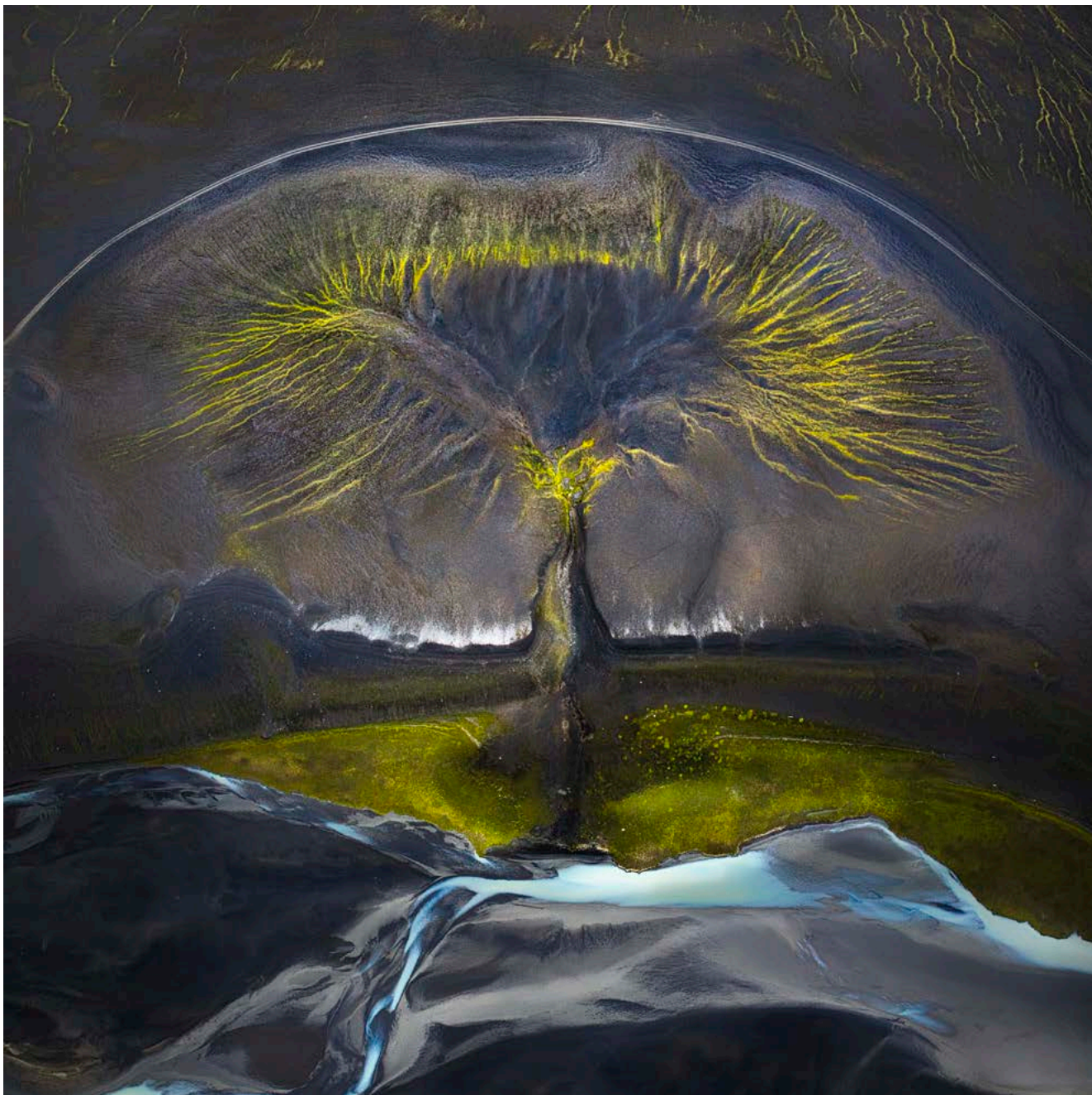




Aurum photographed by Tony Hewitt, Australia

Location Details: *Wheatbelt Region, Western Australia*

This year's overall winner, Tony entered a series of excellent abstracts and regular readers will know Tony and I do aerial workshops together. Yes, it was a little embarrassing when I realised he'd won, but as I don't get to vote, it wasn't up to me. I love Tony's masterful tonal and colour control – every square centimetre is carefully produced and lovingly retouched.



