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**THE MC ART
FRAMEWORK™**

**PHOTOGRAPHY
WORKFLOW**

MAKING PHOTOGRAPHS

When working with only with a camera, it can be quite challenging for many people to visualize their subject matter abstractly. Photography is the medium that is perhaps the most challenged by the concept of "artistic seeing" as photographers work with a viewfinder or LCD screen and with whatever is in front of the camera. They do not have complete freedom to include/exclude compositional elements, rearrange things in a frame at will or have complete control of the quality or direction of light. They must also work with constraints such as poor or restricted shooting angles, weather conditions, lens spatial distortions (perspective distortion), and the ability of their camera to capture and render the light/value range of a scene... **Photographers enjoy one major advantage over other creatives: the ability to practice composition incessantly more than anyone working in any other medium.** Because a photograph is captured with the simple push of a button, the process is quick and allows the photographer to move on to their next composition almost immediately, whereas artists working in other mediums are forced to work more methodically and

without the luxury of speed, thereby not getting as much practice quickly assessing a scene, composing, or making multiple versions before moving on.

Artists paint/draw light; photographers photograph it.

Photographers do not photograph subject matter; they photograph light. Light is represented/rendered via shapes, edges, values/tones (lightness or darkness of an area) and colour. It is light that defines your subject and sets the mood of your photograph. Light guides the viewer's eye through your photograph and defines the very nature of their experience. A photographer must learn to "see" the world in terms of light, understand what it is revealing about their subject and reconcile this with what they wish to convey in their photograph. It is not about photographing what you see; it's really about how to "see" what to photograph—this requires a fundamental understanding of the nature of light and of how to work with it.

It is important to always think and work with an artistic mindset and not be seduced by the ease of use, convenience and speed of using a camera and relying on editing techniques to bring a photo "to life", thus bypassing (and not benefiting from) the visualization due

diligence an artist would undertake through the process of drawing/sketching and doing a tonal value analysis.

My suggestion is to **take pictures as if there was film in the camera and you had only a few shots left—this slows things down and focusses more attention on the subject.**

One can argue that, when photographing, a photographer should keep on shooting to maximize the use of their time for capturing images and not spend time reviewing their photos because, in doing so, they are missing valuable photographing time. I believe that this perspective has merit only in specific photographic situations such as working with quickly moving/changing subject matter (e.g. sports or street photography) and that for most other subject matter, there are simply few valid reasons for not making the time to:

- Think carefully about what you are photographing
- Decide exactly what you want to convey about your subject
- Work on designing your image to the point where you can visualize your final image

- Plan how to best photograph your subject to convey your message

Taking a thoughtful approach to designing your image when using a camera mimics (and derives all of the benefits from) an artist's toolkit. The more you put into the making of a photograph, the more you will get out of it (good or bad, you will learn).

Photographs are not unlike paintings...you can (almost always) sense (no formal art education required) the effort the artist put into the making of it.

When a photographer approaches their subject matter as a trained artist would, they end up "making" pictures rather than simply "taking" pictures. This should begin with inspiration and a concept, then move on to the planning stage, assessing and considering various decisions relating to composition, lighting and technical considerations, then finalizing their decisions and taking the shot...essentially doing everything possible in the field to create a good photograph. With experience, familiarity will allow this process to happen quickly. This is the difference between a snapshot and the making of a photograph.

WORKING WITH ONLY A CAMERA

Here is a photography workflow when the only tool with you is a camera or when a photograph is your desired end result.

1. Walk around the scene without a camera. Think about how the quality and direction of light falling on your subject is affecting the scene and how this impacts the mood of your photo. Focus only on the light (direct/harsh, soft, the colour of it, the angle of it, reflections...), not your subject. It's important to be able to see things abstractly in terms of light independent of your subject and the graphic qualities of the scene. This ability comes with time and repeated practice. Decide what you want to photograph and articulate what you want to express in your photo—write this down and keep it in mind when completing the following steps.
2. Decide how to arrange the elements in your photo:
 - Consider the important elements in your picture and how you may want to position them in the frame (rectangle, vertical/horizontal orientation, square, what to include or leave out of the frame, how much of something to show at a frame edge or corner...).
 - Utilize any angles in the scene to draw the viewer's attention into your photo. If the light is harsh and there are shadows, consider using them as graphical elements in your shot. Consider the vertical angle for your shot: shooting from a position near the ground vs. an elevated position.
 - You may wish to walk around your scene with your phone as an aid to help frame your shot.
 - Consider the lens (focal length) you will use. Don't just stand in a spot and use a zoom lens to frame your shot....move around (lower your camera and look down ahead of your feet and watch your step – walk, stop, then look at your scene, look through your camera, stop, look in front of you, then walk...) and try the same framing with different focal lengths at different distances from your subject. Pay attention to both distant and foreground elements and how each

