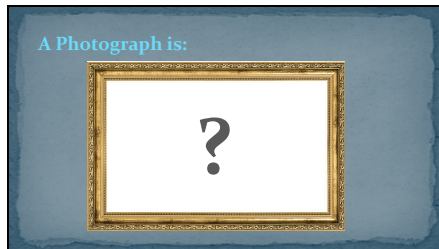




The Photographic Eye

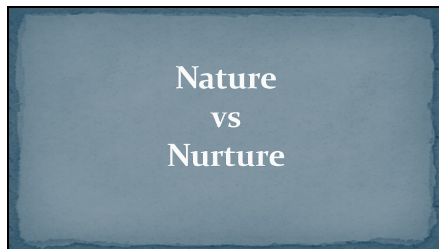
Developing a photographic eye involves acquiring the skills and knowledge to create photographs as opposed to taking snapshots.



First let's consider what a photograph is. A photograph is essentially a frame with something inside it.

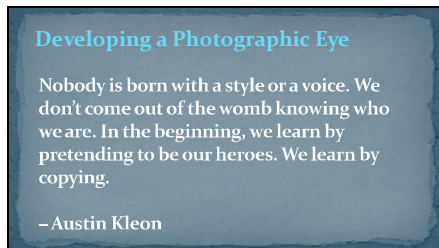
As photographers we are totally concerned with what the something in the frame is. What is the worth of what is in the frame? Does it inform, influence, record, entertain, excite or motivate those who look at our images.

Part of the secret of a worthwhile photograph is our ability to develop a photographic eye so that our images are more creative and informative. Photographs that are not ordinary.



Is a photographic eye something we innately have by nature or is it something we can develop by nurturing.

We have all heard comments along the lines of "you have a great eye for photography" but is it something in our DNA with which we are born or is it something that can be developed.



When we come into this world we come with little more than the basic instinct to cry when we are hungry or in discomfort.

Everything we now know, every skill we have attained has been learned in our lifetime.

We learn by study, imitation, experience and perseverance.

If we are fortunate enough to have some natural ability we must treat that as a bonus but the lack of such natural ability does not mean we cannot learn.

We all have the ability to learn the skills required to develop a photographic eye.



All it takes is the desire to become better photographers who can produce better photographs. Photographs that are more than a simple record. Photographs that have a visual worth that can be appreciated by others who view them.



Developing a photographic eye involves the learning a some basic skills.

A photographer without a photographic eye is likely to produce a snapshot such as the image on the left. Snap shooters have a tendency to place the eyes at the centre of the photograph thus giving an unbalanced composition.

When we learn the most basic photographic composition we start the development of a photographic eye that is more likely to produce the better composition on the right.

This is a simple start along the journey of developing a photographic eye.

To develop a photographic eye we need to have clear goals. We need to be able to visualise our objective in photographic terms and know where we are headed.

To make a start get in the habit of studying your surroundings in detail. Look at aspects such as light, colour, tones in all of the photographic material that surrounds us.

We need to consider four basic standards:

- The value of the image
- The clarity of the image
- The composition in the image
- How the image is presented

Start developing your photographic eye by being observant.

We are surrounded by photographic images – advertising, film, newspapers, magazines, TV and other photographers' work. Take the time to study these images. Analyse them in detail. How do they get their message across, what photographic techniques have been used, what was the lighting like, how are they composed and how well do they convey their messages.

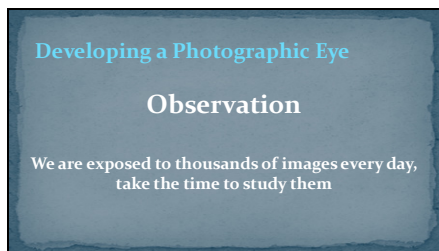
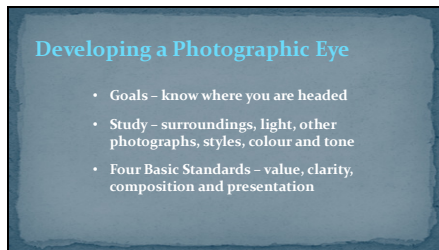
In terms of photographic evaluation we can analyse the four basic standards.