Tree of life photographed by Isabella Tabacchi, Italy

Location Details: *Grooves on the ground and rivers in the highlands, Iceland.*

Aerial photographs are very popular, as are tree shapes created by water on the Earth below. However, this one I found particularly strong in both design and colour.

Abraham Lake, Alberta photographed by Andrew Mielzynski, Canada

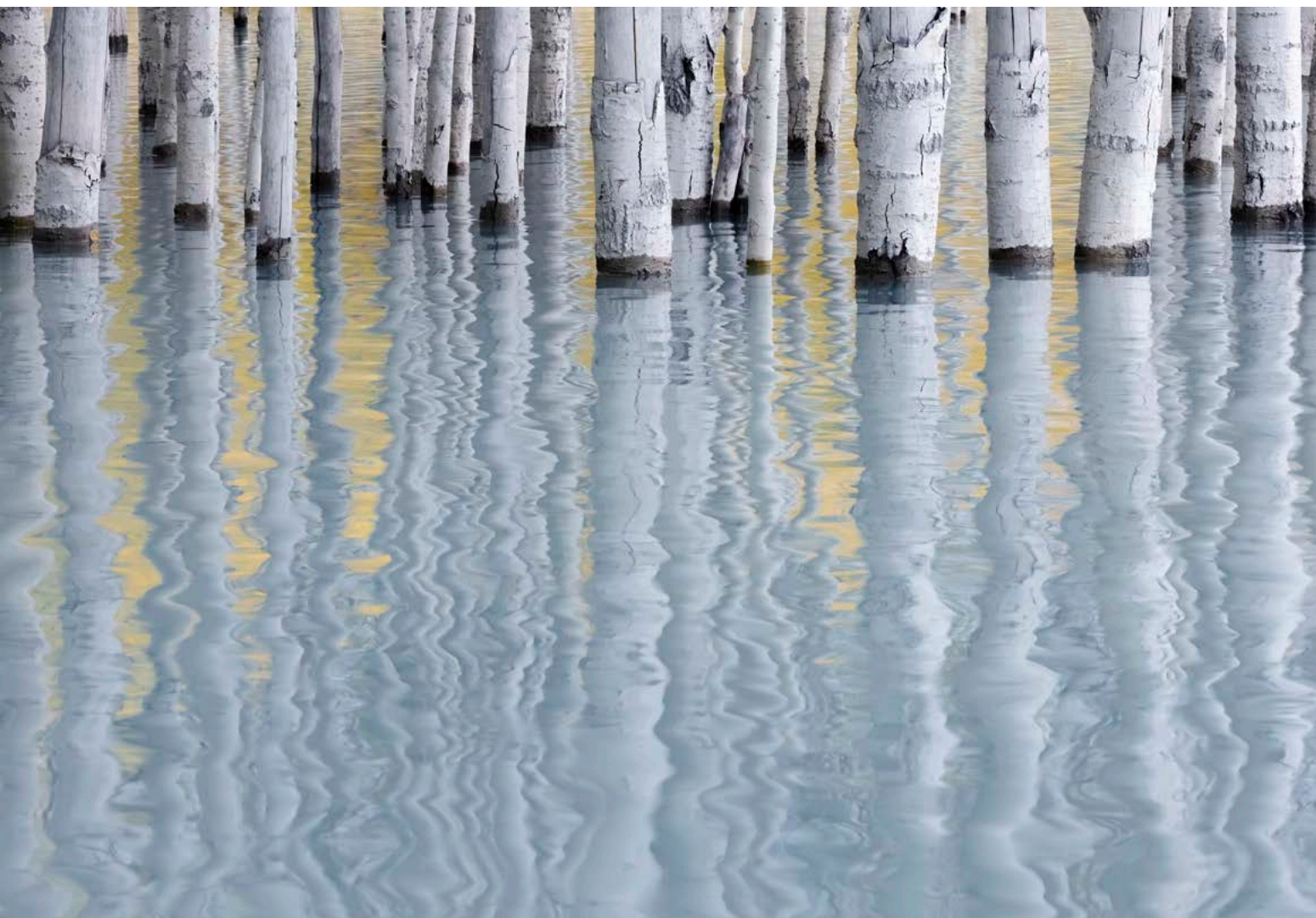
Location Details: *Abraham Lake, Alberta, Canada*

(Opposite Page, Top) Andrew was a very close second this year and this photograph is my favourite in his portfolio. Everyone loves a good reflection, but look at how Andrew has isolated the trees and reflections so there are no unwanted distractions. Look at how he has controlled the exposure in the tree trunks and their reflections, with a soft colour palette of contrasting blues and yellows. Yet it's those wet, dark bands on the trunks just above the waterline that create the finale, almost like a score of music.

