

NOW OPEN: PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR

\$24.95

**ISSUE 123
AUTUMN 2026**

Better Photography

NATURE WITH
A DRONE

**Joanna Steidle's
Remarkable
Aerials**



IAN EVERETT 'ON YOUR BIKE' • LISA LEACH FINDING MENTORS

CONTEMPORARY AI DISCUSSIONS • USING BALANCE IN COMPOSITION



KEEPERS

PHOTOGRAPHER: Peter Eastway

LOCATION: Paro Dzong, Paro, Bhutan

CAMERA: Fujifilm X-H2, Fujinon 56mm f1.2

EXPOSURE: 1/1600 second @ f2.5, ISO 125

SITUATION: I have visited this location many times, usually mid-morning when the sun is overhead. I know a lot of people believe midday sunshine is difficult to photograph with, but there are always exceptions. The dzong is a complex of quadrangles and high walls, so the sun creates some wonderful shadows and highlights. I found this splash of light on the flagging, so it was just a matter of waiting for someone to walk into position. This monk was actually on his mobile, so I had to wait until the phone was hidden – to make the image seem 'authentic'! And they say photography never lies! Post-production was used to lighten the face and I also added a little colour to the prayer wheels lined up on the back wall. If you've never been to Bhutan, don't miss out!



Better Photography Magazine's PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR!

We have four categories to enter and each category offers a \$750 first prize, but to win the \$2000 'Photographer of the Year' Award, we will be judging your top four entries!

This is the only amateur photo competition in the world judged each year by the same three Grand Masters of Photography, providing a level of consistency not found anywhere else! Every entry receives a score and a brief judge's comment. Win Bronze, Silver or Gold Awards. Plus there are four separate Category Awards and the prestigious **Better Photography Photographer of the Year 2026** title with a \$2000 cash prize!

NB: The Photographer of the Year will be featured in *Better Photography Magazine*.

Visit www.betterphotographyphotocomp.com for more information.

Entry is only AUS \$20 per image or 5 entries for just \$80.

PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR



Three Grand Master Judges

- Peter Eastway, AIPP Grand Master of Photography
- Tony Hewitt, AIPP Grand Master of Photography
- David Oliver, AIPP Grand Master of Photography

2026 Photographer of the Year: Hardijanto Budiman

\$2000 Cash Prize for First Place

- Four Category Prizes of \$750 each
- Winner portfolio in Better Photography magazine
- All entries receive a score
- PLUS a brief judge's comment
- Gold, Silver and Bronze Awards
- Award Certificates can be printed

Entries close 31/5/26

Get a head start with your entries this year!

**Purchase Peter Eastway's comprehensive
"How To Win Photo Competitions"
for just \$47.50, a 50% saving!
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www.betterphotographyeducation.com**



2026

Four Categories:

- 1. Emotive Portraits**
- 2. Classic Landscapes**
- 3. Revealing Nature**
- 4. Your Choice Open**

HOW TO ENTER

- 1. The Better Photography Magazine Photographer of the Year 2026 Award** is open to all non-professional photographers. A non-professional photographer does not work full-time as a photographer and has earned less than AUS \$10,000 in the past 12 months from photography.
- Entrants retain full copyright of their images.
- You may enter as many times as you wish. Entry is AUS \$20 (approx. US \$14) per entry. There is an Early Bird discount of one free entry for every four paid entries, up until one week before the final closing date (24 May 2026) – so blocks of five entries for \$80.
- There are four categories: Emotive Portraits, Classic Landscapes, Revealing Nature and 'Your Choice Open'. You can enter in one or more categories.
- The judges are looking for a professional standard of presentation and a highly creative approach or treatment.
- The images presented for judging must be photographic in origin and any post-production must be the work of the entrant. AI images and AI-generated components are not allowed. We want to see your work!
- To ensure we have recent work, entries must be from original exposures made on or after 1 January 2026. Please do not remove the EXIF data from your entry files as this may invalidate your entry.

- Entry is online only at: www.betterphotographyphotocomp.com.
- To enter online, you will need to register. Competition winners may be asked to prove their non-professional status and provide raw files to show no generative AI has been used.
- The judging process is as follows: Each judge will score each Entry out of 100 and the average will be presented as a score out of 100.
- Only one entry is required to win a Category. However, to win the overall Photographer of the Year, an Entrant will need to have entered a minimum of four entries to make a 'Portfolio'. A Portfolio comprises the four highest scoring entries by an Entrant, no matter how many entries an Entrant submitted or how many categories.
- The 5 Portfolios with the highest aggregates will be judged separately. The judges will vote for the Portfolio that best represents the *Better Photography Magazine Photographer of the Year*. This will be a process of consultation and discussion.
- For each Category, the 5 entries with the highest score will be judged a second time to determine the Category winner. This will also be a process of consultation and discussion and the Photographer of the Year is ineligible to win a category.

- Prizes: AUS \$2000 for the Photographer of the Year. AUS \$750 for each Category winner. Total prize money: AUS \$5000. The Photographer of the Year will also have a feature article in *Better Photography Magazine*.
- By entering this competition, the Entrant (copyright owner) grants to *Better Photography Magazine* and associated companies (the 'Organisers') the right to reproduce in print and online any image submitted for publicity or educational purposes in Australia and overseas.
- If necessary, it is the Entrant's responsibility to obtain any and all permissions, including the model releases and/or copyright owner's permission if required, to have the images judged and possibly displayed and published.
- The Organisers will interpret the application of these rules and make decisions on any questions not specifically covered by them. No correspondence will be entered into regarding any decision.
- Entries will be accepted online from 1 April to 31 May 2026.
- Enquiries concerning the competition can be directed to kim@betterphotography.com.
- The results will be published online and in *Better Photography Magazine* from 30 June 2025.
- This is a summary of the rules. The complete rules can be found with the competition entry details at: www.betterphotographyphotocomp.com.

Enter at: www.betterphotographyphotocomp.com



Cover photo by Joanna Steidle.
See article on page 14.

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Better Photography is a special
interest photography magazine
published quarterly by Pt 78 Pty
Limited ABN 75 003 152 136, PO
Box 351, Collaroy Beach NSW 2097.
Phone: (02) 4388 6851
Web: www.betterphotography.com

The cover price of \$24.95 is the
maximum recommended retail
price only.

The magazine is printed by
Carbon8, Sydney, Australia.

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Photo by Hunter Page. Full story page 52.



Photo by Ian Everett. Full story page 24.

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Very often we'll incorporate contrast into our compositions, but now it is a matter of balancing the contrasting or different elements.

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Photo by Joanna Steidle. Full story page 14.

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Using the latest drones, Joanna Steidle has developed a breathtaking aerial approach to nature photography, but it's the refinement that makes each image a work of art.

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Photographers are incredibly fortunate because they can combine their love of images with almost anything they do. Ian Everett reflects on his eclectic combination of interests!

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Lisa Leach knows that photography can be a lonely pursuit, so her solution was to seek some answers through workshops and mentoring.



Photo by Lisa Leach. Full story page 34.

CANON EOS R6 MARK III

Although the rate of new camera releases has slowed, the imagination of the camera companies to dream up new model names hasn't really improved. Fortunately, the cameras themselves are simply sensational with each new version refining and streamlining the previous one.

Canon touts its latest EOS R6 Mark III as a powerful stills camera with advanced film-making features. Now, for many years, photographers have put up with the video features as not being of great importance, but some of the technology loved by film-makers also helps the stills photographer. The new camera has upgrades in resolution, tracking, and connectivity. It features a new 32.5-megapixel full-frame sensor, 40 fps continuous shooting and an expanded buffer capable of handling up to 150 raw images in a single burst (when using CFexpress cards).

The EOS R6 Mark III is claimed to excel in low light, offering an ISO range up to 64,000 for clean, detailed images, even in challenging conditions. Canon also suggests its in-camera crop modes effectively extend reach, but of course we all know it's merely cropping the image and we can do that ourselves in post-production. However, up to 8.5 stops of combined image stabilisation (camera and lens) keep hand-held shots sharp and steady (as long as your subject is too).

For photographers expanding into video, the EOS R6 Mark III captures 7K RAW Light footage up to 60p, delivers oversampled 4K 60p with cinematic motion and supports 4K 120p for slower, more dramatic results. Full HD 180 fps recording is also available for creative slow-motion effects.

The new camera has an RRP of AUS \$4,299 while a kit EOS R6 Mark III and RF 24-105mm f4/L IS USM kit is \$6149.



FUJINON XC13-33mm

With AI becoming more prevalent and many people rejecting what it offers photographers, one wonders if the world of documentary and record photography will find itself in a renaissance! Let's face it, AI generally produces pixel-perfect faces which look like their owners have been on a diet of plastic and Botox. There is a sameness about the images, so what better way to make yourself different than to photograph some real people?

And as all the world's great documentary photographers learned, having a small, unobtrusive camera is half the challenge. The other is spending the time and being in the right position, but all this can be to no avail if your quarry is worried about a big camera.

One solution is to use a small APS-C or Micro Four-Thirds camera with a small lens attached. For Fujifilm X-series owners, the latest Fujinon XC13-33mm f3.5-6.3 OIS may be of interest! The new lens covers a focal length range from ultra wide-angle 13mm (equivalent to 20mm in 35mm format) to standard 33mm (equivalent to 50mm in 35mm format). Despite this coverage, it's the smallest and lightest in the Fujinon range, with a total length of 37.5 mm and a weight of approximately 125 g.



The lens design employs a 10-element, 9-group configuration including four aspherical elements and three ED elements. This enables effective suppression of some unwanted wide-angle lens characteristics (field curvature and distortion and chromatic aberration) across the entire zoom range. It also achieves a minimum focus distance of 20 cm throughout the zoom range and a maximum magnification of 0.25x at the telephoto end. Equipped with autofocus performance of approximately 0.025 second and a 4-stop image stabilisation mechanism, Fujifilm says it never misses an opportunity!

Expected retail price is \$649.

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WORLD SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS

If you love sport photography, then the World Sports Photography Award website has some stunning images to begin the year! (<https://www.worldsportsphotographyawards.com/>) And while January is very early in the calendar to be announcing the best photographs for 2026, there's no doubt in sport that being first is important!

Edgar Su's image "Carlos' Shadow Hits A Ball" is the overall winner of the 2026 competition. The shot was taken during Alcaraz's fourth-round tennis match against Britain's Jack Draper at the 2025 Australian Open hosted in Melbourne. And if we're going to hazard a guess, the perfect positioning of the tennis ball within the shadow is a combination of modern technology and the photographer's ability to recognise something very special when reviewing his work!

Submissions represent work from the world's best professional sport photographers and the overall winner is chosen from a collection of 24 category-topping photographs spanning more than 50 sports including American football, athletics, baseball, equestrian, golf, racquet sports, winter sports and football.

This year's Awards mark the most successful edition in the competition's history. A record-breaking 23,130 images were submitted by 4,120 photographers representing 123 countries, reinforcing the Awards' status as one of the most internationally diverse and widely recognised sports photography competitions in the world. The exceptional quality and diversity of this year's submissions highlight that, even with rapid technological advancements, the photographer's eye and craft remain paramount. Sports photographers around the world continue to innovate, inspire and push the creative boundaries of the medium.

And to give credit to Canon for being a sponsor, Richard Shepherd at Canon Europe, adds: "The images recognised this year showcase photographers at their creative best, pushing boundaries, seeing differently and capturing sport in ways we've not experienced before. Canon's role is to support that creativity through equipment photographers can trust under pressure, enabling them to create different in the most demanding moments."



RICOH GR IV MONOCHROME

There is a story (tongue-in-cheek) that World Press Photo was going to stop documentary photographers from entering black and white images because entries should have minimal editing, but you could only achieve black and white with a 100% desaturation! Of course, Leica and Phase One produce monochrome cameras, so their photographers would be okay, but everyone else...

Well, now there's a third option with Ricoh's GR IV Monochrome. Naturally, it's based on the existing colour camera, but with an anti-aliasing (AA) filter-less CMOS APS-C image sensor with approximately 26 million pixels.

Monochrome images produced using a general colour image sensor first capture each pixel of light through one of red (R), green (G) or blue (B) colour filters, then the information is interpolated to generate a colour image, and finally that result is converted to monochrome. With a monochrome sensor, each pixel captures the subject's brightness information – and that's it! And because the sensor directly takes in the light information entering through the lens without interpolation processing, it's claimed to enable sharper monochrome rendering with richer tonal gradation.



One of the tricks black and white film photographers loved was using colour filters, especially red. In Ricoh's new camera, a red filter that can be dialled in or out with a single operation has been built into the lens unit. By allowing only red wavelengths of light to pass through, it enables dramatic rendering – for example, by darkening the tones of a blue sky to enhance contrast with white clouds, or by rendering red subjects brighter to make them stand out more clearly.

The GR series marks its 30th anniversary this year, tracing back to the film camera Ricoh GR1, launched in 1996. And we love how they describe the new camera's styling: "To evoke the primitive, essential world of black and white photography by unifying the overall colour and texture, the magnesium-alloy body, as well as the shutter release button and ring cap, are finished in matte black." Love it!

Expected RRP is AUS \$3249.

Creative Photography Workshops

Travel Photography Tours

Small Travel groups

Guides/Tutors

Mike Langford & Jackie Ranken

2025 Japan (2 spaces left)
November 21-3 Dec Autumn

2026 Japan (2 Spaces left)
January 12 - 25 Winter

2026 China Landscapes
October 28 - 11 November

2026 Morocco
November 14 - 1 December



Canon



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Creative Photography Workshops

Landscape Workshop Specialists

Small groups: Maximum six

Tutors: **Mike Langford & Jackie Ranken**

2025 Workshop Dates

July 17 - 22 Mt Cook (1 place left)
Oct 9 - 14 South Westland (2 Places left)

2026 Workshop Dates

Mar 26 - 31 The Catlins
May 2 - 8 Karamea
May 28 - 2 June Central Otago
June 21 - 26 Canterbury Lakes
July 23 - 28 Mt Cook/Mackenzie
Sept 24 - 29 South Westland

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DJI DRONES NOT SOLD IN USA

While the availability of DJI drones in Australia is not in question, spare a thought for our American colleagues who like to take to the skies.

The situation is a lawyer's dream or nightmare – and a classic case of bureaucracy not being able to handle a simple process. Or maybe it was intentional?

According to DJI, under the FY25 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) in the USA, Congress set 23 December 2025 as the deadline for a formal national security audit of two Chinese drone manufacturers, including DJI. And if no audit was completed by that date, DJI was to be automatically added to the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) "Covered List" – a move that effectively bans new DJI products from entering the U.S. market. And as we write this at the end of January 2026, that's the current position!

Obviously exasperated, DJI repeatedly called for the required audit to take place, but the problem lay in how the law was written: the NDAA did not assign any U.S. agency to actually conduct the audit. And despite DJI's efforts, no agency stepped forward to take on the responsibility. The editor remembers a British TV comedy called 'Yes, Minister'...

Added DJI, "This situation is largely driven by broader geopolitical tensions surrounding technology and trade and the fact that DJI is the global market leader in drones and headquartered in China.

"It's also important to note that such measures wouldn't just affect drones. Access to DJI's wider range of products – including our cameras and film-making equipment – will be impacted too. This shows how broad and untargeted these actions are and how far their effects will ripple across creative and commercial industries."



PORSCHE CAMERA CAR

Now, if you need an excuse to run past your better half to get that new car, here's an idea that may work!

As part of a training project, nine apprentices from Porsche Leipzig transformed a Porsche 718 Boxster S into a highly functional camera car. The conversion, which took place back in 2017, has remained largely behind the scenes until recently.

Precision is essential when capturing photo and video on track – including in terms of the performance of the camera car itself. When the previous 'buggy', an older Porsche Boxster, could no longer keep pace with current models, a new idea emerged: a 718 Boxster S would become its successor. The task of converting the vehicle was assigned to a team of apprentices, guided by training supervisor Carsten Pohle.

As part of their second-year training, the apprentices developed a concept tailored to the demands of daily use. The soft-top roof was removed, a robust roll bar installed and the vehicle – including all add-on parts – was finished in matte black to minimise reflections during filming. Steel tube mounts were added to the front, rear and sides for versatile camera positioning. The roll bar also serves as an elevated mounting point.



Ensuring the photographer's safety was a key aspect of the conversion. Both luggage compartments were padded and fitted with harness systems. An additional standing platform between the front seats and the rear trunk offers further possible shooting configurations – with the necessary PPE safety harness.

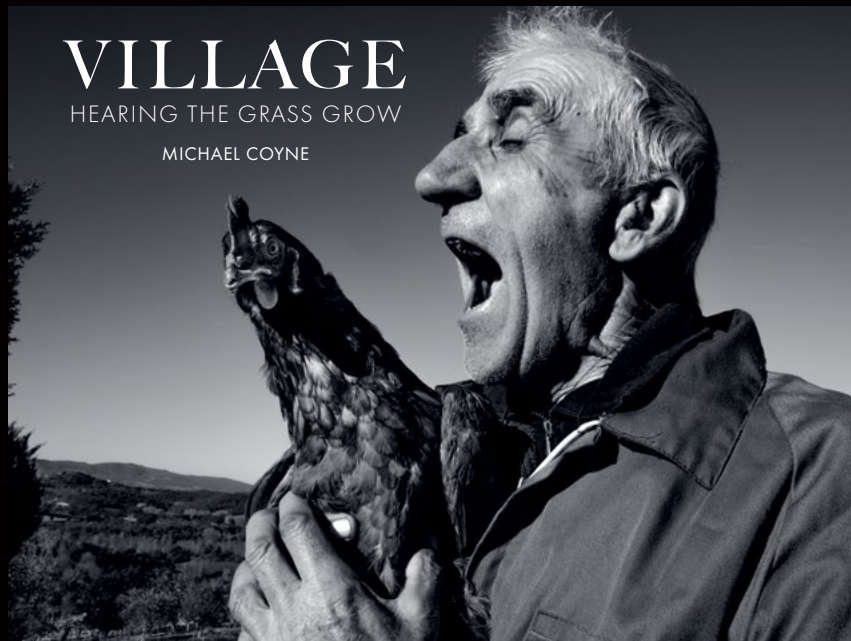
The vehicle also received a few technical upgrades: internal wiring allows direct connection between camera and laptop, which can be securely fastened in the passenger area. An inverter supplies power to operate and recharge all technical equipment. And since its completion, the converted Boxster has been regularly used for shoots on the Leipzig track.

Now, how this exactly applies to your new car we're not sure, but hopefully you have a few ideas!

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.

This stunning collection guides us through a disappearing way of life at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries.

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—PETER EASTWAY, *BETTER PHOTOGRAPHY MAGAZINE*

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JOANNA STEIDLE

NATURE'S REMARKABLE AERIALS

Using the latest drones, Joanna Steidle has developed a breathtaking aerial approach to nature photography, but it's the refinement that makes each image a work of art.

Before you read this article, flip through the photos on these pages first. Isn't there a remarkable clarity and poise about the precise composition, beautiful light and careful exposure? Joanna Steidle has mastered wildlife photography with the drone, capturing her subjects in a way that only comes from a deep understanding of both her subjects and the environments in which she finds them.

Explained Joanna, "I look for uniqueness, be that in subject, composition or potential edit. Although I may be flying for a specific reason, such as documenting marine life from above, I always stay aware and alert for interesting happenings like sand patterns, birds on the shore or crashing waves."

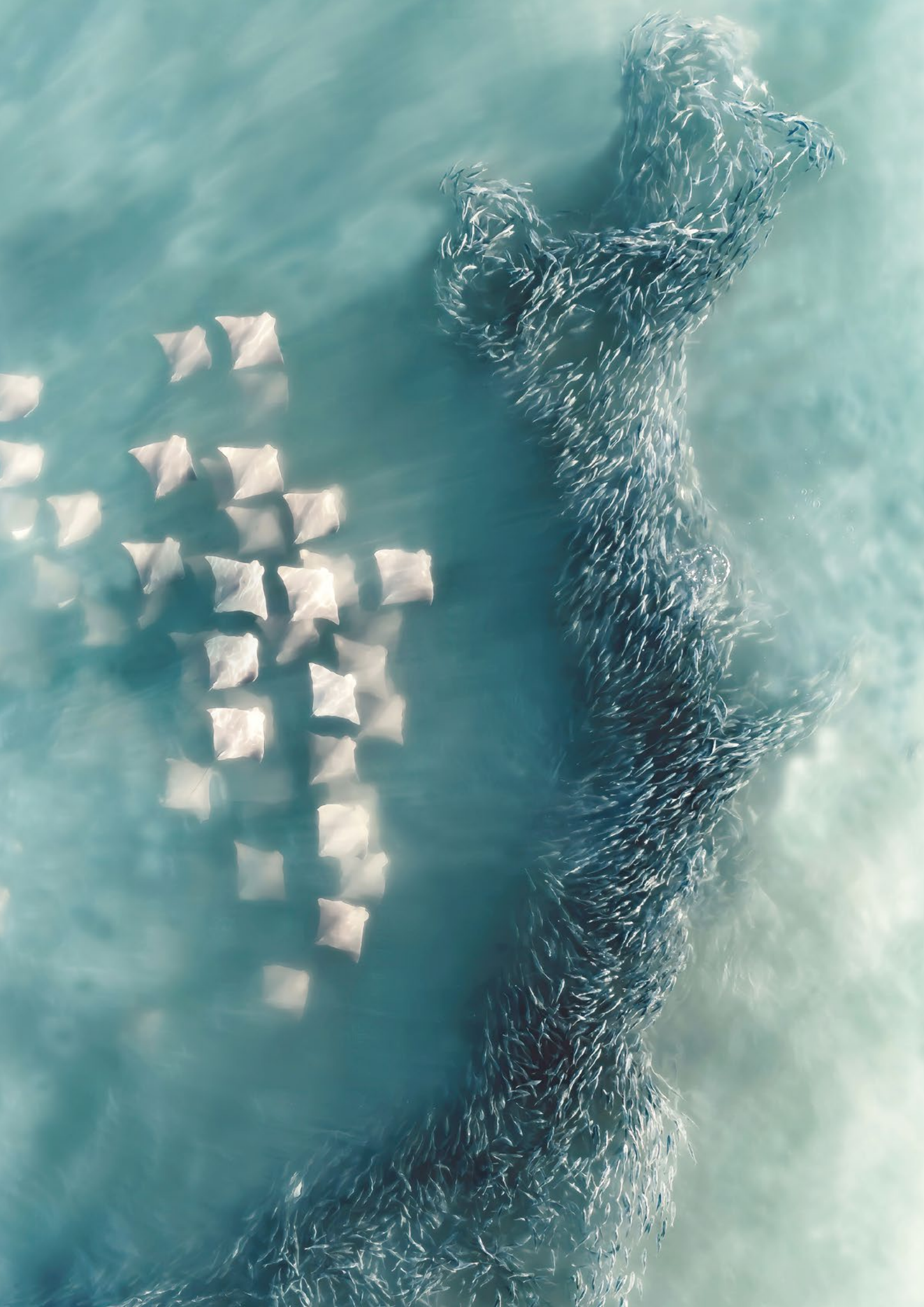
Joanna describes herself as a drone photographer. That's it. She specialises in aerial photography. "This is important to me because it has now become a niche in the photography world. Flying is my passion, my first love in this journey and it is all I want to do. Specialising also adds business and marketing advantages. Plus, it is the clear path for me to create a meaningful legacy.

"Ideally, I simply want to make this world a better place. Drone photography offers a new perspective to many eyes, which in turn creates open-mindedness. I am building a portfolio of fine art works and documenting marine life and coastal regions for conservation efforts. Being a part of global initiatives that help protect and save our planet brings true joy to me. Contests, features and social media influence has very little effect on my work, as it does not bring true peace and contentment."

And while this is true enough, Joanna's photographs have enjoyed great success in contests, features and social media! She was the winner of the inaugural International Aerial Photographer of the Year in 2025, among many other prizes.

Another World

This is a top-down drone photograph of a fever of cownose rays approaching a school of menhaden baitfish, taken just a few hundred feet from the coast of Southampton, NY, USA. Witnessing this moment of species interaction was so exciting. These rays are very unlikely to prey on the fish pictured; they usually feed on sand eels and molluscs. On this day (which happened to be my 50th birthday), the sky was clear and the sea was calm, allowing the sunlight to enhance the depth and bursting sand clouds.





Spinner on the Prowl

This is a capture of a spinner shark hunting in a school of menhaden fish. Captured from a side angle to include light reflections on the surface of the Atlantic Ocean.



Gliding in Jade

This is a top-down capture of a green turtle just under the surface in Florida.

Insight

"I began flying drones in 2015. In 2017, I started a commercial drone business and by 2019, I realised aerial photography was where I most desired to improve my skills. I was 43-years-old when the decision became clear and my life has never been the same.

