

Melbourne Street Photography



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Composing in Panoramic Format

Sunday, March 30, 2014

When people ask me why I like shooting in panoramic format. My response has two parts

- I love the single minded nature of panoramic format. It forces you to make choices about what is critical to your image.
- Everything looks cool in panoramic format... The interesting proportions of the format can make up for considerable weakness in your composition technique. Movies look great in 16:9 format – it is pleasing to the eye. Panoramic format is the same. Point it, get the rangefinder spot lined up, and shoot. It will probably come out looking awesome!

Whilst it is easy to get aesthetically pleasing shots straight away, it is more challenging to master at a high level. The field of vision is very narrow, top to bottom, in landscape format. Composing for the format needs conscious effort – and a clean break from standard frame proportions.

Some standard compositions that I think work :



A story that starts at one end. Put your main subject at one end and then use the panoramic format to show the rest of the story. In this case, the guitar player who is also in the band.



Lead into or away from the subject. Get up close and pop your subject at one end. Use the rest of the frame to draw the eye into or out from. Always be prepared to crop your subject... the frame is simply not high enough to do anything else. Watch movies in widescreen and see how they compose things...



Highlight the subject by plonking them in the middle. Leading lines are always your friend in pano format...



You can show breadth of a scene in a unique way in pano format. Generous in layout. The width with tight top and bottom suggests generosity and helps the viewer enter the scene without being distracted by vertical distractions. We all read left to right, after all, not up and down.



Using the pano format to focus on a particular story or part of the scene is strong too



Panoramic format is pretty good at capturing a suggestion of lateral movement – the wide frame helps the viewer imagine where the subject is heading.



You gotta crop. Crop. Try something different. The pano format welcomes something a bit different. The format requires you to sacrifice subject matter to create a pleasing image. No matter what you do, you are never going to fit everything into the vertical space available.



Be adventurous with your composition. The photo above is kinda all over the shop, but it works for me because of the movement of the subject towards the door, and the skewiff

perspective suggests the motion of the train as it trundles along.

MSP, I want to give Panoramas a try! How can I get into it?

For those on a budget level of “tight arse” : Grab your camera and set up your editor with a crop frame that is proportioned to panoramic dimensions. The down side is that you are doing the composing in post, rather than through the viewfinder.

For those who want some versatility : There are a couple of medium format cameras that either have a kit to insert 35mm film into the camera to achieve a panoramic effect, and frame lines that pop up in the viewfinder to aid composition.



For those who feel they can make a small commitment : Why not try a toy camera from the Lomo crew? The Sprocket Rocket is a 35mm camera that is a bit on the plastique dodgy side, but for about a hundred bucks you can either get panorama fever out of your system, or confirm your format love.

You can check them out here.



Another cheap option is the Holga Pan. It shoots medium format film in pano format, but the lens is not particularly wide angle.

For those who have too much moolah burning a hole in their pocket : The Hasselblad XPan 35mm system beckons.

If you decide to tread the path, don't get lazy. Panoramic cameras can breed lazy due to the naturally pleasing aesthetics once you get past the beginner stage for the format. It is a difficult, yet rewarding format to master...

Wide Angle Photography – Thoughts from a Heretic

Saturday, April 19, 2014

135mm (my preferred focal length) gets you nice a close without getting people's faces. Wide angle photography offers no such buffer zone. Most streety stylin' photographers I know seem to preach a wide angle faith bordering on fanatical – so what have I been missing?

In order to explore wide angle a little more, I acquired a compact... A Ricoh GR digital with a 28mm F2.8 lens. I felt like chucking the camera straight back onto Ebay when I downloaded my first few sets of shots. Everything was too small. People, buildings, objects – all just little random bits and pieces. I needed to stop and reset.

I kept “seeing” and composing shots imagining a longer focal length lens was on the camera. And they kept coming out needing significant cropping to get them even close to being OK.

Back to the internet for some advice, I got two decent guardrails...

1. Get Close

or

2. Move further away

The first thing was to Get Closer. My natural inclination was to continue to keep a fair distance between the camera and the subject, ending up with “inbetween” nothing shots.

When you move in close with a wide angle, you get much more of the background story into frame, whereas with a long focal length, the background tends to “crop”. Hmmm, I need another analogy here... With the same proportional size of your subject, a wide angle lens has a broader “window” behind the subject that will be included in the shot. The longer the focal length, the less of the background will be in shot.

Moving Further Away gets more of a broad scene into shot. Tell a story with more parts.

So, some results I am happier with :





I am still not convinced this is the best outcome – A few more trips out with the camera should help develop my ability to compose with the wide lens. Hopefully.

One thing I have already improved on is determining the focus point. You can see in a couple of the shots above I was still working out how to set the focus point. One of the very few minor issues with the Ricoh GR is the lack of touch screen focus. I love the function on a lot of cheaper point and shoots where you just tap the LCD screen to tell the camera where to focus, and potentially meter from. The Ricoh needs direction from a joystick button – but works very quickly once you get the hang of it.

I have stuck at it for while now, and seem to be developing a better eye for wide angle composition. At a recent exhibition, one of my most popular images was “Intersection”, shot in New York on the Ricoh GR Digital and converted to Black and White in Lightroom. It sold in the first hour of the show!



Tips for Selecting Exhibition Images

Saturday, April 19, 2014

I recently participated in a Photography Exhibition.

I was very surprised by the number of prints that sold. I can only offer the following hypotheses:

Themes and consistency

For the first time, my images were visually quite consistent. Usually I just pick out a bunch of images I like, and slap them up, willy nilly on the gallery wall as quickly as possible so that I can get back to chugging a beer and talking photography shit to mates.

For this exhibition, I had enough images from two separate trips to New York that I wanted to get printed to fill my allotted space at the gallery. I had a theme by default. Sweet.

For all I know, my eye must be getting better. I kept picking up on the differences between the images, which naturally fell into four discrete sets.

1. Consistent New York Street Scenes





These images all build a story around my experience of New York. They are all shot on film, using the Hasselblad H1, mostly with the 150mm HC f3.2 lens. There is a consistency between the images which is appealing.

2. Consistent New York Street Scenes – but shot on digital



These images are street images consistent with the first set, but they were shot with on a Ricoh GR Digital point and shoot camera. I am not sure if it is my super arty brain messing with me, but these just strike me as capturing New York street scenes in a very different way due to the wide angle perspective the little Ricoh delivers. The files also look different when printed direct from digital files out of the camera vs scanning the medium format film from the H1. Or again, maybe I am overdosing on the OCD? They look awesome as a set – and all of them sold pretty quickly.

3. Space and Military



Just don't quite work with the other images, do they? I actually hung them in a separate location in the gallery, and they sold as a pair to a single buyer. They were shot on the Hasselblad H1 again, using film, but this time using the 80mm HC f2.8 lens. There is a fair degree of consistency from pure aesthetics, but the capsule and jet fighter just don't quite roll with the street scenes.

The images from the museums and galleries work for me, and seem OK with the street

scenes, but these two just don't fit into the set without being shoved in.

4. Why Did I Even Try?



Don't get me wrong. I love this image. There is a real "power walk" trope going on here to rival Armageddon. Go on, check it out, you know you want to :

Side bar – power walk images are a strong theme for street photography.

Anyway, this image is a complete outlier. It was so different that I almost chucked it out at the gallery. It ended up in an unloved, and poorly lit area of the gallery. Like a seat filler at the Academy Awards – it was just there to fill up a space. I kinda wish I had listened to the little voice in my head – it is a great image which deserved more attention but it was completely wrong in this situation.

Lessons Learned

- Stick with a camera, focal length, film type, and even the basic image proportions for an exhibition set.
- The consistency between the set of images increases the individual appeal of each one.
- Don't mix digital and film shots

Maybe the legendary fussiness and attention to detail of photographers like Ansel Adams and Henri Cartier-Bresson was not just them being dickheads after all. I often looked askance at other exhibition participants, thinking, "just stick the damn photo on the wall". Actually, I have said it out loud a couple of times too! Hmmm, maybe I need to rethink this 'tude!

Starting Out – Street Photography 101

Monday, April 21, 2014

Preparing to give it a try...

- Why give it a try?
- What camera do you need?
- What I am assuming you know.
- Where you can find out more.

1. Why Give it a Try?

What's your motivation? Street Photography is a worth challenge for those who are already familiar with their camera, and others looking for a spark to inspire them to explore.

I sort of first fell into street photography whilst living overseas. Living in a beautiful foreign city, it was "suggested" to me that I should buy a camera and take some photos to remember my time there. Once a shiny new DSLR turned up from Amazon, I started going out and shooting landmarks. That got fairly predictable, fairly quickly.

It didn't take long to find myself wandering away from the touristy, well known, spots in town. Other subjects started to catch my attention. When I stopped looking at the postcard scenes, my understanding of the city and the people improved. And it was infinitely more interesting.

Street Photography gives you a chance to get to know a place in a meandering, deeper kind of way than staying on the "Hop On Hop Off" bus.

Photographing the city where you live can reveal new places, spaces, and hidey holes. I am constantly learning new things about Melbourne, every time I catch the train into town. There are an infinite number of opportunities – unlike photographing family dos, friends, and tourist locations.

If you are becoming passionate about your interest, finding new inspiration on a weekly basis becomes a challenge unless you are professional. Jumping off a train at a random station each Saturday morning will offer new opportunities to test your developing skills and eye for composition.

Landscape photography offers similar opportunities, but it is just not a passion for me.

If you like exploring on foot, Street Photography can amplify your experience, and enable you to make "trophies" of your experience through your camera lens.

2. What Camera Do You Need?

The camera that you have. Seriously.

A \$100 digital point and shoot is enough to get you started. The photographer makes a bigger difference than the camera. Better gear can make things easier though.

Any point and shoot can be a good place to start. Go online and check them out. Amazon

is a great place to start for user reviews that is easy to access.

Just a couple one real key point – Optical zoom is the only zoom that matters. Digital zoom is virtually in camera cropping of images – meh, I can't be bothered explaining. If you are comparing zoom, optical is the only kind to worry about.

Beg or borrow a camera if you have to. If you “get into it” you will find your taste in cameras will become more and more discerning. The camera you buy in Week Zero is not likely to be the one you will love by Week Nine!

If you must buy a camera, buy the best compact Nikon, Canon, Panasonic, or Fuji for at least \$400. That is a pretty safe guide... Get a more compact camera – at least if this new interest doesn't stick, you will not be left with a camera that you can't be bothered dragging along when you go out. It should fit in a large pocket or in your bag easily. A great compact camera will always be useful...

Here are a few examples. I have not used these examples, so do your own research.

Canon Powershot

Nikon Coolpix

The worst thing you can do is go and buy a DSLR if you do not know much about cameras. You will come home with a fancy looking kit that you will hate in three or four months' time. The kit lenses are generally rubbish lenses. They sound great – wow zoom blah bah, megapixels blah blah, and so on. Lenses are more important than your camera body. This may seem a bit strange, but yes, this is the case.

DSLRs with flip around LCDs just look dorky. Only buy a Canon or Nikon, no matter what the knowledgeable guy at the counter says. There are a few other brands that have OK cameras, but you are less likely to go wrong with these guys. Buy a Nikon. Canon make more photocopiers than cameras...

If you buy a DSLR then get a decent lens. Again, I am not going to explain, but please buy a fixed focal length lens. One without a zoom. Either a 35mm or 50mm lens.

Like this or this.

If you have enough money not to worry, buy a top end compact. They have great single length focal lenses, and were designed with street cred in mind!

Fuji X100s and Ricoh GR.

It will take a little time to learn to love these cameras if you are new to hard core photography. No zoom, and they don't look as impressive to your Mum as a shiny new DSLR.

3. What I Am Assuming You Already Know.

That you have read your camera manual. Find out how to manage your aperture, shutter speed, and ISO if you have a DSLR, and some compacts also have a degree of control. Use Aperture Priority Mode mostly, or maybe Program Mode. Seriously, there is stacks of

information on the web on how to get started. Learn the basics on controlling your camera.

Whilst you are wizzing through MSP.com, make sure you simultaneously start learning technical stuff through wider reading on the internet and old skool books. You can get great books on photography for next to nix if they feature film. The rules of composition don't change due to the medium. Film / digital doesn't matter if it is just about composition.

If you are looking for inspiration and have mad stacks of cash, buy these two books. They are a great place to start your journey. Both are a bit populist, but great, quick places to start...

Digital Photography

Photo Idea Index

4. Where You Can Find Out More.

Google...

Some Fundamentals

Monday, April 21, 2014

Philosophy

Street Photography is about urban exploring, wandering with a purpose. Lots of walking. Capturing people and places in a city, going about their business. Doing it on a regular basis is a must. Getting out the front door, onto a train every weekend. Going to the same places and seeing something differently, and sometimes finding new places.

For me, street photography is about people for the majority of the time, and sometimes a place. Normally, my images include people. Street photography is about getting amongst people – in busy places, to see something special.

Courage is the most important contributor to success. Over the coming weeks you will need to build your confidence in pointing a camera at people. There are some techniques and tricks that can help, but at the end of the day, you need to be hold up your camera and shoot. 99% of the time things will be fine. The other 1% is normally not a major issue either.

Getting out and walking the streets is a great way to understand the people that live in a city. When I have been lucky enough to travel, I would rather spend a week photographing the city pavements than spending time on a tour. I still get to the major attractions, but photograph them in a way that helps illustrate the nature of the city.

Sounds a little pretentious? Yep, but I am not quite sure how to express it otherwise.

To start with, focus on covering ground. When you get home, you can review your images, and begin to identify locations you want to go back to.

If you are using a digital, try not to be constantly checking the images in your LCD. Use the viewfinder if you have one, rather than the live view. It will help you focus on composition, and start to develop your “eye”.

The most important thing is to capture what is commonly known as “the decisive moment”, coined by the father of street photography, Henri Cartier Bresson. For now, it is enough to understand that nothing is static in a street scene. People are coming and going. They are sometimes coming together, sometimes they are moving apart.

The perfect composition may only exist for a split second. The moment the cyclist enters a spot of light in the street. A waitress taking an order from a customer. A couple embracing. A father and son both looking left and right to cross the road. Nothing is staged. If you are not ready with your camera, the momentary opportunity will pass you by.

As your skill develops, you will start to develop a “third eye” which can see photo opportunities before they happen. If you can recognise these in advance, you can camp in the right spot and wait for the photo to compose itself.

Getting Started by Getting Out and Walking

The first step is to get out. Grab the camera you have and get out of the house. Travel into the hub of your city. Take 50 shots. Don't worry much about anything, just get used to pointing and shooting. Make sure you cover at least a few kilometers, and keep moving. Experience your city as freshly as you can.

Get onto Google Maps and plan your route to make it at least 3km. Wear your favourite, most comfortable shoes or sneakers, jeans, and a jacket if it is a bit chilly. Remember you have to have gear you are OK to walk in, but at the same time fit in with the general population. Wear nondescript clothes that blend in.

Just point your camera at anything that you find interesting. It doesn't really matter what you shoot this week. Use the time to work out what you know about your camera. Smashing out 50+ shots will sort this out. Spend some time on the internet filling in the gaps in your knowledge. Understand aperture, shutter speeds, and ISO. They all work together to produce different images – yes, you can set some of them to auto, but understanding the relationship between the three will help you develop.

If you have a DSLR, just take one lens, and keep the bag as small as you can. The bigger and heavier your bag, the more likely you are to give it up too early in the day. You need one camera, one lens. Don't be the person who is struggling under the weight of a hulking backpack, chock full with every piece of gear you own. This is no fun. Take the challenge to pack light.

I often take a full size body – a 35mm SLR or rangefinder, or maybe a medium format, and then a second compact camera. Digital or film for either part of the combo doesn't really matter. If I get creatively stuck with the main full size body, switching for half an hour to the compact can freshen things up.

Make sure you have a memory card that is way too big – or a few extra rolls of film, if you are that way inclined. And a spare battery. Be prepared for something big. An oversized card and a spare battery will be your saviour on the one day when something spectacular presents itself. Maybe once a year, something cool will come your way, and if you don't have a bit of spare capacity...

Look up city websites and find out if there are any festivals or other things on that attract groups of people. There is always something interesting to photograph where large groups of people congregate.

Gear You Need

Notebook. You should be making notes. More on this later. Match this with a quality pen or pencil.

Camera. Almost any camera or even a decent smartphone will get you started. Match this with a very comfortable strap that will last for the long haul.

Bag.

Comfortable shoes.

Photojournal

Photographers are the kind of people who like to journal. Writing things down changes your relationship with the information. It makes it stick, helps you think things through, and is always available to refer back to. There is no need to back it up, get new software, or worry about someone stealing it from the back seat of your car.

A great notebook is a must for a photographer who is serious about learning. What kind of stuff do I write and record in mine?