The first is the value of the image and this relates to the tone or mood that the image contains.

The second standard is about the clarity of the message contained in the image. Is the message concise, clear and unambiguous?

The third standard is composition is concerned with both the subject and the subject matter. How is the subject matter selected, is it appropriate, is it well arranged?

Lastly, the fourth standard is about how the image is presented and whether or not it aids in obtaining viewer engagement.



Value

Strong tone - high impact, dramatic mood

Weak tone - low impact, less dramatic

When we analyse value we can look at the tones contained in the image and how they are used to create mood, impact and engagement.

Strong tones tend to provide considerable impact with dramatic moods while softer or weak tones will be less dramatic and of lower impact.

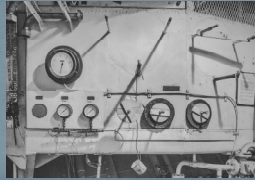
Tone is important in generating the mood of the photograph. Is the mood light and airy or is it dark and sombre? The mood of the photograph has a large bearing on the viewer's reaction and how they may be engaged in reading the message.

In this image we have some interesting shapes and detail with lighting that produces shadows that give dimension and relief.

However, the tonal range is quite narrow and so the image is lacking a strong impact and has a tendency to be too soft for the harshness and strength of the subject matter. In other words the mood is not in concert with the subject or subject matter.

A small area of white in the image would lift the tonal value.

Value



Value

High key should have a full range of tones



High key images typically appear to have a low tonal range but it is important that they actually show a full range of tones from white to black. It is a matter of having the majority of tones in the light range to give the effect. But there should be a small showing of black to obtain a full dynamic tonal range to maintain a high tonal value.

Stronger tones with a wider range from black to white put more impact and drama into this image.

Value



The darker foreground tone assists in directing the view to the middle area of the scene where there is more light. As well as setting a mood in the photograph the value of tone has also been used to enhance the feeling of depth.

Clarity

Selection of Subject Matter

Arrangement of Subject Matter

Unified Effect

Clarity works in conjunction with composition to present appropriate subject matter, effectively arranged to obtain a unified and clear message from the image.

A photograph with clarity will be more easily understood by the viewer than one that lacks clarity.



To obtain a significant level of clarity in the image the subject matter needs to be selected and refined so there is enough to tell the story without extraneous detail or subject matter.

The objective is to present an image that conveys your message clearly to the viewer.

Clarity

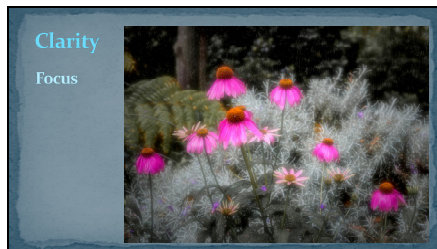
- Technical - Focus, Exposure
- Aesthetic - Colour, Tone
- Message - Appropriate, Unambiguous

Clarity has three major aspects – technical, aesthetic and message.

Technical clarity is about obtaining suitable and correct focus and exposure.

Aesthetics relates to factors such as the colour palette selected and the level of tone used to generate mood.

To obtain maximum clarity the message needs to be appropriate and unambiguous.



Obtaining the correct focus or exposure is not necessarily tied to the purely technical approach. Correct focus and exposure is all about obtaining the result determined by your visualisation or how your photographic eye sees it.

In this image the focus is correct but it is deliberately soft to give the scene a more dreamlike or ethereal quality. In this case technically correct pin sharp focus was not desired in order to obtain the mood that was sought.

Clarity

Which best communicates the story?
This one? Or this one?

Clarity of message is an important aspect of communicating your message.

Figure skating is a sport that embodies grace, movement, colour and speed.

A photographer without a developed photographic eye is likely to take a photograph that fails to capture these characteristics of the sport and come up with a relatively static image.

A photographer with a more developed photographic eye is more likely to create an image that captures the movement and excitement that the sport provides.

Composition relates to selecting subject matter that illustrates the subject of your photograph, arranges it effectively and presents it as a unified result.

Composition

- Selection of Subject Matter
- Arrangement of Subject Matter
- Unified Effect
- Negative/Positive Space

As you develop your photographic eye no subject matter will be missing and no subject matter will be extraneous. Also the subject matter will effectively be organised.