"I had no prior photography experience. I basically grew up on a commercial clam boat, spending most summer days on the water or at the beach. This is where I grew a great love and respect for our oceans. And it's the ocean beaches where I spiritually connect and where I can literally see my smallness in this world. And now, at the age of 53, I still come home dirty and salty, every day."

It seems only natural for the ocean and wildlife to be Joanna's subject of choice. "To be honest, much of my inspiration comes from a spiritual connection. I enter a meditative state, letting go of as much analytical thought as possible, while maintaining safety precautions. This allows me to connect with Mother Nature and to capture intuitive compositions. My editing process stems from heart-centred awareness rather than technical rules alone. Athletes are also quite inspirational in my work as "chasing the shot" gives me great pleasure. Watching gymnastics, tennis, skiing and polo always ignites my passion to fly."

Opposite: Exhale

This is a capture of a bottlenose dolphin exhaling on the surface of the North Atlantic Ocean.



The Gateway

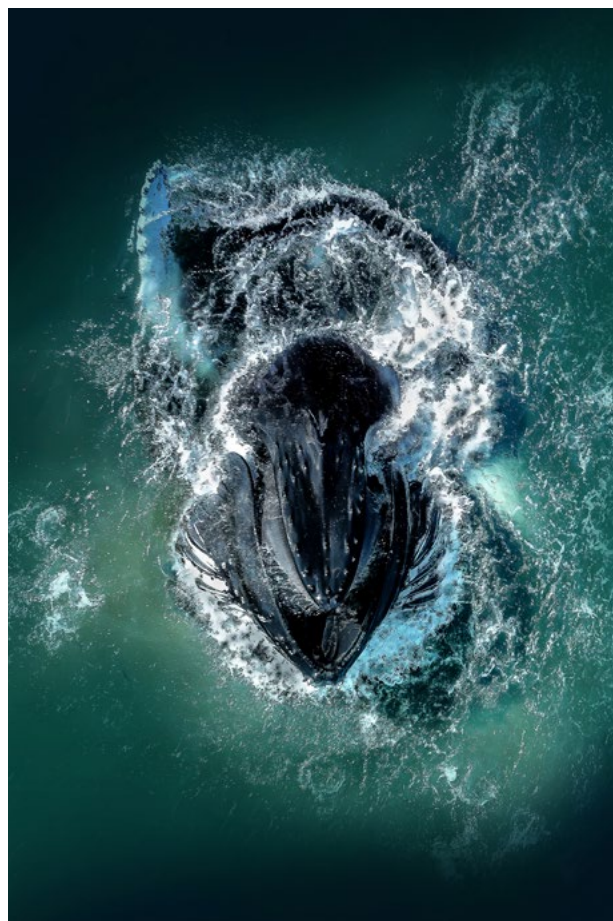
This is a top-down drone photograph of a spinner shark hunting in a school of menhaden baitfish in the Atlantic Ocean, Southampton, NY, USA. I followed this shark for a good 20 minutes, watching and waiting for a pleasant composition where both the shark and fish were very close to the surface for optimum clarity.





Common Terns

This is a top-down capture of a flock of common terns taking flight along the sandy end of a bay.



Mechanics

Joanna flies DJL drones and is currently using their Mavic 4 Pro and Mavic 3 Pro for photography purposes. "I am a Skypixel Creator for DJI. They often offer me free equipment and excellent service. I tried multiple brands in my early years, but nothing compared to the quality and support of DJI."

Back home with her files, she uses Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop for editing and Topaz Giga for enlarging files for prints. Due to the minimal camera capabilities on a drone and maintaining a respectful distance from wildlife, her work is often heavily cropped and must be run through AI enlargement software for proper presentation in galleries and exhibits.

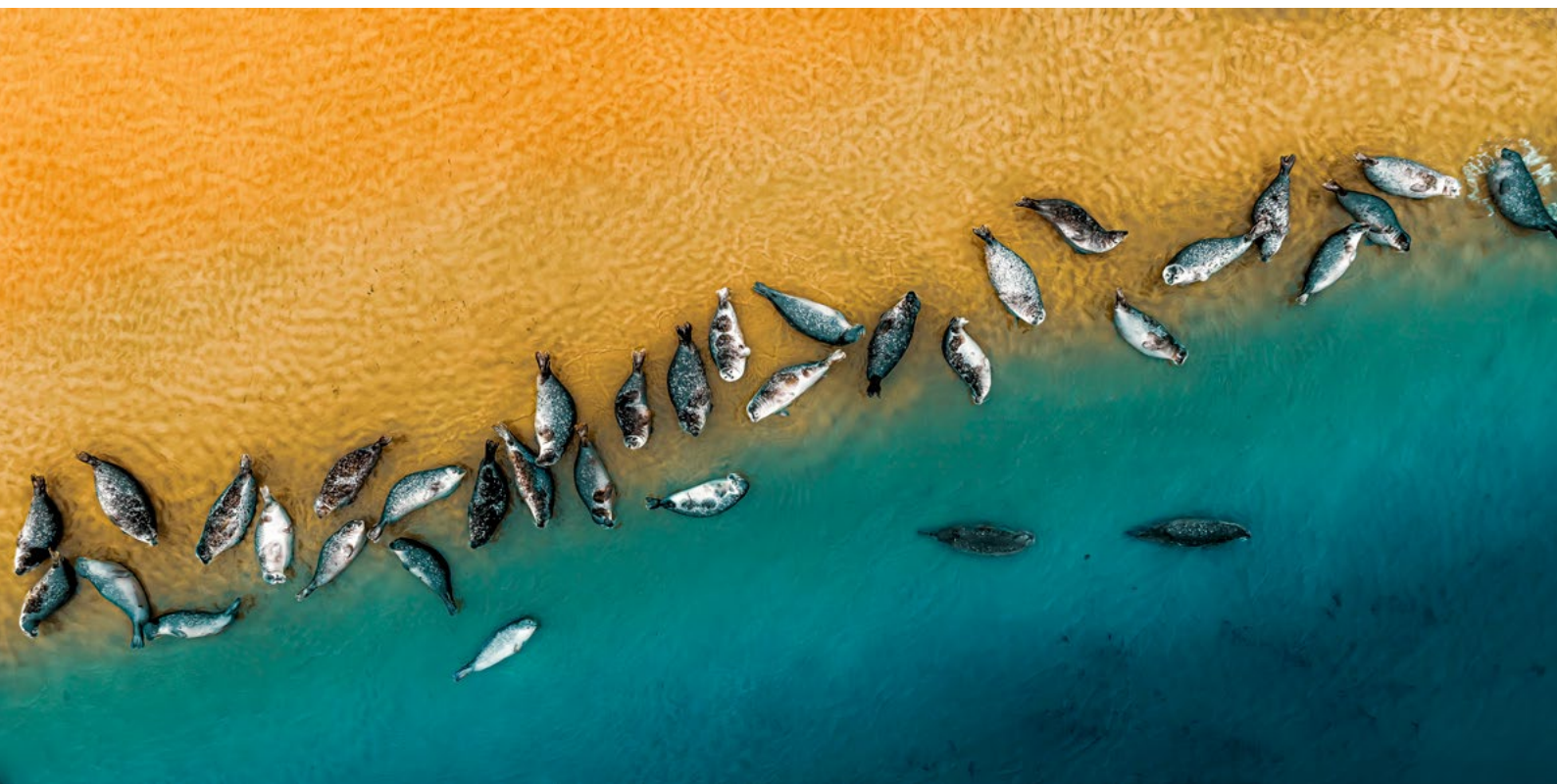
"For me, maintaining original compositions in post-production is essential, but beyond that it's no holds barred. I spend a significant amount of time touching up water bubbles, colour and light." Capturing underwater content from a drone often includes brownish or lime green water due to the top-down perspective, so Joanna has no trouble correcting this.

"During the editing process, I take myself back to the moment in flight and tap into the emotions I felt at the time of the encounter. I often want to reach out and touch these gorgeous creatures; this makes me want to remove visual impediments like water/surface quality to bring the viewer closer to the subjects."

Joanna's work is made for licensing and large prints. "A focus of mine is to make aerial photography more present in galleries."

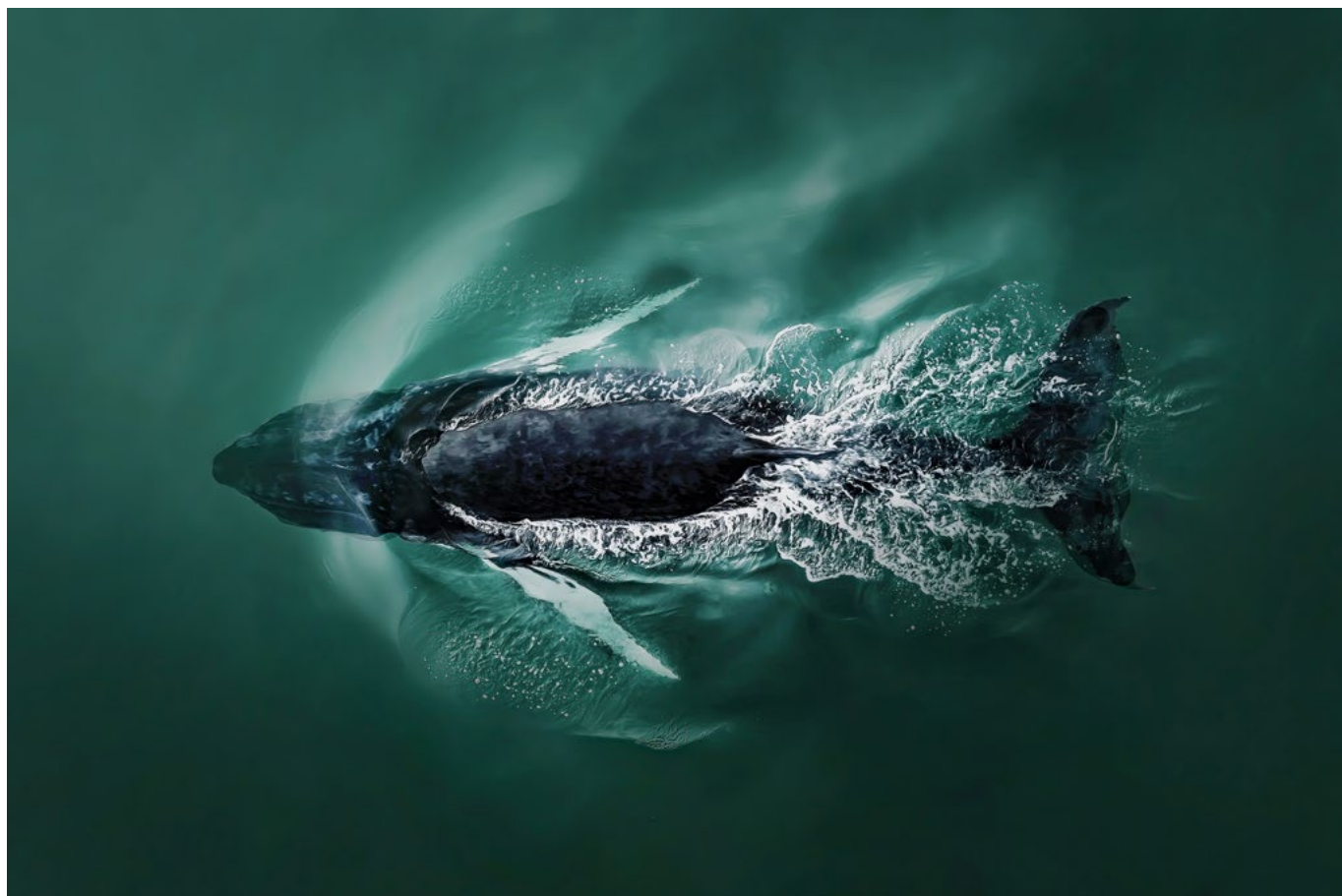
Left: A Whale's Smile

This is a top-down capture of a humpback whale lunge feeding on menhaden baitfish. This angle has never been captured to my knowledge and it almost appears the whale is smiling.



Hauled Out

This is a top-down aerial photograph of Harbour Seals hauled out in the middle of Moriches Bay, New York. Lined up were a total of 74 seals relaxing and taking a break at low tide on a sandbar. This was just a small group of them.



Diving

This is a top-down drone photograph of a humpback whale diving back under the surface of the Atlantic Ocean after taking a breath of air. This was taken within 500 ft of the coast in Southampton, NY USA.



Recess

This is top-down capture of the edge of a school of menhaden baitfish.



Who's Eating Who

This is a capture of a sandbar shark hunting in a school of menhaden baitfish, displaying the nature patterns of predators and prey.

"The power of a large print is astronomical compared to a digital rendition. I will be having a solo exhibit in Bridgehampton, NY, USA this summer and viewing information is sent out via my newsletter. Feel free to sign up on my website homepage!"

Aerial Atlantic

Joanna is currently working on a project titled "Aerial Atlantic" which will be a culmination of chapters consisting of ocean-based wildlife, water sports, abstract sand patterns, waves and marshes that line the east coast of the USA.

"For this article, I take you on a journey into my wildlife chapter. This project is in its infancy as I have only been focused on photography for the past five years. The hope is to depict the power of our oceans and coastline, its inhabitants, how humans interact with it and the beauty of nature from a perspective that very few get to witness."

Opposite: Concerto

This is a top-down aerial photograph of a large fever of cownose rays gliding together in unison just off the coast of New York in the Atlantic Ocean. These rays are known to migrate from South America to New England in August. It is fascinating to watch more and more arrive each day until one day they are just gone on their way back south.





Motherhood

This is a capture of a bottlenose dolphin and her calf displaying the intimate and important message of parenthood.

"I am very actively involved in conservation efforts for our menhaden baitfish which are being overfished, as they are in a rapid decline along the coast of New York. As the keystone species, all other life in the ocean depends on their abundance. Menhaden are plankton feeders and form large tight schools near the coast, which attracts larger predators. I have documented an 80% visual decline along 30 miles of beach in the past two years. I owe my career to these fish and I am trying to bring this important story to more of the world."

Joanna says the best conditions for her approach are blue skies and medium light with calm and clear water conditions. She doesn't use a polarising filter because with the drone, the camera angle is changing so often and so quickly as she chases her subjects. "While a polariser can help with surface glare, it also darkens everything under the surface which makes editing more difficult."

Some of the lesser thought of aspects of outdoor photography are the logistics – getting there, arranging things, permissions, props etcetera. "I fly only on weekdays in summer because weekends attract multiple banner planes flying near 200 ft ASL. I'm always flying in non-restricted airspace and I must keep the drone within VLOS (visual line of sight), which can be a challenge as I move from beach to beach. I watch the tide, moon, wave heights and swell directions (easterly swell means clear water as it is flowing for the open ocean). And there are plenty of

beach webcams to view conditions before leaving my office."

With the logistics sorted Joanna simply flies up, down and around her subject, searching for the best angle and often using a five-shot 'burst mode' to ensure she captures just the right angle or body position.

"When it comes to editing my photos, it's a deep dive into my emotions. The editing process is where I pour my heart and soul into the piece. I try to bring the subject to the forefront, weeding out water quality and glare impediments to make the subjects 'touchable', so viewers can clearly identify the subjects and provoke deep thoughts.

"While my output is often for Instagram, I love making large (often metal) prints because of the wow factor that leaves people staring."

And there's no doubt Joanna's audience will be caught staring for quite some time. She is producing a stellar quality of work.

To follow Joanna Steidle:

Website: <https://joannasteidle.com/>

IG: <https://www.instagram.com/joannasteidle/>

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/joanna.steidle.96/>

X: <https://x.com/HamptonDrone>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/hamptondrone/>

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/@hamptondroneart>

Check out these special subject publications



Aerial Photography Primer

A combination portfolio and how-to eBook on capturing and editing powerful aerial photographs. Includes advice on working from planes, camera settings and advice on post-production for producing incredible abstracts as well as stellar aerial scenics. 100 page. Read online or download to your device.



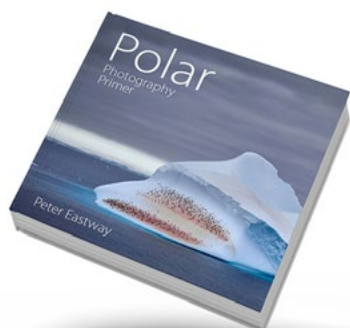
Studio Lighting - Portraiture

Studio Lighting for portrait photography contains a series of articles that ran in Better Photography magazine many years ago. (If you have a subscription to Better Photography, you'll find the articles in the archive stretching over 7 or 8 issues. This publication draws them all together, ready to read.) Read online or download to your device.



Travel Photography Primer

The Travel Photography Primer is a combination portfolio/how-to publication by Peter Eastway. In the Travel Photography Primer, Peter shares a range of incredibly useful ideas and tips that he has carefully gathered over 40 years of travelling the world, from how to capture great travel photographs to doing something meaningful with your photographs when you return home. It's full of practical advice and includes a portfolio of some of his favourite travel photographs as well. 100 pages. Read online or download to your device.



Polar Photography Primer

A combination portfolio and how-to eBook explaining how to make the most of your polar explorations, both north and south. Everything from protecting your equipment, handling exposures and then processing and presenting your work. 100 pages. Read online or download to your device.



The New Tradition - Digital

The The New Tradition is book all about photography, written especially for photographers. It comprises 100 of Peter Eastway's favourite photographs taken over the past 20 years or so, and tracing the development from film through to digital, the darkroom to Lightroom. Each photograph is accompanied by a small anecdote or fable, some are purely instructional, others quite humorous!

For full details, visit the Better Photography Education website.

www.betterphotographyeducation.com



**Better
Photography** Education

PHOTOBIKING, BONE-BREAKING & CONTEMPLATING

Photographers are incredibly fortunate
because they can combine their love
of images with almost anything they do.
Ian Everett reflects on his eclectic
combination of interests!

No Matter How You Choose To Travel

It's late afternoon on day two of my 'photobike' journey through Georgia and Armenia, when I ride past a picturesque, autumnal mountain scene – the type that is photographically irresistible. Riding up to the remote mountain village of Ushguli, high in the Caucasus Mountains, has already exceeded expectations with narrow, largely deserted roads, fringed with endless colour, winding through river gorges terminating in snow-capped mountains that hide ancient villages. I pull over, stop, then commence a slow and fateful U-turn on what is a steep section of road.

Whether the photographer chooses to indulge his passion on a motorbike, bicycle, car, campervan, bus or horse and cart, there will be numerous organisational and functional challenges specific to each mode, even before the shutter is pushed. Has your choice of travel mode compromised your gear options? Have your travel companions made it clear the bus will not wait for you next time? Did your saddle bag housing that holds your favourite wide-angle lens fail to make that last deep river crossing? Did I leave one of the three bags I must carry under the coffee table 150 km back?

Travel and photography can be stressful in good times, but add in a third hobby like motorbikes and the juggling can quickly turn to drama.

Industscapes. *My other obsession is an industrial apocalyptic theme of which there is much material in Georgia. The industrial photos in this article were taken variously in Rustavi, Chiatura and Kutaisi. They feature a high key, bleak approach to editing with an emphasis on reds, oranges and blue/cyans. Composition and balance is critical to the 'lookability' of these scapes and I had vastly more failures than successes. I think these are the latter.*



And so it was. Balancing gear atop the tank of an unfamiliar bike in an exotic location with time pressures so early in the trip, tripped me up. I may have over-prioritised shooting convenience over rider safety, so I will blame technical logistics and not any absence of riding skills (or common sense) for the mishap that was to befall me. But more of this later.

Bit of History, Lot of Gear

This is my seventh tour with Ben and Extreme Bike Tours and my second exploring the dramatic Caucasus region in Georgia and Armenia. This is very much a 'photobike' experience enabling me – despite the odd hazard – to indulge my passion for motorbikes, travel and photography. Shared near miss experiences become entertaining topics of conversation over beers at the end of each day. The camaraderie and the slightly embellished tales of bravery and survival are priceless.



Goderdzi. One of three shots taken atop the pass in Goderdzi. The conditions were perfect for a high key “on the verge” approach to subject, light and composition. Letting the mundane and the everyday shine on.





Sanatorium 'Medea'. A bleak wet day kept sightseers away, so I explored this sanatorium in peace. Most shots required a tripod to keep ISO and apertures down. I exposure bracketed every shot to ensure maximum edit flexibility, but the dynamic range of the Leica meant I rarely needed more than one of the frames.

With each trip, I refine photographic logistics for both the riding and 'getting there' bits of the travel mix. Regardless of destination or preferred mode of transportation, every photographer knows that equipment weight is always the biggest headache. My choice of motorbike to move my camera around amplified the problem as I needed to pack extras like helmet, jacket(s), riding pants, boots and gloves into bags already brimming with camera gear and clothes for every season! Fortunately, the bikes themselves are supplied!

For this trip, I can reduce my photographic load a bit due

to the flexibility of the Leica system(s). I previously travelled through Georgia with my medium format Fujifilm GFX100S (see article in *Better Photography Magazine* Issue 114), however, the GF lenses are a fraction bulky and their zoom focal length ranges more limited when compared to the Leica SL lenses, meaning more inconvenient lens changing while on the road – literally!

The three main Leica SL zooms (16-35mm, 24-90mm and 90-280mm) cover a range that would require four GF lenses to replicate. The smaller full-frame sensor in the Leica also gives more depth-of-field leeway and sharpness forgiveness for the



Ushguli. Though not a purist landscape photographer, Georgia almost turned me. I generally insert man-made elements in my landscapes if I can and they often become the subject. Here there was a section of the road that I later introduced to my face, conveniently near a church had I hit the road a bit harder. A hand-held shot from the seat of my bike.



Another view of Medea sanatorium.

mostly hand-held travel photography I do when on the bike. Another big plus is that both M series and R series lenses can be used on the SL for more range and weight efficiency. No autofocus, of course, but you do get image stabilisation via the camera body.

Even so, the Leica – like my photography – is not yet perfect.

Ergonomically, I find the camera a bit clunky. Too much form over function perhaps. The two large top dials freewheel too easily, resulting in occasional random choices of ISO, aperture or exposure compensation. It can be an exposure roulette as you manhandle prior to shooting. The dials can only be assigned to one of three functions, which is a massive underutilisation (and

has not been fixed with the recent firmware update).

Furthermore, even with the fragility of operation, there is no way to lock or disable these dials. Very frustrating, as I am never 100% sure that what I shot with last is what I am shooting with now.

As a backup (and not wanting to mortgage the house on a second SL3 body), I took along a small Lumix S9 which also takes the SL lenses. I ended up using it for street photography – especially at night – and its image quality is outstanding. My only criticism is the lack of an EVF, so it can be difficult to shoot with in full sunlight – which I do a lot. But at least the backup camera was there if needed.



Another view of Medea sanatorium.



Chiatura. *I darted around manic-like, trying to compose these old cable cars in their wider historical context. The harsh light added to the degree of difficulty, so a bit of serious colour and exposure tweaking was required. I now feel the need to return and do it more thoroughly! Nevertheless, these do record a space in time and tell a story – my main aim.*

Packing, Unpacking, Repacking

Packing all this stuff pre-departure revolves around making those impossible compromises between weight/equipment, needs/wants. Typically, I am still making these choices as the taxi arrives for the airport.

I tend to risk taking a lot of gear inside my checked-in baggage, including 'overflow' lenses, generally socked up and jammed inside a boot or helmet. My Gitzo Traveller Series 1 tripod with its Leofoto LH-30 head (an incredibly sturdy and light travel combo) also sits in the baggage.

My carry-on bag takes the camera bodies, main lenses, laptop, powerpack and various accessories, so that I can still shoot should the check-in luggage go astray. On this trip, the smaller 18L Summit Creative backpack together with a PGYTECH "man bag" as a personal carry-on item, was the perfect set-up to easily meet the carry-on weight restrictions.

On arrival, it is a case of unpack and repack to suit the motorbike (in this case a brand-new CF Moto 450MT). The SL3 with the SL 24-90mm moves to a foam lined tank bag ready to take 75% of my shots. The backpack is loaded with the SL16-

35mm (which oddly I rarely used this time), the Lumix S9 body, filters, batteries, charging packs etc.

Also included in the backpack is a Leitz APO-TELYT-R Series 180mm telephoto with adaptor. These artefacts were manufactured for the US Navy back in the early '70s. I bought this one on eBay (still with original box) and had it freshened up by Leica. It is very sharp, small and light. Such a great option, as I don't typically shoot many long shots, though as it turned out this was so portable I used it quite a lot.

The rest of my baggage remnants travel in the back of a support truck. I am no Itchy Boots (a YouTube adventurer not to be missed), so for me the joy of an organised tour is the fact it is ... organised!