- Locations to visit sometime soon
- Ideas for specific compositions
- Summary of things I learn from others, the internet, or books on photography
- Simple photocopies or laser prints of photos that I love, and then my notes on deconstructing them to understand what makes them great
- Specific learning projects
- Plans for each day made prior to leaving the house. The location, how to get there, what to look for, and notes on what technique etc I am going to focus on during the shoot.
- I often take a few moments regularly during a shoot to write down my thoughts on how things are going. An instant feedback loop is helpful whilst out in the field.
- Post shoot review – comparing what I wanted to achieve vs actuals. I often include simple BW lasers of the the image and mark up notes to help me along the learning curve.
- Anything else that pops into my head that needs to be written down.

Looking back through previous notebooks can be a great source of inspiration – revisiting old and forgotten ideas, recalling different techniques you have spent time working on, and seeing your personal growth through the pages of the notebook.

Before each exercise, write down the key objectives in your notebook, along with any other information you might need out in the field. Photocopy and tape key information like reference maps and a location list into your notebook. Analogue paper and pen is still more fun than the dinky flashing lights of a smart phone. During the shoot, write some notes on what you are learning, and what is still outstanding for the session.

Writing down intentions and learnings has a dual effect :

- I tend to remember things I write down much better.
 - Writing down your goals for the day help me commit to the exercise better mentally.
- Anyway, give it a try. As a journal starter for each shoot...

1. Summarise what you are going to – what are you going to shoot, where, what techniques.

2. Stop once or twice during the shoot and write some notes checking how things are going.

3. When you get your photos, write some notes on what worked and what didn't. Print out the ones that tell a clear story on what you got right or wrong, and stick them in your notebook, along with the notes.

4. Summarize what you learnt.

5. Flick through it when you are on the train into the city.

A great notebook and pen / pencil will help motivate you to keep up the habit. Stationary should demand to be used, and it is an affordable luxury for most. Give my personal favourites a try...

Moleskine Notebooks are my faves for general use. I also use their A4 folders and paper inserts for more detailed home learning sessions.

Field Notes make a soft cover pocket notebook. I got onto this format using the free notebooks from the Mondrian Hotel in Soho. Perfect for temporary notes out in the field – a replacement for what you might normally write on a scrap of paper. Not really suitable for long term notes though.

Writing with either a 4B pencil – the softness of the 4B makes contact between lead and paper a pleasurable and pleasing experience! 4B pencils leave a nice dark mark on most paper types – more than an HB.

When it comes to pens, I get a bit extravagant with Artline Drawing System Pens in a 0.8mm point.

Enough to get anyone motivated.

Assignment – Basics

Get out the front door and point a camera at some street scenes. Catch public transport into your city. Jump on google maps and measure out a trail that is at least 2km and walk it.

If you are shooting film, plan to take at least 3 rolls. Digital – 100 shots.

If you are shooting digital, try not to keep checking your LCD after each shot. There is a good reason for this, which will reveal itself more later. Wait until you take a break to write some notes in your photojournal and review them critically at that point.

Just take photos of anything you see that is interesting. Don't get stuck anywhere – keep constantly moving. We'll spend some time working on specific composition techniques later on.

When you return home and have your photographs, take them down to the nearest Officeworks and get them printed out. 10c a copy... you gotta be able to invest in your art! Or print them at work on the laser printer. Pick 10 ones you like and 5 that you don't. Cut them out and paste them in your journal one at a time, and add some notes on why you selected the image – liking or loathing! Make some notes on what locations you would visit again.

Look up some street photography online. Just google image search "Street Photography" or you can even click here if you are lazy at an elite level! Compare your very first images against what you see. Pick four or five, print them out and put them in your journal along with some notes on why you selected them. This will get you started the next time you go out.

Write down some notes to remind yourself of a few things prior to the next time you go out.

Was there anything you realised you didn't quite understand on your camera whilst out?

Were there any shots that didn't turn out because you had the wrong settings dialed up on your camera?

What were the common factors to remember from what you did OK and not so OK at?

What spots would you like to revisit? Now you have thought about it, was there a shot that you didn't take that you wish you had've?

Did you have comfortable shoes, bag, and clothes on? Was there anything different you would take next time?

What were the light conditions like? Dark, light, overcast, rainy?

Read these notes again on the train on your way into your second shoot.

First Steps – Landmarks

Monday, April 21, 2014

One of the first subjects with minimum stress levels are landmarks.

Landmarks

I am using this as a generic term for any interesting inanimate subject. It could be a sculpture, a sign on the road, a factory door, public artwork, graffiti – if it ain't breathing (and is not just dead!) then it is a "Landmark".

Landmarks are an accessible way to get your skillz going and get impressive results quickly and easily. Photographing someone else's creative bits and pieces means that half the work has been done for you. Stuff that looks cool is easy to find, and one of the easier things to photograph.

There is a challenge though – you have to add something to it if you are going to own the composition.

Here is an extract from a Philosophy post :

"One question can help you, and change the way you photograph landmarks, sculptures, architectural subjects and the like. Did you add anything in your composition? Maybe you took the shot from an unusual angle. Or you saw it in a new way and was able to translate that to the image. Were you able to capture a story around the subject? Was someone interacting with it that you captured in a way that says something about the moment, or the subject itself?"

A second question. Could your image be used for a non-ironic postcard? Answer yes? Then it is a "no". Aspire to more."

Jump on the interwebs and look up what local street art and sculptures are in your city. In Melbourne, there are many different opportunities sprinkled throughout the city. A great place to start is the Docklands precinct – download the guide here : [Docklands_Public_Art_-_Art_Walk_Brochure](#)

Landmarks are perfect for cutting your teeth on. They don't move, are in predictable locations, and look great in early morning or late afternoon light.

Landmarks also attract people, and they tend to interact with the landmark. It gives you a chance to ease in to taking pictures of people. Everyone expects a bunch of cameras to be pointing in all directions at a landmark. Pointing a camera in someone's direction if they are near a photographic subject will generally be completely ignored. So, give it a go – point that camera.

Look at the people visiting the landmark. Can you find an interesting story in their visit?

Different Angles and Perspectives

Don't take a postcard shot of the landmark. If that is what you want, just buy one from the souvenir shop. It will be technically a much better shot that you or I will take.

Start off by standing with all the other people and looking at what they are looking at. If the audience is a bit sparse, just stand in the spot most likely. Think about where you would take the tourist postcard shot from. This is the one spot you should not take a photo from. Walk around the landmark, look at it from 360 degrees. If possible, don't only look at it from a single lateral plane – can you get higher to look down or a spot to look up to it? Move closer, move further away – do any interesting perspectives appear?

Look for geographic shapes – often a landmark provides regular solid shapes for composition.

Can you look through the landmark? Can you use it to frame a subject.

How are people interacting with the landmark? Are they sitting on it? Are they walking through it, around it, or on top of it? Are people happy, sad, disinterested, excited? There are many different options. Take some photos of them – they are unlikely to react as you are taking a photo of the landmark, just like a regular tourist.

Set and Forget Your Camera

This is not a highly technical blog. You can look up your manual or plenty of other websites to learn more about these things. A couple of things I find work really well for street photography on camera settings are :

Mode – Aperture Priority is always my mode of choice. Aperture refers to how big a hole you set in the lens to let in light. The lower the number the bigger the hole. A bigger hole enables more light in which enables faster shutter speeds and Aperture Priority lets the camera select the right shutter speed once you have set the aperture. A bigger hole means nice blurry backgrounds, but has the down side of needing more precise focusing due a very short depth of field. I usually leave my aperture at f2.8 or lower (big hole) for low light, and f5 – f11 for normal daylight without any significant shadows, giving a nice sharp image.

Mode (second choice) – Program or similar. Let the camera make the choices for you if you are in a stressful shoot situation and don't want to second guess what you are doing. I occasionally still use this in challenging conditions.

Shutter Speed – should normally be no lower than 1/125. If you go slower than this (say to 1/60th of a second exposure length) the combination of a moving subject and the natural movement or shake as you press the shutter button will start to blur the image. I try and stay at 1/250th wherever possible, for sharper images. The only way to get super sharp images is with a tripod though. Resting the camera or your elbows on a natural stable foundation can also help, particularly when heading towards 1/30th.

ISO – The higher the number, the more sensitive your film or sensor is to light. A higher number makes it progressively easier to get the shot in low light. The trade off is the higher the number the more grainy or “noisy” the image becomes. Each camera has it's own characteristics – and often lower megapixel cameras handle it better! Try setting the ISO at different levels and see what happens. I generally try to keep it at no more than ISO400 and down to ISO200 wherever possible. Maximum on my DSLR that I would allow is ISO1000. And that is on a pretty darn good DSLR with a wiz bang sensor...

To summarize, my recommendation would be to shoot in

Aperture Mode

Minimum shutter speed of 1/125

Maximum ISO1000

Pretty simple, huh? Some cameras allow you to program these parameters. Check your manual and do the same. If your camera can't do some of these things, just check the data display as you shoot and make sure you are within these guidelines.

The interwebs can teach you all about what aperture and shutter speeds etc you really need in different situations. Look it up. It will help develop your skills.

Less is More – Bags and Accessories

You already know to keep your bag as small as possible. There are a few more tips on travelling light, but still being prepared for different situations, and a full day out and about.



Bags with a flat bottom work are my preference vs messenger bags etc. I have been on a quest for the perfect camera bag over the years – and have quite a collection gathering dust. The most non-descript, dorky looking one is usually the one on my shoulder.

The Lowepro Stealth Reporter is freaking awesome. It is big enough for a decent sized body with a lens, plus an extra lens, and various accessories. The size forces you to prioritise what you take.

Nothing bigger than a shoebox sized bag is a good place to start. Again, go for something with a thicker and preferably padded strap. The best straps have a way to fix the padding to the strap either permanently or temporarily to ensure it stays in the right spot. I have plenty of dud straps where it moves around – mostly to any spot on the strap that doesn't make contact with my shoulder!

Once you develop a preference for a particular strap and shoulder pad, don't be afraid to change the straps around on your bags. I have one strap that I often move from bag to bag as it is more comfortable than the standard strap that the Lowepro bag came with. A great bag is the cornerstone of your kit.

I am constantly placing my bag down during the day – the first situation where a flat bottom is critical. Squarish or rectangular bags with a flat bottom are inherently stable

when placed on a surface. The second advantage is the relatively flat top to the bag – which can be used as a work surface, if you are careful. Use the top to hold your spare lens mid-change. Yes, you need to be careful... Flat bottomed bags also seem to protect gear better by having a clearly defined space, preventing gear rubbing together etc.

I also have a Domke F2 Classic Bag which is significantly bigger, but also has flat bottom.



Most importantly, don't take out a bag that screams "expensive camera gear inside" – anything branded Nikon or Canon is an absolute "no". Plus they are incredibly dorky. That also goes for camera straps with brands on them – unless worn ironically.

Another groovy option is an "inner" which can transform any bag that you like into a camera bag.

The one to the right is the Crumpler version. There are plenty of others. Most bag manufacturers also make inners which you can buy separately and just stick in any old bag that you have.

What's in my bag? Hmmm, let's have a look...

- A resealable glad wrap baggie of individual dust free disposable cloths for one off lens cleaning. I am a bit OCD on the cleanliness of my lenses, viewfinders etc. I only use these for dry cleaning
- A little spray bottle of lens cleaning fluid
- A microfibre cloth in a resealable bag. I chuck these as soon as they get a bit dirty. They are cheap as chips and it is false economy to keep them too long. This cloth is for wet cleaning with fluid.
- Spare battery for the camera in the bag.
- Spare film / memory card
- Plastic shopping bag if the bag doesn't have a wet weather cover. In a pinch the plastic bag will keep most of the rain out in an unexpected shower.
- Some spare cash – just in case.
- Notebook and Pen
- "Business" cards. If I ask for a someone's portrait, I always give them a card so they can email me for a copy. These ones are cheap, great quality and you can set them

up directly from your Flickr stream last time I checked, but I am sure there is someone local doing them too.
Take only what you need... The bag gets heavier and heavier the longer you are out!

What If Someone Approaches Me?

In the whole time I have been shooting, I have been approached proactively by one person. Aussies tend to be a very reserved bunch. An old duffer came up to me and asked if I was taking photos – he was little overly interested for my liking, so I just grunted and moved on. Occasionally you will get an “official” asking you to do something. If you are in a public space you have every right to photograph with some exceptions. But just agree and move on before they have a chance to engage.

A lot of the time they are more concerned about “professional” photographers – a tripod will always get the wrong kind of attention as it suggests you are taking a “professional” shot for commercial purposes. Big ass lenses have a similar effect on officialdom.

Taking photos of kids is probably something you want to avoid for the time being if you want to keep a low profile.

In the unlikely case that you get approached by someone who is overly interested in what you are doing – again, it is very unlikely unless you are a naturally creepy person – just be upfront and delete the photo if they demand it. It is just not worth the effort. If you have a film camera, just explain that it is old fashioned film and cannot. Then move on before they can engage again. If they engage again, just ask them to call the police. Whilst this is not ideal, you have done nothing wrong if you are in a public place.

9/11 has made the world paranoid. Deal with it.

There will be more guidance regarding dealing with the public in later weeks as you start to focus more on human subjects without the excuse of a landmark to point your camera around...

Assignment – Landscapes

It is much harder to capture a composition that you can “own”, but let’s not get worried about this yet. On this trip out, borrowing “cool” from someone else’s work is exactly the objective.

To start with, do a web search on “public art” and other similar terms to find some spots to visit. It could be a museum (providing the light is good!), sculptures – preferably more modern, architectural oddities etc. Anything that will offer some interesting composition options. Check them out on Google streetview if you are unsure.

Maybe even jump onto <http://www.flickr.com> or google images and see what other photographers have been able to achieve at the location. Get inspired by others’ images. Don’t be afraid to very directly take the inspiration and create your own version of a particular composition. Mimicry is a great way to learn through the vision of others.

Pick two or three locations. Spend at least thirty minutes at each spot. “Camp” out and watch people coming and going. Start to develop your ability to predict shots. Take a couple of shots of people interacting with the landmark.

Once you get a feel for what people are doing, spend some time walking around the landmark. Shoot it from each point of the compass. See if you can find a spot which changes the perspective by getting higher or lower. One of the problems with a lot of street photography is that it is all captured from head height – the images are being captured from the same perspective that everyone sees everyday. Getting lower or higher can offer a new perspective on a subject.

Stop at this point and get out your journal. What has worked so far? What shot haven't you got yet that you wished you had? Is there another composition that you can quickly sketch out in your journal. Is the light good in certain spots? Write down what you think is going well, and what you would like to get better at in the second part of the shoot.

After you get back home and have your images, review them in your journal. Print out ten that you like, stick them in your journal, and write some notes on the "why". Do the same for five that you don't like.

Getting Used to Photographing People – Ruckenfigur

Tuesday, April 22, 2014

The next theme to explore is Ruckenfigur, a German word which translates to “back figure”. The “back figure” is a recurring theme in romantic landscape paintings, typified by Caspar David Friedrich, a 19th century German Romantic landscape painter.

Ruckenfigur style compositions are generally seen from behind the main subject, who guides the viewer with their own gaze at the scene unfolding before them.

Ruckenfigur is another path to help ease you into street photography. Taking images from behind the subject is generally less invasive and less likely to be noticed by the subject. But don't get all funny about it – you are going to have to take front on shots at some point... this is just to help you overcome any reluctance, step by step.

The composition style is very compelling though – without an identifiable face to focus on, the view can almost transpose themselves into the position of the subject.

The viewer is encouraged to take the place of the subject in their imagination.

Ruckenfigur compositions tend to the dramatic.

I was first introduced to the theme by Christian Were (Memetic on Flickr) – check out his flickr stream for inspiration.

Getting the Shot and Moving On

One of the tips to start picking up on is to keep moving or remaining inconspicuous. Remaining invisible whilst out and about will be explored in another post. Continuously moving with your camera enables you to maximise your chances of seeing a great composition, and doesn't really give anyone a chance to react to being photographed.

When taking closer in shots of people, decisiveness and speed are your friend. Get the shot and move on without the subject even having a chance to consider if they were just photographed and to respond. If you keep moving 99.9% of people won't respond at all. If they make eye contact with you, three choices are available ;

1. Smile and mouth or say “thank you”
2. Point your camera again, in a slightly different direction to suggest they were not the subject, and ignore them.
3. Completely ignore them, turn away, and keep moving.

I have never had one person chase me up or call after me. Use your judgement on which technique is best for each situation. I can't give guidance past this, except to say, that it is unlikely to happen very often, if at all.

Speed of execution is the absolute key to not attracting attention.

Here are some tips to help.

1. Pre-compose. Once you have landed on a focal length for your lens for the session, spend some time alternating looking through your viewfinder and then just with your eyes. Start to “see” potential compositions and predict the framelines without looking through the viewfinder. People only notice your camera once it is up to your eye and pointing at stuff. So keep it down at your side and only bring it up when you can see the composition.