Light of the Soul photographed by Ryohei Irie, Japan

Location Details: *Ichinomata River, Yamaguchi, Japan*

(Opposite Page, Bottom) Another simple and elegant composition. In many competitions, photos like these would be overlooked as being too dark or without sufficient impact, so I congratulate our judging panel on selecting what is a very sophisticated exercise in light and tonal control. The shadowy verticals are emphasised by the horizontal lines of colour, the repetition adding to the interest.





**The Moon Dancers photographed by
Kilian Sch nberger, Germany**

Location Details: *Hautes Fagnes, Belgium*

A classic subject, beautifully handled and I applaud the two exposures or the post-production used to keep a little colour in the moon. People talk about using the rule of thirds, but here's yet another example that suggests there are other ways to frame a subject as well!

**Bottle Tree Bokeh photographed by
Benjamin Barakat, Switzerland**

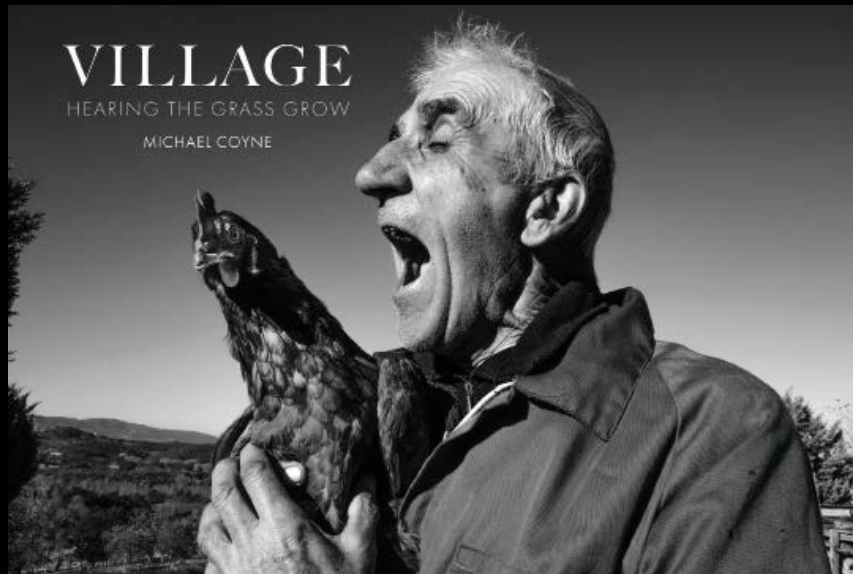
Location Details: *Socotra, Yemen*

A well-used composition, but I like the point of difference – rather than keeping both tree and sky in sharp focus, the sky has been allowed to blur. The light is beautiful and the image quiet. A simple colour palette strengthens the composition.

VILLAGE

HEARING THE GRASS GROW

BY MICHAEL COYNE



Around the world traditions are disappearing, languages are being forgotten and cultures washed away.

The main culprit is urbanisation resulting in the wholesale disappearance of villages and village life. It is this that Michael Coyne has made his mission to capture through his probing lens.

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Sound of Pacific photographed by Ray Cao, United States

Location Details: Bay Area, California, USA

I'm guessing this is a drone photograph, not that it matters. I picked it to remind me to take my drone out on early mornings with big seas to capture the atmosphere of a raging surf. Strong composition, good timing on wave action and placement and the light reflected in the foreground is superbly executed.

Linden tree and the Schreckhorn photographed by Cédric Tamani, Switzerland

Location Details: Sumiswald, Emmental, Switzerland

We have had a few trees in the snow in previous competitions, possibly from this same area, but I try not to be influenced by entries in other years if the current entry is strong enough. The central composition is incredibly strong and the timing of the mist separating the tree from the mountain behind is superb.



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For more information, email Kim Valenti (kim@betterphotography.com) or Peter Eastway (eastway@betterphotography.com).

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