Not 'A Fall' Just Falling

Heading up that mountain road, I am full of confidence. I have a foolproof set-up permitting safe and efficient roadside shooting. Mid U-turn as I freefall face first toward the bitumen, I start to question my judgement, briefly wondering also if I have padded up the Leica sufficiently and will this be an early end to the trip? Fortunately, my head (being itself well padded) breaks the fall, but jabbing pains elsewhere suggest other bits of me haven't been so lucky.

Extracting my leg from under the exhaust, I scramble to the verge, cursing my spur of the moment photographic decision making. Lifting the bike which now lies below the horizontal due to the slope, is too backbreaking, but assistance arrives in the form of two large Georgians exiting a very small Lada. Language no barrier on this occasion!

I ride in shame into Ushguli half an hour late with a very painful and, as it turns out, slightly fractured wrist, an ankle rapidly assuming the form of a large lemon and one cracked rib. As part of my defence against accusations of rider idiocy, I have included photographs in this article as evidence of the sort of crazy scenery along that road that caused such distraction and poor decision making.



Another 'industscape' from Georgia.



Chiatura.

Safer Travel Options

For photographers with a more sensible approach to both life and travel, there are safer ways to photograph here and still access more remote locations. For a few days prior to the motorbiking leg, I hired a guide to drive me around various locations which, to be honest, were best explored with the assistance of a knowledgeable local who spoke the language(s).

Disturbingly for those close to me who enjoy a good travel photo, I have a penchant for altered landscapes, doom laden scenes, derelict industrial areas and when in Georgia, Soviet-era relics. So we zeroed in on old or abandoned industrial areas and towns around Tbilisi, the backblocks of Kutaisi and

toured Soviet-era sanatoriums in Tskaltubo where I had been previously in 2023.

The other standout photography location is the old (but modernising) industrial town of Chiatura and the Soviet-era cable cars that still criss-cross the hills either side of town. These rusty and decaying gems, which amazingly only stopped operating recently, are faded remnants of old 1950s Soviet mining infrastructure and not to be missed – while they still exist.

Hiring a guide for these three days means more time available to explore and shoot at selected locations and to break out the tripod for more considered photography. I was surprised at the lack of tourists here generally and the accessibility (albeit



Another part of the Chiatura cable car infrastructure.



Another 'industscape' from Georgia.

diminishing) of these old sites and relics, particularly the cable car stations. It rained continuously for one day, but this simply added to the mystique and the Leica gear demonstrated the value of first-class weather sealing.

A tripod is invaluable for the long exposure shooting (and bracketing) required inside the dark Tskaltubo sanatoriums. I got to see areas not generally open to the public these days, thanks again to my guide, who engaged in Georgian or Russian with those informal guards who now patrol many of these buildings. The sanatoriums still house refugees displaced during the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, so care and respect is required.

Poking around old Soviet industrial infrastructure with a hefty camera, long lens and tripod can be a little nerve-racking given recent political tensions here and the elevated levels of suspicion. We were frequently confronted by security guards suggesting our interests might be best served by moving on. My guide talked us into many buildings and complexes. I'm not sure what was being said, but I assume it was something like, "Yeah, just an idiot photographer from Australia fascinated by broken windows, concrete and rust!"

Shooting From Two Wheels

After three guided days, I moved to the bike, the winding roads and the more remote locales that two wheels access so well. Limping battered and bruised into town on the second night wasn't the ideal start, but Ushguli is a special place with healing properties. Gazing with friends across the old town and its Svan towers, to the snow-capped peaks at sunset eased the pain and quickly reignited photography passions.

One of the style consequences born out of semi-independent photo biking has been the evolution of a shooting and editing style making the most of the 'not so' golden hours. We ride through the day and I stop when something catches my eye. Most of the time, this occurs during harsh light, but you cannot not photograph in locations which you may only see once – and fleetingly – simply because the light is being difficult. This is especially so in places like Georgia and Armenia which for the most are far removed from anything I would encounter in Western Australia.

However, I find a growing appeal for this type of middle-of-the-day, stark and bland photography. These shots typically

end up as high key, low contrast, intentionally 'washed out' where I work with the reds and blues and tone down the natural contrast, to create the effect I want. It also forces me to think more about subject placement and composition when shooting as fancy lighting won't save me.

Most importantly, this approach captures the mood (and memory) I experienced from the bike. The other advantage of bright light shooting is smaller apertures, lower ISO and higher shutter speeds so sharpness is assured. And no tripods required. The actual editing and toning is done via a back and forth process between Lightroom and Photoshop and exploration of different colour profiles and LUTs; which after some years I seem to have refined into a crazy combination which works for me. Though I never stop experimenting.

A lot of my shots are taken roadside and I am currently amassing a collection called "On the Verge" which I hope to exhibit – someday. Other travel collections from this trip focus on the industrial and man-made landscapes that so intrigue me, such as the sanatoriums and relics of Tskaltubo.

Over two weeks of riding, we saw a variety of subjects that would make any photographer drool. Whatever your photographic passion, you will find it in the Caucasus so it is important to arrive with as much gear as you can carry. You will capture uncrowded ancient cities, towns, villages, forts and monasteries. Add to those the stunning Caucasus Mountains with their rivers, gorges and forests. There is a huge variety of places and cultures steeped in history, which genuinely stretches back past antiquity. All topped off by extraordinary locals and food sure to test the best dietary intentions.

So What, Now What?

Trip done and back home. Lots of okay pics and a few keepers. Now what? Review, edit, agonise, re-edit, re-agonise, question sanity, then totally lose all perspective and go watch TV.

But after that? Whilst I couldn't travel without prioritising photography (much to my wife's disgust), I still frequently ask myself post trip, "What's the point?" Why not just enjoy the moments in the moment and forget the whole photography malarkey? Why take that time-consuming photo or spend time wandering anti-socially around a single location, seeking that killer composition – but failing? And why lug around that damn



Goris. *I was amazed at the extent of major power infrastructure, criss-crossing Armenia. So eye-catching if you like that sort of stuff – which I do. These are very much ‘anthroscapes’ – landscapes of man. I stopped continuously to find compositions that worked, failing 99% of the time, but maybe it’s just a motorcyclist thing. Winding road through a metal forest.*

gear, constantly worrying about it getting stolen or left behind? An iPhone is much easier, surely?

Good photographers speak of the ‘what, how and why’. What do I shoot? How do I shoot it? And why do I shoot it? Everyone’s answer will be different, naturally, but purpose is the leader. I believe the what and how sort themselves out the more you shoot and the more you learn. However, the answer is not static and broadens over time.

I struggle to specialise or confine myself to a single genre as there is too much to explore to exclude choices through

specialisation. But the why bit will still provide the star to follow.

Do I photograph to record, to remember and to then recreate, or is it the more obsessive and frustrating pursuit of finally juggling the elusive fine art masterpiece? And who am I really doing it for, because that informs the why?

I’ve come to realise that regardless of the shot or how I might edit it or the style I might choose to adopt for that image, for the most part I tend to shoot with a here today but maybe gone tomorrow mentality. Moments, places and spaces that



Another ‘induscape’ from Georgia.



Sanatorium 'Military'. *An early morning walk from our accommodation in the 'restored' part of this complex and I managed to catch the sunrise along an old entry road in the unrestored quarter. Another few years and it will be tarted up to house more tourists like me who come here to see unrestored buildings. Ironic, but inevitable.*

are changing either through decay or the fact the moment is temporal in the first place. Spaces in time.

Whilst in Georgia and Armenia, where time did stand still for so long, I was acutely aware that the photographs I was taking, even if not potential fine art outcomes, do record not only my journey, but the past. The past exists in the present and the future in the past. This sense of record as a photographer does provide me with enormous satisfaction.

But I am also looking for a few bangers where the pursuit of the moment in time and the desire to shoot a ripper fine art

image might overlap at a planned or fortuitous moment. This drives a lot of the desire to always strive for quality.

For satisfaction guaranteed I am shooting for myself. Where will the photos end up? In collections on my website, once upon a time on Instagram and in books that only a small circle will see. A few may wind up in a photo competition or two if the stars really have aligned.

So is it worth the effort? Yep. I will be doing it again on motorbike in six months in Tanzania, but I will bin everything I said above and be extolling the virtues of animal photography!



Another view of the Military sanatorium.



Peter Eastway's

PHOTO PROCESS

CREATIVE & TECHNICAL ATELIER

Photo Process is a series of video tutorials that shares a wide range of techniques, concepts and processes that I use every time I take a photograph. These processes have evolved over 40 years of photography.

When teaching photography, I find many students have great ideas, but don't know how to implement them. Or they have great technical skills, but nothing to use them on! While I can help solve their immediate problems, the solution is relying on my skills, not theirs. And unfortunately it's not possible to transfer all of my knowledge and experience in a few hours or even days.

I'm also asked, how do I seem to immediately know what to do when I'm faced with a subject? Why do I always seem to have a solution? The answer is my 'database' of skills and influences collected throughout my career. It's my professional experience.

So how do I share this experience? The aim of **Photo Process** is to collect these skills, influences and experiences into a single location so they can be easily shared with photographers searching for their own answers.

It's a knowledge bank of what I use when I create my photographs, so if you like how I work, the answers are in **Photo Process!**

When you join **Photo Process**, you receive:

- Access to the **Photo Process** section of the website with over 80 video tutorials in categories – Capture, Composition, Post-Production, Influences and Output. It is a lifetime subscription, so there's no hurry to view all the content.
- A comprehensive portfolio review by Peter – you can submit up to 10 images for critique, feedback and appraisal. The written report will be presented as a PDF.
- A personally printed, signed and embossed A2 print by Peter on Canson stock using archival pigment inks from Epson – and you can select the photograph you'd like printed from his website (www.petereastway.com). The print is unframed and postage is included.

For full details, visit the Better Photography Education website and follow the menu to Photo Process

www.betterphotographyeducation.com

LISA LEACH

F-STOPS, FIBONACCI SPIRALS AND FOCUS STACKING

Lisa Leach knows that photography can be a lonely pursuit, so her solution was to seek some answers through workshops and mentoring.

Landscape photography was a natural choice for me. Offering endless variety, from coastal views to dramatic mountain ranges, diversity of textures, light and contrast, it provided me with perfect opportunities to quieten the mind and connect with Mother Nature.

Having purchased my first 'serious' camera in July 2024, I'm only now approaching my second anniversary as an amateur, 'just for fun' photographer. However, since childhood using the family's Kodak Instant 110 film camera and eagerly awaiting the

film to be developed at the local pharmacy, I have experienced a fascination in capturing moments, preserving memories and celebrating the beauty in the ordinary and everyday.

I am attracted by the power of an image to evoke a unique and varied emotion in each viewer, or to inspire a story and ultimately create a visual time capsule.

I have embarked on a photographic and geographic journey to develop my technical and creative skills and, as the title suggests, I've also developed a whole new vocabulary along



Lonely In A Crowd, Kiama Beach, NSW

280mm telephoto, f8 @ 1/1000 sec, ISO 12

A solitary crow stands among a gathering of seagulls on the sandbank at Kiama's headland. Water and sand form opposing yet complementary forces, whilst the curved line of birds echoes a natural yin and yang. The curious crow becomes a quiet symbol of balance, connection and harmony.



Horse Head Rock

22.5mm wide-angle, exposure bracket 1/10 second, ISO 100

Donned in gym boots and guided by a head torch, a pre-dawn walk around the bay delivered the first glimpse of this distinctive formation. Warm sunrise hues appeared well before the sun reached the horizon, heightening the anticipation. As the first light broke, soft golden tones embraced Horse Head Rock, revealing its equine form in all its glory. An early rise, slippery rocks and wet feet made the experience all the more memorable!

the way. As I continue along my creative voyage, I would like to review how photography workshops and mentoring have operated to create a positive trajectory for my development and piloted my way from 'acute imposter syndrome' to 'failing upwards'.

The Lure Of Gear

At the beginning of last year, I refined some of my equipment choices. The first was to upgrade my tripod to a Leofoto LP-324C with a Leofoto G3 geared head. This created greater precision from a previous ball head, more robust stability in varying weather conditions and improved reliability for the key requirements of fine art and long exposure methodologies.

A more expensive exercise, but definitely one without regrets, was changing cameras from a Panasonic Lumix S5 II to a Nikon Z7 II. Learning to master the light on the landscape

during the soft lights of dawn and dusk, high quality low-light performance was paramount to capture the details, textures and patterns. Nikon's great colour, high resolution and image quality combined with cost effectiveness, has me thrilled with my decision to change. My only minor gripe, if Nikon is reading, is the tilt only LCD.

Purchasing a Shimoda Action X30 V2 Women's Starter kit backpack in a funky teal colour, designed ergonomically to transfer weight off the shoulders for the female shape, has been game changing for my five foot and a smidge frame. These functional decisions may not directly increase my ability to achieve flawless, award-winning images, but comfort and happiness are certainly fundamental to allow us to flourish. (Please feel free to reference the previous sentence if you need to justify purchasing another piece of photography equipment to your significant other.)



Bombo Quarry, NSW

14mm wide-angle, f13 @ 1/640, ISO 100

First [Real] Workshop

As with the early stage of any new learning, my mind was absorbent and thirsty for all things landscape photography. I searched YouTube daily for visual and engaging content to get started. It was while watching YouTube photography channels that I became aware of photography workshops. Workshops offer a fabulous opportunity to boost your skills, gain hands-on experience, get feedback and explore new environments. All



Lisa Leach on location near her home in the Victorian Alps.

the logistics of the workshop day or trip are arranged, including the pre-scouting of incredible locations to maximise optimal in-camera time, create communities and connection with fellow photographers and provide increased safety in what is usually a solo pastime. The commitment and investment in a workshop increased my accountability, to extend my skills and capitalise on the expert guidance on offer. The workshop environment helped me to make the most of my equipment, craft my imagery and schedule a dedicated space for my development.

My first photography workshop was to the magnificent northwest of Tasmania photographing some of the most rugged coastline, pure rainforest and pristine rivers in the country with Sydney-based professional photographer, Ben Maze and Hobart-based professional photographer, Paul Hoelen. This was also my first experience of the moss-laden trees, jagged dramatic seascapes and flowing tannin rivers of the Tarkine, the largest temperate rainforest in Australia.

Group tuition and 1:1 mentoring to build my knowledge of composition and support in the field, were combined with local insight and an introduction to the work of passionate naturalist photography legends Peter Dombrovskis, Olegas Truchanas and Chris Bell.

Imposter Syndrome was prevalent for me as a new hobbyist photographer, however, the camaraderie, conversations and sharing of images over meals and coffee saw my angst dissipate. Ben Maze and Paul Hoelen spoke of forming a respectful and responsible relationship with the landscape as a photographer, encouraging us to take only photographs and leave only foot-



Great Ocean Road, Vic

58mm, f14 @ 1/4 sec, ISO 100

The soft light and gentle hues of the sunset seascape stood in complete contrast to the bitter cold on the beach below. Wrapped in three coats against the ocean winds, I still managed to smuggle some sand and seawater back to the car in my purple gumboots. Making memories one frame at a time.

prints ... but not on the delicate moss! On my return flight from Launceston, examining from the window seat the textures, colours and patterns of the skies and terrain below, I recall wondering if I would ever look at the world around me quite the same way again. It was a truly magical location and workshop to acquire my initial photographic practice. I was hooked...sign me up for a lifetime subscription please.

Further Workshops

The Great Ocean Road in Victoria is a spectacular coastal national park that is a dream location for photographers and tourists alike. The dramatic cliffs, seascapes and iconic rock formations put this location high on my 'photography to-do list'. Excited to capture this remarkable coastline during the winter months, I joined Peter Eastway and Len Metcalf for their Great Ocean Road workshop.



London Bridge, Port Campbell, Vic

28mm wide-angle, f/14 @ 30.0 sec, ISO 100



Sunrise at Bombo Quarry

19.5mm wide-angle, f13 @ 0.5 sec, ISO 250

Intrigued by Peter Eastway's creative use of post-production and Len Metcalf's teaching style, I was excited to experience their visionary processes applied to this legendary shoreline that has otherwise been photographed traditionally by many.

The weather delivered drama in abundance during the week-long workshop, adding to the reverence of the photography locations. Len's delicious homemade soup and fresh, warm bread for lunch back at the accommodation, fuelled us to get back out in the elements with enthusiasm at dusk, newly inspired by our afternoon tutorials. There was great fellowship amongst a diverse group of participants with varying degrees of photography experience, all embracing the end of day stories, antics and images over dinner. A particular takeaway from this workshop for me was a tutorial where we reviewed photographers' and artists' work, discussing what we admired and why. As I engaged in the exercise, I began to identify common themes that resonated with me, bringing increased awareness to my composition skills, choices and intent. (See article '10:10:10', *Better Photography* Issue 120, Winter 2025 for more information.)

Personalised Mentorship

On my drive home from the workshop, I reflected how easy as a novice it is to become embroiled in the mechanical and technical at the expense of the creative. As a self-confessed over-thinker, the mechanical and technical dialogue going on in my head can restrict or nullify my creativity. With awareness and knowledge, I endeavour to be mindful, not to dampen the creative process, but this continues to be a work in progress.

I completed a further two workshops with Ben Maze to the dramatic Sapphire and Kiama coasts, capturing the iconic

Horse Head Rock, Cathedral Rocks and Bombo Quarry, as well as other underrated location delights Ben's local knowledge led us to.

Seeking in-depth, personalised and on-going tuition, it was during one of these workshops that I enquired about Ben's Mentorship Program. Following some discussions and planning to identify my individual learning focus, I commenced a mentorship program with him in September. For my personal program, I have chosen to complete monthly goals with regular online, 1:1 tuition to develop my creative eye and capabilities with my camera, whilst simultaneously working on a project gallery of my choosing. Ben also provides me with monthly image review/feedback and post-processing tuition.

My motivation for seeking a mentorship program was to provide a discipline and structure to help achieve my creative goals and address technical deficits. Whilst that all sounds terribly serious, this commitment to my development directly correlates to maximising my enjoyment of photographing places and times that have meaning to me. It can be very fulfilling to capture a scene knowing you made deliberate choices with your camera to influence the narrative and/or the emotion.

The reasons for my participation in photography workshops are multi-faceted, including scheduling time to undertake something I love, seeking out community with which to navigate the setbacks and celebrate the wins and understanding that I will continue to fail upwards as part of my creative journey; knowing now that it is simply an essential part of the process.

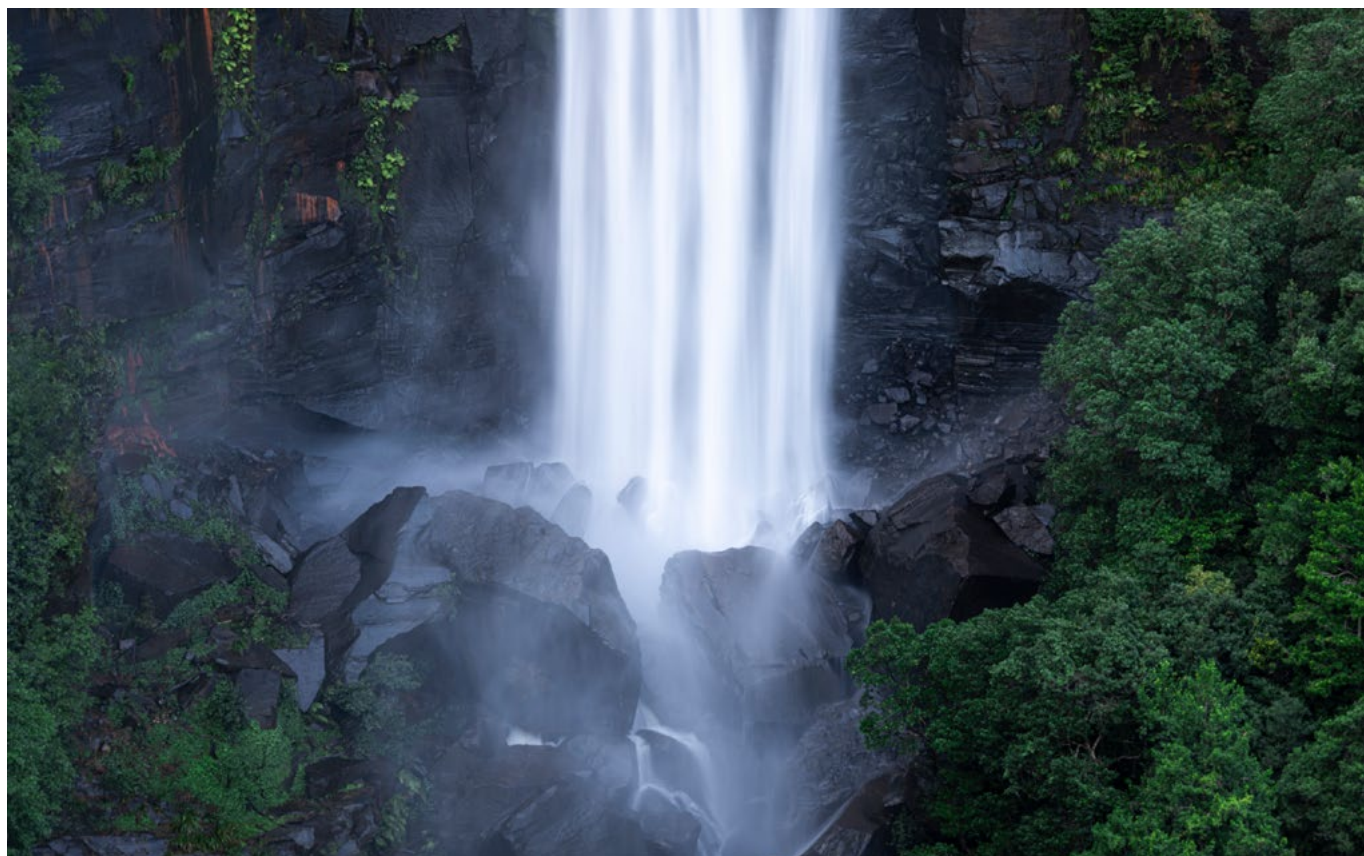
I believe photography workshops will continue to be part of my hobbyist photography journey. Perhaps we will meet on one soon.



Camel Rock, NSW

18mm wide-angle, f14 @ 90 sec, ISO 100

Wet and wild weather met the dramatic Sapphire Coast of NSW. At sunset, turbulent rain clouds swallowed the sky above Camel Rock, reshaping the colours of the geology. A long exposure captures the restless motion of the clouds and calms the tempestuous sea.



Fitzroy National Park, NSW

130mm, f14 @ 0.5 sec, ISO 80

Using AI:

BUT IS THERE SATISFACTION?

If you're not the one directing or controlling the output, will the result make you happy?

Will you feel the same ownership you now have with photographs captured

on a camera or edited with a computer? Peter Eastway muses...

Elsewhere in this issue are a couple more stories about AI. They came about after the New Year break when I had a little time to sit and play. It seems other photographers were doing the same, so what follows are some thoughts and observations that may help you work out what to do with Artificial Intelligence, specifically the AI that generates 'creative' output.

Can We Accept AI Photography?

A philosopher may come up with a proposition that suggests we have no choice but to accept Generative AI because it is so similar to the processes we currently use when taking (and editing) a photograph.

When we hold a camera to our eye, have we 'generated the content'? We've visited a location or we're photographing people. We move around in different directions, looking for something we like and, when we recognise something as being 'good', we take a photograph. We are told that finding this angle is 'creative', but really all we have done is record content that is already there. Already generated.

Similarly, when it comes to post-production, we're moving the sliders or the controls until we 'recognise' something as being good.

Now consider how we use Generative AI: we type up a prompt, like a large elephant in a pink room, and the algorithm generates three or four results. What do we do next? We select one because we recognise it as being good.

At the heart of all our creative processes is an act of recognition, so why isn't recognising a good AI image the same as finding something to photograph out in the field?

I can think of dozens of reasons, but if the end result is

having an image you're happy with, why does it matter? Film? Digital? AI? Surely all are just a means to an end?

For most of us, I expect the biggest difference is the input we have into the process. If we wanted to photograph an elephant in a room, we'd probably decide that organising a real elephant in a real room was too difficult, so we'd photograph the elements separately and use our compositing skills to put them together. We would have full control over the position of the elephant, the look of the room and so on.

Some people may argue that you also have this control with Generative AI and in some respects this is true because you can specify the size of the elephant, the colour of the room and so on. But my experience of AI is it doesn't always listen or it thinks it knows best. I specified one window in my pink room and on at least one occasion, it included two windows.

For me, I have no control over the process generating the image once I've entered the prompt. I don't feel the result is my own, but perhaps this is because I've spent a lifetime using film and digital sensors to create my photographs. But it's not all about me!