2. Don't Loiter. The window to take capture an image will only be open for a few seconds. You will either get the shot or miss it. If you miss it, don't persist unless conditions allow. Don't keep pointing your camera unless you are in the process of taking a shot already pre-composed in your head.

3. Compose With Your Eyes, not the Viewfinder. Look for the next shot with your eyes, unglued from the viewfinder. Potential shots are going to happen throughout your entire field of vision. If you are constantly searching through your viewfinder, at least half the action is going to be invisible to you, blacked out by the edges of your frame. Using your eyes is quicker and more likely to get a result you are happy with.

4. Master Focus.

Manual Focus : Prefocus your camera at a similar distance to what you think you will be using for the next shot as best you can. At least then all you need to do is fine tune it. Think carefully in the split second before you bring the camera up to your eye. Where is the split prism in your viewfinder and what can you use in the image to confirm the focus? A straight line at your point of focus is perfect for quickly getting it right – once the line becomes a continuous object rather than two splits, you are ready to shoot! The edge of an object is also suitable.

Automatic Focus : If your camera has multiple focus points, make sure you know how to change them. Before you shoot, set the focus point to the spot you think most likely. Learn what kind of conditions your autofocus struggles with. Write them down in your journal to keep on top of it, and avoid these situations.

Rangefinder Focus : A little like manual focus – look rapidly for a line or edge that you can use to focus on. Know which line prior to composing.

Hyperfocal Distance : A method for pre-setting your manual focus lens to focus on anything past a particular distance. There are plenty of great tutorials on the web if you search for it that will do a much better job than I can!

Snap Focus : Some digital and film cameras (well the Ricoh GR1-V and GR Digital that I know of!) have a “snap focus” function – the camera automatically snaps to focus at the pre-determined distance. Check your manual and see if your camera has it!

5. Handle Your Camera. It sounds pretty obvious, but practice knowing which button or dial changes which setting by touch when you are looking through the viewfinder. A quick adjustment can make all the difference in achieving an in-focus or correct exposure on the fly, and not missing the shot.

6. Check Your Exposure. As you move through different conditions, occasionally

checking your exposure settings will save you doing it whilst taking the shot. Make sure your ISO, Aperture, and Shutter Speed are all combining to give a good, quick exposure at 1/125 or faster. If you don't get a reading of 1/125th, reset your ISO or Aperture accordingly. An opportunity may only present itself for a few seconds, so fiddling around to get your exposure right might mean you miss the shot.

7. ISO is Your Friend. Hopefully you already have an idea of what the maximum ISO your camera can handle and still develop a decent shot. Always use the lowest possible, but if you are in shadows, or lower light, then don't be afraid to move a digital camera up to ISO 400, 800, or 1000. For film, you are pretty much locked in once the film winds on. I tend to shoot predominantly on ISO400 films as they are the most likely to handle different "normal" conditions. Shadows and light. If you are confident in the light, then go for a ISO100 film for sure! ISO400 keeps things fast and properly exposed.

8. Be Ready. Make sure you have a firm grip on your camera at all times and sling it over your shoulder rather than around your neck. Over the shoulder keeps it close to your side – and out of the direct view of potential subjects and pointing downwards. Bring it up to your eye quickly, take the shot, and place it back down at your side.

Regular Repetition and Review Builds Skill

"If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot. There's no way around these two things that I'm aware of, no shortcut." Stephen King

If you want to be a writer – switch off TV, disconnect from the interwebs, and sit down and start writing. There is no other way to do it. Sit down and write.

If you want to become a Street Photographer, then take photos on the street. Do it often. Do it regularly. The temptation is to research gear, look at gear on eBay etc, maybe even do a course – anything but actually picking up a camera and taking fifty shots.

Regular habit is what builds skill. Commit to a regular time each week to get out and take photos. And stick to it. If you miss a session, schedule a make up. I am not sure that you need to spend 10,000 hours practicing a skill as Malcolm Gladwell prescribes, but the theory is right. The more often you do something, the better you should get at it.

Spend time after each shoot reviewing your compositions in your journal.

People I Don't Shoot.

Everyone must find their moral compass when it comes to subject selection. I don't shoot homeless people as a general rule, for example. Homeless people are often mentally ill, and have a right to privacy, free from prying eyes. Their situation is bad enough already without becoming a fishbowl subject for our entertainment. I suppose if you have a greater purpose or theme in mind, you might think otherwise. But capturing evocative images by borrowing the inherent pathos of homeless person is just a short cut. Too easy.

People that are probably not in complete control of their behaviour. People that are drunk or clearly drug affected are not ideal subjects. Firstly, they can be unpredictable. Most of the time they will not even notice you, but if they are noticeably affected, you just don't know how they will react if they do see a camera pointing at them. I am not talking about

people drinking normally at a bar – This is all about people who are stumbling, “out of it”, or otherwise at the wrong end of the spectrum.

Secondly, they might just be a good player out of luck. An error of judgement does not give you licence to exploit their mistake and capture it for all time in a digital file. If I made the same mistake, I would not like to be reminded of it on a stranger’s photo feed for the next ten years... There is always someone who knows someone – even if you don’t know the person, someone you know might... And again, it is just too easy. Challenge yourself.

Be considerate of people that find themselves in dodgy positions. You might be OK with shooting these kinds of people – and that is a choice you can make. I suspect you will find it becomes boring pretty quickly though. It turns out to be the same shot over and over.

Shooting in Places You Shouldn’t Necessarily Be Taking Photos.

Sometimes you will want to take a shot in a place that you might not supposed to be. There is a judgement call required that you have to make yourself. A couple of good low risk examples are a shopping centre or city loop train station (in Melbourne). Both are private property, and prohibit photography. Of course, I recommend you always follow any laws or regulations, so don’t do it.

Hypothetically, if you were to do it, I would imagine the smaller the camera kit, the lower the possibility of being challenged by an official. A compact camera would be the best option – look more like a tourist and less like a photographer. And keep moving – Standing still probably just draws attention.

Being quick, decisive, and moving on quickly are still the foundations of capturing the images you need.

Assignment – Ruckenfigur

Hah! Another easy one. Get your camera and head out to a busy area of the city. Don’t click away just yet. Practice just watching people from behind (without being creepy). What are they looking at, what are they doing, how can you channel the spirit of Caspar the Painter?

Ruckenfigur is about shooting a subject from behind in a way to guide the viewer of the image on how to look at the scene. Whew! Combining the two elements of Ruckenfigur composition can be challenging – both the “back figure” and the scene before them. Finding both an interesting “back figure” and scene is easy to start doing, but will take some time to master.

Ruckenfigur composition can help develop skills in identifying interesting subjects prior to shooting them from the front, where they will be aware of being photographed.

Look for shadows and light in the compositions as well. Having the subject in either vs the scene can offer an attractive contrast.

Start taking some photos. As per every shoot, stop at least once and review how you think things are going. Write down in your journal what is working, and not working. And maybe think through and note down a couple of ideas for locations or situations for your

ruckenfigur shots.

Spend the time reviewing your day once you have your photos done and dusted at home.

Busy Places – Building Your Skills

Tuesday, April 22, 2014

Busy Places

Busy places are full of busy people all moving in different directions with different purposes. Their minds are wholly engaged with their own affairs and missions. Whether in a group or by themselves, their main priority is whatever it is that they are doing. Their default is to not even notice you, unless you give them a reason to.

Hopefully some of your expeditions have already demonstrated that people visiting a landmark expect to have cameras pointing in all directions, sometimes at the thingy, and sometimes at them. In busy places, the sea of people gives a degree of anonymity and uncertainty of exactly what you are pointing your camera at. If you lift your camera in the immediate direction of thirty people, you are unlikely to be noticed in any meaningful way. Nobody feels singled out, or sure of what your actual subject is. When people believe that they are only a small part of the image, they don't seem to worry.

Another useful technique is to camp out in a good spot and let them come to you. Pick your spot, wait for a break in the foot traffic, and move into it. Simply stand there and wait for a wave of people to flow around you. This is one of the occasions to lift your camera up early. Lifting the camera tips off people that they might be your potential subject. If you already have your camera up before the people arrive, they will assume you already had a subject in mind, and that it probably isn't a person. The only response you will normally get is people pausing to avoid "spoiling" your shot!

This technique can also be used in lower traffic areas once you get a good feel for it.

Parking yourself off to one side, often in a shadow or doorway can also be a good way to keep out of the way around crowds. Nothing too suss, there is a fine line between being inconspicuous versus being suspicious! Positioning yourself at an angle to the general field of vision can work.

You should be developing some basic abilities now in scouting and identifying locations you like.

Wide angle lenses are very helpful in these situations. A 28mm lens on a standard 35mm FX body has a 75 degree field of view. Nikon has a great simulator here that shows both the field of view and the different framelines for various lenses. Pop a wide angle lens on your camera and stand in front of a mirror. Keep rotating your body until you can't see yourself in the viewfinder. Put the camera down and notice which way it, and your body were pointing. It might be a surprise to notice how far to the left and right you can direct the camera lens and still get your intended subject in frame.

A wide angle lens enables you get people into frame without them realising it. Most people have point and shoot cameras, or maybe a DSLR with a kit lens – neither of which will generally have a very wide field of view. They will only expect to be in shot when the camera is pretty much pointing straight at them.

Wide Angle Lenses

The most often recommended lens for street photography is 35mm focal length in 35mm / FX format. 28mm is another, wider preferred length. The smaller the number, the wider angle of view for the lens. Wide angle lenses are perfect for including subjects into your composition without having to point directly.

Tips for composing with a wide angle lens.

1. Get Closer

First, try to Get Closer. The natural inclination of most people is to keep a fair distance between the camera and the subject, ending up with “inbetween” nothing shots.

When you move in closer with a wide angle, much more of the background story comes into frame, and the subject becomes a much more important and prominent part of the composition. A rookie mistake is to believe you have to get more into frame to fully exploit the benefits of a wide angle lens – which means moving further away. It is actually the opposite. A wide angle lens is at its best when you move close in to your subject. The wide nature of the lens will naturally bring in more of the background to balance the composition.

Your subject can be a clear focus of your composition, without losing the broader context. With a longer focal length lens, an 85mm lens for example, if you compose the frame with your subject at the same relative size, the background “window” will be much smaller – less of the context will find its way into the shot.

Closer is better with a wide angle lens.

2. Move further away

Moving Further Away gets more of a broad scene into shot. Tell a story with more parts. Just be careful not to become too generic with your composition, or use it as an excuse to not get closer.

Shooting with Purpose

Street Photography is perfect for exploring your interest in photography – you have an excuse every weekend to get out and take some photos. Just wandering around with a camera is purposeless. Each time you go out, set a goal or objective to give purpose to your wanderings.

- Practice a new technique that you have spent some time researching
- Try some new gear
- Explore a new location
- Have a creative theme

Yeah, ok, I do wander a bit – but the most fruitful shoots have an underlying purpose. Other opportunities often appear when you are in that mindset of purpose. It just kinda puts you in the right frame of mind.

Light

Photography is the art of visually capturing the way light falls on an object, rather than the object itself. The right light can transform the ordinary, everyday scene into the

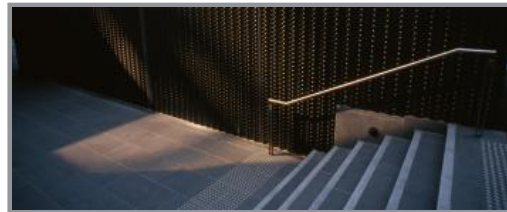
extraordinary. Light is the most important element of composition.

What is the light like today? Overcast, sunny, early morning, late afternoon? The light in the morning and late afternoon tends to bathe scenes in a gold tinged way. Go out to your letterbox today at daybreak, midday, and the end of the day and take a photo. Notice how each photo has a different colour cast to it? Understand how different light conditions change the same scene.

Assignment One

Yes, there are two assignments, should you choose to accept them!

The first assignment is to wait for a sunny day, wait for late afternoon, and then go out and shoot the light. Don't worry too much about composition. Just look for interesting light falling on different scenes and objects. Try to find shafts of light that contrast with shadows.



Take as many as you can – might be a digital kind of day... Review them when you get home, and see the impact that great light has on the most mundane of subjects. Think about light when framing compositions.

Assignment Two

Visit a busy place – where there are plenty of people coming and going. Go and stand in a spot in the middle of the people coming and going – behind a bench or something similar can help create an island for you. Watch the people walking by. Start to identify the right angle to start capturing images – what backgrounds do you have to work with in this location? Put your camera up to your eye and start shooting!

People will just keep coming by – they have their own missions and things to do. They won't be really sure what you are taking photos of, and will not be bothered by you. They are coming to you, you are not chasing them.

Find another busy spot, and place yourself off to one side – in a doorway, or something similar. Out of the line of sight for people walking past. A 45 degree angle is usually more

than enough. Take some shots.

Just make sure that the spot is very busy. Train station, shopping centre entrance, main pedestrian thoroughfares are the kind of places that work.

Pause and reflect in between locations. Write some notes in your journal on how the shoot is going. What is working, not working?

Visiting the Impossible Project Studio in New York

Wednesday, April 30, 2014



The Impossible Project Studio NYC (from their website <http://shop.the-impossible-project.com/shop/>)

Analogue Hipster. Low fi junky.

Every smart phone can now take crazy good pictures. So the natural thing is to make to take these sharp, detailed images, and strip out some of the quality to make them look like they were taken using a crappy analogue toy camera or polaroid.





Funnily enough, the result is generally more aesthetically pleasing than the jpeg file straight out of the phone. A counter point to the obsession with megapixels, terabytes, and megahertz. I love browsing through the Officeworks catalogue and marvel at how cheap a TB of storage and imagine all the wonderful backups I could put on it.

So, now we have free apps for your phone to replicate 70's analogue technology. Yep, makes sense (non-ironic tone please! my opinion of these apps is actually very positive!).

Technology continues to change rapidly. Moore's Law applies in different ways to just about anything that plugs into a power socket. Vinyl, 8 Track, Cassette, Minidisc, CD, MP3 – everything just keeps moving onwards.

The Polaroid Camera was a technological marvel when introduced, and had an exciting life. But it's time had come and gone.

Like most gadgets that have been leapfrogged, Polaroid stopped making film for their cameras about 4 years or so ago. I can remember the rush for some Polaroid lovers to stockpile what they could afford – it has always been about a buck a shot.

I was looking for something to do on a Saturday afternoon to hold off the jet lag from my

flight for as long as possible... With a sleep deprivation hang over, I googled “camera stores” around Soho, as I had to pick up a memory card. Ay yi yi – The Impossible Project studio came up – and it was just around the corner! These were the guys that managed to get Polaroid film up and into production again.



Just another doorway on a street busy with out of towners shopping like crazy. I realised I had walked past it without having any idea earlier that morning, and on my last trip to NYC as well. This time, with a hand drawn map (to avoid looking like a tourist / mark for the hop on hop off buss shills with the city grid map) I found it after a 10 minute walk.

When I went to enter, I virtually had to push my way past a family taking a break from consuming, resting up on the doorway. Whilst I am a great supporter of buying goods and services that can make your life happier, it was a bit of an obstacle for me on this occasion. Yes, we are all part of the 99%...

The elevator did not disappoint – it was slow and was 70's clunky like it should be. The studio was like a little club. One of the team was doing some framing on a table, whilst another casually strolled around, offering in a very non-salesy way any help I might need.

Another camera would probably be superfluous to my current needs, according to my wife... But some of those old-skooly land cameras looked quite compatible with my arty lifestyle.



Waiting for the Lazarus treatment

The gallery was of a high quality and worth a look for its' own sake. Instant cameras are not really my thing, so I passed on investing in new gear – I did look very carefully at a genuine replica Polaroid staff tracky top, but they were only in impossibly hipster thin sizes.

You can check out the NYC store here :

<http://shop.the-impossible-project.com/stores/spaces/ny>

Inconspicuity Tip #1: Gear

Friday, May 02, 2014

Street photography is about hitting a pause button. Taking a split second to record a moment. Star Trek's Prime Directive is "don't get involved with or noticed by the locals". Follow this philosophy -don't actively impact the scene in any way. Move to get the right perspective, change lenses, fire up a flash – but generally without interacting with subjects.

Scenes have a way of changing when you get involved.

Some photographers ask people to pose, some don't. Normally, apart from rare occasions, I don't ask. Whatever you liked about the way a person looks often evaporates as soon as you ask to take their portrait. Angsty scowls borne of youth become cheesy grins, with a tinge of self consciousness...

The upside is that you can usually get closer.

There can be some exceptions, but asking people also gives them the opportunity to refuse. Refusal can hit your confidence hard, if you let it.

I only ask for permission in very specific circumstances.