will be impacted by a change in focal length. Shorter focal lengths exaggerate the sense of depth/space in your photo; longer ones compress visual depth in a photo but can serve to isolate elements. This factor alone can make or break your shot.

- Consider the foreground, middle area and background of your composition. How do they relate to one another from both tonal and compositional perspectives? These are factors that contribute to the sense of depth in a photograph as well as to the viewing experience of it.
 - Always keep in mind that your choice of focal length, your physical position relative to your subject, composition and lighting all contribute to guiding the viewing experience and that you will often need to reconcile an optimum compromise between all of these factors.
3. The first photo you should take should be a black and white shot. Yep, you heard right! After taking this photo, focus only on the light of the scene and not on your subject matter. Look for areas/tones in your scene that blend into each other. If the photo looks dull, try using a B&W filter (yellow, orange, red, green, blue) or a

higher contrast to separate tonalities in the scene and make it look a little more three dimensional. Sometimes squinting can help to make lighting and composition decisions (doing this eliminates details and forces you to focus on the graphic elements of your scene). Other helpful tricks are to rotate a photo or camera so that you're viewing your image upside down (helps to see it abstractly) or using a small pocket mirror to laterally reverse what you see on your LCD screen (it will, almost always, look completely different, and you will likely notice things you hadn't before) or, putting a piece or two of clear plastic wrap over your LCD screen when reviewing your photo (blurs the image content and helps to illustrate how your scene is lit and composed).

4. Next, decrease the exposure considerably and take another black and white photo. This one (quite dark/"low key") can be used to validate your composition and the relative tonal relationships of the scene. It darkens most of the image and removes details forcing you to look closely at your composition and use your imagination to visualize what the photo should look like. This shot may also inform your decision regarding the exposure you want to use for

your final shot as it affects the mood of your photo...very exciting!

5. Now, overexpose (light/"high key") a shot (yep, still in black and white). This will assist in determining how bright you want the shot to be (more brightness changes the mood of a scene). This photo will also bring out shadow details (that you may not have noticed) and may inform your final exposure and camera settings determination.
6. Adjust your exposure based on the above and take a colour shot (also important to do for visualization purposes even if your desired end photo is a black and white). Make several variations with different colour saturation levels/settings. The majority of photos we see today tend to be on the contrasty side with heavily saturated colours. This is unrealistic pervasive aesthetic is not necessarily appropriate for all subject matter, so ensure you include a photo with more natural renditions of colour and contrast. If your intent is to take a black and white photo, take your final shot now.
7. Next, take several carefully considered variations of the scene as "visualization insurance" and for learning purposes. Do not go snap crazy...make specific

conscious decisions about what you're photographing before every press of the shutter button. The photo you took at the scene in step six is the result of all of your diligence and should stand up to any/all of the other ones as your preferred choice. Unfortunately, there are times when this may not be the case, and this is when and how we learn from our mistakes.

AN EXAMPLE OF THIS IN ACTION

Here is an example to illustrate how I put the above into practice using only a camera to plan my final work (a paint sketch):

My vantage point was up a small hill overlooking a marina.