When digital arrived, it allowed many more people to become involved in image creation, but still a majority of the population can't confidently create photographs we'd consider 'good'. Now with AI, all their images will be good - or so we're promised. On a macro scale, AI is fully democratising the image creation process (even though it has appropriated the process from creative humans).

But it's not the same. Using both film and digital gave us a feeling of involvement. The process was a part of the journey to the final print on the wall, but that process is stolen from when we use Generative AI. That might be fine for the majority of the



It's time for us to have a frank discussion about the elephant in the room: Generative AI.



MidJourney at work. Interestingly, I had been asking MidJourney to create a photo of a walrus on an iceberg in the middle of sandy desert. It struggled, so I changed tack and asked for a large elephant in a small room: the first results had a walrus instead of an elephant and lots of icebergs! However, by refining the prompt, I was gradually able to direct the AI to something I was happy with.

world's population, but I think photographers will struggle to make the change – and that's a good thing (from my biased viewpoint).

Someone Else's Creativity

For me, the biggest jump in understanding Generative AI is not to expect the photos to look like what I had in my imagination. When I type in a prompt (an elephant in a room), I have something in mind, so when the algorithm delivers four suggestions, all of them quite different to my imagination, I'm initially disappointed.

So I change the prompt to be more specific, to see if the algorithm will produce something closer to what I have already imagined. This can be an exercise in frustration and a habit I am trying to break.

Of course, sometimes the algorithm generates a result even better than my imagination, but then I feel like I'm cheating. It's not my creativity that has done the hard work, it's based on the work of whoever the algorithm has scraped to generate the result.

Over the years I have constantly attended exhibitions, read photo books and visited websites, looking at thousands of photographs and being inspired. I'll take notes and keep ideas in the back of my mind, ready for an opportunity to use them. This

is part of the creative process, copying or being inspired by the work of others. Generative AI essentially does the same - except I don't really have any control over what inspiration is being used. Sure, apps like MidJourney allow you to direct the results somewhat by using its Style Creator and Moodboards, but all this is doing is limiting the sources used by the algorithm. I still have no real input in the creative output.

So, what's the downside? The downside is there are millions of non-creative people out there asking an algorithm to generate images based on their ideas. Some ideas are truly whacky and that's what currently attracts our (the public's) attention. It was the same when digital first arrived - a cow jumping over the moon etcetera – was used to show its potential. Perhaps that's what's happening now with AI and it will mature as a (creative) process.

The Good News (For Now)

When Ignacio Palacios started posting his animated still photographs on Instagram (there's a link to his wildlife video in his article), he mentioned there were some limitations. His result looks fantastic on my phone, but when I uploaded the video to Vimeo (for your access), I could see what he meant. There are lots of areas that are fudged with low resolution noise and artefacts. As part of a video, you don't get time to dwell on them and so



This is the image directly from MidJourney, before tweaking it in Photoshop. I still don't feel it is mine.

the video looks better than a still, simply because we don't get the time to assess it in the same way.

When playing around with MidJourney and Photoshop offerings, I have found the same thing. Down small, the results are very capable, but look more closely and the results are not photographic. Today, AI imagery still looks illustrated rather than photographic.

Some readers will rightly claim that AI generated portraits can look incredibly lifelike - and they do, but again, as you look closer, the skin's not skin, the pupil is painted. It's close. For someone who is not a photographer and is just looking for an image, it's fantastic. Don't think for a minute that I'm not impressed, but it's not the type of brushstrokes I want to use for my artworks.

And when it comes to less common subjects, like a walrus, the photography side of AI seems to struggle. It's like there isn't enough 'data' out there to create something realistic, whereas the human face is probably the most photographed subject and, along with facial recognition technology, I'm thinking this is why AI portraits shine. But for less common subjects, the ideas and their AI illustration are very lifelike, very believable, but you believe them as you do a painting.

Maybe one day AI will replicate photography, but today it doesn't need to. Most AI imagery is viewed on small phone

screens, so fine detail isn't important. Most people don't care if the image looks photographic or almost photographic. Most people will be ecstatic with AI's quality. And most of the dissatisfaction will come from people like us who, having been sold the dream, are expecting photographic perfection.

So, this gives me some hope. There's a chance that AI will always be limited when it comes to photographic quality.

But there's just as good a chance it will improve out of sight - I simply don't know. However, in the earlier years of Generative AI, apps like MidJourney were improving in leaps and bounds every six months. More recently, the improvement in photographic quality seems to be slowing down. The rhetoric is more about how the prompt interprets your results - and that's fair enough. These apps are designed to create 'images', not 'photographs'. The images are already amazing - as long as you're not expecting true photographic quality.

So, as it stands at the beginning of 2026, I'm not feeling at all threatened by AI as it simply can't match the quality I produce with my cameras. And when it comes to ideas and imagination, well, I struggle to find what I want and in many cases, it would be better to do it a different way!

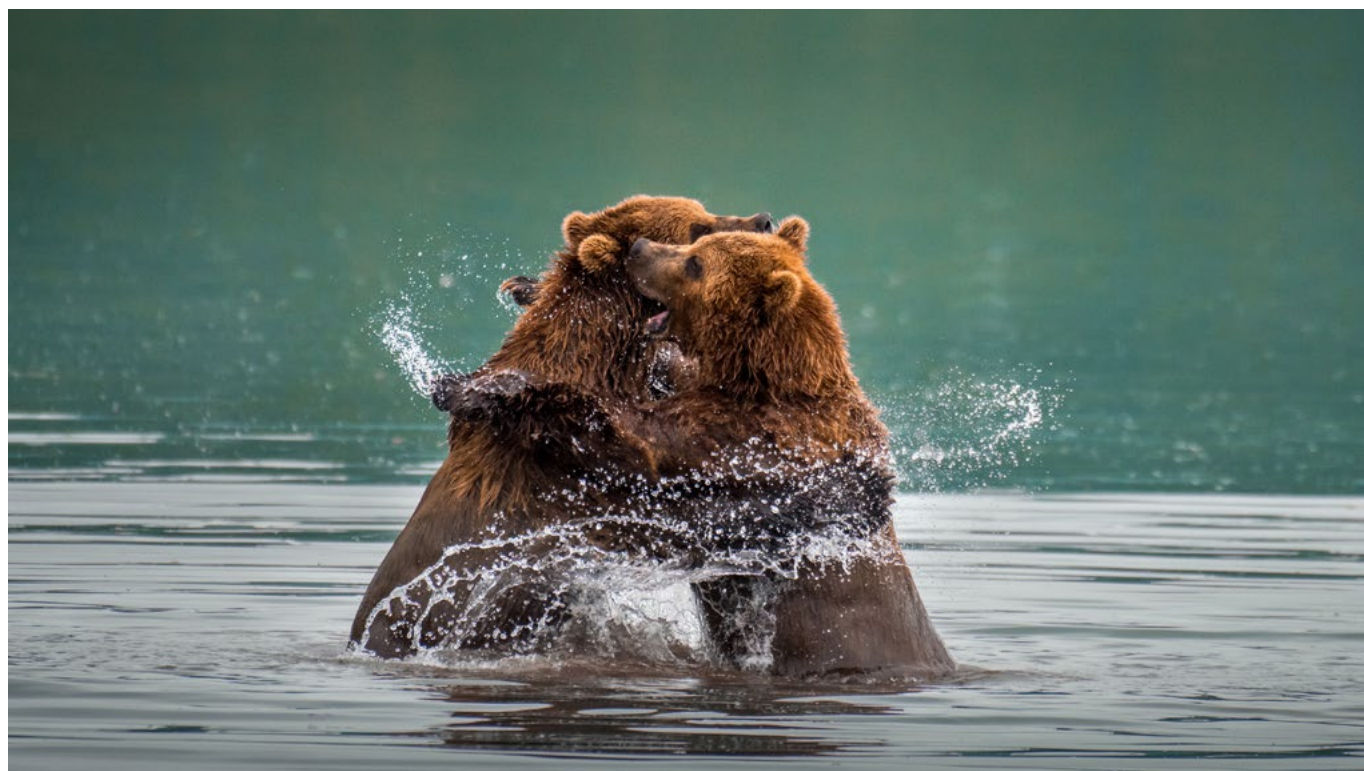
But things will change and maybe next year my impressions will be quite different!

Photography in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

A PERSONAL RECKONING

While preparing the magazine, Ignacio Palacios sent the editor a link for a movie, featuring a number of his wildlife photographs with animation. We'd recognise the first frame and then, just like in the Harry Potter movies, the image would come to life. The lion would roar, the buffalo would walk. Even the chameleon managed to wander around, even though the original image didn't include its tail!

We asked Ignacio to write a few words about what AI means to him and where it's going – which he has done using ChatGPT. Within a few minutes of the request, the following article arrived. Most of the content has been generated, but it's been read and approved by Ignacio. Then, it has been sub-edited, just like all the articles in this magazine, and it is presented not as a shortcut for preparing material, but to challenge you: what do you really think about AI and how it applies to creativity? This is a very capable article, presenting the AI challenge fairly and squarely – and yet it is AI that has created most of it!



The action of these two bears playing is very realistic, although when you look at the footage carefully, you can see the limitations. However, these are early days in AI.



In the movie, this herd of elephants lumber along very realistically through the trees.

By Ignacio Palacios and AI

Artificial intelligence is transforming photography faster than any technology we have witnessed before. What once required days or weeks of planning, travel, patience and an intimate understanding of light and timing, can now be generated in seconds. A few written prompts, a click of a button and an image appears, perfectly lit, meticulously composed and unconstrained by geography, weather or budget.

It does not take much imagination to see where this is heading. In the near future, AI-generated images will be virtually indistinguishable from traditional photographs. No expensive cameras. No long journeys. No missed opportunities. Just instant, endlessly refined results.

For photographers, this raises uncomfortable, but necessary questions. If anyone can create compelling imagery without technical skill, experience or time in the field, what happens to photography as an art form? And what happens to those of us who have dedicated decades to mastering it?

These are questions I have been grappling with for the past two years. Artificial intelligence represents one of the great turning points in human history, comparable to the agricultural, industrial, electrical and digital revolutions. Yet despite its rapid development, many people still do not fully understand what AI is capable of or how deeply it will affect creative industries.

Among photographers, reactions tend to fall into three categories: excitement, fear or a mixture of both. I find myself firmly in the latter group.

Many of my colleagues feel threatened by AI and their concerns are entirely valid. Photography has always been rooted in authenticity. Being present, responding to reality and capturing moments that cannot be repeated. AI challenges those foundations by producing convincing images without ever engaging with the real world.

History tells us, however, that every major technological shift disrupts existing systems while simultaneously creating new ones. Digital photography once sparked similar anxieties. So did autofocus. So did smartphones. AI feels different in scale and speed, but it follows the same fundamental pattern.

The question is not whether AI will change photography. It already has. The question is how will photographers choose to respond?

For me, wildlife and landscape photography have never been just about the final image. The photograph is only part of the story. The real value lies in the experience. Travelling to remote places. Learning the rhythms of the natural world. Observing animal behaviour. Waiting for the light to align with the landscape. Accepting that many days will yield nothing at all. Those experiences shape how we see and how we photograph. They shape who we become.

AI cannot replicate that process. It cannot feel anticipation, discomfort or awe. It cannot replace the personal growth that comes from repeated encounters with wild places. And for many photographers, that lived experience remains the true heart of the craft.



While the original image doesn't show the chameleon's head, the AI movie does! It's not perfect, but most people won't worry about these minor technicalities. The result is very powerful.

But acknowledging this does not make AI disappear.

AI will touch every aspect of our lives, including photography. Rejecting it outright may feel principled, but it risks leaving photographers disengaged from conversations that will shape the future of visual storytelling. Rather than treating AI as an existential threat, I decided to explore it carefully and critically to see whether it could add something meaningful to my work.

AI Experiments

Earlier this year, I began experimenting with AI-generated video using still images from a selection of wildlife images that I had been working on for a book. For this project, I used KlingAI to generate short video sequences from individual photographs and CapCut to assemble and edit the final film.

What surprised me most was the speed of the process. Once I had a clear idea of what I wanted to achieve, the entire workflow from generating clips to final edit took just a couple of hours. KlingAI took approximately one minute to generate each individual video clip from a still image. Compared to traditional video production workflows, the efficiency was remarkable.

Creating effective AI-generated motion required a shift in thinking. In many ways, it felt closer to directing a film than to traditional photography. You are forced to think beyond the frame. Is the camera static or moving? Is there wind in the scene? How does the light change over time? What exists just outside the image if the camera slowly pans or pulls back?

Writing prompts became an exercise in visual storytelling. It forced me to articulate ideas that had previously lived instinctively in my head. In that sense, AI did not remove creativity. It demanded a different kind.

As with my photography, I kept the aesthetic restrained and natural. No exaggerated effects. No unnecessary drama. In

most cases, I began with the original photograph and worked outward, imagining what might exist beyond the captured moment. In other cases, I used the still image as a destination rather than a starting point.

After generating the individual clips, I edited the strongest sequences together in CapCut, added subtle sound design and music and built a cohesive narrative. The result was something I had not anticipated. Familiar images, gently reimagined, without losing their original intent.

AI is far from perfect. It misinterprets instructions. It struggles with realism in complex natural environments. It often requires repetition and experimentation to achieve satisfying results. Yet considering how early this technology is, its potential is extraordinary.

More importantly, the process did not diminish my relationship with photography. It expanded it. The images remained central. AI simply offered a new way to present them, particularly to audiences increasingly drawn to motion and immersive experiences. Rather than replacing photography, AI became a complementary tool.

I am not abandoning traditional photography. I will continue to travel, to wait, to observe and to photograph. I will continue to lead tours and spend time in the field. Those experiences remain essential, not just to my work, but to who I am as a photographer.

What has changed is my perspective. I no longer see AI as something to fear outright. I see it as another tool in the creative process. One that, when used thoughtfully, can co-exist with traditional practice rather than erase it.

Photography has always evolved. From film to digital. From prints to screens. From stills to motion. AI is simply the latest chapter in that ongoing story.

The future of photography may look different from its past,



From the original photo of the young gorilla looking to the heavens, the movie has it turn and make eye contact with the viewer before dismissing us as inconsequential!

but difference does not have to mean loss. Approached with care and intention, it may open new creative possibilities rather than diminish old ones.

For now, I remain both cautious and curious. That may be the most honest position any photographer can take at this moment in time.

This article was created using ChatGPT in just 5 seconds from a few prompts and was reviewed and edited by the editor in 5 minutes.

You can view the video at the following link:
<https://vimeo.com/1152114459>



The movie opens with this pair of leopards, breathing gently, a tail swishing. It genuinely looks like movie footage.

Is AI Right Or Wrong?

MANY DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS

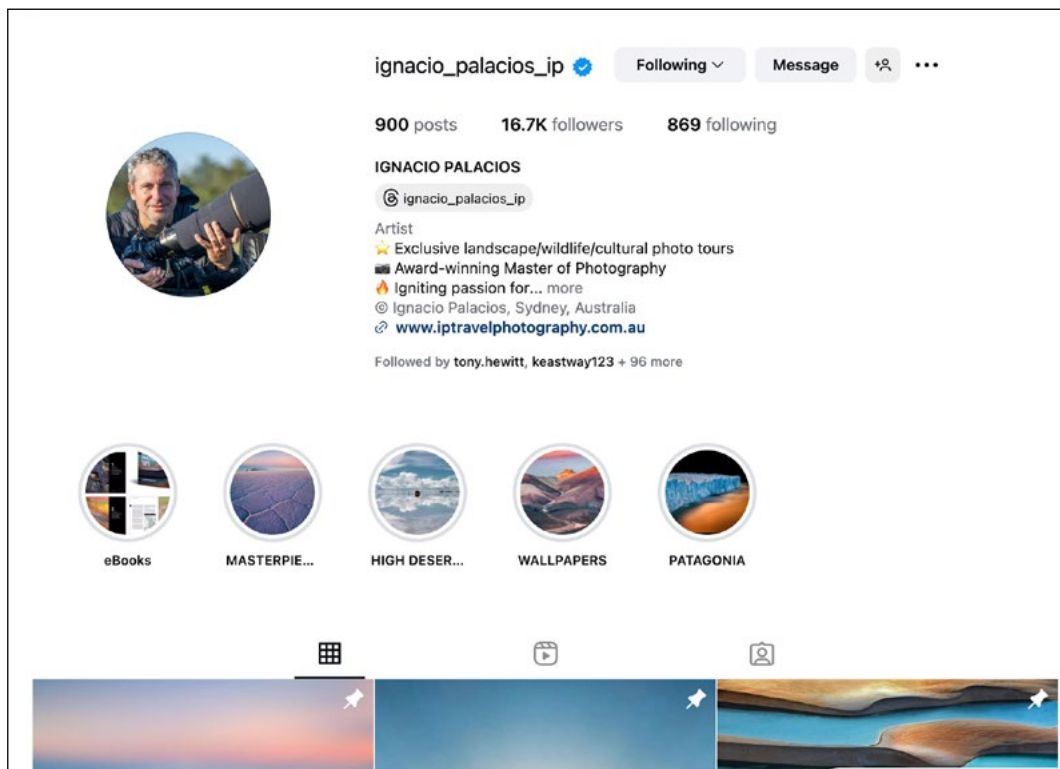
There's no doubt AI in photography is polarising viewers! Most commentators seem to accept that it is here, but it doesn't mean they have to agree with it.

As you will read in the accompanying article, Ignacio Palacios has posted a number of movies using AI on Instagram which in turn created a great conversation between Marsel Van Oosten and Marc Adamas. Ignacio started with several dozen of his award-winning still photographs and let AI turn the still photos into moving footage.

Many of the AI generators have started offering this feature – and the idea is not even new as iPhone users have been able to do this for ages – the Harry Potter effect. However, the difference is the iPhone is using 'reality', while the AI tools are creating new content – albeit based on an original photograph.

The output is quite simply stunning. Forget the rights and wrongs of AI, just for a minute and look at the result! It is incredibly creative and it looks great. Okay, now let's listen to Marsel and Marc as they discuss AI in more detail.

The following transcription comes from Ignacio's Instagram post with permission.



Ignacio Palacios's Instagram page features the conversation between Marcel and Marc.

Ignacio Palacios visit:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/DS9xQmnkzJe/>

Inspired by the amazing video that Marsel van Oosten shared a few months ago with some of his most popular wildlife images, I decided to dive in and experiment with creating short videos from still landscapes using AI tools such as CapCut, Digen, VEO, and Sora2.

It was a bit of a learning curve and getting the AI to understand the prompts can be time-consuming and frustrating, but the results are really fun and sometimes surprisingly good!

Soon these tools will be faster, easier and even higher quality, but it's amazing what you can do starting from a single still image!

marselvanoosten

@marcadamus You will get more hate than support for this, but I think it's pretty cool to add an extra dimension to your photographs using AI like this.

marcadamus

@marselvanoosten I definitely do not support turning photographs into something that never could have existed. I don't hate it, but I don't get it either. Seems to be just jumping on the bandwagon leading us all into this fake world.

marselvanoosten

@marcadamus That's the great thing about art—and it's the first thing I learned in art school: there are no rules in art. Art is simply your personal, artistic expression beyond purely practical function. Art is 100% subjective — you're free to feel whatever you want. If art were limited only to what could exist, most museums would be pretty empty. The fact that you can use a camera to make photocopies of 'reality' does not mean that you are limited to that.

While I will personally stick to using my camera for my work in the traditional way, I appreciate that artists are exploring the new possibilities AI offers, while also acknowledging the threat it poses to our profession and our credibility. Still, I've seen some incredibly creative and beautiful work created with AI and it will only get better.

AI will never replace the work that people like us create, but I do worry that it may very quickly start making our work look mundane and that people may become less interested in the real thing. The same will likely happen with personal robots.

Just my thoughts. You know I've always appreciated your work – keep doing what you do!

marcadamus

@marselvanoosten You were right about art being no other definition except personal expression and that is exactly why

it isn't AI. You see, even if we design a machine to do art for us, we know how it works and we can control the outcome through innovation. AI is the opposite of that. It makes decisions independent of what we can control and will only do so more in the future as the oligarchs that control it seek more and more power and control over the population. I will never be on board with its use and never consider it art. Never.

marselvanoosten

@marcadamus No, that is incorrect. The way artists use AI now is by using prompts. These prompts are where the real creativity lies because it requires ideas and pre-visualisation. The better and more precise the prompt, the more the outcome will match your idea. It's actually a lot like how modern conceptual artists have worked for decades: they come up with the creative idea, decide what it should look like and then have a team of people create the actual artwork. The concept is the hard part, the physical process that follows is much easier and can be done by many. AI is the same: garbage in, garbage out. The artists who will survive in the AI tsunami are the ones who have original ideas. AI only makes decisions you can't control if you don't know how to control the AI. It's a new technology and people are rightly frightened of it. But people were also frightened of the first car, the first plane, the first computer, Google, the CD, digital photography etc. We survived all those scary new things.

marcadamus

@marselvanoosten I completely disagree. If you tell a chef how to prepare your meal and he prepares it and you claim that is your art, that is all that is happening here. The thing is, we do NOT know fully how to CONTROL the AI, nobody does and leading AI experts will tell you exactly that. And in the future, that will only be more the case. The process is never going to be entirely human, nor entirely predictable. To me this detracts from the very essence and value of humanity itself.

marselvanoosten

@marcadamus I understand and respect your viewpoint, but you are almost making my point for me. Let's stick to your chef example. In the early stage, a chef invents recipes, sources ingredients and cooks every dish personally. But in most Michelin star kitchens, the chef no longer cooks every dish personally, but their authority and sensory judgment become absolute. No one says "That's not his food — he didn't cook it" or "The sous-chef touched the plate, so the chef is a fraud."

Jeff Koons does not personally do most of the manual labour for his artworks. He works in a large studio system, where teams of highly skilled assistants and specialised fabricators execute the physical production under his direction. Koons is the conceptual author: he originates the idea, defines the intent, scale, materials and finish. Assistants and fabricators execute the work: painters, sculptors, engineers, metalworkers and industrial manufacturers carry out the production. Koons is famously obsessive about precision — colours, surface finish, reflections, tolerances. Works are often rejected or redone if they don't meet his specifications. This is not unusual in art history. Koons is working in a long, well-established tradition:

- Renaissance masters (Michelangelo, Rubens) ran workshops
- Contemporary artists like Damien Hirst, Olafur Eliasson, Takashi Murakami do the same

- Architecture, film and fashion function similarly: authorship ≠ manual execution.

An architect has the creative vision — he then creates the design (the prompt) that contains all the specifications necessary to build the structure. But that's where it stops. The architect does not lay a single brick, he does not pour the concrete and he isn't even involved in the structural integrity. Hundreds and sometimes thousands of different people of different professions do the actual physical labour. And when the building is finished, all the credits go to the architect because it is his brainchild. He wrote the prompt. This extends to movie directors, fashion designers, conductors etc.

In contemporary art, authorship is defined by concept, intent, decision-making and final approval — not by who physically holds the brush or welding torch. Delegation does not dilute authorship.

The machine currently resolves form within constraints set by the human — but those constraints are rapidly becoming more explicit, granular and deterministic.

AI will not replace meaningful human art — but it will saturate the visual world so completely that:

- Human work risks looking ordinary by comparison
- Viewers may stop caring where images come from
- Authenticity becomes invisible unless actively defended.

But photography's value has never been invention alone. It has been testimony. Hope that makes sense.

marcadamus

@marselvanoosten It does not make sense, no. You make lots of great points about human art, human delegation, direction and teamwork to create art. But we are not talking about humans here, nor something that humans are solely responsible for creating.

The goal of AI is independent. It is not a tool, nor machine. This is the fatal flaw in your argument. I agree with all you say about photography, but I disagree about how you define art as a whole. Using prompts does not now nor will ever make someone an artist, not in my opinion, not unless the entire definition of humanity itself changes to include this parasitic infection that is infiltrating every aspect of our consciousness.

Humans are not AI and AI is not human. AI is purely about control, money, power, greed. You will not ever see me promoting the artistic value of something created to control humanity as a partner in creating art. These are not two worlds that can exist. Art lives in our soul alone. Your argument is purely superficial.

In any case, when the time comes where our biggest battle is freeing ourselves from the influence AI has taken over us, you will understand then. You cannot compare this to a technology that is fully controlled by human beings, that's not where this is going. If we don't draw that line somewhere, or recognise that such a line even exists, it will surely be our own end.

marselvanoosten

@marcadamus I understand your position and I agree with you on many of the ethical concerns around AI, credibility and power. Where I think we differ is in how we assign agency. AI itself has no intent, goals, or consciousness — those remain entirely human. What you're attributing to AI (control, greed, power) are corporate and political forces that have accompanied



On Ignacio's Instagram page, the waterfall is moving – a hint as to what he has been up to and what has prompted plenty of discussion!

every major shift in art history. Photography was once dismissed as mechanical and soulless.