An element of composition that is only understood or intentionally practiced by photographers with a developed photographic eye is that of negative and positive space.

Negative/Positive Space

Negative space is the area surrounding the main subject matter in a photograph that is left unoccupied.

Put simply, it is the space around the object itself that helps define the positive space or main focus.

Negative space relates to those parts of the image that do not contain supportive subject matter that directly relates to the subject of the image. That is, the area surrounding the main subject matter.

The use of negative space can be a powerful tool that can help define the positive space or main focus of the image.

Negative Space

Negative space surrounds the main subject matter and can portray a sense of scale/size to the viewer.

This can be useful for a landscape photograph.

Stepping back from the edge of a shot can have more impact than if you were to be right in the action.

Negative space can portray the scale or size of the main subject matter. This can sometimes be useful in landscape photographs.

Stepping back from the main subject matter to incorporate some negative space can provide more impact than when the main subject matter fills the frame.

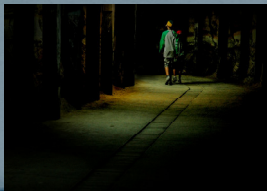
Negative Space



Uluru is the largest rock monolith in the world but in spite of its gigantic size when taken in consideration of the whole vast landscape of central Australia it seems less impressive.

In this photograph the large expanse of sky and to a lesser extent the foreground is included as negative space to illustrate this aspect of the rock and its place in the bigger picture.

Negative Space



In this photograph the large expanse of dark area is included as negative space to give the image an air of mystery as the two lads explore a dark tunnel.

Making the figures larger by cropping would lessen the negative space and thus much of the story and atmosphere.

Negative Space



This photograph shows an interesting group of garden objects. The side lighting is effective, the composition is OK and there is some story line in the subject matter presented but it is not overall all that exciting.

Let's see what the inclusion of some negative space does to the photograph.



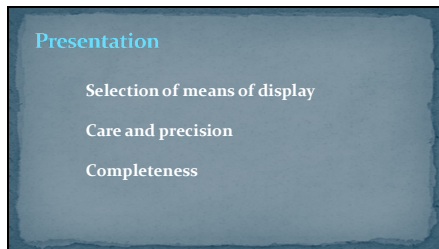
By using a wider lens to include some background context as negative space we change the story.

Instead of just a group of garden objects we can now see a bit of futility in the scene. The garden objects now seem somewhat out of place and useless in the overall scene once a sparse and empty background is added.

The subject matter is essentially the same but the message is vastly different through the use of some negative space.

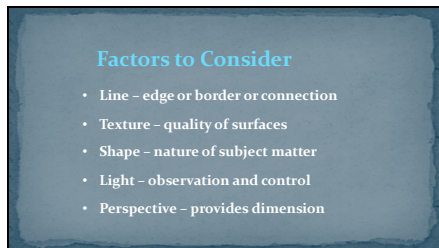


In this example negative space has been used to emphasise the isolation and solitude of the subject.



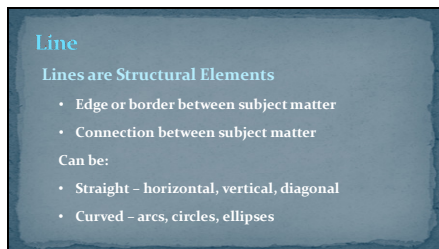
If your photographs are poorly presented, no matter how developed your photographic eye is, there is a high chance that your viewer will quickly tire of your work and move on.

Carefully select how you should display your work and take precise care to ensure it is presented with skill, attention to detail and completeness.



In developing your photographic eye you need to become familiar with the elements of visual language. You need to reinforce your understanding of text with an understanding of the building blocks of visual language.

The main elements of visual language are line, texture, shape, light and perspective.



In an image lines are important structural elements.

Lines are used to define edges or borders between the items of subject matter contained in your composition. Lines can also be used to connect items of subject matter in the photograph.

Lines can also be used to direct the viewer's attention by guiding them through the image.

Lines can be straight in the horizontal or vertical planes or they can be diagonal. Lines can also be curved as arcs, circles or ellipses.

The lines are enclosed within the subject matter and can be quite obvious or quite subtle.