- There is only myself and the subject in close proximity.
- Movement is restricted, ie. in a closed space where you can't take a quick snap and keep moving easily.
- The subject has "made" me – and made significant, unavoidable, eye contact.
- If I need them to move to recompose the frame.

So, only ask for permission when you cannot avoid it.

Henri Cartier Bresson believed in not being noticed. So do I.

Tips To Achieve Inconspicuity – Gear.

Inconspicuity – I am not sure it is a word, but it is a way to describe how to take photos without being noticed by subjects.

Less creepy looking = more inconspicuous.

Avoid Looking Like a Pro. Pros are always up to "something". Consider a compact or rangefinder camera.

The bigger the camera and lens the more you look like a pro to the average person. Pro photographers all have suspicious ulterior motives – using your likeness in an advertisement, gathering evidence, preparing terrorist attacks, catching you doing something wrong or silly, and so on.

Many street photographers use rangefinder or compact cameras.



Nikon 35ti Film



M Leica Digital

Not very threatening are they? They both kinda look like something your mum might use? Not too many people care when you point one of these in their general direction. Both cameras deliver excellent image quality.

Don't underestimate the utility of compact cameras. High end compacts, both film and digital, deliver great pictures, can fit in your pocket or in a small bag, and you can take them anywhere. I took some photos in the Qantas Platinum Lounge using a compact – no one batted an eyelid. If I had've pulled out a big ass Nikon D4 with a prime lens on it...



Even on the plane, nobody cared when I started clicking away with my compact film camera. OK, you may not be a massive film nutter, but at least read some reviews on cameras like the Nikon Coolpix A, Ricoh GR, and Fuji X100s.

Rangefinders will feature in more detail in another post. Suffice to say, they are smaller due to having less internal stuff and still delivering great quality. Leica rangefinders come at a significant price premium though – the old “if you have to ask, you can’t afford it”. Some put black tape over the Leica branding to avoid tipping off people – including Bresson, I believe.

If you have a DSLR, that is cool. Just don’t stick a 70 – 200mm lens on it. Go for a fixed focal length (say 35mm or 50mm), smaller lens. Remember, the longer the lens, the more you will get noticed.

Avoid lugging around a massive backpack. Nothing says creepy more than a person with a big camera and massive backpack. How many dead bodies you got in there, pal?



Yup, dead bodies in that bag...

There are more tips on Inconspicuity [here](#).

Fan Ho – 9 Composition Techniques. Part One.

Tuesday, May 06, 2014

Fan Ho has captured Hong Kong over the years using a Rolleiflex. Born in 1937, Ho has an important body of work that borrows from his experience as a Hong Kong based film director. You can find out more about him at his website [here](#), and an interview with him [here](#).

I have one of his books, "Hong Kong Yesterday" available [here](#) – a great investment in your photography education. He is currently my favourite photographer, and a constant source of inspiration for me every Saturday morning when I have to drag my sorry ass out of bed to get out with the camera.

Ho used the standard 6×6 medium format composition offered by the Rolleiflex. Ho then cropped his compositions to suit the vision he had in mind when taking the shot. The large negative size enabled him to do this.

Looking at other photographers' work helps you understand what is possible, what you might be missing, and what you like that you haven't quite been able to capture yet. Learning from the masters is a great way to improve and develop your own style. Like any skill, emulation is the first step to learning. Once you have learnt a skill, you can make it your own.

I am not massively interested in interviews with photographers, but prefer letting their work speak for them. "Don't tell me about your work, show me" is my preferred way of learning – with the exception of street photographers talking about their techniques and learnings. Understanding that Gary Winogrand shot with Tri-X 400 pushed to ISO1200 to ensure he achieved 1/1000th shutter speeds for sharpness and clarity, really challenged my thinking around shutter speeds for photography.

What things have I learnt from studying Fan Ho's images?

1. Long Shadows





Ho often shoots either first up in the morning or late in the evening – whenever the sun is very low on the horizon. This lengthens shadows to the point of becoming a feature in each of the images. With colour photography, this time of day produces beautifully warm light, but Ho uses it to draw out and emphasize the shadows in black and white.

The Long Shadows add drama and emphasis to the subjects – almost changing the image from a continuous range of tones to a set of well defined solids and highlights.

Long Shadows are also used as a subject “multiplier” – making a smaller subject more important in the image by adding a size with the shadow. This is particularly effective with silhouetted subjects. A small human subject can be given more prominence in a composition this way without losing a sense of their overall insignificance.

Parallel lines in the image are often combined with the Long Shadow to draw the viewer’s eye to the subject. Ho often used rail lines to achieve this.

As I now shoot predominantly now only in black and white, it was interesting to see how Ho manipulated “the golden hour” of the sun setting or rising to produce his images.

You can read Part Two of the series [here](#).

Part Three

Part Four

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Fair Use Statement

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Name(required) Email(required) Website Comment(required)

Fan Ho – 9 Composition Techniques. Part Two.

Saturday, May 10, 2014

2. Light Edges

Light Edges are very clear, defined strips of light contrasting with a shadow. These feature regularly in Ho's images to highlight what is usually a small human subject. The size of the subject removes the "human" face and enables the viewer to project themselves into being the subject (IMHO).

These Light Edges are most often created by human built structures, readily available in most higher rise cities. Finding the right time of day for the best sun angle is the challenge. In Melbourne, I am often surprised by what time of day is best for creating these hard edged, clearly defined shadows.



3. The Intersection of Light and Architectural Lines

Ho often uses a combination of Light Edges and clear Architectural Lines in images.





In the first image, there are three main things happening in the composition.

The Light Edge is intersecting with the strong lines of the stairs.

The lines intersect on a diagonal plane which give a strong dynamic feel to the image.

Finally, the subjects are moving in different directions along the diagonal plane, towards the outer edges of the image, continuing to contribute to the dynamism of the image.

There are multiple parallel lines in the image, running along diagonal planes, strengthening the image.

The second image uses a strong diagonal Light Edge which intersects with a ninety degree Architectural Line of the building edge that the subject is standing against. The two lines draw focus to the subject – it is pretty hard to miss!

The subject is beautifully isolated by the solid blocks of tones.

Both images benefit from the simplicity of the building tones. There is very little visual clutter to distract the viewer from the subjects.

3. Using Simple Tones of Buildings as Backgrounds

Fan Ho recognises and uses Simple Tones as a way to isolate and focus on subjects.



In both images, the tones of the buildings are clearly defined, solid blocks of colour. The patchwork feel of the second image is consistent with the Simple Tone theory as each “patch” is a clearly defined block. Simple Tones simplify the visual information being presented to the viewer, making the compositional tool being used more recognisable.

In the first image, the use of Framing is highlighted by the Simple Tones and the overall proportion of the frame to the image. It is relatively small, and isolated. The sign in the bottom right corner provides a sense of balance to the image, and the word “private” provide a delicate juxtaposition to the people in the frame.

The patchwork of Simple Tones in the second image are still clean and clear blocks. The subject is highlighted against one of the blocks, and Long Shadow is used to draw more attention. The patchwork is not visually distracting due to the Simple Tones.

You can read Part One of this series [here](#).

Part Three

Part Four

All images featured in this post are the copyright works of photographer Fan Ho.

Fan Ho's Website is [Here](#).

Buy Fan Ho's “Hong Kong Yesterday” [Here](#).

Fan Ho – 9 Composition Techniques. Part Three.

Monday, May 12, 2014

5. Look for Angles that are Not Ninety Degrees. The Beauty of 120 Degrees.

Ninety degree angles naturally appear everywhere. Fan Ho often created images using angles other than ninety degrees, often approximating 120 degrees.



Angles other than ninety are unexpected and more interesting. The angles of the shadows in this image are much wider than ninety, giving a more diagonal feel to the lines rather than the straight line feel of ninety degree angles.

The repetition of the Light Edges are combined with Long Shadows to highlight the single subject, and then move the eye across to the two subjects towards the bottom right of the image – at least, that is how my eye moves across this image!

6. Top and Bottom Frame Composition.

Like most photographers, I am guilty of not considering the whole frame when composing images. It is a difficult trap to escape from – gravity pulls most compositions to centre middle of the frame. One of the most important steps a person with an inspiration to improve is to start putting the subject in frame off centre – normally using the rule of thirds.

Fan Ho often uses unexpected portions of the frame to build an image. His use of the Top and Bottom Frame of the image is a lesson in seeing possibilities.



Most compositions focus on the bottom third of the image, whereas Ho balances compositions with objects at the top and bottom of the frame. Hong Kong is a particularly cool place to explore this compositional technique – there are things hanging over the narrow streets and laneways everywhere.

All three compositions feature a key point of interest in the top third of the frame. Keep looking towards the top of each of your frames when composing.

Whilst there are not the same crowded narrow streets in Melbourne, or in most cities for that matter, actively considering options in the Top Frame can produce great results.

7. High and Low Perspectives

Most photographs are taken from a height of somewhere between 5ft and 6ft. The perspective of the world at the height of the human head is something most of us experience every day. Changing the perspective from which you take a shot – getting higher or lower than you would normally expect to view a subject from – is an easy way to increase interest in a composition. The advice “to get down low to the same level of a toddler” when taking a portrait of a kid can also be applied to street photography.

We see the world everyday from the same height. Changing where a composition is viewed from presents a new side or way of understanding the scene.



In the first image, Ho has lowered the camera to close to, or at floor level. This changes the angle at which we see the main subject in the centre of the frame to a “bottom up” perspective. It also shifts the relationship the main subject has with the “Light Funnel” (more to come on Light Funnels) behind him. The view is subtly different from what the eye would expect at head height, and contributes to the interest in the composition.

The second image has also been taken from a Low Perspective, from the bottom of the stairs. Getting lower on this shot helps Ho backlight the subjects and frame them to some degree using the Top Frame fabrics hung over the lane, and the darker bottom stairs in the Bottom Frame.

The third image uses a very simple technique of just shooting from the bottom of a set of stairs. Instead of pointing the camera upwards, just shoot straight ahead – the lens should be at shoe height for subjects. A perspective you don’t naturally see.

The final image is an example of getting up high and shooting down to create interest. There is also use of Ho’s trademark Long Shadow technique. There is also some Escher-style confusion created by the perspective. It takes a moment or two to orient your view of the image.

To start recognising High and Low Perspective opportunities, look for stairs and overpasses. I suspect the first shot was taken from a standing position on a lower set of stairs Ho had positioned himself on, “camping” for the right composition to present itself. Stop a metre or two from the top of a set of stairs and see if an opportunity presents itself to you.

Part One is here.

Part Two

Part Four

All images featured in this post are the copyright works of photographer Fan Ho.

Fan Ho's Website is Here.

Buy Fan Ho's “Hong Kong Yesterday” Here.

Fan Ho – 9 Composition Techniques. Part Four.

Saturday, May 17, 2014

8. Light Funnels

Urban landscapes create many Light Funnels that Fan Ho took advantage of to either add drama to an image, or backlight a subject to some degree.



The narrow confines of Hong Kong's streets offer many opportunities to narrow the flow of natural light into a funnel.

In all of the images, Ho has spotted a restriction of the way light is flooding a scene – just like the way a snoot or honeycomb grid on a flash. Look for opaque edges that hold the light and then release it in limited area in your composition. Many of these spots are very dependent on the angle and intensity of the sun.

The greater the contrast between the light and the shadow, the more effective the Light Funnel will be in your composition. Most Light Funnels run vertically, so look for skylights,

narrow laneways, and gaps in roofs that let the light stream through.

Light Funnels seem to work best with a silhouetted subject.

9. Inconspicuous and Conspicuous Framing

Natural, unforced framing can add focus to a subject without it being overt or obvious to the viewer.

Inconspicuous Framing :



The first image combines Light Funnel with Inconspicuous framing. The lateral dark edges of the image help bring the eye to the subjects, and the cloth in the Top Frame continues the natural frame.

Natural positioning of fabric in the second image frame the subject without being overt. The focus is squarely placed on the bottom left corner by the sections of fabric which are also Simple Tones.

The third image uses the roofs of the market to swing the eye to the silhouetted subject walking up the pathway, both providing the edges of a natural frame.

Conspicuous Framing :

Sometimes framing quite overtly can have a pleasing outcome.



Ho also uses light consistently as a tool for framing subjects.

Conclusions

I love Fan Ho's work. I have been to Hong Kong twice now, Ho's images are a source of inspiration to me.

Inspiration is not enough – a creative vision cannot be realised without technique. Without skills, ideas just remain locked in the mind.

Performing an extensive dissection to try and reverse engineer how a photographer achieved a specific result is my preferred mode of learning. Firstly, I sat down and spent some time looking at Ho's work, identifying what images featured compositional techniques I didn't feel skilled at, and then worked the "how".

Understanding more "how" increases your options for composing images.

I would recommend starting with each technique individually, focusing on recognising potential opportunities to use it. Being able to spot things like Light Funnels and Simple Tones in field is a skill that needs to become second nature. Your photographer's eye should be constantly scanning for these situations and recognising their potential whilst you are walking with your camera.

Once you can recognise them, you can start using them in your compositions.

You can read Part One [here](#).

Part Two

Part Three

All images featured in this post are the copyright works of photographer Fan Ho.

Fan Ho's Website is [Here](#).

Buy Fan Ho's "Hong Kong Yesterday" Here.

Inconspicuity Tip #2 : Angles

Sunday, May 18, 2014

How little people notice can be quite amazing. Photo ninja skillz do not involve things like stealthy camera bags with lens holes or 90 degree angle mirror attachments. Actively “hiding” when out with your camera is a tad on the childish side. The less you are noticed, the less you will contaminate or interfere with the scene.

How can you avoid being noticed?

1. Stay Still.

The human eye is attracted to movement. If you remain still and keep your movements smooth and to a minimum, you can just sink into the background of whatever scene you are a part of. This is particularly effective if there is a considerable amount of movement going on around you. Step back towards the edge of a crowd, in a place where you are not going to interrupt the natural flow of human traffic.

2. High Contrast Shadows

The human eye struggles to shift from areas of high contrast – light areas to dark. When you walk into a dark cinema, it takes a little while for your eyes to adjust and be able to see again. If you stand in a shaded area that has significant contrast to the prevailing light conditions, people will find it more difficult to pick up what exactly is in the shadows. Stay in the shadow areas, don't fidget, and you are less likely to be noticed by people walking by.

3. Stay Out of Field of View

The easiest way to avoid being noticed is to move outside of a person's natural field of view. Move off to the left or right, or move above or below your subject.



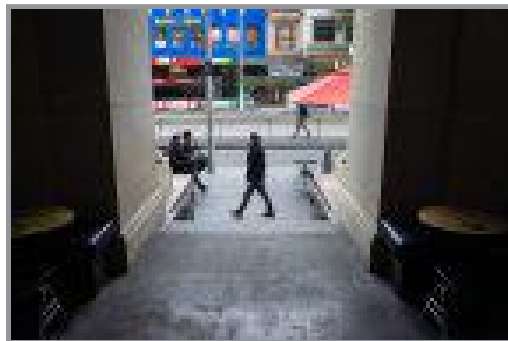


4. Alcoves

Look for doorways, entrances, and other places to remove you from the natural field of people's vision. Even better, if the spot delivers some shadows. Look for natural architectural cover and compose your shots through gaps, with or without showing framing.



Shoot from behind the pillars



Standing here



And composing through the columns



Shot from between the columns at the GPO

5. Colour

Wear colours that do not contrast with the environment. I usually wear plain jeans and grey or other dark coloured hoody. When the weather warms up, just a plain, dark coloured polo shirt. Avoid red, yellow, and other colours that catch the eye. This includes your bag and camera strap. Change out the manufacturer strap with Nikon Yellow or Canon Red with a plain black strap. These straps just scream for attention...



Check out some more tips on remaining inconspicuous [here](#).

Rangefinder Cameras – Starting Out

Sunday, May 25, 2014

Rangefinder Cameras are a revelation to photographers who are starting to delve into more exotic kinds of gear. At first glance, to the developing photographer, rangefinders can look like toylike and less than worthy of your new found skillz. There are good reasons why rangefinders can look a bit 'r Us.

The viewfinder is a separate window that doesn't go through the lens like an SLR. Isn't that how cheap cameras compose the image?

This is a good thing. A lot of the bulk of a SLR body comes from that nifty mirror tool that shows you what is happening through the lens. When you fire the shutter, the mirror flips up with a "slapping" sound, and the image is captured on the film / sensor behind. The shutter closes, and the mirror pops back down.



Voigtlander R4a – a great starter rangefinder.

The composition window of a rangefinder is slightly offset. It does not ever "blackout" like an SLR – so you can always see what is happening. The windows are usually quite well suited to "two eyed" photography. You can often keep both eyes open, yet still focus and compose your image. Even in "one eye" mode, the RF viewfinder is usually bigger than the image space.

