

# Beyond Technique:

## Artistry, Creativity, Meaning and Personal Style

### Presentation by Kas Stone

#### Compelling Images

- Images that are **expressive & evocative**: they **respond** to and **interpret** subject matter (rather than merely document it), arising from one's personality, interests, experiences, and physical & cultural environment.
- Images that **communicate** and **connect** with viewers: trigger memories, evoke emotion, tell a story, suggest an idea, raise a question/mystery, elicit aesthetic pleasure.
- Camera gear and technique are merely the means to achieve the desired image outcome:
  - Exposure**: measuring and managing light with ISO, aperture, shutter speed, filters, flash, etc.
  - Clarity of Detail**: camera-lens focusing system, Depth of Field, Point of Focus, motion.
  - Field of View**: lens focal length, camera position → perspective
  - Composition**: guidelines for selecting and arranging visual elements in the frame.
  - Post-Processing**: raw conversion, image optimizing, enhancement & output.

#### Artistry → aesthetically compelling images

- Thoughtful application of visual design guidelines to give aesthetically compelling results that are *appropriate* for the image's subject, mood and message.
- Knowing the "rules" of composition, using them effectively when they are appropriate, and confidently ignoring them when they are not.
- **Process** of Visual Design: **Select** (visual elements & imaginative ideas) → **Eliminate** (simplify, isolate 1-3 key elements, exclude distractions) → **Emphasize** (elements that convey your intent).

#### Creativity → unique & imaginative images

- Skilfully and imaginatively producing something new; inventive, innovative, inspired, original, visionary; Camera Club definitions include abstract, impressionistic, surreal and experimental.
- Looking at the same thing as everyone else, and *seeing* something different.
- Connecting things: unusual juxtapositions, visual similarities, real & unreal, visual & non-visual.

#### Meaning → significant & eloquent images

- **Meaning** = importance, significance, essence, substance, value; Meaning is *not* intrinsic to a subject; meaning is perceived, attributed and expressed *by people*, and varies with a person's cultural background, values, interests, experience, age, etc.
- **Photographic Meaning** = thoughtful perception of the visual content in a scene to determine its significance (to me), and eloquently expressing that significance (to a viewer) → forges an emotional, intellectual, aesthetic connection between maker and viewer.
- **Content** = what an image is **of** (1-3 key visual elements).
- **Meaning** = what a picture is **about** (what those elements represent); abstraction from the specific elements to 'universal' concepts (story, feeling, idea, question, mood, mystery, etc.).
- Meaningful images happen when you invest in *experiences* rather than gear, spend less time clicking (leave your camera in the bag) and more time looking, feeling and thinking so you have something interesting to say in your images.
- Meaning may be clear from the moment you see a subject, or may occur to you *later* when you are reviewing your image(s), or may come *first* (ie. when working on a project) with image-making afterwards to express it.

## Personal Style → distinctive & expressive images

- An image, and ultimately a whole body of work, that is distinctively and recognizably *you*.
- Style is a unique collection of attributes that arises from your personality, experiences and interests, and is reflected in your images with preferences for particular subject matter, points of view (wide-angle vs intimate), brightness, colours, simplicity/minimalism vs richness/complexity, and even the methods and tools you use for post-processing.
- **How to Develop Personal Style:** let go of expectations, recipes, rules and other people's images; respond authentically to what is actually *there* (take your *time*, look all around, have a genuine *experience*); make photographs of things and places that interest *you*; make bodies of work (projects, series) that explore a theme in depth; don't be afraid to specialize. Caution: don't force it! Photographic style takes time to develop and is often more evident to other people than to yourself. Style is not a Photoshop or camera technique; it is who you **are**.

## Putting it All Together

- Use your camera technique and post-processing methods in ways that are appropriate to the subject and reflect your feelings/ideas about it, to create images that are compelling, expressive and evocative.

## Recommended Reading & Websites

Guy Tal: *More Than a Rock*, Rocky Nook, 2015 ([www.guytal.com](http://www.guytal.com)).

Guy Tal: *A Landscape Photographer's Guide to Photoshop*, Rocky Nook, 2017 ([www.guytal.com](http://www.guytal.com)).

Brooks Jensen: *Letting Go of the Camera*, LensWork Publishing, 2004 ([www.lenswork.com](http://www.lenswork.com)).

Brooks Jensen: *The Creative Life in Photography*, LensWork Publishing, 2008 ([www.lenswork.com](http://www.lenswork.com)).

David duChemin: *The Soul of the Camera*, Rocky Nook 2017 & *The Visual Toolbox*, New Riders 2015.

David duChemin Craft & Vision books, blog & YouTube videos: [www.craftandvision.com](http://www.craftandvision.com).

Freeman Patterson: *Photography and the Art of Seeing*, Key Porter Books, 1979.

Chris Orwig: *The Creative Fight*, Peachpit Press, 2016.

Michael Freeman: *Fifty Paths to Creative Photography*, Ilex Press, 2016.

Bruce Barnbaum: *The Essence of Photography*, Rocky Nook, 2014.

Alain Briot: *Mastering Photographic Composition, Creativity & Personal Style*, Rocky Nook, 2009.

Rafael Rojas: *The Photographic Message (e-book)*, Essential Seeing, 2017.

John Paul Caponigro: [www.johnpaulcaponigro.com](http://www.johnpaulcaponigro.com)

Erik Johansson: [www.erikjohanssonphoto.com](http://www.erikjohanssonphoto.com)

Elliott Erwitt: [www.magnumphotos.com/photographer/elliott-erwitt](http://www.magnumphotos.com/photographer/elliott-erwitt)

Valda Bailey: [www.valdabailey.com](http://www.valdabailey.com)

Darwin Wiggett & Samantha Chrysanthou: [www.oopoomoo.com](http://www.oopoomoo.com)

Peter Barss: [www.peterbarssphotography.co](http://www.peterbarssphotography.co)

Mariëtte Roodenburg: [www.marietteroodenburg.com](http://www.marietteroodenburg.com)

Larry Monczka & Kathleen Pickard: [www.raraavisphotos.com](http://www.raraavisphotos.com)

Barbara Bender: *Creativity and Playfulness*, Blurb Books, 2010 ([www.barbarabenderarts.com](http://www.barbarabenderarts.com)).

Katherine Keates: [www.katherinekeatesphotography.com](http://www.katherinekeatesphotography.com) (and her *Landscape Illusions* article at [www.leaguelandscape.com/katherine-keates-landscape-illusions](http://www.leaguelandscape.com/katherine-keates-landscape-illusions))