Line

Structure - position

Relationship - subject matter

Dynamics - directing eye movement

The placement of lines, even though they are somewhat imaginary, is important in your composition.

Where they are positioned and how they relate to or are generated by the subject matter is important to obtaining good balance to make them work effectively.

The dynamics of the lines is important in controlling or directing the viewer's eye movement.

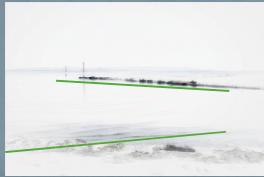
Line



In this photograph the wheel tracks provide diagonal lines that direct the view from the foreground through the scene and into the background.

This direction of the lines also gives the photograph some sense of depth.

Line



In this photograph diagonal lines are used to take the viewer's line of sight from the bottom left corner, across the image to the right and then up and back to the left to arrive in the middle ground.

This again takes the viewer well into the scene.

Line



The curvature of the road provides an arc line to direct the view left from the bottom right and then to curve into the background. Again taking the viewer well into the image.

Texture

Quality of Surfaces

- Gives feel to image
- Gives interest
- Separates subject matter

Texture can be used to give sense or feel to your images. They can also add interest and can be used for separating subject matter.

By combining soft and hard or smooth and rough textures you can create contrasts that define areas within the photograph.

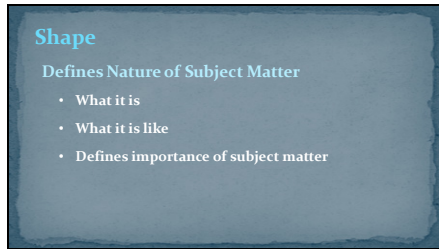


Here the softer texture of the moss contrasts with the harder texture of the tree bark to separate surfaces within the photograph.

This works in combination with colour to define and delineate the differing areas of subject matter.



In this photograph texture has been used to separate the sea weed from the rock on which it is growing.



Shape defines the nature of the subject matter in the image. It gives us information about what the subject matter is and what it is like.

Shape can be used to define the importance of various items of subject matter and their relativity to the message.



In this image shape has been used to separate new and old.

The fairly rectangular but consistent shapes of the modern buildings contrast with the more intricate shapes of the old building thus separating the new from the old and assisting in the message of the photograph.



In this architectural image shape has been used to separate different items of subject matter.

The sharp rectangular shapes of the front buildings contrast with the more subtle curved shapes of the rear building. This effectively separates the subject matter into zones of interest while maintaining the architectural features and unity in the composition.

Light

Required to Make a Photograph

- Quality
- Strength
- Direction
- Turns snapshots into creative images

Light is of course the essence of photography. It is necessary for us to be able to make a photograph.

When we sufficiently develop a photographic eye we learn to control light to make our images communicate more effectively.

As far as light is concerned we are concerned with three characteristics; quality, strength and direction.

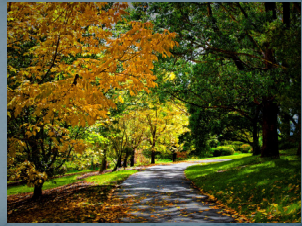
In terms of quality we need to consider if the light is soft or hard and what colour it is.

The strength determines if we are going to get a dark or light result and the contrast.

The direction will control shadows and modelling.

In this photograph strong side light has been used to give good textures and modelling to the foliage. Shadow has been used to over the foreground and direct light has been used on the background to give visual depth and dimension to draw the viewer into the image.

Light



Light



In this photograph strong light coming through the doorway has been used to light the interior and show the difference in strength between the outside sunlight and the interior.

The backlight direction gives some interesting shadows on the floor and walls.

Light



In this photograph strong evening side light provides quality, strength and direction.

The quality provides strong warm tones, the strength provides contrast and the direction provides modelling.

Perspective

Controls

- Dimension
- Depth
- Relationship of subject matter

Controlling perspective in your images allows you to give your photographs dimension, create depth and control the relationship between the individual items of subject matter.

In purely technical terms perspective is controlled by viewpoint. Where you stand in relation to the subject matter will determine the perspective in the resultant image. Changing focal length of your lens does not affect perspective.

However, because we tend to change viewpoint when we change focal length, in practical terms, we can use focal length to have an effect on perspective in our images.