The viewfinder will have lines marked to indicate the frame which will hit your film, called "framelines". Most viewfinders are larger than the frame lines, so you can see what is about to come in and out of shot, whereas SLR viewfinders are pretty much shows ONLY the shot – no more no less.

Some cameras automatically illuminate the correct set of framelines when you connect the lens. Some cameras have a dial you manually select the framelines with. Some just have multiple framelines in the viewfinder, and you have to remember which ones are the right ones for the lens you have on the body.

Not having a noisy mirror slapping up and down in the body makes rangefinders almost silent to use. I was lucky enough to trial a Bessa 3 and was constantly wondering if the shutter had fired or not – it was that quiet and virtually vibration free. Rangefinders are very quiet, and the reduction in internal movements required to take a shot leads to sharper, shake-free, images.

Rangefinders are particularly useful for street photography for this reason. Nobody is really sure if you have taken a shot or not, they are so damn quiet. The lack of internal mirror system also reduces both the size of the body, and the size of the lenses – which are tiny and light for the same quality as an SLR lens. Rangefinders just don't need a big hunk of metal and glass to take high quality shots.

As you are not looking through the lens, 99% of rangefinder lenses are primes. Just one focal length. Use your feet to zoom in and out. Being prime lenses, you can get some crazy apertures – F2, F1.4, even F0.9! I prefer prime lenses for all my cameras when out walking. I just hate fiddling with a zoom as I am trying to compose.

Using prime lenses trains you to be a better photographer, I believe.

Being smaller, they are less threatening than an SLR for subjects. They just look like an “Uncle Arthur” camera. With a smaller body, and very small lenses, rangefinders are light and mobile – perfectly suited for street photography.

Focusing a rangefinder is something that takes a little getting used to. In the viewfinder is a “focus spot” in the middle. It is a clearly marked bright spot. In the focus spot will be two identical images, superimposed over the top of each other. As you turn the focus ring on the lens, a coupling mechanism does the same to the focus spot. When the two images “become one” the lens is correctly focused. Here are some examples of how it looks :

Got it? Great! The trick is to get us a straight plane or line in your viewfinder to focus – it is easy to see a “break” in a straight line in the focus spot and get an accurate result.

It only takes a second or two to focus, depending on your dexterity, but it is no auto focus. There are no autofocus rangefinders (well there is one, but the debate rages on the interwebs if the autofocus Contax systems are true rangefinders).

You can use hyperfocal focusing very effectively though. Once you set up your lens properly, everything in excess of a calculated distance to infinity will be in focus, eg: from 3m to infinity. You just have to point the camera in the direction and pull the trigger. The wider the lens, the closer the focus distance minimum becomes. I just wish I had the temperament and courage to use it. There is more information [here](#).

The greatest thing about shooting with a rangefinder is knowing you are walking in the footsteps of some of the greatest. Robert Capa, Larry Burrows, and Henri Cartier-Bresson all used them. Knowing I have a similar camera in my hands never fails to inspire me. A bit like motorcyclists who nod at each other, there is a knowing between people who can recognise a rangefinder. I get asked engaged most often by randoms when I have a rangefinder out – other photographers who know.



The shot of the couple kissing here demonstrates the potential outcomes using rangefinders for street photography.

- Shot on a small rangefinder – inconspicuous small camera
- 21mm F4 Lens attached – the wide angle meant the camera was actually not pointing in their direction, despite capturing them in the frame.
- I was less than a metre away from them – the camera shutter is virtually silent and did not alert them. Although I suspect it would have taken a fair bit to interrupt their “moment”.
- I used a patient “camping” technique to get the shot. I just stood on the corner of Elizabeth and Flinders Streets and waited for people to come into frame. The corner is very busy, with lots of people pusing through. I stood behind a telegraph pole so that I would not be “moved along” by the crowds, and just waited for image opportunities to present themselves.

Don't Just Make a Carbon Copy

Sunday, June 01, 2014



Architectural Photography is a passion for some. Taking a shot of a building's interior or exterior, with the perfect lens, on a perfectly still tripod, with the perfect light, and at the perfect angle is challenging pursuit that requires patience. The same applies to Landscape photography. The result can often transcend the technique. But mostly not. If you are taking landscapes like this snapshot on the left, then, yes, you have transcended technique.

Ansel Adams' best images are mesmerising. He brings something more than just a beautiful scene created by nature to the image in his best.

I am not slagging off on Architectural or Landscape Photographers – just suggesting the best always seem to bring something of themselves or their own vision to the image.

Again, the same applies to other items of art and design. It is not enough to just faithfully capture and reproduce the intent of the artist – unless, of course, you are doing a book on Banksy. Are you? If not, stop just photographing groovy looking things. You can do better than that.

The surprising thing is that most of the photographers I spot just taking carbon copies of other people's work are usually technically very proficient. The images they create are beautiful and capture the way the thing looks. The lighting is precisely right, the composition is completely thought out, and the focus is sharp from the front to the back of the image. It is a perfect facsimile.

I suppose I might be a little harsh in my assessment here, but photographing the Mona Lisa does not make you Da Vinci. Nor are you siphoning off a bit of his brilliance by making a great representation of his painting. You have to add something to it if you are going to own the composition.

Photographing someone else's creativity is a cop out. Photos are not cool by association. Your image is completely reliant on the other person's concept. But don't fret, all is not lost.

One question can help you, and change the way you photography landmarks, sculptures,

architectural subjects and the like. **Did you add anything in your composition?** Maybe you took the shot from an unusual angle. Or you saw it in a new way and was able to translate that to the image. Were you able to capture a story around the subject? Was someone interacting with it that you captured in a way that says something about the moment, or the subject itself? Could you frame the subject, or provide a leading line, or prop to add to the image?

With regards to the Mona Lisa subject, could you shoot the faces of the people gazing upon the painting, capturing the emotion. Or the painting from the perspective of a person at the end of the line, gradually edging closer to the holy grail – I have never seen the thing, but I feel it is safe to assume there is a line?

A second question. **Could your image be used for a non-ironic postcard?** Answer yes? Then it is a “no”. Aspire to more.

Take photos of unusual and aesthetically pleasing subjects. Sometimes this is reliant on someone else’s creativity – if this is the case, then add something to the image to make it truly your own.

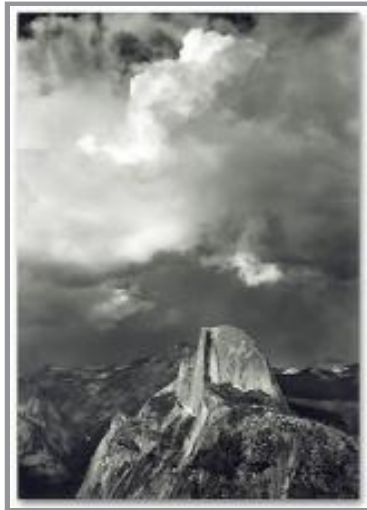
Here are some images I have taken over the years with some commentary to help explain the thinking.



My Image from Yosemite



Ansel Adams



Ansel Adams

The two Black and Whites are more images from Ansel Adams. When I visited Yosemite some years ago, I had already seen Adams' wonderful landscapes. If I want a straight up postcard shot, I would have left my DSLR at home, and spent up at the Yosemite gift shoppe. Adding the smallness of the human subject adds something to the landscape. It is a particularly powerful to me personally, as my wife is the subject! It reminds me of our time at Yosemite, and the overwhelming "hugeness" of the beauty – not a very elegant phrase, but captures the sentiment...



Another Landscape – the threatening weather and sunlight on the wet road produced something more...



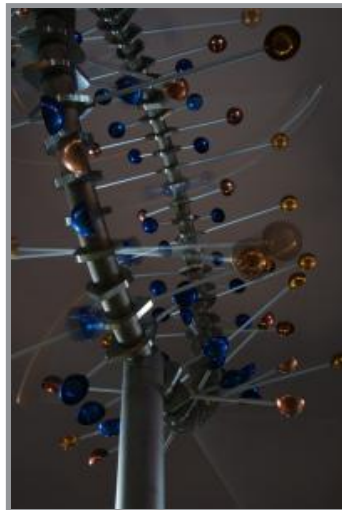
Possibly Australia's single most recognisable landmark – The Sydney Opera House. One of my oft used composition tools is to change a landmark into an abstract. Buy your postcard shot from the shop.



"The Vault" is a much-maligned Victorian outdoor sculpture. Again, an abstract composition brings something additional to the image.



Victorian State Library building. There are a couple of things here delivering the final image – toy camera, cropping, angle, and some colour work.



Finally, “The Blowhole” sculpture at the Docklands. This is quite a favourite with many photographers, so it is critical to at least try to do something different. This is captured at night, with a ten second exposure, delivering the smooth textures and colours against the greyish night sky.

Camera Straps

Saturday, June 07, 2014



If you wear the standard “branded” strap that came with your camera please click out of this website and never come back, unless you are wearing it “ironically” – But you better look like one of these guys if you are using that escape clause...

Apart from the clear crime against humanity, branded straps are cheap, uncomfortable, and often a bit on the short side. If you regularly have one hanging off your shoulder or around your neck, spend the time to find a great brand of strap that you love. It is kinda like a great mattress – once you get a decent one, you wonder why you spent so much time with a crappy one.

First things. Buy a neoprene based strap, regardless of brand. Forget leather. Leather looks great, but is not practical or as comfortable. Everytime I pick up a new camera, I take the train into town and visit the crumpler shop. It has gotten to the point where the girl who works on Saturdays actually recognises me. I also buy straps as gifts for mates who are photographers, so I do end up buying a few straps over the course of a year.

Next thing. What size camera? Little camera – little strap. Big camera – you get the idea...

Big Strap Recommendation : Crumpler Industry Disgrace

You can find them here.

Why?



- Neoprene is soft, and a little bit stretchy. So when you are walking with a fairly heavy camera around your neck the little bit of “give” absorbs the bouncing around of the camera.
- The strap is nice and wide where it comes into contact with your body – spreading the load as much as possible and the neoprene has no sharp or hard edges that can cut into your skin. This is thing I dislike the most about fabric straps.
- There are little sticky nodules on the underside of the strap to help prevent unwanted movement and slipping – either off your shoulder, or around your neck.
- The system for securing the strap to your camera is virtually risk free. It can take a few minutes and an unending well of patience to get the straps on, but once they are on, you can have complete confidence.

Just be careful when securing the straps that you get them nice and even. The Industry Disgrace has a flap specially designed to rest against the back of your neck. If you don't get the length right on both sides, the flap will not locate in the right place.

Make sure the strap is not twisted and is around the right way when you secure it. There are no swivels to enable you to rotate the straps independently – if it is twisted when you tie it up, it is going to be twisted the whole time around your neck. I usually secure the straps initially to the camera whilst in position around my neck!

At the risk of mothering you, only secure one side at a time. I often need to reference something to work out how to do the strap back up properly.

Don't be tempted by the Convenient Disgrace, unless you are using it for a medium format camera! The increased width of the strap doesn't really help much. I don't like anything called “quick release” coming into contact with any bit of gear worth more than \$200. The Convenient Disgrace has plastic quick release tabs. I am not sure how clicking out one or two tabs is any quicker or “convenient” than just lifting it off your neck? Quick release is just another phrase for “camera impact damage”.

I have the Industry Disgrace on my H1 which weighs at least 18kgs and it works just fine. Highly recommended for anything bigger than a 35mm rangefinder.

I would like a little bit more length than it currently has. It is just long enough to hang over a shoulder, which is my preferred mode of transport, and raise it up from the side still for

the shot. I don't like heavy stuff pulling at my neck all day.

Little Strap Recommendation : Crumpler Popular Disgrace

You can find them here.

The Popular Disgrace is the little brother of the family. It is suitable for smaller compacts, 35mm rangefinders etc. The strap is light, but a little on the short side still.



A lot of compact cameras, particularly older film ones, have very small connection lugs that will not take the standard strap. The Popular Disgrace has nylon threads as an alternative. Whilst they do not look that strong, I have not had one fail yet. Quick releases that attach to the nylon threads on each side are a downer. Even more useless considering the weight of the average camera the strap is designed to hold. I look forward to a rationale from Crumpler one day!

My preference over the nylon is using split key rings to connect the strap.

I am considering re-strapping my compact cameras with them. They are much more secure than nylon. Or maybe it is just a perceptual thing for me?

The strap is very comfortable around the neck. Over the shoulder is a little more challenging due to the lack of sticky points on the neoprene – it is just waiting for an opportunity to slip off and introduce your camera to the concrete, so keep a careful eye on it. The neoprene section is not quite as flexible, and won't quite mould to your body, making it more of a flight risk.

Despite these challenges, the Popular Disgrace is still my strap of choice on compact cameras. Both straps are relatively inexpensive and make carrying around a camera for a few hours around town less of a comfort challenge.

I have had a look at their other straps instore, and can't say I was incredibly wowed – but then, fabric straps are not in my consideration set. The wristy looks interesting, but mostly as a safety.

Both straps are only mildly branded, which is a plus. You can check out the straps in their stores or buy online. They have a pretty good warranty and return policy – they seem genuinely proud of their products and stand behind them.

Other Alternatives :

I had a cheap Op/tech Neoprene strap for a while which also worked a treat. It was strong and reliable, but had a little bit too much flex for me.

There are plenty of straps out there that remind me of the guy selling Schtickys and Sham Wows. Any strap that uses the words “sling, quick action, stabilizing, fast action” or has more than two release clips is a gadget, not a strap. Don’t buy one unless you want to look like a tool. Don’t develop a gear addiction. Gadget straps are a gateway drug. And they tend to look ridiculous.

Any strap that holds more than one camera or would look at home on a soldier is also not okay to use. Two cameras? Whilst I am slagging off on less fashionable gear, it shouldn’t need to be said that camera vests are on a par with stealing from nuns. I long for the extra pockets, right where I need them, but that doesn’t necessarily make it a good idea. I would also like an ass on the back of my hand to take a dump just by putting my hand in a rubbish bin when I am out... but whilst convenient, probably isn’t a great idea either.

The Only Acceptable Attachment :



Something like this can help your camera sit a little more naturally on your side. This one is called “The Strap Buddy” and comes from one of my favourite doo dad websites, Photojojo. \$15 well spent, although you do have to occasionally check the screw is not undoing. Maybe a bit of Loctite could fix that?

Compact 35mm Cameras

Monday, June 09, 2014

Hmmm, it would seem I am a regular breaker of one of the ten commandments handed down to Moses on Mt Sinai.

“Thou Shalt Not Covet”

It is tough when friends come along to a photography function with shiny new items. I find that as soon as I pick up a camera or lens that I immediately start liking things about it, and jumping on the iphone and checking the ebay values.

So, on a couple of outings lately, I noticed that compact 35mm cameras had become quite avante garde amongst the artistic salons that I frequent. In particular, two caught my eye. The Ricoh GR1v and Nikon 35Ti.



I managed to pick up one of each surprisingly cheap on ebay and gumtree. I have always been somewhat of a lazy buyer on both sites, but over a 4 week period I was checking both sites daily for these cameras (and a Contax t3 – but they do not seem to come up very often at a decent price). There is always someone who comes up wanting a quick sale and prices their item accordingly.

Both cameras came up at a great price and I committed instantly. I realised then that if you want something at a great price you have to check these websites at least daily.

The GR1v was on Gumtree for about an hour... I am starting to wonder how many good deals pass me by because I am distracted by things like work and a home life... Hmmmm.

As I have mentioned previously, this is a short but glorious moment in time for analogue photography. Both cameras, particularly the Nikon 35ti, were “rich guy” point and shoots. Great lens quality, superior metal build, and have been used very little.

I found them absolutely perfect for street photography – nobody much cares if you point

an itty bitty compact at them vs a 70-200 lens on a body the size of a brick.

Pretty much any camera can be a “street” camera. I carted around a big ass medium format camera around New York City for a week – it nearly destroyed my old man shoulders, but I got some great shots! A nice wide angle compact camera that fits in your pocket is probably more suited though. My camera selection skills are not always fantastic... Medium format is cool, but the weight really did start to get tiresome slogging around NYC with it.



Compact cameras are perfect for ambling around the streets of the world. Being light and compact makes you more likely to take the camera to more places – you can only get the shot if you have the camera, after all.

Japan Camera Hunter has a great review of compact cameras you can read [here](#).

The image quality captured by both the Ricoh and the Nikon are excellent, particularly considering the size of the cameras.

Many of the blogs I follow from time to time recommend compact cameras for street photography, but I didn't pay much attention. Compact cameras always seemed to suggest “toy camera” to me. Once I did a bit of internet research on them though, things started to change in my mind.

After using both cameras, along with a Ricoh GR digital, I am a convert to the convenience and covert nature of compacts!

The first few rolls came back from Bond Colour from my New York trip. As soon as I started scanning, I realised I wasn't quite sure which shots were from which camera – the Ricoh GR1V or the Nikon 35ti... I will do my best to separate them... but only the camera gods know for sure which is which...