Digital art was rejected as 'not real'. Sampling in music was called theft. Even oil painting emerged through patronage systems tied directly to power and money. None of that determined whether meaningful art could be made – human intent did.

You also accept delegation, direction and teamwork in human art, which already separates authorship from execution. That's where I see a contradiction: if authorship survives delegation to humans, it's not logically clear why it collapses when execution is delegated to a tool. The intent, judgment and responsibility still sit with the person directing the process.

I fully agree that AI will destabilise trust in images – especially photography – and that's a real problem. But that concern is about impact, not ontology. History shows that fear often precedes integration, not because the medium lacks artistic potential, but because it forces us to redefine where meaning and authorship actually live.

Also, AI appears to have a will, but it does not. Will requires goals of its own, preferences, ability to choose otherwise, capacity to refuse or question. AI has none of these. What AI does is called forced completion – AI is not allowed to stop, it is designed never to pause and it cannot choose not to decide. It is forced to complete and will use the most probable completion based on learned statistical patterns. This is nothing new. Two examples:

1. Autofocus and autoexposure in cameras. You don't specify focus; camera chooses. You don't specify exposure; camera chooses. Early photographers said: "The camera decides for you", yet no one argued the camera had will.
2. Photoshop Content Aware Fill. You don't specify what's behind; algorithm invents it. It fills gaps without asking and it often adds plausible, but fictional detail. Again: no will, just default resolution.

AI has no intentionality at all, it doesn't care — it only resolves. Ironically, this means AI behaves less like a collaborator and more like an extremely obedient, but unimaginative intern who is forbidden from asking questions.

I understand the concern you're expressing, but at this point we're talking about predictions and beliefs rather than definitions or present realities. I'm arguing from how authorship, tools and art have historically evolved; you're arguing from where you fear this may lead. That's a valid concern, but it's a different conversation. We may simply disagree on where the line should be drawn – and that's okay.

marcadamus

@marselvanoosten To believe this is not a real and present danger is naive and leading us further down the path of no return. If we can't see the point where we have lost control and draw a line there, then we are all in big trouble. To pretend this is just another tool to create art and help us, ignores the present reality and endangers our future.

THE INTERNATIONAL **LANDSCAPE** **PHOTOGRAPHER** OF THE YEAR 2025



THE EDITOR'S PICKS

For the past 12 years, David Evans and I (Peter Eastway) have been putting together an authoritative book full of amazing landscape photographs.

There's no doubt that each of the 101 photographs in each of the 12 books is a masterpiece, a study in the art and craft of landscape photography, but we should also spare a thought for the hundreds of images that they couldn't include in the books.

Photography is subjective. While there are preferences and popular styles, there really is no right or wrong – these are not useful words for photographers or for artists.

So, maybe it's a good time for us all to do our own reality checks. When you look at the photographs in the International Landscape Photographer of the Year book (visit www.internationallandscapephotographer.com) and the photos published in this article, ask yourself if your own landscape photographs are really good enough to sit alongside?

Maybe one or two are, but I know deep down that some of my favourite photographs wouldn't make the grade. It's not that they aren't 'great' in their own right or they are technically deficient, it's just that the Top 101 landscape photographs are better in one way or another: better technically, better aesthetically, or from the judges' perspective, of a more exciting subject, location or event. Perhaps they are better in several ways – if I knew the ingredient that makes that difference, I'd be a very smart person!

So, next time you're entering a competition and you don't place as highly as you wanted to, it might not be a limitation of your own work, rather the preferences of the judges and the creativity of the other entrants! Chances are you're still on the right track!

So, a big congratulations to J. Fritz Rumpf from the USA, the International Landscape Photographer of the Year for 2025.

The competition received 3601 entries and the threshold for inclusion in the book (a Top 101 entry) was a score of 86.6%.

However, with the exception of Fritz's winning portfolio, all the other photos published in this article are taken from the next 101 high scoring images – our Top 202+ as they are called. There's less than one percentage point difference between these and the Top 101 and, given they are so good, the editor thought it would be interesting to show just how good some of the photos are, even though they didn't make the book! And he has added a short comment after each as to why he found them worthy of publication in *Better Photography*!

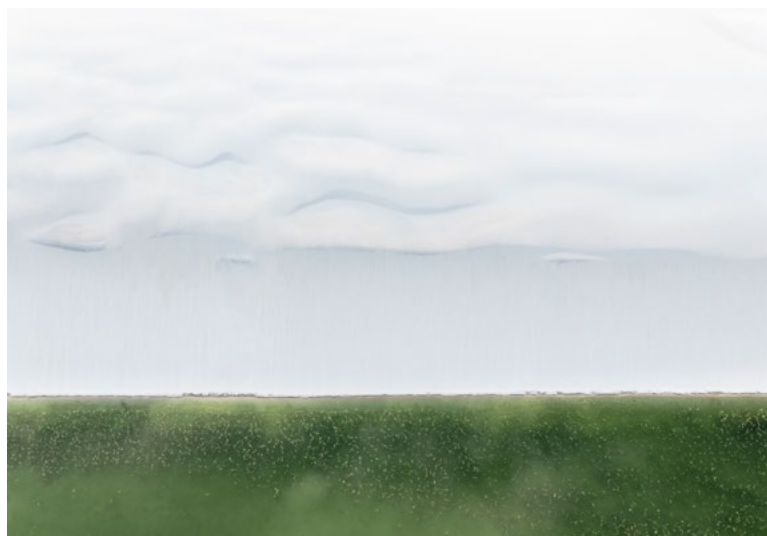
All photos by J. Fritz Rumpf, USA – The International Landscape Photographer of the Year 2025.

Opposite page: River and Dunes, Lençóis Maranhenses, Brazil.

**Right, top to bottom:
Storm over Fields, or Dunes by the Water? Lençóis Maranhenses, Brazil.**

Winter Meditations, Fjords of Norway.

Whispers, Death Valley, California, USA.

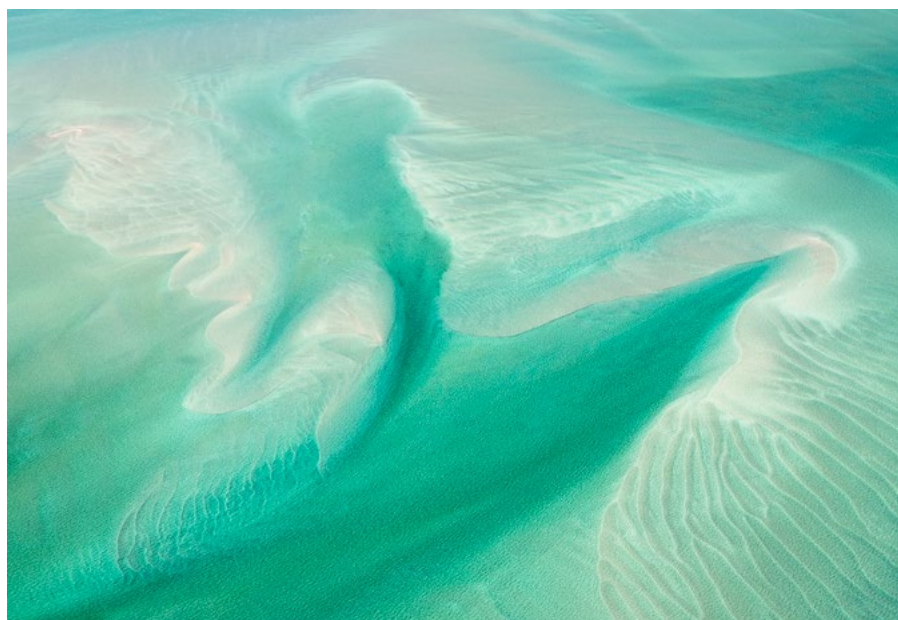




Xuejun Bian, United States, Winter Wonderland, Banff, Canada
While the post-production could be refined, I love the white and red highlights.



Kazuya Komura, Japan, Gotterdammerung, Nagano prefecture
Simple, elegant and looks like not much has been done. The light is to die for!

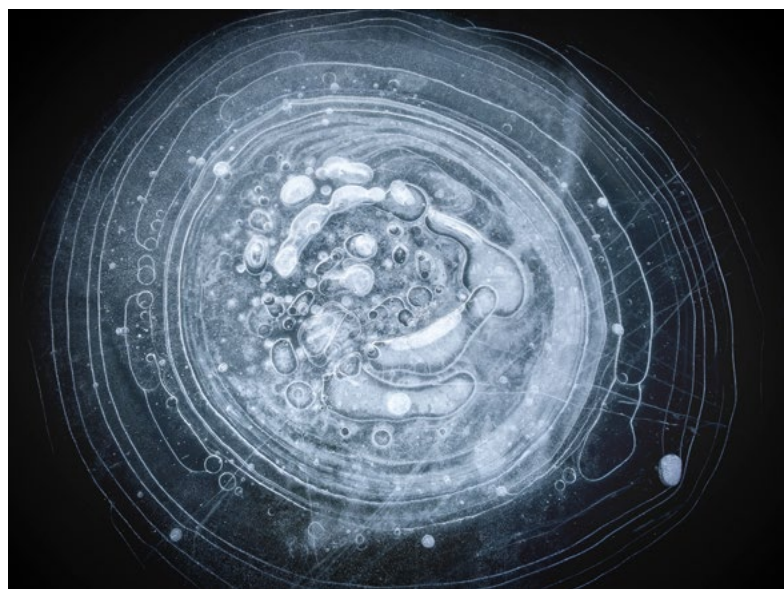


Heather Rose, Australia, The Flying Seahorse, Shark Bay, Western Australia
Simple colour palette, elegant shapes, superb framing.



Hunter Page, United States, Dreamland, Southern Utah

I'm noting that many of my picks are mono or duo-chromatic. The strong triangles in the foreground balance the mountains behind.



Above: Soichiro Moriyama, Japan, Moment of Creation, Tateiwa Lake, Nagano Prefecture, Japan. *Some of the most amazing landscapes can be found in very small places. Beautifully seen.*

Left: Philipp Jakesch, Austria, Resisting the swell, Iceland *Wonderful use of leading lines, great tonal mapping and tonal control, love the tight framing up the top.*



Isabella Tabacchi, Italy, Against the waves, Mount Seceda, Dolomites, Italy
One of my favourite areas in the world, Isabella's photo is simply ethereal!



Jannick Clausen, Australia, Winters Embrace II, Ben Lomond, Australia
I've always liked Jannick's work, funny I should pick it out without referencing names! Simple composition, strong square framing, birds are great centres of interest.



Carolyn Cheng, Canada, Coral Hills, Spain, Dryland Farming
A pattern within a pattern. Beautiful use of tone and a wonderful display of light and shadow.



Marcin Orszulak, Poland, Arctic loner, Lower Bug Valley, Mlynarze, Poland
A subject with a difference, but I'm an Australian who doesn't see much snow. Simple, elegant composition.



Bernd Tschakert, Austria, Lava River, Woodquarter, Lower Austria, Austria

Still looking at this one and trying to work it out. Sometimes photographs work because they don't tell you everything.



Samuel Fraser, United Kingdom, Autumnal Whispers of the Burn, The Birks of Aberfeldy, Scotland

Beautiful soft light and atmosphere, proof you don't need to be bold to have an impact.

COMPETITION COMPLAINTS

When it comes to photography competitions, there are many different opinions and suggestions. All are gratefully received and considered by the organisers, but some comments are more common than others.

Last year, Lukas Tixl's photograph of Mount Taranaki in New Zealand won the Photograph of the Year category in the 2025 International Landscape Photographer of the Year Awards. Obviously, the majority of judges felt it was a beautiful photograph because they scored it highly, but after the announcement, the competition organisers received a series of complaints and suggestions.

Some said it was such a famous subject that has been photographed so many times before, it shouldn't win. However, in an international competition, what is commonplace for one judge might be exotic for another – and that's why most competitions have several judges. In the case of the International Landscape Photographer of the Year, one of the judges comes from New Zealand – but of course, she may have given the entry a low score because for her it was indeed commonplace – but I don't know. These days, it's hard not to photograph something that hasn't been photographed before and I don't think it's fair to discount an entry just because someone else has photographed it as well. While we don't permit direct copies of other artists' photographs, some subjects are so famous and popular we expect to see photographs of them in most competitions.

There was also a suggestion that if the judges all sat around at the end of the initial round of judging and discussed which of the highest scoring prints should be the winner, this would produce a fairer result. I was one of the proponents of just such a system with the professional photography awards in Australia, because it gives judges a second chance to review the highest scorers. Sometimes during the judging process, initial scores might be higher or lower than intended and so there's nothing wrong with giving the judges a second look. If the photo really is the best, it will still be the best after a review process.

However, what I found is that when the judges get together in person, there can be a 'big dog' syndrome where one judge guides or bullies (pick your flavour), subtly or overtly, the other judges towards their goal. This complexity can be eliminated by still giving judges a review process, but without being unduly influenced by another judge.

At the end of the day, I can write a proposition supporting many different judging models, all with their strengths and weaknesses. Like photography, there isn't a single correct approach.

Then there was Lukas's treatment of Mount Taranaki itself. One of the comments stated the photograph didn't look like the mountain does in reality. They complained the photograph

used AI or stretched the subject in post-production, which surely is against the rules of landscape photography. Others were outraged that the photographer would distort a place which had such spiritual significance for the local people.

It's true that Mount Taranaki in New Zealand is a spiritual place for many of the Maori. It is steeped in legend and lore, perhaps in a similar way that Uluru is revered in Australia. Of course, when we delve a little more deeply into any culture, heritage or religion, we find that there are not just one or two places with significance, but hundreds, perhaps thousands all around the world.

The local Taranaki newspaper published the winning photograph along with a story and there was no mention of cultural sensitivity, so I would gently suggest our complainants are in the minority.

Still, it raises an interesting question about what sort of restrictions should be placed on photographers and artists, if any. Sometimes a minority group, often the owners, exercises a level of control over significant sites by controlling our access. If you want to visit these locations, you pay an entrance fee and essentially sign a contract that stipulates what you can and can't do. You can walk quietly through St Peters Cathedral in Rome, but you can't have a picnic next to the altar. You can walk around Uluru in Australia, but you can't climb up to the top. However, while your behaviour can be controlled within the precincts of these significant places, it's harder (and in some jurisdictions, not legal) to prevent people from taking photographs or creating artworks of them when done from the outside.

Most readers would not want to intentionally inflame cultural or religious issues. On the other hand, what is reasonable in a situation like this?

So, I have a question: as a traveller, should you be aware of every place of significance you might visit? Should you be able to photograph it, even if some people closely associated with the site would prefer you not to? And if you can photograph it, should you be able to edit it, to create a non-literal version, much like an artist might do with canvas and paint?

Perhaps we shouldn't photograph places of significance at all, simply because we run the risk of offending someone. That's going to kill the travel industry! And while being careful to look after the interests of a minority, is the majority disadvantaging itself? Is it fair that a minority can hold the majority to ransom like this?

My view is that it's mostly a free world (let's leave military and political issues out of this) and part of that freedom surely allows us to use a camera. However, I agree that neither freedom of photography nor freedom of speech means you can photograph or write anything you like. Along with that freedom is a responsibility to not insult or slander other people, but I'm



Photograph by Lukas Trixl, Austria – The Land Before Time. New Plymouth, North Island, New Zealand.

not sure that responsibility extends to offending someone. Being offended is a choice.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not advocating we rush out and try to offend people. Far from it, let's be sensitive and get along with each other. However, as we can see from the variety of opinions on social media, while some people may object to a photograph, others might love it or, more likely, most would have no real opinion either way.

Should a minority be able to restrict our photography? Should a minority be able to restrict the majority's freedom? I'm sure there are situations where some restrictions should be in place, but in a world of tourism and travel, it seems unlikely any restrictions can be effectively upheld with so many mobile phones and AI technology!

And what about the photographer's intent? When you read Lukas' story about how he took the photograph, he was in awe of the location. His photograph was like a homage – it's just he was expressing it differently to what a narrow group of people think is acceptable. And to be fair to the critics of Taranaki, most were not complaining about the mountain being photographed, they complained about how the photo was treated.

Running a photography competition is not for the faint-hearted! There are always people who will complain or who have a 'better way' of organising things. Yet as incensed or well-meaning as these complainants were, it's great that they spoke out and expressed their opinion. Whether they offended the organisers or not can't be helped – we respect their right to freedom of expression.

The Temple of Heaven

A FILE LOST TO AN OLD DRIVE

Peter Eastway resurrects an old photo from 1997 and wonders what the judges are saying today now that AI has begun?

I have almost every digital photograph I have ever taken on a Lacie 6big storage unit. Almost. Back in the late 20th Century (sounds like a long time ago now), I was storing my files on CDs, DVDs, Jazz and Zip drives. No one was really quite sure how long these storage media would last and I had multiple copies of lots of things, but perhaps not as well organised as they could have been.

In the early 21st Century, I transferred most of my digital photos from CD and DVD onto hard drives and over the decades, my archive has grown to around 90TB. Of course, for a busy wedding photographer or a video producer, this is but a drop in the ocean.

However, for some reason when people ask me about my first forays into Photoshop, there are two photos I think back to, both taken in China. Having confirmed they are definitely not in my pre-2008 folder on the Lacie, it struck me that I had published one of these photos in the magazine, so one evening, I sat down with my archive of over 120 magazines and looked through them.

I found the article, written in 1998. And as I read the article, I wondered if these sentiments could be applied today to the emergence of AI.

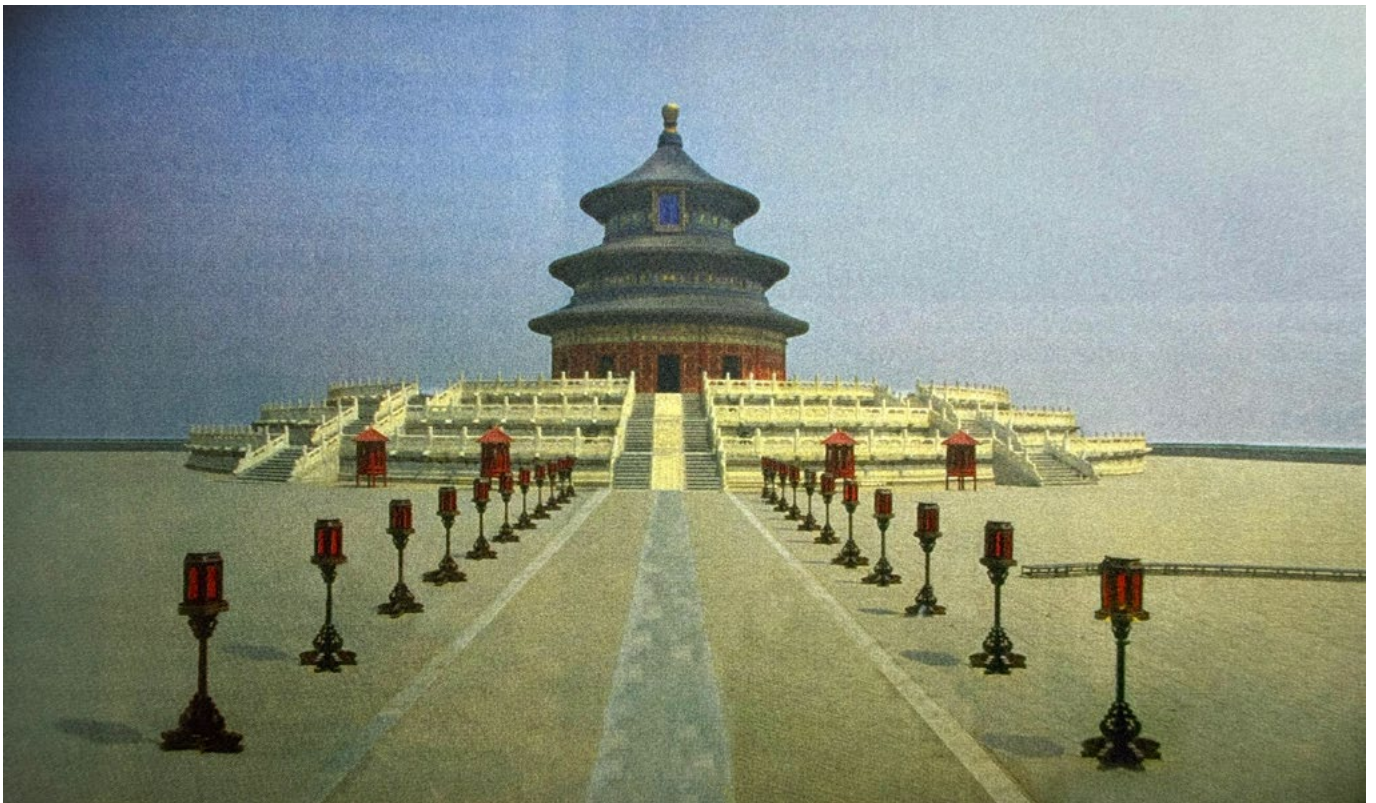
Here's how the article began:

The judges were quiet. Five of them sat looking at the print in front of them. One at a time, they would get up from their chairs and walk around the table to take a closer look, then return to their station with a thoughtful frown. Still they sat.

The judges were sitting at the 1997 NSW AIPP Professional Photography Awards and the print they were looking at is reproduced on the opposite page. The Panel Chair cleared his throat and asked if the judges would like to enter a score. "It has been over five minutes," he admonished the panel. The usual time for scoring was less than a minute or so. "No one has entered a score yet."

Another minute or so passed. "Does anyone want to stand down?" the Panel Chair asked. One judge agreed to be replaced and a new one was found. Gradually, the scores filtered through from the judges to the computer screen on the Panel Chair's table. "Eighty two," the Panel Chair called, "a Silver Award."

I often wonder what the judges were thinking about. Did they not like the image, in which case it shouldn't have scored Silver. Or did they like the image, but were uncomfortable judging it as a photograph because it had been so heavily



This reproduction has been taken from the pages of *Better Photography* magazine, back in 1998 or thereabouts. The original was on a Zip or Jazz drive, never to be resurrected as I can't plug them into any computer I currently own.



The original photograph, captured on Kodachrome 64 and scanned for editing in an early version of Photoshop – version 2 if I'm not mistaken!

'worked'? Did they consider it more 'illustration' rather than photography?

I'm sure there were many issues at stake and that's one of the reasons I entered this print. Not that I'm some kind of digital evangelist flowering the world with elegant electronic images – far from it. However, I did want to see how far digital imaging could go before it ceased to be called 'photography'.

And here is the crux of the matter. Some photographers believe that when you press the shutter, that's the end of it. You either have a good photograph or you don't. However, even the staunchest purist will allow a photographer to spot a print or even burn in the edges a little to contain the composition. In fact, these same photographers will hail Ansel Adams as a legend, yet Adams himself was a bountiful user of printing techniques, everything from heavy burning in and dodging to surreptitious use of local bleach and toning.

Perhaps the main reason purists will accept some darkroom manipulation is because the average person doesn't know that the print was manipulated and what we don't know won't hurt us (or so the story goes). Perhaps these same people will also accept hand-colouring of black and white prints as an acceptable form of photography – after all, hand-colouring was extensively used in the good old days before

colour photography had been invented or computers even thought of.

The photograph has been copied using my iPhone and you can see in the sky where the text on the other side of the page shows through – it's not a great reproduction and I wish I could find the original file! But I did find my article quite interesting.

To remove all the people in the original photo today would be relatively easy and there are a number of techniques I could use to make it easier still. However, as I wrote, I did it the hard way with the clone tool.

For the anti-computer brigade, you can chuckle quietly to yourself when you read that it took me around eight hours over two or three nights to successfully remove the people to my satisfaction. I dare say it wouldn't take me quite as long now (I've had lots of practice), but my point is that digital imaging isn't just a matter of clicking a mouse button and it's all done for you. Like creating a beautiful fibre-base print, it takes time and patience to get it just right.

Well, that was then, but today, Photoshop would make this retouching very easy!

Also a little different for the time was the fact I had the file printed using an early inkjet printer.

The final print was made with an Iris printer on textured

Is it a Photograph?

How far can
you alter a
photograph
before it's not
a photograph –
and does it
really matter?
By Peter
Eastway.

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PUSHING DEFINITIONS TO THE LIMIT

80

Better Photography



Photo Notebook

Photographer: Peter Eastway
Location: Temple of Heaven, China
Camera: 35mm SLR
Lens: 28-135mm zoom
Film: Kodachrome 64
Aperture: Around f11
Shutter Speed: Around 1/500 second
Filters: None
Lighting: Overhead midday lighting, diffused by smog and cloud.
Notes: The image has been totally reworked in Photoshop. See article for details.