This practical use can be easily illustrated.

In this first image we can see the relationship of the Coke bottle and the background. Because a wide angle lens has been used the Coke bottle appears quite large in respect to the background that recedes quite dramatically.

By changing to a long lens and moving the viewpoint so that the Coke bottle remains approximately the same size we change its relationship to its background.

In this way we can use our lenses to control perspective as we develop our photographic eye.

In this image there are two perspective lines that control the sense of depth. One from the large vessel to the right to two more craft to the left and one from the large vessel to the smaller boats behind it.



These two perspectives add to a sense of depth in the photograph.

In this photograph a wide angle, low viewpoint and strong diagonal lines have been combined to give a sense of great depth and distance.



Observation is probably the most effective tool we have available to develop our photographic eye.

Everywhere we go we should be observing our surroundings and the objects we see before us.

Examine their shapes, textures, colours, relationship to environment and light and shadow and a myriad of other characteristics.

Do this whether or not you have a camera with you and you will start to develop a photographic eye.

Careful observation will gradually build up your sense of your surroundings. This will ultimately lead you along the path of developing a photographic eye.

Great photographers are able to see the nuances in their surroundings and turn them into great photographs.

Observe, analyse and question in your environment.



Developing Your Eye

Careful Observation

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What makes the scene visually compelling?
- What would make it interesting to the viewer?
- How can I best capture the scene?

As you observe and analyse your surroundings ask yourself:

What makes the scene visually compelling?

What would make it interesting to the viewer?

How can I best capture the scene?

Once you can effectively answer these questions you are well on track for developing your photographic eye. There are some sound techniques you can employ to develop your photographic eye.

The first is to look to others for inspiration. Study your favourite photographers or artists and try to determine how they do it.

Analyse their work; what light did they use, how did they select subject matter, how did they arrange their subject matter, how strong was their message and all other aspect of their work.

The secret to this process is to analyse, learn and be inspired NOT to copy.

Around four years ago I produced a portfolio that I titled 'The Edge of Darkness'. My inspiration for this portfolio came from two motion picture films.

The first was The Edge of Darkness, from which I borrowed the title. The film was about a man who was continually living on the edge in dark life threatening situations.

The second film, by Woody Allen, was called Shadows and Fog. The opening sequences in this film consisted of a series of night time scenes of the streets and alleys of London taken in heavy fog. The scenes were dark and mysterious.

Using these films as inspiration I created a set of mystical images.

Each image showed an area of light that receded into an area of darkness where we can no longer clearly distinguish our surroundings. Surroundings that are lost in the mystical mire created by the lack of light.

A series spawned by a photographic eye inspired by observing two motion pictures.

In another portfolio I was inspired by the work of Claude Monet. By studying many of his works I was inspired to create a number of photographs using subjects that were captured and processed to emulate his style.

Developing Your Eye

Use someone else's work for inspiration

Often we look at another person's work and wonder how did they think of the idea.

If you struggle to find an idea, look to other photographers or artists to get inspiration.

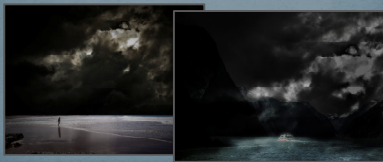
The key to this process is not to simply make an exact replica.

Inspiration



Inspiration

Edge of Darkness Portfolio



Inspiration





I called the portfolio Monet in Oz. The portfolio comprised a number of photographs of subjects taken in Australia that were similar in subject matter and style to an actual Monet paintings from European settings.

My photographic eye was inspired from Monet's work.

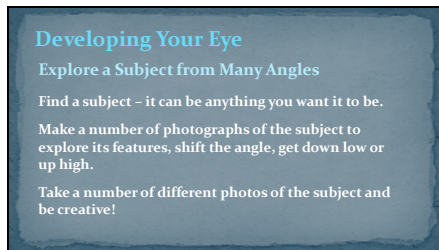


Some years ago photographer Robert Maplethorpe released a book entitled Pistils. The book contains a large number of images of flowers all beautifully lit and photographed in a sensual and sometimes erotic fashion.

Each image explores the subject and its characteristics to present each flower in a most artistic fashion.