The Nikon 35ti shots that I could identify came up surprisingly nice and sharp – exceeding my meagre expectations of what a compact camera could deliver. I must admit that the 35mm focal length is my preferred option over the 28mm, but I am going to persist with the 28's...

I am getting rather attached to the compacts – after years of carrying around heavy gear, it is a nice change to have a camera that fits in your pocket!

Smaller is usually better for getting out and about.

I suppose the downside is that they have a lot of motorised stuff on them. The lenses retract, the film winders are motorised, along with the focus. Those motors are not going to last forever... and are virtually impossible to replace with no spare parts available any more.

You can read more about the Nikon 35Ti [here](#).

Nikon 35Ti Camera Review

Saturday, June 14, 2014

What a wonderful little camera. The Nikon 35ti was made from 1993 – 1999, the period of the “Great Resistance” – a time when the film companies thought everything was still going to be OK.

Nikon mostly did not skimp on anything with this little beauty.

The Lens is a suprisingly sharp 35mm F2.8 Nikkor. It is hidden behind a sliding lens cover, and promptly pops out when you switch the camera on. The sound of the motor pushing the lens out is one that I never quite like. Just another thing that is going to break one day...



35mm is a nice focal length for street photography. A sort of “inbetween” that works in most situations. Not that wide that you struggle to focus in on a subject, but still get plenty of the scene into shot. A lot of peeps prefer a 28mm lens on their compacts – I just find that a little wide most of the time.

Close focus is 40cm – not too bad.

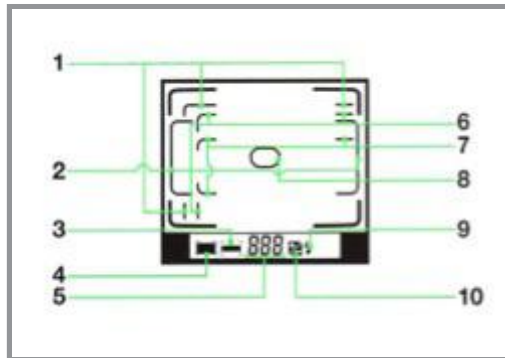
Nikon put a full on Matrix Metering system which enables the camera to handle challenging light conditions easily. I am surprised how few under / over exposed shots come through this camera. Combined with the nice wide F2.8 and built in flash, there are not too many situations which it won't keep up with. The DX code reader will allow for films from ISO 25 – 5000, although I am not sure where you will find an ISO 25 film these days?



The 35Ti flash in action.

Shutter speeds are OK for compact – 1/500 to 2secs, and up to ten minutes on manual exposure. The 1/500 can be a little on the slow side for bright sunny days. Just something to keep in mind, especially with ISO 400 film loaded up.

There is no way to set ISO manually which is not a massive hassle, but still makes it hard if you want to push a film. You can always find a way around automatic functions – there is a whole web page dedicated to it here.



Focus is OK – it is pretty accurate, but can be a little slow as the focus motor winds backwards and forwards. There is only one single centrally placed focus spot. The viewfinder is a little confusing at times – it is fairly busy.

The various framelines pop up as required. Mostly they are for parallax angle correction. What makes it super painful is a bogus 13mm x 36mm panoramic function on the camera. It just cuts the frame in half laterally. A bit of fun for those thinking about an expensive panoramic camera...



The panoramic framelines are #2 – although they also have additional parallax correction #7 frame lines that pop up when required. To be fair, only the relevant framelines appear in the viewfinder, as required – so the frame doesn't look quite so cluttered as the illustration.

Still, a cheap way to explore panoramic format photography without shelling out for an Xpan.



13mm x 36mm Panoramic Crop Mode

The little on camera flash is pretty good and well controlled by the camera. The fill flash is particularly good. One of the camera's quirks is that the only way to completely cancel the flash is to hold the right button down when exposing. A bit of a hassle... and unpredictable. The flash symbol does come up in the viewfinder, but it is still not ideal. Maybe I just haven't worked it out yet?



The camera works in 3 exposure modes.

P – Program Mode : Automatically selects the most appropriate shutter and aperture combination. The manual claims there is a way to change the combo, but I have not successfully been able to work out how to do this. I usually leave the camera in P mode most of the time and hope the camera makes a good choice!



Super awesome handling of the light conditions and accurate, sharp focus in P mode.

A – Aperture Priority Mode : User selects the aperture and the camera does the rest. Whilst this is the mode I mostly use in other cameras, the 35Ti just doesn't do it for me. There is no aperture reading in the viewfinder and the command dial is not in the best

ergonomic position for adjusting whilst shooting. I can't always work out which way is opening up the aperture and often miss the shot opportunity but the time I get the exposure right in this mode.

T – Long Time Exposure Mode : Haven't used it.



All the main readings are laid out in a suitably awesome analogue dial on the top of the camera body. Shutter speed, aperture, shots remaining, and exposure compensation. It really does look aesthetically incredible, but is also next to useless. The information it displays is what I need to see in the viewfinder – it would only make sense if they had a waist level viewfinder?



Close focus with parallax correction.

Aaaah, don't take it too seriously. The analogue dials are what attracted me to the camera in the first place. They are very pretty. And like most pretty things, not always useful.

The body is made from titanium, apparently, and pretty tough. It is tough and light enough to comfortably leave hanging around your neck for a few hours at a time. The body is a little wider than it probably needs to be.



There is only one connection point for a strap. The only other “watchout” is the film back release lever. It is very plastic and very breakable. Just got to be careful with it. A bit disappointing when the rest of the body is tough.

Summary

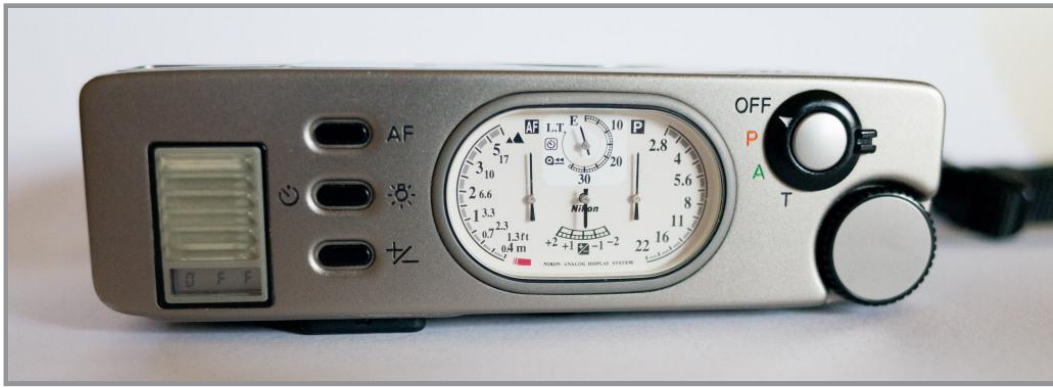
The Nikon 35Ti is a great little camera, but tends to quirkiness. The lens is simply fantastic and combined with the matrix meter produces excellent images. The focus is a bit on the slow side, and, of course, the motor is going to burn out someday and not be repairable.

Re-reading the review, I realise it sounds a bit negative. It is easier to pick on stuff that to pump it up sometimes. Overall, I love this little camera.

Nikon 35Ti cameras are not as highly sought after as some of its contemporaries such as the Ricoh GR, Contax T3, and Leica Minilux. Prices are usually OK on ebay and other sites. You should be able to pick one up for well under \$AU350 if you are patient.

If you like the look of the camera, and have been hankering for a compact 35mm, it is pretty good value for money.

Compact cameras can tend to be underappreciated by people starting out in street photography. They are perfect for long days out and are easy to take everywhere. Film or digital, doesn't really matter. So long as you have a camera with you, you can't miss the shot...



Yikes! It's Raining...

Saturday, June 14, 2014



Heavy rain is a great time to get out and shoot. Have confidence that you can do it without ruining your gear by following a few guidelines.

Before the rainy season starts in your city, you should already be scouting potential rainy day spots.

- Think about where people are still going to be walking even on a wet day. What are some “destinations” people are still going to want to visit despite the weather?
- Look for natural “people funnels” – areas where the path people will take is predictable due to obstacles, cover, corridors etc.
- A tight spot with cover is best. A shallow doorway is perfect. Just big enough for one – you don’t want anyone joining you for respite from the rain! There should be no other cover nearby, a spot where people are using umbrellas or trying to escape the rain.



In the photo above, you can see the edge of the doorway that I was standing in on the right of frame. It was a shallow doorway in a spot without any other cover. The subject is exposed completely to the rain.

Try for a small spot that only fits one person comfortably. If you are by yourself and not likely to be interrupted, you can camp out for much longer than usual. People will keep rushing by and even if your camera registers in their field of vision they are not going to stop in the rain...

The composition is not great – the pedestrian pole thing and the doorway edge make sure of that. But the “camping” spot is perfect. It is at the Flinders St end of Degraves St – a spot that no matter what the weather has traffic.

The lane naturally funnels people towards the doorway.

Wet weather offers great opportunities. People tend to be rushing from one bit of cover to another. If you can sit yourself somewhere where people are rushing through the rain, plenty of interesting opportunities should present.

Some tips around gear :

1. Buy a decent bag.

Most bags are somewhat showerproof. Just check the specs. So long as you are only sporadically exposing yourself to rain – the CBD of most cities usually provides a fair bit of cover – the bag should be fine. The best bags will often have a “pull out” shower cover which is 100% waterproof. The Lowepro Stealth Reporter has one :



Rain cover packed away.



Rain cover deployed!

The rain covers are usually your best bet to keep your gear dry – but once they are out, it is very difficult to put them back in their storage pocket without everything getting wet. So only bring it out when you are done shooting for the day and need the extra confidence for the journey home.

If you are on a budget, then look on Ebay or Gumtre. Second hand bags have very little value.

2. Keep a few plastic shopping bags in your bag.

To get to your location, just put your camera bag in a plastic shopping bag as best you can, tie it up, poking holes where necessary to allow for straps etc.

Once you get to where you want to shoot, just tear it open and chuck it in the nearest bin. The water goes with the bag into the bin. Yah, of course, only ever use biodegradable bags...

If you need to move to another location, grab another dry shopping bag out of your kit and away you go. This is so much easier than drying off the showerproof cover at each location, and being careful about not letting the collected water get on your gear.

3. Less is more.

I suppose you can take an umbrella, and wear a big, waterproof jacket. I don't. Wearing a regular non-waterproof jacket helps keep me mindful of keeping out of the rain. Keep looking for cover – if you are fully in the rain for an extended period of time, it doesn't matter how good your bag is – gear is going to get wet.

An umbrella is a great help for getting to places, but becomes a bit of a hassle once you stop.

Don't worry too much about fancy wet weather gear – the only time you should need expensive covers is if you are not undercover. Nature and landscape photography springs to mind, as does sports photography. Street photography locations should always offer some kind of cover if you look carefully enough.

So, grab some plastic shopping bags and get out there next time it starts raining!

Ricoh GR1V Camera Review

Sunday, June 15, 2014

Simon Stephenson got me hooked on the Ricoh GR1V – a little surprise of a camera.

You can now read my review of the wonderful newish digital version of the Ricoh GR here!

Ricoh have a fair bit of cred in the compact camera space. The GR series of 35mm film cameras have continued into the digital age and the most recent iteration is a ripping camera. But that is a review for another day!

The series of film cameras were

Ricoh GR1 : The original – 28mm F2.8 lens.

Ricoh GR1s : Pretty much the same as the GR1.

Ricoh GR1V : Same – but with manual ISO, manual focus, bracketing.

Ricoh GR21 : 21mm F3.5 lens



I have only tried the GR1V which I am reviewing here.

The camera is incredibly compact – it can truly live comfortably in a pocket. Unlike the Nikon 35Ti which I have reviewed previously, it is quite narrow front to back. It is almost half as thick as the Nikon. The lens retracts nicely into the body to minimise the chances of damage.



The Nikon 35Ti vs Ricoh GR1v. The Ricoh is more “pocketable”.

The lens is pretty wide – at 28mm. A little wider than I find comfortable to shoot with, but quite well loved by a lot of street photographers. As the saying goes, if your photos are no good you are not close enough to your subject. The 28mm lens does take some fantastic images, but it does require you to really get into the face of your subjects. I prefer to keep a little ways back...

The Ricoh must have been designed by a street photographer. The focus is pretty quick for a compact film camera. It has a centre spot which changes from a rectangle to a square as focus is achieved. The viewfinder has useful information which is laid out without distracting the user.

The different shot modes are actually reasonably useful. The camera automatically selects the right mode and makes the adjustments where required, eg: turning off the flash if in Macro Mode. Whilst these modes are not that useful on a decent SLR or similar camera, they are specifically designed on a compact to overcome the limitations of machine, from what I have experienced.

The lines at the top are the parallax compensation marks – which pop up when needed. The viewfinder is much less cluttered than the 35Ti.

Displaying the shutter speed in the viewfinder is essential for street photography – I try not to shoot anything that is moving slower than 1/125.



Platinum Lounge at Melbourne Airport.

The flash has a specific, easy to use switch. The choices are No Flash, Auto Flash, and Always Flash. The camera has been well considered from an ergonomic perspective. The switch is simple, and in the right spot on the back of the camera for quick access. The camera also shows under and overexposure in the viewfinder window by flashing either the 30 or 500.



I am pretty sure the flash fired for this one. Kodak Trix 400.

The shutter is good for 2 seconds to 1/500. Still a bit slow for my liking, but not unusual for a compact film camera.

It will shoot in P mode where the camera selects the aperture and shutter speed. This is usually my preferred mode for on the go shooting. I find it difficult to change aperture on the fly on compact film cameras. The dial on the Ricoh is pretty well designed, but I still don't often use it. Without an indicator in the viewfinder for aperture, it is just a bit hard.

Everything is easy to use on the Ricoh. The exposure compensation dial is on the top surface and clearly marked. The Command dial has easy to read F stops and P mode marker.



Quick focus for street photography.

The Ricoh GR1v has a manual ISO setting function for pushing film. It is pretty easy to set, and very useful for those darker, overcast days, or inside buildings etc.

One of the things that fascinates a lot of photographers is the snap focus mode. Once set, the camera has a fixed focus point of approx. 2 metres. Perfect distance for quickie street photos where you don't want to have wait for the camera to focus.



There are also separate manual focus modes which enables the user to set the focus at 1m, 2m, 3m, 5m or infinity. I don't really use either snap or manual focus mode. The camera focuses quickly enough in most situations that I find myself in.

Everything about the camera has been designed with the user in mind. The right hand side of the camera has a comfortable grip, making it easy to handle. All the dials and switches are clearly marked, click into place properly, and are intuitive for an experienced photographer.

The only downside is the LCD display which tends to eventually fail, from what I hear, along with the film winding motor.

Summary.

If you like super wide angles for street photography, then this is a great camera. Very compact, and very light. Much lighter than the Nikon 35Ti.



The main issues with this camera is the LCD potentially bleeding, the foam inside the film compartment, and the motors.

The GR1V is quite sought after and a decent example is going to run you at least \$AU500 – with no guarantees that the motor will last more than a couple of rolls! A lovely camera but a relatively high risk purchase, I suppose. The GR1v commenced production in 2001, but I can't find a reference as to when Ricoh stopped production.

Tilt Shift Digital Toy Camera

Saturday, June 21, 2014

Tilt-Shift lenses are designed to help 35mm and medium format cameras achieve the same effect as a large format field camera. The bellows of a field camera allows the photographer to tilt the lens left and right, and shift it up and down relative to the film plate. There are a whole bunch of technical reasons to do this, which you can look up on the interwebs if you so desire. They are also used to create a “miniaturising” effect on images. By choosing a “plane” of focus rather than a strict focus point, tilt shift lenses can make the world look like your father’s train set. The big problem is that a decent tilt shift lens starts at \$2000... A lot to pay for a “toy” lens. A caveat though, for an experienced architectural photographer, tilt shift cameras can really help in a completely non-toy way!



I purchased a little tilt shift point and shoot camera from Photojojo a couple of months ago. The NeinGrenze 5000T TiltShift Digital Camera has a very german sounding name and a very non german build quality. The instruction book is not much help, and the unit is built to the price – \$AU100 or so. Meh, you get what you pay for. This was my first real crack at it. I actually thought I had acquired a dud piece of gear, but I clearly didn’t understand how to use it. The first couple of shots I took were just from a “normal” perspective and the camera just spit out images that had no miniature effect and of poor quality. I really had to rethink it. You really need to get up high and make sure that subjects are quite small. Taking shots from a high perspective seems to get the best results. Light is very important – bright conditions and colours are important in achieving the effect. And I am not sure how great the sensor and lens are when they have to come in under a hundred bucks!





Under the right conditions, the camera makes a great little image. Fun to look at and very compact, the NeinGrenze does enough to evoke a smile...