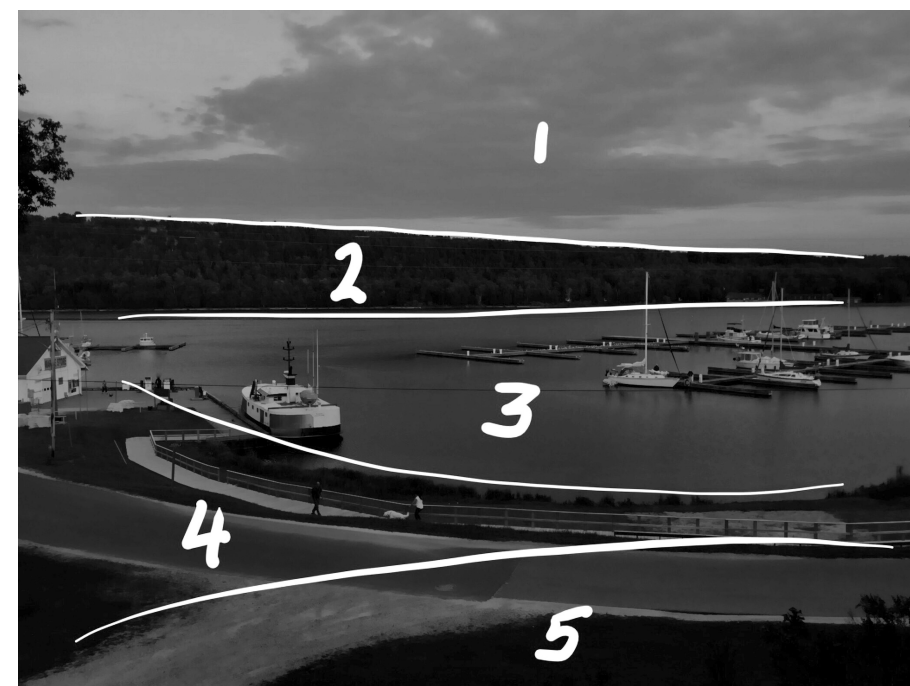
Statement/Vision for the piece: A peaceful post-sunset evening scene at a quaint marina

Initial Photo:



The tonal values in this photo were generally acceptable: no washed out areas and darker areas retained detail. The camera overexposed the dark scene—this was taken at dusk but looks like it was taken in the middle of the day.

Dark Photo:



This made the major compositional elements more apparent. Underexposing photographs can also contribute to making them more moody and provides a good basis to manipulate the qualities of light (tonal values) in an image to focus attention on the subject and brighten up selected areas to guide the viewing experience.

Light Photo:



There were no dark shadow areas in this particular scene that required this step, this photo, however, does serve to illustrate how a lighter photo can reveal details in darker areas. Now that you have made overly dark and light photographs, you are in a position to judge how to expose the final shot.

Viewing Experience and Composition:



Some lines of sight when exploring this shot...

Colour Photo and Final Shot:



I adjusted the exposure to reflect my desired mood for this scene. Notice that the reflections of the marina lights are barely noticeable as it wasn't quite dark enough to make them seem stand out given the level of ambient light.



I embellished some colours to introduce more warmth to contrast with the coolness of the night scene. I also exaggerated the reflections of the marina lights in the water to provide more of a late evening feel.



Final Work—Paint Sketch:



A NOTE TO PHOTOGRAPHERS WHO DON'T DRAW...

Though this photography workflow is designed to make one analyze a scene with an artistic mindset, there is no true substitute for making a drawing and a tonal map of a scene. The experience of drawing forces you to pause, consider, and “build” your final image with every pencil/pen stroke. Having to do this slows you down...definitely. It is precisely this contemplative consideration of your subject that will ultimately serve to improve your photography.

I believe that all photographers should take notes and make sketches as a general rule...at all times and of anything. You will soon discover that it's not at all difficult to draw the main shapes you see in front of you. To get a tonal map of your scene, just start filling in darker areas of your sketch or simply make notes directly on your drawing. As

an example, you may find that some foreground rocks may disappear in the shadows or that there are too many dark areas or too large a dark area in your picture or that you don't like the positioning of a tree in your frame... Think about how your drawing and tonal map relate to your initial statement about what you want to convey with your image. Even if you decide that your drawing is hopeless and/or too much work, the act of drawing will make you think about composition and tonal relationships the very next time you take a picture...and “light” is what photography is all about, so my advice is to use all the tools you have at your disposal. You can't lose; you will not only improve your photography but you will develop some drawing skills over time and, you may even decide that you prefer drawing over photography!

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