Better Photography

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The magazine article asking, is it a photograph?

watercolour paper. No doubt this fooled the judges a little as well – Iris printers were relatively new to the Australian market at this stage. The result was a print with generally rich pastel shades, but there's no doubt opinion about the image was polarised. People either loved it – or hated it!

All up, it probably took around two full eight-hour days to create this image. A lot of time could be saved by having a more powerful computer with lots of RAM (I'm starting to think 256 MB is a starting point and thankfully the price of RAM is dropping so that it is almost affordable), but most important is the need for practice.

I'll probably look back on this image in a few years with a very critical eye. It will be one of those efforts you'd rather forget – because there are so many technical shortcomings in the image. I know my technique could be better – and with the practice gained on this and other images over the past year or so, it is improving all the time. Working with a computer is a bit like learning to print in the darkroom. Your first efforts are generally okay, but your best work only comes with experience.

And then I finish off with an infamous line: Is this a photograph? Does it matter?

Well, of course it matters today! With AI making huge inroads, the provenance is going to matter to us

(photographers), but will it matter to the general public viewing the images?

Unfortunately, if AI can create imagery that pleases the public, many professional photographers are out of a job. Amateur and enthusiast photographers still have room to play because of one fundamental point: we enjoy the sense of satisfaction that follows a good result.

Personally, I can't see myself getting the same sense of satisfaction by writing a suitable command into an AI engine and then choosing one of the results produced. I might like the resulting image more or less than work I have created myself, but that's not the point. I don't feel any ownership.

In the transition from film to digital, the sense of ownership remained. In the transition to AI, ownership is lost. For me, at least. I am very sure that the younger generations will get a sense of satisfaction when they use AI. Maybe in another 20 years, people will pull out this article and have a laugh at our timid response to AI imagery.

Maybe. But surely the difference is personal and, having never used a camera or created a photograph themselves, how will future generations really understand what drove photographers to capture and create their work?

We live in interesting times!

HOW BRIGHT IS YOUR LAPTOP SCREEN?

A large percentage of photographs are processed on a laptop or phone screen, so they must be okay... or are they? What are you really looking at?

By Peter Eastway.

When we write about post-production and photo editing, there's an underlying assumption that all the decisions we make – how light, how contrasty, what colour – are being made with an accurately calibrated and profiled monitor. Unless what you're looking at when you're editing is a true representation of the numbers in the digital file, the edited file will not be accurate!

What does this mean? It means that if your computer monitor isn't set up correctly, every decision you're making during the editing process is inaccurate. If you lighten your image so it looks correct on your screen, but your screen is too dark in the first place, then you have lightened up the file too much. As soon as you send your freshly edited photograph somewhere else – onto the internet, to a bureau for printing, to your own printer – the other screen or system will assume the numbers in the file are correct – and the photo will look too bright.

The Laptop Menace

Many photographers only use a laptop computer. And those who have a high-end desktop monitor often use their laptop when they're travelling.

A laptop screen will probably never match a high-end monitor, but let's be realistic about what happens in the real world: lots of people only ever use their laptop screen to edit their photos and lots of great photographs are being produced on laptops!

So, it's possible, but what should we expect? Despite the limitations, you can get a very good result. Over the years, laptop screens have improved to such an extent that they can be very reliable, but!

The 'but' comes mainly from the brightness setting you use. A lot of photographers have their laptop monitors set at a low brightness setting as this saves battery power. Others have the brightness at full strength so they can see things clearly. Chances are neither of these settings is correct.

If you have a low brightness setting, you will edit your photos to look correct on the screen you are using, but the actual numbers in the digital file will be too bright. If you have a strong brightness setting, you will edit your photos to look correct on an inaccurate screen, but now the actual numbers will be too dark because you are compensating for the overly bright screen.

The trick is to get your laptop monitor as good as possible and to realise that this may not be as accurate as you would like. However, it is what we have to work with.

There are some simple solutions, such as using a colorimeter like the Datacolor Spyder. It measures the screen and its software sets the profile for you, automatically. This is still the case on PC and older Mac laptops and is somewhat effective, but there's only so far you can tweak a laptop monitor. It's not a perfect solution.

The new Mac laptops (which a lot of photographers are using to take advantage of the speedy M chip) have an XDR monitor with new screen technology that makes older colorimeters obsolete, but if you purchase one of the latest colorimeters they should work okay! The new screens look fantastic with strong, bold colours and contrast, but used on their default settings they are not at all accurate for photography. You can use a Photography preset in the system dialog which dims the screen, but now you have no control over screen brightness.

Apple has taken control and, while there are workarounds, this article is not going to talk about monitor calibration per se.

Checking Things Yourself

So, how can you be sure your photos are looking their best? I have three suggestions.

First, use the laptop to do preliminary edits only. Then, when you return home or to your studio, use a properly calibrated and profiled monitor to tweak and correct your edits so the tonality

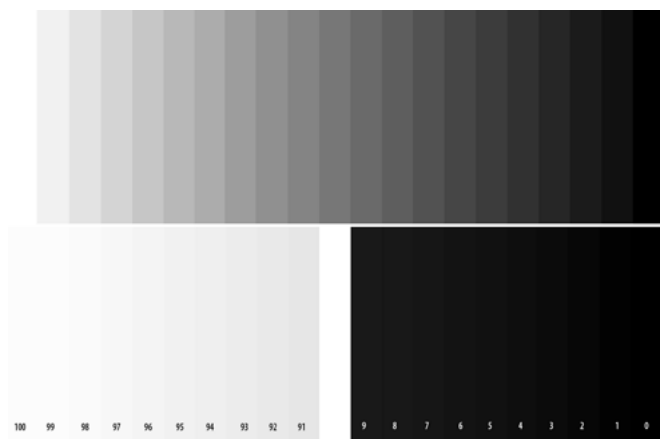


Is your laptop screen too bright or too dark? How do you know? Do you even check?

and colour are correct. Even with the next two suggestions, this is the preferred method.

There's nothing wrong with editing your photos on a laptop and making them look as good as you can. This is proof of concept. And if you can make your photo look good on a laptop, then you should be able to easily re-edit your photo when viewing it on your studio monitor. The problem you have with the laptop-edited photo is that the numbers in the file don't match the colours and tones you are seeing on your laptop screen, but the edit itself is good once you fix the numbers!

Second, use a step-wedge to check what your monitor looks like. This is only somewhat useful because the human eye adapts itself to existing illumination levels and colours, but it's a help.



A step-wedge can be created easily enough in Photoshop or even Microsoft Paint.

A step-wedge is a series of squares of different values, from white to black in 5 or 10% steps. I also use a finer step-wedge which has 1% steps (or thereabouts) for the lightest and darkest tones as well. They are easy to make and I keep mine in my Pictures folder so I can easily find it.

When I'm working on a photo, I can open up the step-wedge file at the same time and check that the whites and blacks are looking good on the screen and not blocking up or blowing out. If there's a problem, I adjust the monitor brightness until it's fixed. (You can also see if the colour is neutral as the steps should all be grey with no colour issues.)

The third and final approach is to read the numbers. Whether you're in Lightroom, Photoshop or Capture One, you can see a readout of what the actual numbers are in the pixel underneath your cursor. The readout is usually in red, green and blue and the trick is not to have too many 0% and 100% readings. Similarly, you don't want the brightest parts of your photo to be 50%. Or the darkest values, for that matter.

Another way of checking what the real values are is to turn on the exposure warnings – where the pure blacks and pure whites are highlighted with a colour to show the problem. You should be able to check that your photos are on the right track.

What I find when editing on my laptop is that my photos are generally too dark. When I get back to my studio monitor, I am invariably lightening up the images. The colours are usually okay, but it's the brightness I struggle with.

Of course, if you're not checking your photos on a studio monitor or the laptop screen is all you have, then hopefully this article has helped explain the issue so you can find yourself a solution.

COMPOSITION

BALANCE

Very often we'll incorporate contrast into our composition, but now it is a matter of balancing the contrasting or different elements. And together, contrast and balance are perhaps the two most important 'rules of composition'. By Peter

From our school years, most of us will think of a traditional set of scales with two weights sitting perfectly in equilibrium. Well, as photographers, balance is incredibly important, but 'balance' is not simply a matter of having equality between two sides.

Think of this old chestnut: which weighs more, a ton of feathers or a ton of lead? Together they will keep the classroom scales in equilibrium, but visually the huge baskets of feathers will be a lot larger than a small ingot of lead. Are they still balanced?

Photography is a language and when we talk about balance, we need to take into account subject importance and value just as much as the physical area a compositional element might occupy.

We also need to consider where elements sit in the composition (within the frame), their relative sizes and the spaces surrounding them.

Different people have different senses of balance, so don't approach balance with a scale and a ruler. It's more about what feels right and you'll gradually learn what feels right to you by studying the photographs of others that you like. Spend a little time on social media or a photographer's website and deliberately analyse the photos. The ones that you like probably have a sense of balance – ask yourself how does that balance work and why? There's no right or wrong answer, it's how it works for you.

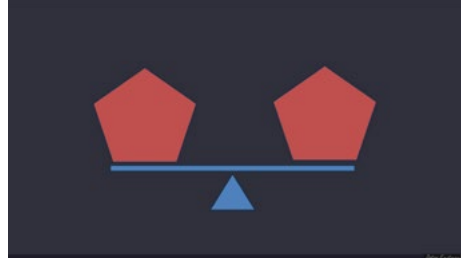
So, what types of balance are there?

The most obvious balance will compare the size of one object or element against another. Balance can also be achieved by positioning an element or subject within the frame – bang in the middle would be considered balanced, but it might also be boring! Having balance on its own doesn't make a strong photograph.

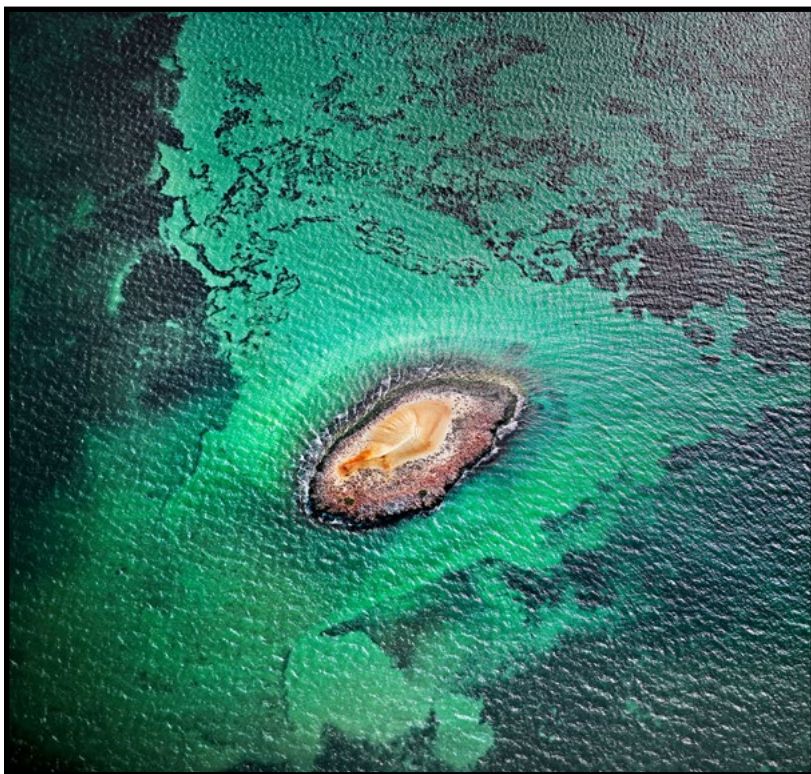
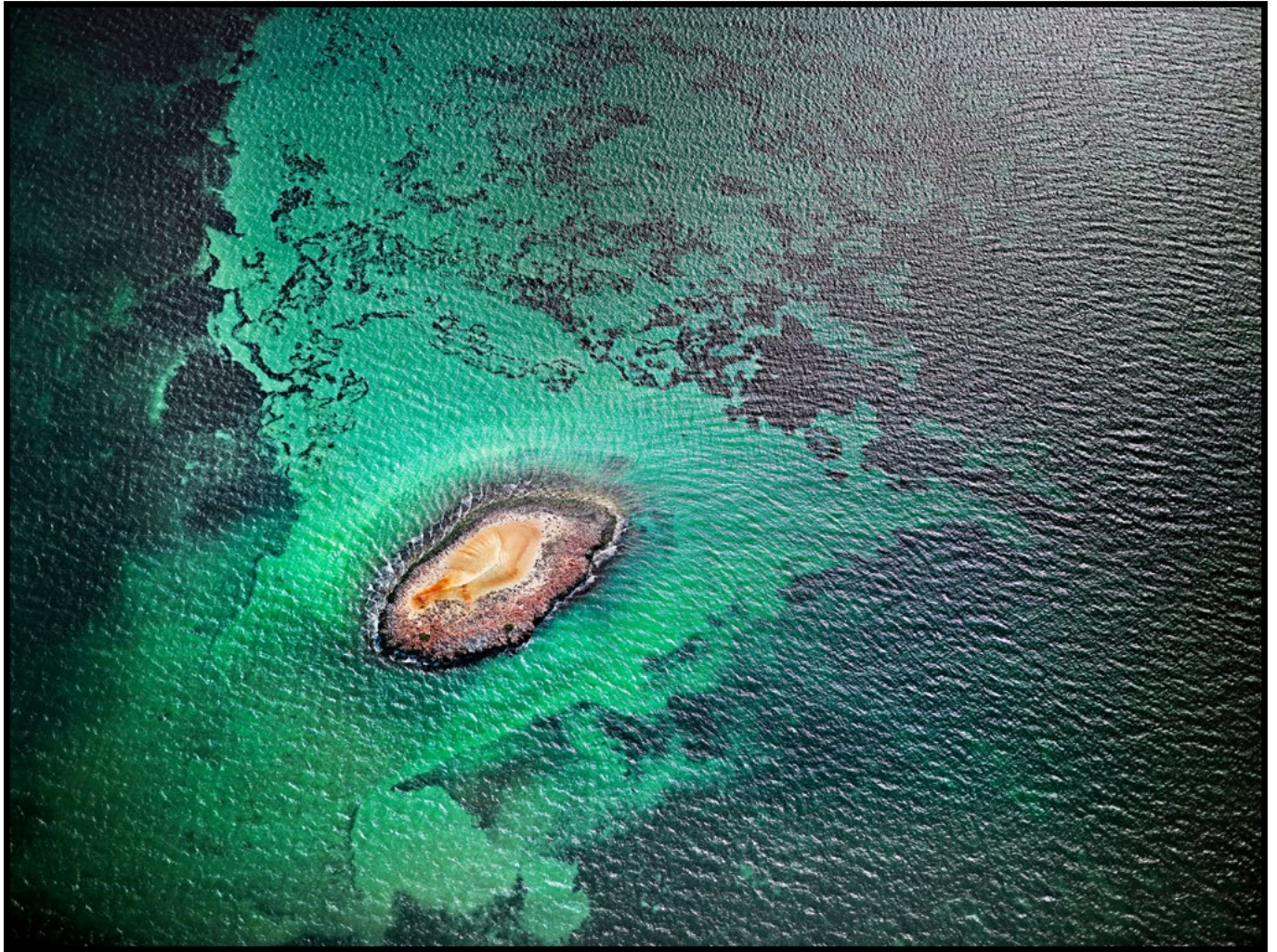
Perhaps one of the most useful types of balance is considering the main subject in relation to its surroundings. For instance, a small island in a huge sea can be balanced, even if positionally the island is off to one side.

Let's take a look at a few examples of compositional balance.

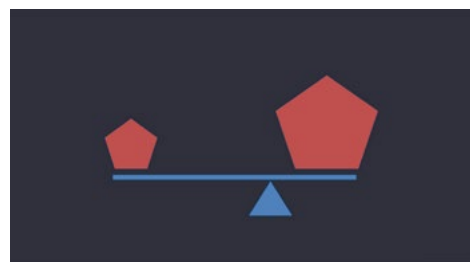
*This article is based on Peter Eastway's **Photo Process** educational program found on the www.betterphotographyeducation.com website.*



The fence line down the middle of the frame divides the photograph into two equal halves, so you can't argue there is an element of balance. However, the two halves are not exactly the same, so some people might feel the right side is stronger as overall it is lighter. Other people might not consciously worry about which is stronger, simply enjoying the different shapes and lines either side of the dividing fence. However, we can't take all our photos with a line down the middle, so there have to be other ways of achieving balance without measuring image area.



I consider the photo above to be balanced. In terms of image area, the sea is much larger, but it's not as important as the island. So think of feathers and lead - the island is fundamental to the composition. Note also that the island doesn't have to be in the middle of the frame. In fact, as you can see on the left, centrally framing the island creates a less stimulating composition. In the language of photography, 'balance' can send mathematicians into apoplexy!





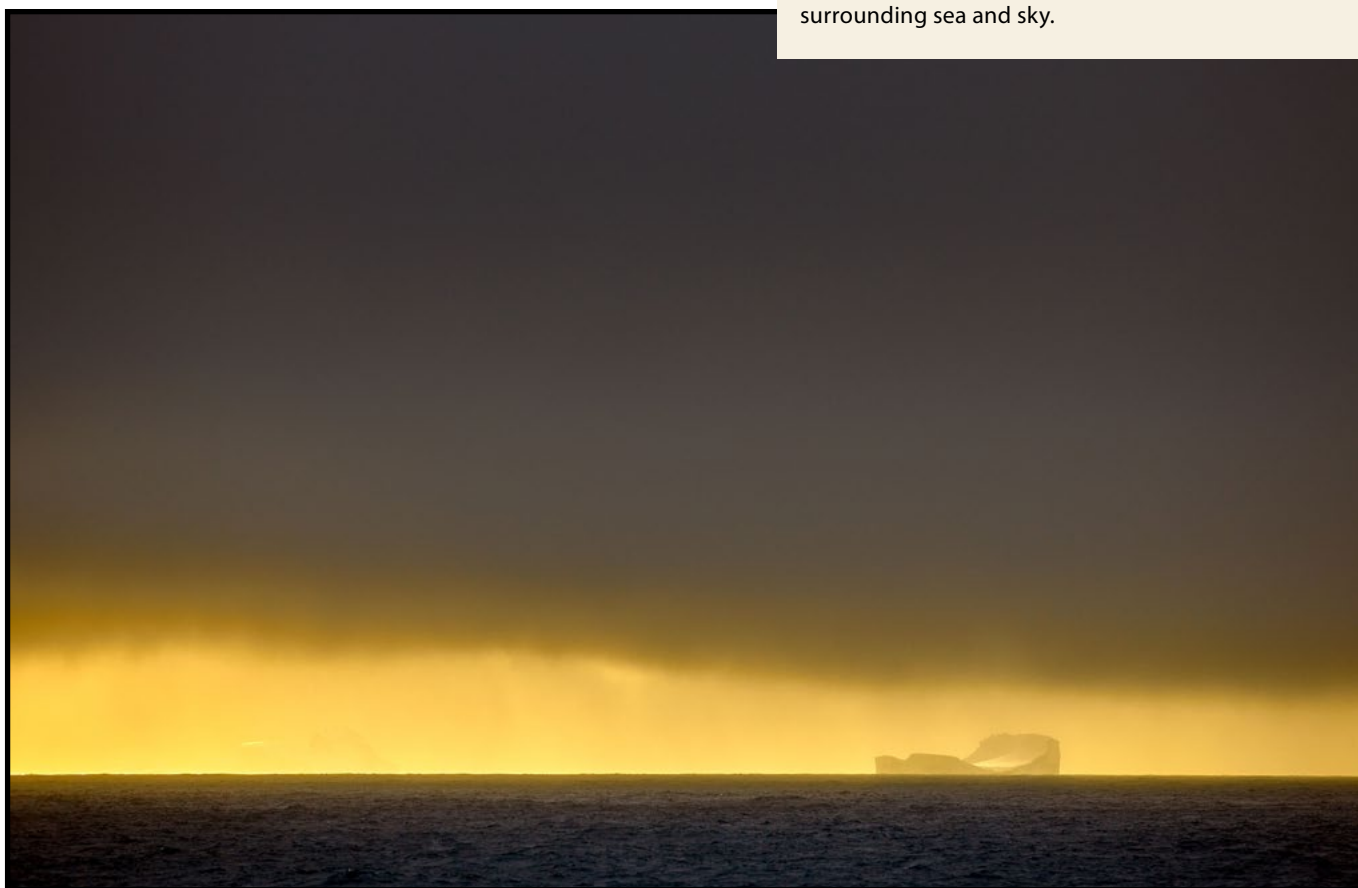
In a photograph, the edges are an important part of our composition. Based on our previous example, we can accept that the small shopkeeper balances the larger shop environment - the shopkeeper has more weight. We can also accept that the shopkeeper doesn't have to be in the middle of the frame for the image to be balanced. However, look what happens when we move the shopkeeper too close to the edge of the frame - the balance is lost. Balance requires careful use of space.





Sometimes you can use a compositional element to make an image appear balanced. Here the central column divides the monks on the left from the women dancers on the right. The two sides of the image are given equal importance, even though the monks are more active than the dancers. There is a contrast between the two sides, but balanced.

So, is this photo balanced? We're moving into another area of composition called 'space' or 'negative space', but it's all tied in together. Although the iceberg is small and low in contrast, it is a strong centre of interest and its importance is much greater than the surrounding sea and sky.





There are lots of ways to talk about balance and use it to create strong compositions. For instance, we can say the moai (statue) balances the crater and the vertical line of the moai balances the horizontal line of the crater. We can talk about the warm and cool colours being in balance with each other. Some photographers will think this approach to 'balance' is a little wishy-washy and in some ways it is. On the other hand, thinking this way can help position, order and frame your subjects for a stronger composition.

What about this old chestnut - is it balanced? I think so, but note how important the framing is. The tiny girl in the cape has more importance than the large church, but we only know the church is large because of how we have framed the photo. If a telephoto lens had been used and we just had the girl and a part of the church facade, the balance might not be so successful. Note also how the small amount of strong magenta balances the greater volume of oranges and yellows and how the light in the middle of the frame is balanced by the surrounding darkness.



The End of Nature, Pay It Forward

As this issue goes to press, Australia experiences heat waves, wildfires and floods.

Len Metcalf is obviously feeling the stress and asks us

what we can do as photographers.

So many photographers and artists turn to nature as our muse and inspiration. It is full of beauty and the sublime. We often photograph it as though we have dominion over it — taking our photographs and sharing them with the world. Yet often, the practice of doing so is at the very expense of the nature that we love.

The carbon footprint of our camera equipment, our trips into nature and the printing and distribution of our work is far larger than most of us are willing to admit. I lust after the newest camera as much as anyone else. I have been a victim

of capitalism and consumerism, continually upgrading and acquiring the latest equipment. But this article is not going to dwell on that side. Instead, I am going to plead with you to use your nature and landscape photography to help educate others — to help save what we are rapidly losing.

An Ethical Creed

What I am asking you to do, is to use your nature and landscape photography as an educational tool. Use it to show people what is happening to the world. Use it to start conversations about the environment. Tell others the stories that you already know.

If you are into bees, educate us about the loss of bees and what that means.

If you are into birds, tell us about how habitat loss and insect collapse are driving the decline of bird populations. We are losing insects largely because of neonicotinoids — pesticides and herbicides that poison entire food chains. Heatwaves are killing bird populations as well.

Use your beautiful, nature-based photographs to help fight for a better future. Please.

We do not photograph nature just to decorate our walls. We now need photographs that bear witness to ecological collapse. To see what is happening around us is to accept responsibility.

Silence, now, is a form of consent.

We profit from photographing nature and receive immeasurable benefits from it. We must defend it. Our images must do more than stir our emotions — they must awaken our spirit to change.

Nature gives to us without asking for anything in return. It gives us light, form and life. It is time for us to repay that gift — with truth, with education and with the refusal to look away.

It is time to shift from photographic artist to advocate. We are the translators, the interpreters and the messengers. For beauty without consequence is dangerous. We need to disrupt. We need to disturb. The beautiful image can be an entry point into discussion — just as I am doing here.





The Tarkine, Tasmania

The photographs accompanying this article were made in Takayna/the Tarkine, on Tasmania's remote west coast, in the weeks following the bushfires of February 2025. What you are looking at is the aftermath of a fire that burned close to 95,000 hectares of wilderness – much of it in places so remote they had rarely, if ever, burned before. Ancient rainforest, alpine woodland and peat soils that have taken thousands of years to form were lost in a matter of days.