I often buy cheap toy versions of gear to see if I like them. Before I bought a medium format camera, I had a couple of Holgas – not really a direct comparison, I suppose?

I have always had a hankering for a tilt shift lens but they are uber pricey. This little camera delivers the raw effect that I love – the virtual miniaturisation of the subjects – for the cost of a cheap point and shoot.

You can get one here if you so desire....

<http://photojojo.com/store/awesomeness/tilt-shift-camera/>

And find out more here

<http://www.neingrenze.com/#!/products/c1jik>

You can also create a similar effect in photoshop – there are plenty of tutorials like this one on the web.

Holga Panoramic

Saturday, June 21, 2014



This is one big ass piece of plastic. Seriously, this thing is massive! The Holga Pan 120 takes medium format film and shoots 6cm x 12cm negs – yes, 60mm x 120mm! The camera technically has a 90mm fixed focal length lens – the best estimate I could find for 35mm equivalency was a 29mm lens on the interwebs.

The camera is essentially two Holga bodies almost welded together, somehow. The image is pretty much two standard 6 x 6 square frames side by side.

The Holga Pan does not feel like a super wide angle camera – it just shoots in the very aesthetically pleasing panoramic format.

It is no different to any other Holga – cheaply made, plastic lens, and questionable film door that you know will jump off the camera at the first chance. So, it has all the same good bits and bad bits.

The viewfinder is pretty good, and provides for easy composition – of course, there is some parallax error, but normally you won't really get close enough to a subject for it to matter.

You should be able to pick one up for about \$AU90 or so. Another economic way to get panoramic out of your system without having to acquire an XPan. Well, it is not a true panoramic, by my definition. An Xpan has a frame size of 65mm x 24mm, giving a ratio of approx 2.7x width to height. The Holga runs at exactly 2, so it's no so much a letterbox format as a wide screen TV format. Still, it is a better choice than something like a Lomo Sprocket Rocket in terms of image quality.

Here are some images – granted they are not urbania – but demonstrate the camera's capability. The shots were taken around the Mansfield / Merrijig area in regional Victoria.



There is some pronounced vignetting, which I find quite suits the Holga style. The scans were done on an Epson V700 and processed using Lightroom – the combination of both resulted in the saturated colours.

The lens is surprisingly sharp in spots with the usual attractive smearing of the image in other spots, delivering the classic Holga look.

I do quite like these photos....

Recommendation

I very much enjoyed taking the Holga Pan out for a spin after it arrived. Since then, it has sat, a little forgotten, in my toy camera box.

With only 6 shots per roll, a discerning eye is needed to ensure you don't spend more time loading film than shooting.

The 6 x 12 ratio doesn't offer much for me personally. If I want to take some toy camera action, a standard 6 x 6 Holga is my tool of choice. I just don't like height to width ratio of this camera. It is a bit of a nothing ratio to me. I love square format, I love panoramic, but 6 x 12 just feels boxy. If you don't have a panoramic option in your gear, then you might enjoy this camera more.

All Holgas are great for Street Photography – lightweight, and unassuming. Nobody is really threatened when you point one in their direction. Sometimes I think they question if it is even a real camera.

If you want to have a crack at panoramic on a budget, get one.

Domke F2 Classic Bag

Sunday, June 22, 2014



Gadgets, doodads, and technical stuff seems to go hand in hand with some photographers. Sometimes I wonder if photographers are just bicycle freaks who are too unfit to ride. Both groups suffer from GAS – gear acquisition syndrome. The number of times I have seen “wiggle” boxes turn up with scientifically proven performance enhancing cycle gear at work was overwhelming at my last company. Shoes, rims, cranks, pedals, quick release this, fast start that.

Whilst not completely in the grips of GAS, I am on a holy quest to find or design the perfect camera bag. What am I looking for?

- No obvious branding that is relevant to cameras – nobody wants a Nikon bag that paints a target for thieves.
- Not obviously shaped as a camera bag – for the same reason.
- Easy access to key compartments – I don't want to have to undo fiddly straps when I need to get at my gear.
- Flexible interior space – dividers that are not fussy and complicated. Most of the time I take them out anyway.
- Secure interior pockets for keys, phone etc.
- Wet weather shroud that pulls out from a hidden compartment.
- Not too big – having a smaller bag forces you to make better choices on what gear to take out each time. Big bags just encourage a pack horse mentality where you schlep around kilos of gear you are not going to use.
- Loops to attach a tripod.
- Removable strap, in case I want to customise.
- For larger bags, a good even spread of weight.

The Domke F2 Classic Bag ticks a few of the boxes, but not all. It is a wonderfully retro styled canvas bag. It is soft, and supple, with a firmer bottom insert in the bag to give it some structure. Domke bags come with a recommended insert to get you started. The one that came with my F2 does not fill the whole bag. It has four compartments, each big enough to fit a lens in. You can fit two larger items such as a 24-70mm 2.8 zoom (which is quite a big lens) and a 35mm body without a lens, and then two smaller items like a

flash and smaller lens.

To give it a bit more flex, I unpicked the seam of one of the inner compartment walls.

The wall is now a moveable flap – which can still separate two items which hold the wall in place anyway, or push it aside to fit an even larger item, like a medium format body.

The remaining space outside the insert can be used to fit another body or similar, but is only protected by a thin layer of canvas – no impact protection at all. Another insert or protective bag is a good option here. Unless you love the sound of cracking glass.

The two external side pockets are perfect for things you need to access throughout the day. Good sized velcro tabs hold the flaps down adequately. I keep things like flashes, light meter, and film in the side pockets.

Moving around to the front of the bag is where it rapidly goes south. There is only a one layer lid in a flap format. There is no zip or similar securing the inside of the bag from the external environment. Nor is there a quick access zip or similar on the top of the flap so you can access a lens without undoing the whole shebang. This wouldn't be a problem except...

The latches are an abomination. They are sharp, unyielding, finger hurting monsters. The amount of pressure required to depress the lever to unhook the latch is bordering on Hulkian. They are definitely not "quick release". There are some velcro patches that could work when things don't need to be totally secure, except the velcro must actually be "Vilcro" or "Felcro" – a cheap private label imitation which doesn't deliver. The velcro does not seem to hold the top flap in place.

So most of the time, you will be walking around without the top flap secure, so don't tip the bag over. Even with the latches secure, the combination of no complete seal and the flexible structure of the bag can open up gaps for stuff to fall out of if gravity aligns. I have not had something fall out yet, but have come close once or twice.

The bag has no weather proofing either. The canvas will hold off a light sprinkle, but anything more is going to soak through. I keep a shopping bag in the side pocket as an emergency raincoat if I get caught out – but tend to take other bags if it looks a bit grey.

OK, so there are few issues. I still love this bag.

The sandy coloured canvas looks pretty cool and is fairly inconspicuous – it doesn't look much like a camera bag. The strap is pretty good – soft cotton webbing with rubber sticky grippers woven in to prevent any slippage. . The bag also has an additional small strap that is pretty tight which you can use as a "handle" to pick up the bag by hand anytime.

The inside of the bag is a pretty large space, so you can configure it however you you like. There are not too many complex compartments – the more specialised a compartment, the less flexible and therefore more useless it is – unless I have exactly the same gear as the bag designer. This is my "go to" for when I want to take more gear than usual out with me.

Now for the best bit. This is the most comfortable larger bag I have ever used. There is an accessory harness that makes you look like a Gallipoli reject, but I always fancied

joining the army, so no problems there.



This one accessory makes all the difference. It is a bit complicated hitching it on, and can get a bit tangled up when you take it off. It rests your bag on your lower back, depending on how much you let the straps out. This is a suprisingly sensible place. I personally find backpacks uncomfortable and restrictive. Just like a backpack, you can only access the bag contents by taking it completely off.

The two straps distribute the weight of the bag evenly, reducing the senstation of being loaded up.

Conclusion

I realise I have an irrational attachment to this bag – particularly after re-reading this article.

Cropping an Image to Explore New Formats

Sunday, June 29, 2014

Getting composition right when under pressure to “take the shot” can be challenging for a lot of photographers, both experienced and not so experienced. Making sure the focus point is where it needs to be, for example, can lead to a bit of “centre” heavy composing – where the subject is smack, bang in the middle of the frame in a fairly uninspired spot.

Just because you haven’t composed the shot perfectly, why not transform a good image into a great one by spending some time cropping it? A good crop can make difference between artsy and also ran with images. You should know your rule of thirds, so why not apply it in the post process?

Great news is, most digital cameras have enough megaunbelievablemonsterpixels to allow you to crop the shot right in and still have more than enough resolution to print, and almost always enough for an on-screen use like your FB profile...

Experimenting with composition by cropping on your computer screen can help develop your eye. Think about how you could have better positioned yourself to take the shot as you crop. Be adventurous – you can always “undo” anything that doesn’t quite turn out. If you find you are drawn to a particular style of composition through your cropping, make some notes for next time you are out as a reminder to give it a try.

To try a different format, there are a couple of options.

1. Beg or borrow some film gear.
2. Buy some low cost film gear.
3. Grab a camera with a “live view” LCD on the back and mask it to the format you want to try. Crop the images to match what you see on the LCD when you get home.

There are plenty of relatively inexpensive film cameras to assist in your exploration.

- Yashica TLRs
- Bronica 6×6
- Bronica 645 format (the viewfinder has panoramic framelines for running 35mm through the camera with a specially designed back)
- Holga 6×6 toy camera – a very cost effective way to try square format! I would start with a Holga.
- Sprocket Rocket – 35mm panoramic toy camera

My favourite image format at the moment is panorama – yes, I have a camera that shoots in this format, but why not try the same format out on some of your photos by giving your crop tool a work out and see what happens!



Start thinking about panoramic composition when you are framing your shots. Crop to a roughly 1 : 2.7 frame size for panoramic. See if you like it... You can find out more about panoramic composition [here](#).



Some of the most famous film cameras of the past shoot in a square format – 6×6. The Rolleiflex and Hasselblad 500 series both capture in this format. Square composition makes composition a different challenge. The classic “Rule of Thirds” doesn’t necessarily need to be applied to achieve pleasing compositions.





Again, think about square when you are composing and crop the images on your computer.

Ok – if you have made it this far, I have one more thought...

This photo below is one of my all time most viewed on flickr. All the kids pick it up for their Tumblr feeds. It is not a super remarkable image, but I think it has two things going for it that the sk8trs like...



1. the moment of anticipation – the bmxer is just about to take off
2. people like images of people where you cannot see the face – and can therefore project themselves into the image

Try taking some more images of people where the actual face is not recognisable. At most shows I participate in, the best selling images tend subscribe to the “Rückenfigur” style. Literally meaning “back figure”, the term rückenfigur is usually associated with German romantic painters, such as Caspar David Friedrich, to describe a viewpoint that includes another person seen from behind, viewing a scene spread out before the viewer. You can read more about it [here](#).

Holga “Toy” Camera

Saturday, July 12, 2014

Analogue is good. Overlay that with plastic and you get something great!

Holga cameras were designed and started manufacture in China during the heady days of the early '80's. I suppose they were manufactured as a super economical camera suitable for a radiant socialist future. They are a medium format camera – ie. they take film like this :



Holgas consist of three cents worth of cheap black moulding, a two cent plastic lens, and a couple a metal springs to make the shutter work. You won't die wondering why they are called “toy cameras” once you get one in your hand. Holga along with Diana were responsible for the genesis of the whole toy camera genre.



This is the Holga you want, not the 35mm version.

The Holga should have outlived its usefulness once cheap digital cameras became available to the comrades. Luckily, Western photographers kept discovering the Holga, and buying them. Toy cameras are much loved by modern photographers and poseur

hipsters for their low tech approach. Normally kitted out with a plastic lens, they can give dreamy and unique effects without the predictable boredom of Photoshop.

What do you need to get started?

1. A camera – You can pick one up on Ebay for under \$30 from Hong Kong. Make sure you buy the medium format / 120 film, not one that takes 35mm. You will be missing a big part of the experience in 35mm.
2. Some film – grab some medium format ISO 400 colour C41 film. Either Fujicolor PRO400H or Kodak Portra 400. It can run at around \$10 a roll. Expired film is OK if it is less than 12 months out of date.
3. An outdoors scene.

The Holga is perfectly set up with 400 speed film and a nice sunny or brightish day. Regular C41 negative film is the most forgiving if the light conditions are not perfect. Slide film needs much more precise light conditions to produce a great image.

When your shiny new Holga turns up, check the tightness and seal around the side clips that secure the film door. I do not recommend using a strap if you attach it to the lugs on the side clips. These little fellows have a well established history of popping the film door open at inopportune moments. Many Holga enthusiasts actually tape up the film door each time they load film to prevent this, and general light leaks.

Minor light leaks are a treasured and sought after feature for many Holga types – giving the resulting images a pattern of light that is a virtual fingerprint of the camera.

There are plenty of websites that can help you with loading film etc. that are much more informative than anything I will ever write.

Squarefrog – Life through a plastic lens. Some great tips and advice on “how to”

Freestyle Photo – online US store that has plenty of bits, accessories, and film. Highly recommended.

Freestyle have this great manual on Holgas which I can't quite work out if I am allowed to post here or not. But here it is.

Everything Holga

It answers every question on “how to” that I can imagine...

Make sure you buy your Holga and film from them if you love it. Here are some links to what you need to buy on the Freestyle site.

Film. Camera.

Lomography – A bit of a culty analogue camera company. They have a sensational range of toy cameras, some of which are exclusive to them. Can be a bit expensive though. And disliked by many photographers for... being successful in promoting film? I think Lomo haters are driven by their marketing strategy of selling mostly to hipsters who use their cameras twice and do a shitty job of composition. I am neutral – have bought a couple of their cameras and loved them, but am not exactly an acolyte. Polarising.

What can you expect from your Holga?



Holga



Mamiya 7

Holga image is on the left. Both are similar images from Footscray Station. The Holga image has a very attractive natural vignetting (dark edges, light middle). The plastic lens is also delivering a sharper image at the starting point of the hand rail and more “dreamy” elsewhere. The Mamiya 7 image on the right is sharper and more even across the image, although there is also a little “post” vignetting due to pumping up the blacks in Lightroom.

The difference should be fairly obvious now. The Mamiya 7 image is pretty sharp, and looks great. The Holga is technically a poor quality image, but is still aesthetically pleasing.



Mamiya 7



Holga

More composition tips...

Negative Space. A smaller, focused subject with a plain background that makes up the majority of the shot.

Landscapes can work surprisingly well.

Most Holgas shoot in square format. I often find that a centrally placed subject rather than using the rule of thirds can work extremely well.

Getting close is good. Bright colours. Things that have a retro look often come up nicely. If you get one with a flash, it works pretty well at night.

Try photographing everyday things on the street – but make sure there is a definite single feature. It may come out nice and funky!

Recommendation

Holgas are great street cameras. Filmy, dreamy goodness in the images, and simplicity in

operation. When you have a holga in your hand, there are zero technical issues distracting you. Your focus becomes on “seeing” potential images that might look great on the camera. Taking a holga out occasionally will make you a better photographer.

It is a great way to try medium format film. There is very little that can go wrong – excepting a film door malfunction. Holgas are just a few grams of plastic. So you can put one in your bag and it just takes up space, but doesn’t add to the weight.

The down side is that you need to get film, process the film, and either scan the film or get them developed into paper photos. The upside is that at least you can go to the Lomo crew to get this done at first – they will hold your hand.

No focus, no real aperture to speak of – it is quick and simple. Sometimes a bit slow on the speed for darker street conditions, but on bright days – overcast or sunny – the Holga is great.

Buying Guide

There are a whole swag of different Holgas.

Flash. Coloured Flash. Pinhole. TLR version. Panoramic. Custom coloured. Old style 3D. Glass Lens. A 35mm version. Modified Holgas. Just to name a few. It is tempting to try a few different things, as none of them are going to break your budget unless you are quite the starving artist.

There are a plethora of attachments, gadgets, and gee gaws for Holgas. Give them a go – they are all pretty cheap. Most of them work pretty well. Filters are a pretty good start, along with the fisheye attachment.

One of the grooviest thing to use a Holga for is infrared medium format – but that is for another post.

Here is a gratuitous gallery with notes on technique for some shots.