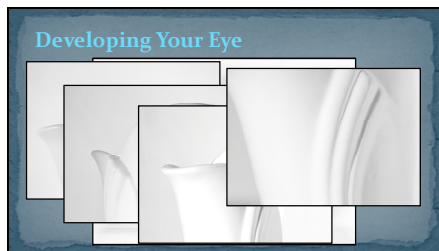
Using Maplethorpe's work as inspiration I made my own portfolio that I called Inflorescence. My portfolio presented a number of flowers photographed in a fashion that attempted to explore the essence of each of the flowers photographed.



Another means by which you can develop your photographic eye is to find a subject that interests you and then make a series of images of that subject that explore its shapes, colour, textures and overall aesthetic.

Be bold in your exploration by taking the subject from many angles and lighting conditions including some close up detail shots.

The challenge is to really analyse the subject to examine all of its characteristics.



The plain white vase shown in this photograph has some interesting form and shape with sweeping curved surfaces. Not a straight line anywhere.

By taking a series of photographs from a number of angles the sweeping curves and features of the vase can be explored to create a mini portfolio.

Developing Your Eye

- Set yourself a challenge outside your normal comfort zone
- Restrict equipment used
- Study the world without a camera

Other means that assist you in developing your photographic eye are to set yourself the challenge of getting outside your comfort zone, these include:

Try photographing a genre you have not previously attempted.

Restrict yourself to photographing with a limited range of equipment.

Study the world without a camera so you can observe without feeling the pressure of needing to make a photograph. For example, if you normally specialise in taking landscapes try making some portraits.

Developing Your Eye

If you normally do landscape



Try Portraiture



Developing Your Eye

Use a single lens for a day



Either a prime lens or a zoom set at one focal length

Go out to photograph taking just one lens. Either a prime lens or a zoom set to just one focal length. This will encourage you to be more creative in the way you select and photograph your subjects.

Developing Your Eye

Study the world without a camera



Take the time to just observe the world.

Everywhere you go be mindful of what is around you. Look for interesting photographic opportunities that you can later turn into great photographs.

Developing Your Eye

Understand your camera



It is difficult to develop a photographic eye and be creative if you do not understand your primary tool – your camera.

If you do not know what your camera is capable of your creative abilities will be compromised.

Know how to use your camera intuitively so you can concentrate on using your photographic eye to make great images.

Challenges

You can develop your photographic eye by challenging yourself to move out of your comfort zone

If you always do photojournalism try portraiture

If you specialise in street photography try macro

If you always do nature try sports photography

Do not fall for the trap of always taking the same type of photograph. This will severely limit your ability to develop your photographic eye.

Try different genres.

Challenges

You cannot expand your horizon and develop a photographic eye if you are in a rut

There is no challenge in a rut



Your photographic eye and your photographic skills will not be expanded if you are in a photographic rut.

There is no challenge in a rut.

Challenges

Try the following challenges to develop your photographic eye

1. Study the work of a photographer or painter of your choice and create a series of photographs using your chosen artist's work for inspiration.

Following is a number of challenges you can set for yourself to assist you to develop your photographic eye. Some of these challenges will actually be in our formal program for the year and will form the basis of challenge nights.

- Study the work of a photographer or painter of your choice and create a series of photographs using your chosen artist's work for inspiration.

Challenges

2. Select a subject and make a series of photographs that illustrate the significant character and features of the chosen subject.

3. Create a series of photographs that examine negative and positive space and the importance of the relationship between the two.

- Select a subject and make a series of photographs that illustrate the significant character and features of the chosen subject.
- Create a series of photographs that examine negative and positive space and the importance of the relationship between the two.

Challenges

4. Create a series of photographs of a selected subject that use light and/or time of day to generate different moods.

5. Select a subject and using a combination of camera position and lens focal length create a series of photographs that illustrate the effect of perspective on composition.

- Create a series of photographs of a selected subject that use light and/or time of day to generate different moods.
- Select a subject and using a combination of camera position and lens focal length create a series of photographs that illustrate the effect of perspective on composition.

Developing Your Eye

You will know you have an eye for photography when you can easily find more unique angles or moments to capture than most people.



You will know you have an eye for photography when you can easily find more unique angles or moments to capture than most people.

The end.