Many of the trees here will not grow back in any meaningful human time frame. Species such as pencil pine and Huon pine are not adapted to fire and their destruction represents a loss measured not in decades, but in millennia. This is not a natural cycle playing out. These fires were ignited by dry lightning in conditions driven by a warming climate and they burned with an intensity and scale that would once have been unthinkable in this landscape.

I photograph this place not to aestheticise the damage, but to sit with it. To witness what has been lost and to acknowledge that time will not restore this forest in the way we might hope. What time will change is us – how we remember this place, how we understand our responsibility to it and how seriously we take the forces now reshaping the world we depend on.



So, if you photograph forests, you must speak about deforestation. If you photograph reefs, you must speak about warming oceans. If you photograph birds, you must speak about their decline.

Education is now part of the craft of being a nature photographer.

Today, you are photographing a nature that will not survive us. We are recording what will soon be 'once was'. Let it be said that we did not just admire the natural world – that we stood up and tried to protect it.

Coral Reefs

I do not know if you are aware of just how dire the situation is with climate change. We are breaking records daily, yet we continue to smash and degrade the very natural systems that have allowed biodiversity to flourish. Planetary boundaries – tipping points that scientists believe are irreversible – are beginning to collapse.

The most recent to fall are our coral reef systems. They have passed a planetary threshold due to rising ocean temperatures driven by climate change. Simply put, the water is getting so hot that coral can no longer recover from repeated heat stress and bleaching.

Coral reefs struggled to survive a 1.2 °C increase in global temperatures. Today, we are already sitting above 1.5 °C. The dieback of reefs we are seeing now is not temporary stress. We are losing them permanently.

Around 80% of the world's coral reefs experienced extreme bleaching during the 2023–2025 global bleaching event — the worst on record. Bleaching occurs when elevated ocean temperatures disrupt the symbiotic algae living within coral tissue, causing corals to turn white, weaken and often die.

The oceans are warming faster than predicted and faster than air temperatures. Ocean acidification has also crossed a

critical boundary, further weakening coral systems.

Losing coral reefs will affect approximately 25% of all marine species and will directly impact coastal economies and food security for hundreds of millions of people. Coral reefs also provide natural coastal protection from storms and sea-level rise.

Forests

Because I love trees so deeply, let's look at why I am so passionate about losing them.

Globally, we are currently losing around 11 million hectares of forest every year. That is an area roughly the size of Iceland – every single year. We are losing this life-sustaining forest due to logging, mining, agriculture and increasingly due to climate-driven wildfires. It is hard to fathom that wildfires linked to climate change are now a major contributor to forest loss.

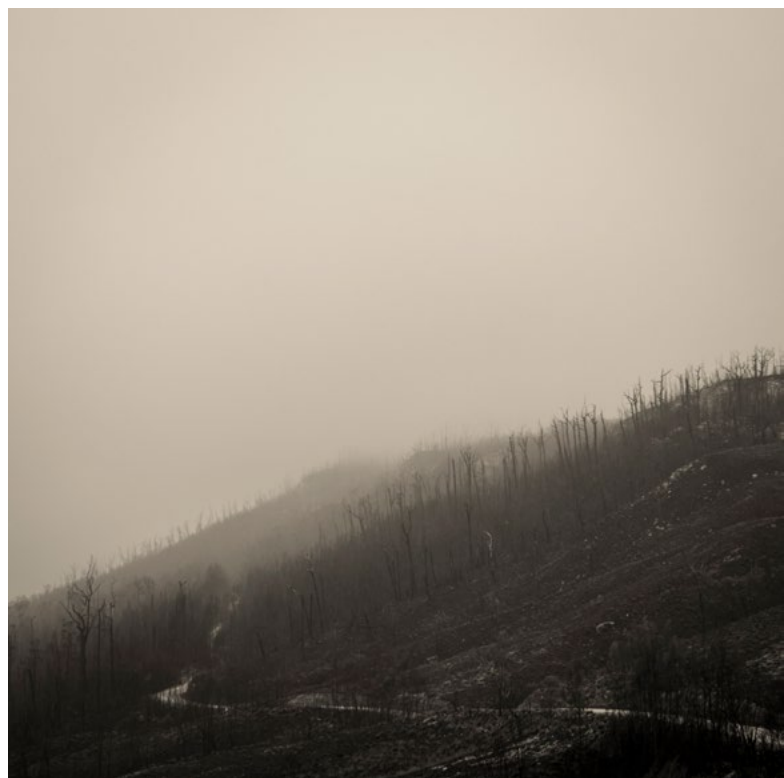
Here in Australia, we lose around 10 hectares every minute. That is roughly the size of a university campus, or about 100 suburban house blocks – every minute. It is an astonishing figure.

We do not want to lose any more forests. They are home to the majority of the planet's terrestrial species and forest destruction drives their extinction.

When we lose forests, we lose stored carbon, which is released back into the atmosphere, contributing to global warming and climate instability. Forest loss contributes roughly 15% of global greenhouse gas emissions. As forests are actively absorbing greenhouse gases, we also lose that vital carbon sink, accelerating planetary warming.

Forest loss alters rainfall patterns, water cycles and soil moisture. This leads to drier climates, increased drought risk and more extreme weather events. Forests hold soil together, so without them we see worse landslides and floods. They hold water and release it slowly – without them, water moves fast and destructively.

The biggest loss for me is the mental peace forests give me. They are my therapist and my refuge. I cannot fathom losing my favourite muse.





The benefits to humanity of maintaining our ecological mothership are enormous and worthy of a book in their own right. A good place to start is 'The Last Child in the Woods' by Richard Louv, first published in 2005. Louv coined the term 'nature-deficit disorder' and, through extensive literature review, documented thousands of studies showing how our physical and mental health is deeply linked to nature.

Climate Change

I am not sure if we all truly understand the frightening and dire times we are living in with climate change, so please allow me to elaborate.

Let's first address the sceptics in the room. The insurance industry has already accepted climate change as fact – and you are paying for it. Insurance companies are actively adjusting premiums and coverage to mitigate climate risk. An industry driven purely by profit does not do this lightly.

But science is where I prefer to look. The overwhelming majority of climate scientists agree that human-driven climate change threatens the natural systems we depend on.

Atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations are now above 420 ppm – higher than at any point in the past 800,000 years – a 51% increase since pre-industrial times.

Methane, a far more potent heat-trapping gas, has increased by over 160%. Nitrous oxide has also risen significantly, adding further to global warming.

These gases thicken the heat-trapping blanket in our atmosphere, committing us to continued warming for centuries – even if emissions stopped today.

The past decade has been the warmest on record. Global temperatures are now over 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels. While climate models traditionally measure warming over twenty-year periods, they struggle to account for the rapid acceleration of the past few years.



The oceans, which absorb around 90% of excess heat, are warming even faster than the atmosphere. We can expect continued sea-level rise. Entire nations are already being displaced. Around 40% of the world's population lives within 100 kilometres of a coastline – roughly three billion people. Of these, around 230 million live within one metre of today's sea level and are likely to be affected within my lifetime.

Extreme weather events are intensifying – floods, droughts, heatwaves and storms. Events once considered rare now dominate our news cycles.

We will witness the collapse of habitats and food systems, pushing countless species toward extinction. We are seeing cascading tipping points accelerate as ecosystems unravel.

As David Suzuki recently said: "It's too late to escape climate catastrophe. We have known the causes, consequences and solutions for decades. If we pass one boundary, we should be shitting our pants. We have passed seven."

For those who bother to look into the research, the unfolding reality is horrifying. This beautiful planet – our home – is being dismantled.

Honestly, we should be worshipping nature and stopping this senseless destruction, because in destroying it, we are destroying our own health.

A CALL TO ACTION

Photograph beauty.

Tell the truth behind it.

Teach what is at risk.

Advocate without apology.

Silence is no longer neutral.



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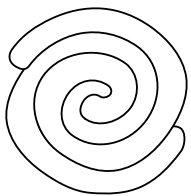
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TRANSPORTED

How do you approach your photography

at home or while travelling?

Michael Coyne looks at Rob Gale's

***Transported* portfolio for inspiration.**

"When travelling, the world we see is framed by the structures of our transport. The environment is perceived through glass and occasionally mirrors," said Rob Gale about his new project, *Transported*.

Many photographers document people and the environment by walking along streets, down tracks and along highways. Rob Gale has taken a different approach. He shoots his vision of the world through the windows, portholes and



An image from New York shows the freneticism of the city with brightly coloured taxis carrying passengers past billboards, which include an American flag and a traffic sign showing a hand signalling people to stop.



Gale's image of a dog framed in a car window and captured through the car mirror demonstrates his use of the photographic frame. The pedestrian and his shadow on the billboard hold the image together like a third frame around the portrait of the dog.



A woman staring out of a train window in Spain at a landscape and blurred railway tracks demonstrates Gale's comment about trying to make the viewer feel what it's like to be surrounded or engulfed by sensory information, emotion, or chaos.

doorways of cars, trams, boats, buses and planes, looking both inside and out. Gale who was contracted to the prestigious agency Liaison International, travelled the world shooting major assignments for prestigious corporations. He saw a lot of the world from the inside of vehicles as he journeyed around the globe. This went some way to inspiring his passion for the photography of travel resulting in a long-term project titled, *Transported*.

Transported captures the movement and design inherent in the way people and goods travel through the world. Exterior shots highlight the shapes and colours of vehicles – cars transporting their passengers, buses weaving through city streets, cyclists meandering through traffic or planes ascending into the sky. The interior photography, on the other hand, reveals the human experience of transport: the patterns and shapes of light through windows, the quiet focus of passengers, the concentration of drivers and the details of control panels or signage. Together, the interior and exterior images of *Transported* tell stories about connection, technology and the rhythm of everyday journeys, showing how transportation shapes our environments and our lives.

Gale said, "From my earliest experiences with making still photographs, I've been intrigued with the photographic frame. What is included or excluded and why those decisions are made." These considerations are reflected in his earlier work about people travelling on Melbourne trams, which is a precursor to his project *Transported*.

Rob Gale was inspired by photographers like Lee Friedlander, whose image 'God Bless America' is complex and unusually constructed. It focuses on a church and includes the photographer taking a picture through the window frame of a car.

Gale's image of a dog framed in a car window, captured through the car mirror pays homage to Friedlander. The pedestrian shown in the photograph and his shadow on a billboard hold the image together like a third frame around the portrait of the dog.

This dog picture is a quiet moment compared to the freneticism of an image Gale shot in New York. Here, brightly coloured taxis carrying passengers flash past a billboard featuring an American flag as well as a traffic sign with a hand signalling for people to stop.



The image of an ascending plane in Singapore links travel with location. Earth and man's creation demonstrated by a statue of petals planted in the midst of fresh, waving sunflowers.

His image of an ascending plane in Singapore links travel with location, both natural and man-made; a statue of petals planted in the midst of fresh swaying sunflowers.

The image of a woman gazing at a landscape and blurred railway tracks through a train window demonstrates Gale's intention to provoke the viewer into feeling "surrounded by or engulfed in sensory information, emotion, or chaos."

There is a tradition of photographing transport which goes back to the 19th century and French photographer Jacques Henri Lartigue who produced a massive collection of images about his family, friends and transport. He documented automobile races, photographed people in cars,

on cars, bobsleighs, boats and flying planes. One of Lartigue's photographs shows a portrait of a woman sitting in a car with her arms against the windscreen, producing a frame within a frame. This is a style that Gale emulates as he captures people framed in the windows of vehicles.

Rob Gale says, "We are transported by our experience both within vehicles and outside of them. We're changed because there are so many frames. The speed of the vehicle also impacts our experience. These phenomena are relatively recent in terms of human experience. That's what transport means, we're changed by it."

ABOUT TIME

Murray White asks if our photographs have a sense of time, can that strengthen the storyline and give our images more depth?



UNTIL NEXT TIME

The 'rules' of composition are proudly breached multiple times here, because I would contend that the background story is a much bigger player than just aesthetic conventions. The water quietly moving out of the frame in the top left of the image appears rather innocuous, but the stone arrangements speak of a much more boisterous time. Clusters of rock pushed into submissive positions are testament to what has been, while the time-scoured river bed confirms a cycle that will probably outlive humanity.

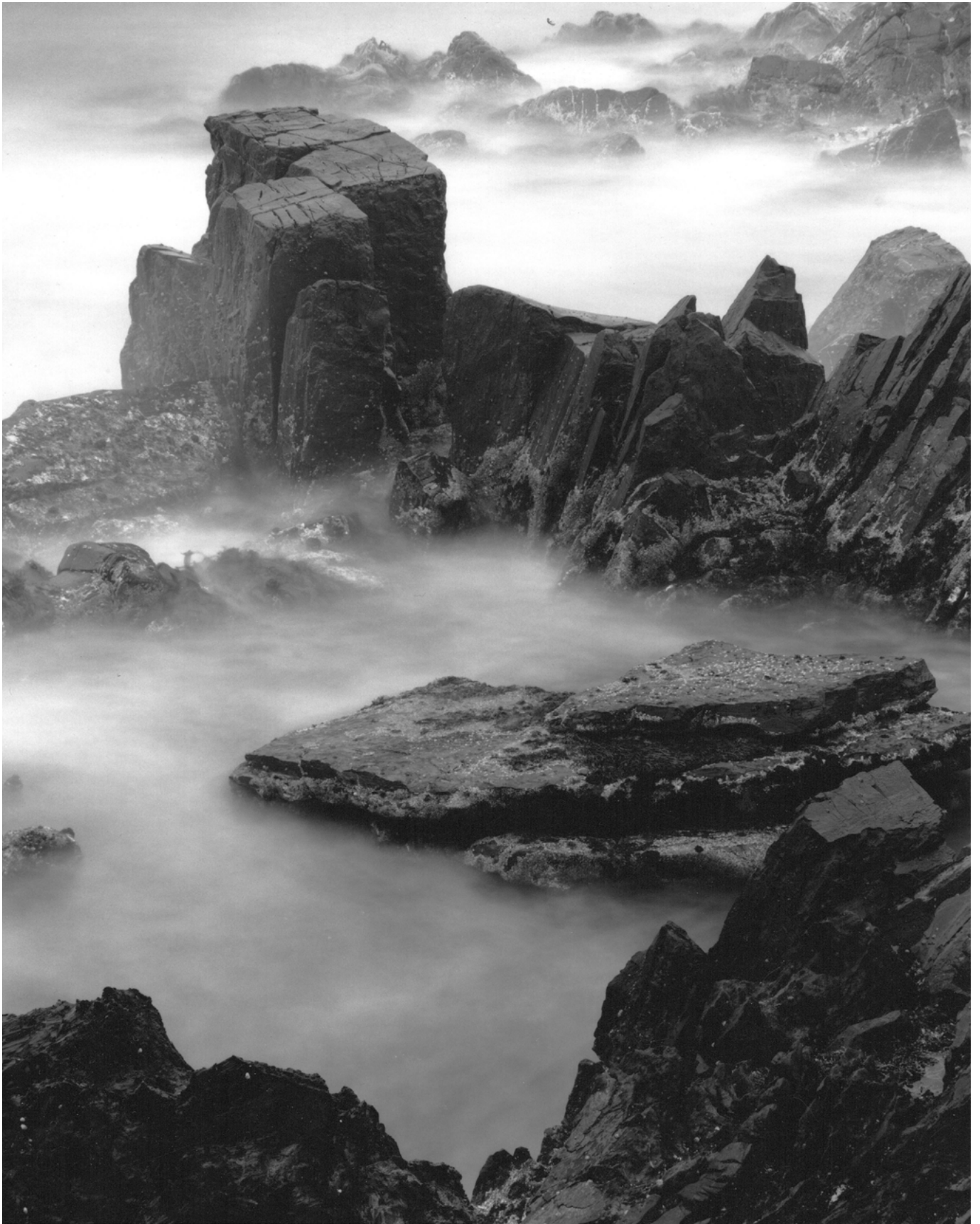
For much of my photographic life I aspired to bring a feeling of timelessness to my landscape captures. It was a desire, I think, that led me to believe the 'unimproved' natural landscape was inherently more pure and worthy of reverence than those cultivated landscapes that speak of human involvement. It is of course a desire that is entirely without aesthetic merit, but I do believe that there is some primal quality to many pristine settings that expresses an ageless beauty.

Timelessness can transport our minds into a world where the forces of Nature appear perfectly balanced, the subjects harmonious. It seems to matter not that great turmoil and apparent destruction may be taking place; an inconsistency overlooked by most perhaps, because from the boiling cauldron of our planet's constitution, transition is expected. But in many instances that sense of transition, that awareness of consequence over time is rarely explored photographically and its impact remains academic at best. Our paltry human clocks unfortunately share little with the almost incomprehensible periods of waiting that define subsequent milestones in the natural world.

However, as photographers we are well placed to capture a piece of this progression – to seize an actual recording of time if you will. By utilising the camera's unique ability to separate a split second from history, we can choose to either suggest timelessness as a concept or indeed to focus on change over time as a universal inevitability. In either case it is the appreciation of time as a vector for visual understanding that is photographically relevant. With the benefit of a more directed

PILLARS IN THE MIST

That sense of erosion and imminent transformation is more likely appreciated in structures when the grinding forces are rendered with clarity and purpose, and are therefore obvious to the viewer. In this case, the seawater is so blurred it has now become a more ambiguous entity. Its erosive power has been structurally softened to a point where time may be seen to have slowed to barely an intermittent tick. Ironically, images such as this one suggest timelessness not through permanency of the moment, but through the visual changes brought about by the use of a time exposure itself.





CONFINEMENT

The idea that a camera may arrest one moment in time is perhaps most obvious when there is a comparison to be made. The water flowing in and out of the top half of this image is timeless in the sense that this part of the cycle appears to continue endlessly. The cloud reflection in the still pool beneath freezes reality, but just long enough for us to know that there will almost certainly be a different reality in a day's time, an hour's time, or maybe only a minute's time.



response our viewers may journey beyond the image as a visual formulation alone and enter a realm where that fourth dimension carries additional weight.

I know in my case that the desire for timelessness has now morphed into a broader pictorial search for time itself. I have found there are many occasions when the forces of transition provide an alternative and often equally rewarding narrative for photography. By drawing on these resources beyond just their visual attributes, I can try to express the concept of time as it relates to elements of the composition – for example, the sun juxtaposed with a bleached tree, or new grass shoots appearing on a fire-blackened field. I would contend that the before-after relationship can provide a compelling storyline to our work, in

BEYOND ITS GRASP

The concept of a hand-like structure seemingly reaching out for help plays with reality and the inevitability of time. As soft sand and tidal influences gradually swallow this subject, our eyes are confronted with the present, but our minds may well extrapolate what fate lies ahead. Sure, in a traditional sense the composition is reasonably well balanced and offers a traditional range of tones, but to me these technical and aesthetic considerations play only a secondary role to the overall message of transition.



SAND CASTLES

A sense of timelessness is frequently associated with primitive shapes and atmospheric lethargy. In this case, moving seawater blurred by a long exposure, filters in and around structures of an indeterminable age and origin. Like all photographs, this scene is a snapshot in time, but without recognisable markers to reveal even a hint of connection to those calendars that define human interpretations of time. Uncertainty surrounds the subject's genesis and even identity, preventing us from labelling it by age; an ambiguity of existence perhaps further muddled by the B&W capture.

much the same way as a near-far composition brings inclusion and association in a visual sense.

Once the exclusive domain of diptychs or prints with supplementary written captions, the essence of time passing or anticipation of consequence has not been widely encouraged by traditional landscape photography. The reason for this I guess is largely due to the difficulty in translating a visually obscure entity onto film or digital capture. This is not a criticism of the medium, just a reality to be factored into our image making when we attempt to quantify the passage of time and how it manifests in a world that in practice has never stood still. However, this restriction can also be seen as an opportunity for those willing to at least consider incorporating something of this intangible element into their work.

In the genre of landscape photography those strategies most suitable for a particular subject or location will revolve around which qualities or interactions we wish to emphasise. Timelessness is often implied by elemental simplicity – primitive structures rather than complex shapes, the blur of moving water rather than a frozen wave and mist or haze instead of a defined

cloud bank. There is often an uncertainty of role played by the visual elements and it becomes difficult to judge which process or entity is affecting change to the setting, or indeed difficult to assess whether transition has occurred at all.

The visual consequence of time passing, on the other hand, relies upon certainty of structure and may be better expressed through selective juxtaposition and nuanced composition. Often we feel the passage of time more keenly when there is a clear relationship between a force and its previous impact, or a subject and its implied future. While a photograph can technically only represent the present (at the moment of capture), as storytellers we can still gather visual resources strategically to build an image with as much or as little reference to change as we feel is appropriate.

I believe there is a place for each interpretation of time and just factoring this possibility into our visual deliberations will broaden our understanding and potential interpretation of a scene. We could, for example, wander along a stretch of coastal headland and recognise that ocean-scoured erosion is taking place virtually as we watch. That immediate understanding



I ONCE WALKED THIS WAY

Many images rely on comparison for effect – in this case the visual differences of white vs black, large vs small, leaves vs defoliation. But the comparisons can go deeper than this. In identifying similarity we become even more aware of the differences; the smoothness and roughness, the supple and rigid and the obvious life vs death, where an anticipated and now quantifiable time frame defines a particular duration. In my opinion the visual message is magnified when the suggestion of time is stamped into the composition's DNA.



could prompt us to capture the transition itself; the definitive wave action, the sculptural sandstone, or the interaction of elements that effectively build this momentary snapshot of time.

Yet from a broader perspective this same coastline could convey a sense of enduring resilience if our capture is arranged to suggest that the rock is ageless, the swirling waters primal and the interaction perpetual. It is perhaps puzzling at first to consider that the same landscape (or seascape) can simultaneously occupy a time frame of multiple dimensions. However, in my experience a willingness to look beyond a visual structure for the nuanced interpretive possibilities will indeed

FLAT OUT

Even simple images can illustrate the dimension of time by virtue of those expressive elements we choose to include (or exclude). To me, this capture speaks a great deal about what preceded this moment in time – perhaps more so than that uncertainty which may still lay ahead. By excluding the river bed and those trees and vertical structures above the background grasses in this tight crop, I have attempted to emphasise the now invisible flow of horizontal floodwaters and a tumultuous period of time that has now passed.



THE PRESSURE TO CONFORM

The suggestion that unrestrained movement in photography creates a more timeless feel may be illustrated by this image. Those areas of grassland not subject to the wind hold a static presence, more aligned with a sense of immediacy, perhaps even one of momentary defiance. Meanwhile, those grasses blurred by the coastal breeze act in a more perennial manner, seemingly resigned to a fate of perpetual flow – an act not unlike the wave action defining the background.

provide a more ambiguous definition of time and can add considerable depth to our captures.

By applying a thoughtful focus to our deliberations we can emphasise a complexity in our photography, where the basic composition only begins the conversation. We can expand on a visual only response with a slant that can introduce time as the defining feature. We can depict what has happened, what is happening or even what may be about to happen. In this respect landscape photography is not unlike sport photography – it conveys the story of action as part of a continuum, although the former is typically expressed over a much longer period.

A swifter time frame can still be suggested in landscape photography, however. A sunrise or sunset implies a daily continuum in the same way as seasonal hallmarks conjure visions of their impending transition. More subtle expressions of time such as lengthy shadows or depictions of age-weary trees can become qualifying elements in themselves. Photographers looking for new ways to define that fourth dimension can use these visually dramatic features for reasons other than just aesthetic exclamation marks.

Of course the appreciation of time as a concept is not new to landscape photography, but it is often applied to our workflow in an incidental way. While not always fully conscious of our motives, we camera creatives routinely focus on ancient forests, on seasonal changes, on the impact of tides or the morning light. These are deliberate decisions not made because of the photogenic nature of time, but because of its intimate hold on the subject.

The passage of days or months or years is not foreign to our awareness but typically only flows through to our photography because that message has become an integral part of our visual package.

For many photographers the pictorial here and now speaks a louder and more coherent language than any dialect from an indeterminable time hiding within a particular landscape. This outlook is entirely valid in a craft where visual expression is our prime method of communication. But perhaps it is worth considering just how much more complete our message could be if some additional sense of time did permeate our vision. Our story could become more specific, more understandable, perhaps even more timeless.

WHAT DOES A PHOTOGRAPH SOUND LIKE?

Mike Langford reveals the secret of his ancient talents:

Use your eyes as ears and listen to what you see!

Pete Eastway Quartet Stranger than Fiction



MRL

Pete Eastway Quartet

Pete Eastway: Synthesizer, electronics

Tony Hewitt: Trumpet, flugelhorn

David Oliver: Bass

Jeff Moorfoot: Drums

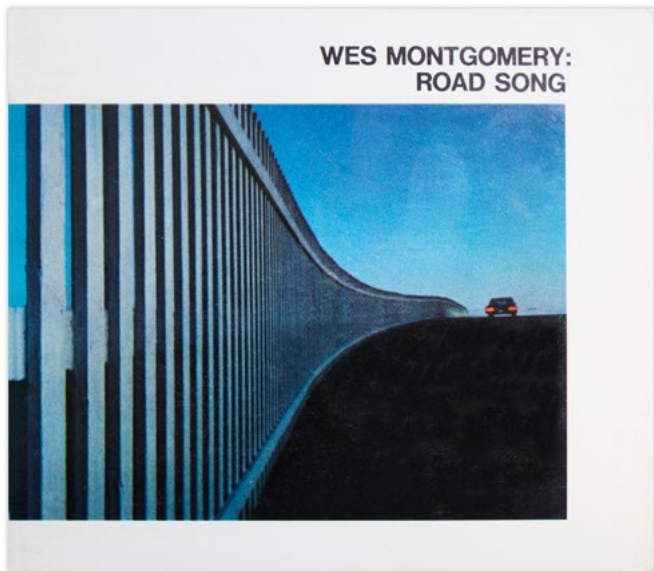
It all started for me in my late teens when I had a friend who was the music critic for the local newspaper. He would regularly invite me around to his house to listen to the latest international pressings that he had been sent to review. I would spend hours sitting on the floor in his lounge, surrounded by a pair of futuristic looking electrostatic speakers, listening to an extensive array of music. A lot of it was jazz, some

of which I loved even though I obviously didn't have an ear for it. However, regardless of the music, there were also the album covers that offered another sensory perception, not just in the tactile nature of holding them, but in their viewing. I struggled to comprehend the relationship of what was on some of the covers to what I was listening to, but other covers excited my imagination even more than the music itself.

At this point, I wasn't a photographer, but through the exposure to these album covers I was quickly becoming visually aware and very interested in many of the ideas they presented.

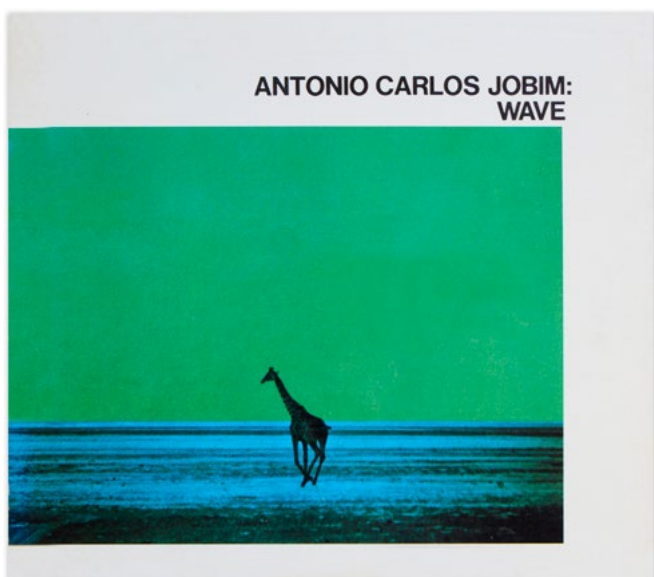
Pete Turner

The most interesting and exciting covers at that time were on the jazz labels of Impulse!, Verve and CTI, with the latter featuring the standout colour work of photographer Pete Turner, whose photographs appeared on over seventy covers. By mirroring the improvisational and emotive nature of jazz, Turner bridged sound and vision.



His Surrealist predilection and unparalleled ability to translate the essence of music into striking visual compositions, redefined the role of the album cover in the art world and reshaped how music could be experienced.

His covers invited you to immerse yourself into a fusion of sound and sight where the visuals created narratives – some of which I related to and others that I didn't understand at all.

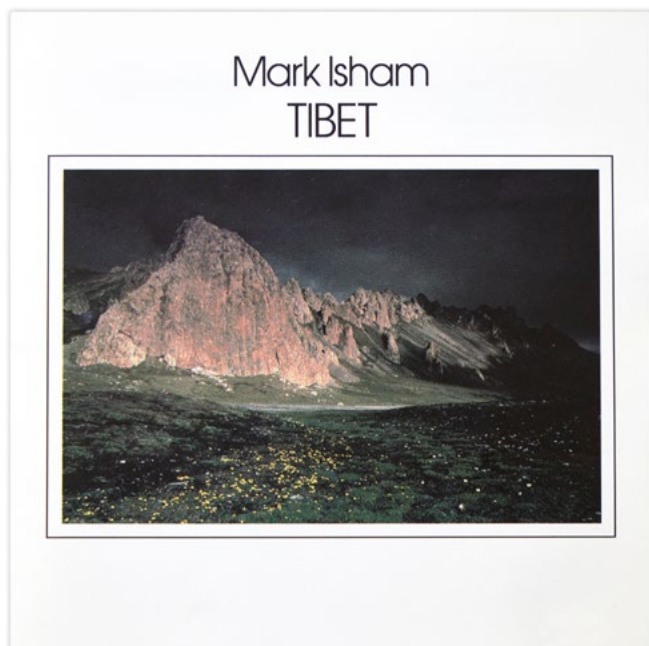


A good example of this is Turner's surreal image of a giraffe running across a blue desert with a green sky on the Antonio Carlos Jobim album 'Wave', which creates an unexpected but fitting metaphor for the music's undulating, fluid rhythms,

as opposed to an expected photograph of something more literal. With Pete Turner, each album cover became a statement, a collaboration between artist and musician and the record cover became a new art form that I really related to.

Windham Hill

Another visual stimulus from the music world that appealed to me in the 1970s, was the Windham Hill label, featuring a fresh minimal design created by Anne Robinson, who produced covers that were both minimal and photographic. Even though I really liked the design and photographs on this label, the music wasn't to my taste and as a result, the only record I have kept from this label is by jazz trumpeter/composer Mark Isham and the L.P. 'Tibet'; featuring a cover photograph by Galen Rowell who became one of my favourite adventure photographers of that time.



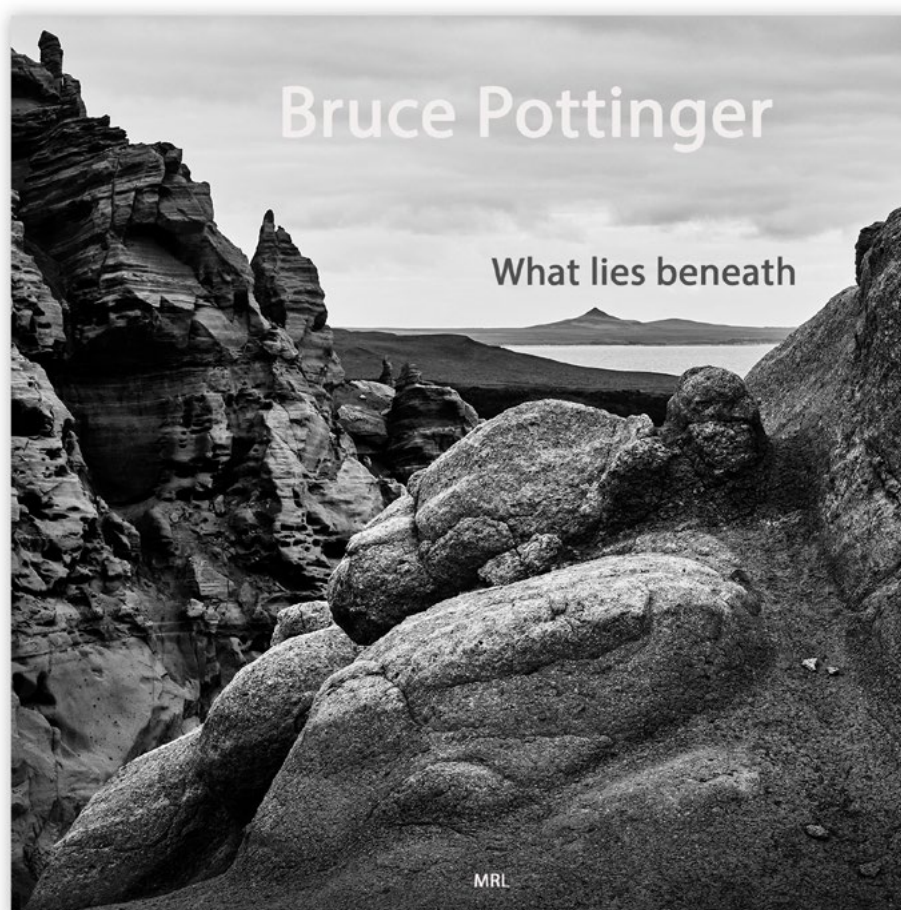
This label also featured the photographs of Japanese photographer Shinzo Maeda and as a result of this exposure, I purchased several of his books.

Undoubtedly, the biggest musical influence in my photographic life has been the German label ECM (Edition of Contemporary Music), which was created in 1969 by Manfred Eicher. The label's motto, 'The most beautiful sound next to silence', reflects the vast range of musical styles it covers, with an emphasis on multi-genre and transcultural projects, from free jazz to notated classical music. Some say that ECM is almost a musical genre with blurred boundaries that in their own way create new and exciting genres.

The cover work created initially by Barbara Wojirsch and then later by Dieter Rehm, reflects the eclectic nature of the music, blending painting, drawing, calligraphy and photography with graphic art to create expressive and thought-provoking covers that have become artworks in their own right; resulting in two books of the work.

Music Store Research

While a photography student in the early 80s, I regularly visited the local record store to see what second-hand ECM albums they had in stock. There was always a steady stream passing through the store, as music lovers purchased albums they



Bruce Pottinger – Solo Piano

weren't familiar with, then flicked them on if it wasn't to their taste. Fortunately for me, this was mainly in the ECM series as they continually pushed musical boundaries and ventured into unknown territories. My taste was in the covers first and the music afterwards, but at around \$7 per record and a resale price of \$5, it was a very cheap way of listening to new music, while at the same time being able to study the work of some great photographers featured on the covers.

Two of my early favourites from the '80s are Rainer Brüninghaus's 'Freigeweht', with the cover by Christian Vogt, and Art Lands 'We Begin' with the cover by Joel Meyerowitz, (with Meyerowitz being a regular photographer for their earlier covers).

This exposure also led me to purchase two Meyerowitz photographic books, the first being 'St Louis and the Arch' and later 'Cape Light'.



Jackie Ranken

Between light and space



MRL

Jackie Ranken – Cello



In more recent years, with the addition of musicians from eastern Europe and North Africa into the ECM community, the covers started to reflect different ideas and ethnicity in their photographs, as with this cover for the Tunisian oud player Anouar Brahem album 'Le pas du chat noir', with the cover photograph by the Hungarian photographer Andre Kertesz. I love both this cover as well as the music and now every time I hear this music, I see this cover in my mind.

My Own Covers

Early in the 21st Century, with the development of digital technology and the release of ECM titles as compact discs, I started to copy my favourite music onto blank CDs so I could have a copy for the car and keep the original safe at home for the stereo.

As these copies didn't have covers, I started to create my own in the style of the ECM artwork, but instead, using my own photographs. I also shared these with friends so they could see my photos and listen to some wonderfully exotic and creative alternative music.

This new and creative way of showing my photographic work to friends extended my visibility beyond just books and prints. It was something I could do myself at home using a desktop printer and Photoshop. I would start by creating a template that was the same dimensions of a CD case, then choose what I felt to be an appropriate image that resonated with the music. Finally, I'd add a title and a name.

I now do this with my playlists on Spotify, my computer music play list and even my iPhone. There is even an old Flickr site dedicated to posting photos in the style of ECM cover photographs [www.flickr.com › groups › ecmrecordcoverphotographsECM](http://www.flickr.com/groups/ecmrecordcoverphotographsECM).

Accompanying this article are some of examples of my own covers in the style of ECM, but with fictitious titles and names attached.

What covers could you create?

IMAGES OF ANGKOR

Nick Melidonis has travelled to Cambodia for nearly two decades

– and looking at his portfolio, we know his favourite location!

At the time of writing, I had just returned from another trip photographing the magic kingdom of Angkor. My first trip to the archaeological park in Siem Reap was back in 2007. I was so taken with the vast complex of temples and monuments that rival the best of Greece, Rome and Egypt. Add in the soft, gentle people of Cambodia and it's no surprise that I have been going back to Siem Reap every year since that first trip, for the last 19 years!

Siem Reap As A Destination

The Khmer civilisation is, in my opinion, one of the most underrated in the world. Angkor Wat alone is the world's largest religious complex. Like an ancient parchment erased and overwritten repeatedly, the capitals of the Khmer Empire were built here one after another, one on top of another almost continuously for over seven centuries.

The inhabitants were some of the first peoples in South East Asia and their prehistory in caves goes back 6000 years. A succession of powerful kings started the Angkor Empire with an 8th Century king called Jayarvarman II. The greatest king

was Jayarvarman VII who defeated the Chams (Vietnamese) to reclaim Angkor and commenced the prolific temple building we see today. These temples of brick and sandstone survive whereas monuments of wood and other perishable materials have disappeared in other civilizations. If you visit Siem Reap, don't miss their amazing museum that sets out the history of Cambodia with incredible artefacts and audio visuals that explain the monumental works of their God Kings.

Amongst the many temples and throughout the walled city of Angkor Thom, you will find the Wats and Pagodas filled with monks dressed in bright orange. If you arrive very early in the morning, you can photograph the young monks returning with rice and offerings to start the day and conducting prayers under candlelight beneath massive statues of Buddhas.

Cambodia's religious landscape is anchored in a deep tradition of Buddhism, but it also includes Islam, Christianity, animism and other spiritual practices. For most Cambodians, religion is not merely a private belief, it is part of everyday life, community ritual and national identity.

A tip is to arrive at the Wat you want to photograph the day before, seek out the head monk and offer a gift to the Wat; a suggestion is a bag of rice. That way, you may have the permission of the head monk to visit the Wat and monks are then relaxed when you arrive and photograph them.

Many poor families who can't afford to raise and feed their children often leave them to be raised and educated by the monks. Khmer Buddhism encourages parents to involve their sons in the life of a Buddhist Pagoda. In many Buddhist traditions, having a son who is a monk is held to bring good karma to the child, the parents and other family members. For children from remote areas, attending a Wat can be a way to get an education.

Siem Reap over the years has grown exponentially due to tourism. The gateway to the vast Archaeological Park is the new one billion dollar, Chinese-built, state of the art airport (Siem Reap Angkor International Airport (SAI), 45 km from town and about an hour's drive. The primary reason for building a new airport was a crucial act of conservation. The old Siem Reap Airport (REP) was located just a few kilometres from Angkor Wat. For years, experts worried that the vibrations from



After the French explorers discovered the ruins of the Angkor temples in the jungles, many have been left as they were found with the classic 'Strangler Fig' roots intertwining with the temple walls.



An iconic photo of Angkor Wat at dawn. Most photographers strive to get this image at dawn from the left-hand pond inside the walls of Angkor Wat. Recently the pond has been under reconstruction, but the right-hand pond is also good as a sunset shot since the temple faces west.

planes taking off and landing, along with air pollution, were causing incremental damage to the fragile foundations and delicate carvings of the ancient temples. By moving the airport approximately 45 kilometres away, the risk to Cambodia's priceless national treasure has been significantly reduced, ensuring its preservation for generations to come.

The large, very comfortable 3-to-5 star hotels are growing in number, are well priced and many are found near the colourful markets and old French Quarter. At the last count, there were nearly 700 hotels to choose from.

Planning And Costs

Planning a trip to get some iconic images of the people and temples of Angkor can be a challenge, but not difficult and I will offer some tips for a first-time visitor to Siem Reap.

Although the Cambodian Riel is the local currency, I suggest you use \$US (around 4100 Riel to the US\$). Australians need an e-Visa and a Cambodia e-Arrival form.

It is important to distinguish between the e-Visa and the Cambodia e-Arrival system. In 2026, all travellers are required to complete the e-Arrival form (replacing the old paper immigration cards) within 7 days before arrival (do this online). Make sure you get your e-Visa online from the Official Website: <https://www.evisa.gov.kh> for US\$36. Do not get scammed by the many fake e-Visa websites.

Firstly, some facts and costs. The Angkor Archaeological Park is massive – 400 square kilometres to be exact. Figuring out what temples to visit, how to get there and how to avoid the crowds and the heat can be daunting.

You will need a Temple Pass obtained at the entrance to the park. One day is US\$37; 3 days US\$62 and 7 days US\$72. The 3-day pass can be used over 7 days and the 7-day pass over one

month. The pass is checked and stamped whenever you enter the park.

The park is only a short distance from town and you will need transport. A Tuk Tuk (enclosed motorcycle) is the cheapest at around US\$20 a day, but it is open and it can get very warm in the middle of the day. A better option is an English-speaking driver and car for around US\$45 -60 per day (8 am to 5 pm). These can be arranged at your hotel or found online.

A registered guide is highly recommended because they can describe the history behind what you are seeing and photographing and tailor your visit to your needs. Tell the person who is arranging your car or guide that you are a photographer,



Most of the temples have delicately carved images of the 'Apsara' or celestial maidens. A popular evening in Siem Reap is dinner and a modern Apsara dance show with the dancers performing intricate and slow hand movements.



I have written several articles in Better Photography on infrared images and Cambodia is perfect for these. The white foliage against the stonework makes for good separation. This is the stunning little 'Water Palace,' Neak Pean.

as some guides can offer many suggestions on where to get the highly prized photos of the large strangler figs that can envelope temple walls and where the less crowded temples are. The famous large smiling faces on temples and city gates are also a must and a good guide can find these for you.

A guide can cost between \$US 40-50 per day. An option is to ask for a driver who can double as a guide and many guides often have their own cars.

Pick a hotel close to the Central Markets or Old French Quarter and you are then within walking distance of the best restaurants. The famous Pub Street is a must at night and is lit up like a mini-Las Vegas. Here you will find every imaginable type of food, some restaurants have cooking classes and some have the famous Apsara dancers.

When you visit the temples, you will find tiny sculpted women everywhere called Apsaras. Apsaras are celestial nymphs from Hindu and Buddhist mythology, renowned as divine dancers in Indra's heaven. In Khmer culture, these figures are embodied by Apsara dancers, who perform a sacred, slow-motion classical dance characterised by intricate hand gestures and elaborate golden costumes. In Pub Street you can find restaurants with small stages that offer a meal and an Apsara Dance show.

What To See

You can spend months looking at the near and far temples scattered around Siem Reap. I think the two most popular visits are the Small and Grand Circuit, depending on time.

The Small Circuit is a concise tour of the most majestic temples, including the 'Big Three': Angkor Wat, the enigmatic

stone faces of Bayon and the jungle-strewn temple of Ta Prohm. When Lara Croft and Tomb Raider pushed Hollywood images of Ta Prohm temple into cinemas around the world in 2001, they consolidated the case for Cambodia as a tourist destination. Millions now flock to Ta Prohm each year, many of whom will have their picture taken under 'that tree' that Angelina Jolie stood upon during one of the movie's action scenes.

As a first-timer, I suggest you plan on the Small Circuit first as it is very doable in a couple of days. The most popular photo of Angkor Wat is normally taken from the left-hand pond at sunrise with a silhouette of Angkor Wat against a brightly coloured dawn. The pond has been under reconstruction for the last few years and now most take the late afternoon shot around sunset as Angkor Wat faces west from the right-hand pond.

I won't elaborate on the many things to see at Angkor Wat but this UNESCO World Heritage site will astound you. The bas-reliefs on the long walls are a wonder in themselves.

For something different, see Angkor Wat from the air with the nearby tethered hot air balloon. This only flies above Angkor when the wind is right, but provides a great shooting platform.

Several centuries before Leonardo DaVinci created the enigmatic smile of his Mona Lisa, hundreds of serene faces displaying equally enigmatic smiles were carved into the famous temple now known as Bayon. Bayon is in the heart of the ancient city of Angkor Thom. The smiling faces are repeated in numerous temples and above the main gates of the ancient city.

The Grand Circuit is a circular loop that passes many of the lesser-known Angkor temples near Siem Reap. It's great for getting off the beaten track. Less visited, but no less remarkable,



Another infrared photograph of the South Gate in the ancient walled city of Angkor Thom. The enigmatic smiling faces facing North, South, East, and West are a common theme in the structures here.

the Grand Circuit temples are more decayed, wilder and more lost-world. They include intriguing pyramid structures, Greek-like libraries and ruins consumed by the forest.

It's a great circuit to do if you are spending at least five or more days in Siem Reap and like to get a bit off the beaten track. Suggestions on this circuit are the temples of Pre Rup, East Mebon, Ta Som, North Baray (a Baray is a large man-made lake). Neak Pean is a must and known as the 'Water Temple'. You cross a wooden walkway over a large lily-strewn lake to get to it and it is in the middle of a smaller lake.

Preah Kahn is also a must; a giant intricate temple. A 100-metre-long causeway, flanked by giants holding a Naga (snake), crosses a moat to enter the complex made up of four enclosures. Each enclosure converges on the Main Sanctuary, a perfect square in the centre. Gigantic tree roots surround the eastern wall. Other wonders include the massive gates to the city of Angkor Thom with their smiling faces peering down.

The Mighty Tonle Sap Lake

Apart from the temples around Angkor Wat, visiting a Tonle Sap floating village has become one of the most popular tourist and photographic attractions in Cambodia. Hire a boat from Chong Neas or one of the other floating village sites and you get to see entire communities, houses, schools, markets, domestic animals; in fact, everything literally anchored in the middle of the water. Photographing and shooting video of the busy and often chaotic life in this floating environment is a real treat.

The Tonle Sap is huge! It's the largest lake in Southeast Asia and one of Cambodia's most important landmarks. It's home to around 1.2 million people who make their living by fishing in and around the lake. During the peak dry season, the lake covers an area of 2500 square kilometres and has a length of 160 km.



An entrance overrun with strangler figs in the outlying stepped pyramid near Koh Ker.



A monk resting at one of the entrances in Angkor Wat. People here are relaxed about having their photos taken if approached in a respectful way.

During this time the Tonle Sap River, which connects the lake with the larger Mekong River, flows south and water drains from the lake into the lower Mekong River and towards the ocean. During peak wet season, the lake swells to an area around 16,000 square kilometres and grows to be 250 km long. All this growth is due to the monsoon rains every summer.

When To Photograph

During my visits, I have enjoyed photographing the temples in all seasons. Most tourists flock during December-January in the dry months. The temples can be overcrowded and I found the sunny, blue skies didn't give me the sort of photographs I was seeking.

Some of my best images were taken around June/July at the end of the wet season when the temple sites are less crowded and the surrounding tropical landscape is at its full, fertile green glory. Bring an umbrella, but the rainfall usually comes in brief showers with lots of good light to ensure you'll be able to take lots of photos of the Angkorian temples.

The other advantage is that the stonework of the temples is wet and glistening with good colour and contrast and occasionally, the puddles that form around the temples make a great foreground with a wide-angle lens. I have taken photos of the famous Bayon in these conditions, as well as the ponds that form in Angkor Wat and can make them look like a lake with magic reflections.



The huge Tonle Sap Lake becomes an inland sea during the Wet and is the source of fish for the whole country. Excellent photos can be had with a boat ride early morning amongst the floating villages.



An interesting perspective of Angkor Wat can be had by taking a ride in the tethered balloon just outside the monument. Best times are early morning or late evening.

Photo Gear

I try to keep my gear simple which means I have a better chance of carrying it so I can use it. My cameras are a Sony Alpha 1 and a Sony A7 R II converted to infrared. I carry three lenses; mostly a 14-24mm Sigma Art Series wide-angle, a 24-105mm mid-range Sony and a 70-200 mm Sony telephoto with macro capabilities. I very occasionally use a polariser in Cambodia, but no other filters.

One genre I have enjoyed in Cambodia is infrared photography which produces an amazing, 'out of this world' look to black and white photographs with contrasty skies and almost white foliage. Cambodia is perfect for infrared.

The temples and water areas (Barays in Cambodia) really work well with I/R as stonework is usually surrounded by jungle, foliage and water lilies in the pond areas. As the temple stonework will appear dark with black and white photography, the almost white shades it produces with foliage provides excellent separation. Take a normal black and white image next to an I/R image and see the difference.

AN OFFER TOO GOOD TO REFUSE

If you want to see and photograph the best of Vietnam and Cambodia, Grand Master Tony Hewitt and myself are offering a small group boutique tour in July 2027 called 'Pearls of the Orient'. We will take you to photograph both countries in comfort with lots of tuition, workshops and access to the pick of the photographic icons. And sprinkled with lots of anecdotes and bad jokes. For expressions of interest, please email me at nickphoto@iinet.net.au or Tony Hewitt tony@tonyhewitt.com



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