Infrared Film



Infrared Film



Fisheye Lens Attachment



Red Filter on Flash





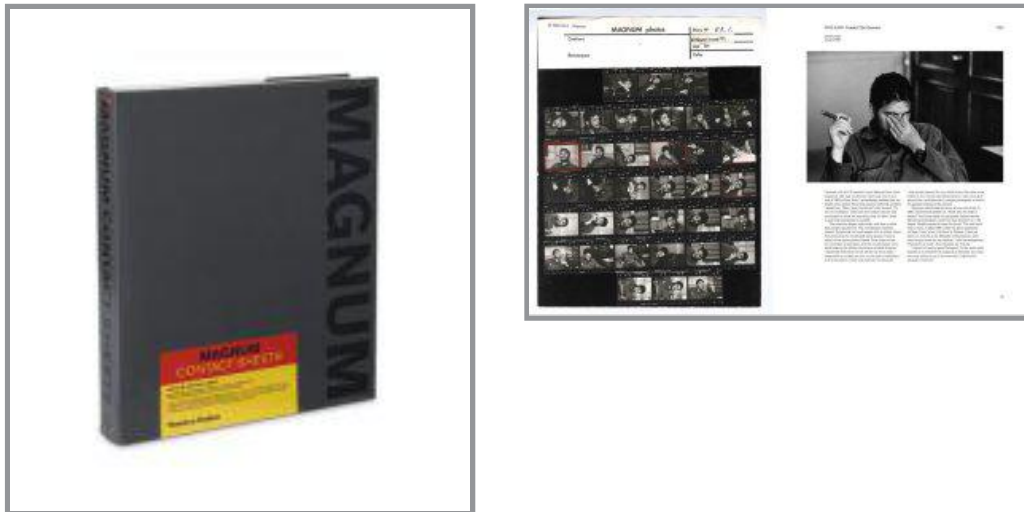
Maybe Cross Process???

Trent Parke – 3 Lessons from “Summer Rain”

Saturday, July 19, 2014

A copy of “Magnum Contact Sheets” was in my Santa Sack last Christmas. Who would have thought Santa was that clued up on photography? The book presents some of the most famous Magnum images and pairs them with the contact sheet it was selected from. The photographer also gives some commentary around the photo and selection rationale.

You can purchase the book here.



It gives the reader a chance to understand the thinking process behind the image. Like my last rolls of Neopan 1600, I have been reading the book sparingly. Just one photo at a time to ensure I give myself every opportunity to walk in the shoes of these wonderful photographers for a moment.

The first image I just couldn't go past was Trent Parke's “Summer Rain”. It was a pleasant surprise to find out it was shot in Sydney.

Parke talks about spending enough time in a city to know when different shots might happen under the right circumstances. All kinds of circumstances – weather, cultural, events etc.

In the case of “Summer Rain” he was visiting his usual favoured city locations in Sydney, when a summer thunderstorm came through. Parke's masterstroke was knowing from experience where strong light might break through into a rain soaked scene. He ran across the CBD until he got to the corner he had in mind.

The main subject in the left of frame is often mistakenly thought to have a backpack strap over his shoulder. It is actually his tie – flipped over from running through the rain.

Parke talks about his time in Sydney “always standing, watching, and waiting on street corners for something magical to happen”.

What Makes it a Great Image?



The “over the shoulder” perspective directs the viewer towards the exit point of the image – top right. It is a very natural progression. People generally “enter” a visual on the left and exit right.

The direction is supported by the traffic lines that continue to draw the eye from the subject on the left towards the top right. The contrast between the road and the line is aesthetically pleasing.

The rain is clearly falling in the frame. There is a sense of anticipation. The subject on the left has a clearly defined path he is going to have to travel – through the downpour. He is already a little dishevelled with his tie coming over the shoulder. The pedestrian crossing almost looks like a landing strip.

The light is falling on the subjects on the right in the circle. The light then gradually falling off in a roughly concentric circle as marked up. It highlights the exit point and main silhouetted figures at the destination point. The objective of the guy with the tie is clear – he needs to cross the wet and raining road.

The figure to ground ratio for the figures on the right is contrasty and helps break them clear of other visual clutter.



To simplify the aesthetic even a little more – the relationship between the “tie guy” on the left and the silhouetted figures on the right forms a rough triangle. Triangles are good. Hmmm, very technical...

Summary of Learning

1. Stand – Watch – Wait :

Something magical will happen if you are patient. Find the spot, wait for the shot.

2. Know Your Locations :

Mentally catalogue locations as you discover them. Think about what time of day the light is best, the kind of angles that work etc. Or you could record them visually? Just know where to go when different sets of circumstances occur. For example, when it rains, I have a doorway in Degraes St that I always know is a winner!

3. Be Decisive

Parke talks about running across the CBD to get to where he thought an opportunity would happen. Once you recognise the opportunity, be single minded and get to it. Don't faff about. About a month ago, I was looking out the window mid/late Saturday afternoon and thought the light looked extra special. One of my photography buddies, Cos, even posted about it on Facebook!



I saw his post. And just kept wearing an ass groove into the couch, watching Fox Footy. I thought, "yah, I'll get out tomorrow and the light will be just as great". It wasn't and I didn't...

For the record, here is the contact sheet that the image was selected from.



The Art of Bar Photography – Part One

Sunday, July 20, 2014

I was hanging out with a few photography buddies at a pub called the “Marquis of Lorne”. What a pub named after Lorne was doing in Fitzroy confused me somewhat, but we had a great day over a few pints and cameras.

One of my esteemed colleagues commented on the preponderance of portraits of younger people at bars on my photo stream. “Bar Portraits” are amongst the most popular images on my stream. I walked them through my thoughts on how to successfully get people to pose at bars.

A month or two later, that person said that they were now more confident about asking strangers for permission to photograph them since they started to apply the golden rules.... so here is what I remember from the advice.

Pre-work

Make sure you have two or three beers to warm yourself up. Alcohol is your friend, as it reduces your natural inhibitions in approaching strangers. It will help you the same way it will encourage your subjects to agree.

Identifying “Possibles”

People are more open to new ideas and are approachable after 3 – 4 beers. After that, they can get grumpy, so go get ‘em before they finish their second jug. A great reason take your camera to the pub more often!

People with visible tattoos like to be noticed. Why else would you get a tattoo in the first place, except to say: “look at me, I am special”?

Young people – Generation Y – think that life and the world is a movie that they are starring in. They are going to battle against the odds and, one day, succeed. Their idea of success is being noticed in a karaoke bar by a record producer and being offered a deal – not through practicing and working your ass off to succeed – they want reality TV success that comes quickly and without work.

Gen Y are both very suspicious of media and voracious consumers of it. Mostly, their need to be noticed and feel special will overcome any suspicion of your intentions to take their portrait. You are feeding into their own belief that they are “special” by noticing them in a bar.

Credibility is assured if you have a number of other photographers in the bar with cameras out – you look more like a genuine artiste than a GWC (guy with camera – a term used for suss characters).



Oh, I nearly forgot – smokers tend to make good subjects, for some reason I cannot quite define. I think it has something to do with the fact that they have something cool to do with their hands.

How to Approach Them

Don't stalk the people you want to photograph. You are not trying to pick them up (most of the time), so you don't need to make eye contact once or twice before going over. Staring at people is not going to win their trust. Just walk on over to them and ask simply "May I take your portrait?" Make sure you have your camera out and obvious. I find that lifting the camera slightly towards them, almost as an offering, tends to work for some reason.

One of two things will happen. They will usually say either "yes" or "no" straight away. If they say "no", just say "OK, thanks anyway" and move on. It is simply not worth the hassle to debate the point at all. If they say "yes", get on with it straight away. You do not need to know their name, their interests, or their favourite footy team. Tell them what to do, if anything, and take your shots.

Get the shots you want quickly. You have about 30 seconds before you start to wear out your welcome. Get the shot and thank them and move on. Most people become uncomfortable after a while being the focus of a stranger with a camera. Move on quickly, before they think too much.

Other people will be watching you in the bar, and will be judging. The more people that say "yes" the more likely the next person will also say "yes". If you are intrusive and talky, other people will simply say "no" to save themselves. The same rule that applies to guys at a bar applies to you – the more times you get knocked back, the more likely it is that the next girl will say no as well. Nobody likes unwanted goods...

Gear Makes a Difference

Bar photography is best done on a retro film camera, not a big ass plastic DSLR. The kind of person who is a great subject also generally fancies themselves as connoisseurs of all things hipster. Film cameras are hipster icons.

Grab an older, metal bodied camera like an FM3A or Hasselblad 500CM (or Seagull TLR if you are a starving artist type) and plonk an inoffensive 35mm or 50mm lens that

doesn't poke out too far.

For some reason, people like to be photographed on film. It feels more like a student style activity. A big DSLR is perceived as being intrusive, and full of suspicious intentions.

Engage or Not?

Occasionally someone will ask "what are they for?" – just motion towards the table full of camera geeks you are with and say "just an amateur photographer". Don't elaborate too much.

So why am I so against engaging with subjects?

They could be a pain in the ass. If you talk to them, they might be under the mistaken impression they are your new best friend and stalk you around for the rest of the day. The more information you give, the more questions it raises. The more you talk to the subject, the more time it gives them to think up reasons not to let you take their portrait.

You want to take more than one portrait of one person. Hanging around wastes your time. The most interesting subjects are usually a bit "edgy". Don't give them a chance to "turn" and get grumpy with you.

Spending as little time with them as possible removes the "fishbowl" feeling people hate. If you don't get your shot, don't linger longer unless the subject is really into it. People don't like to feel like animals in a zoo for your viewing pleasure. The subjects are not there for your entertainment – if you make them feel like they are in the fishbowl, they will react very negatively... trust me.



And to wrap it up...

If you follow the rules, the worst thing that will happen is someone says "no". Two out of three people will say "yes".

So, instead of sitting on the train on the way home thinking “I wish I had’ve taken a photo of that girl at the bar”, you will have a great bar portrait that will win accolades and acclaim from your Silver Mine buddies.

Harden up, go and approach people. Say goodbye to that feeling of lost opportunities.

Summary

1. Approach people who want to be noticed.
2. Be quick, take your shot, and move on.
3. People who smoke and have tattoos generally have a good “look”.
4. Use a hipster friendly film camera

This is an updated repost from an article written for the Melbourne Silver Mine...

Part Two of this Article can be accessed [here](#).

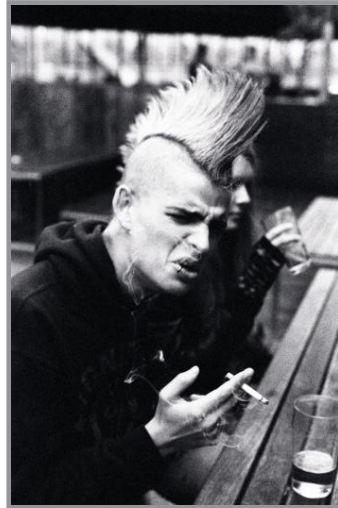
The Art of Bar Photography – Part Two

Friday, July 25, 2014

In the last article, I outlined some basic guidelines to getting subjects to pose in bars.

This time, I am going to share the story behind some of my personal favourites to help illustrate the lessons.

The Punk Kid



Taken at The Corner Hotel in Richmond.

Delta 3200 film – hence the extreme grain

I had been sitting with a bunch of mates at The Corner, enjoying the sunshine in the beer garden, and the cold beer. I think this was the day I started to develop my Nikon film body fetish. There was a stray FM2 body on the table, and I was itching to use it.

This guy had caught my eye as he walked into the bar. Someone who has the guts to wear this haircut in public was screaming for attention. He was with a couple of friends, and had a couple of beers.

He was pretty scary looking, but a couple of beers had given me a bit of extra courage.

Following my principles, I walked straight over to him and proffered up the FM2 asking “hey mate, can I take your portrait?”. He was quite stoked by my request and immediately asked “what do you want me to do?”.

“Just look tough”. I took two or three shots, thanked him and went back to my table. It worked a treat. You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take – Wayne Gretzky’s quote holds true for photography as much as ice hockey! At least I didn’t go home wondering if he would have agreed...

Smoking Girl



Taken at The Workshop bar in Melbourne's CBD.

Again, was with a bunch of photography mates at the bar. This girl had been sitting there for some time, waiting for a friend or boyfriend who later showed up. She was living the bohemian lifestyle perfectly – tattooed, smoking, drinking a glass of wine, reading “A Life By Design” – a biography of a wallpaper designer, of all things!

She was sitting there, looking all moody and indy. She had glanced over at us a couple of times, so I popped over and asked the question. I think the old skool 500CM I had for the day also looked pretty cool, and appealed to her. I thought there was a 50/50 chance I was going to get a straight “f&*k off”. As soon as I asked though, she got all giggly and girly. The moodiness I wanted to capture evaporated. But I still got a great shot.

I took three shots in rapid succession. I had already done a light reading before approaching her. And returned immediately to my table.

Again, at least asking the question meant I got a great result.

A Final Thought

Both of these shots were taken around 2007 – over six years ago. They both might live in Patterson Lakes now with a spouse, kid, and a labrador for all I know. You never appreciate your youth until it has gone. These portraits show both subjects radiating youthful adulthood – for all I know, both of them could also be overweight suburbanites now.

I wish I could give them each a copy of their portraits to help them remember that time in their life.

I now carry bite sized Moo Cards that have my contact details (just a website contact and email) – so if I take a potrait that features a person, they can check out my website, and if it makes the cut, they can request a copy of it.

Part One of this Article can be accessed [here](#).

Idea Prompt : No-Face Saturday

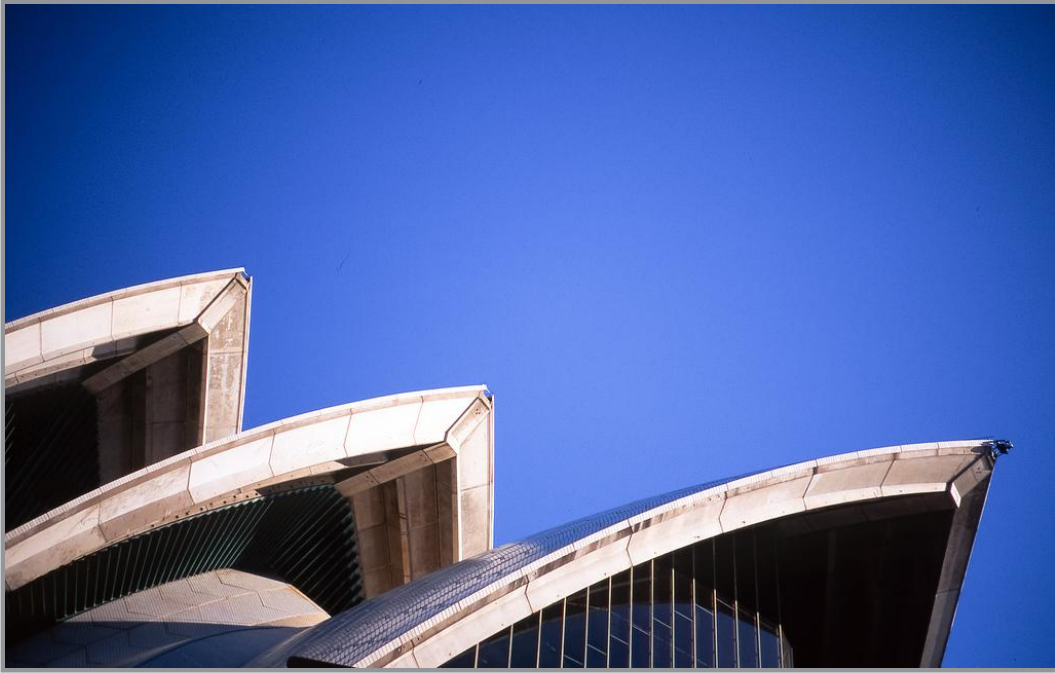
Saturday, July 26, 2014



Sometimes you don't need a head or face in shot to create interest.

Idea Prompt : Hide the Horizon

Saturday, July 26, 2014



Create an abstract using a recognisable subject by completely removing any reference to the horizon. Start with buildings and develop from there.

Life Magazine Photographers – Lessons 1

Saturday, July 26, 2014

Looking at other photographers' work is a great way to find your own style. Whilst I am in the midst of reading quite a few specialised street photography books, they can be fairly demanding of my attention. I have to make some "quiet time" to really get into them.

I recently managed to watch "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" in 45 minute increments over 3 or 4 consecutive QANTAS flights last month. It was the perfect aeroplane movie – not too involving and mildly entertaining. I make a call in the first 10 minutes if a movie is worth watching. As soon as I found out the plot revolved around a missing photographic negative, I was smitten!

The story is set during the closure of the printed Life Magazine product. It reminded me of one the first "photography" books I purchased – "The Great Life Photographers". You can buy it [here](#). I have never actually read a Life Magazine, but everyone knows the images. It is an easy way to explore "journalistic" style which can be very relevant to street photography.

Here are some of the images I love from the book, along with a brief explanation of what I learnt. Sorry about the quality, but they are direct scans from the book as I struggled to find the images on the interwebs...



Photographer : Robert W. Kelley

For a scene taking place in a relaxed rural setting, there is a strong point of tension. The work already complete vs. the work yet to come. "The calm before the storm."

The wide angle of the image demonstrates why the main subject is having a break. The massiveness of the table settings is augmented by the clear repetition – the people setting up have had to do the same tasks over and over and over.

The repetition present in the image suggests the sense of the exhaustion the maid must already be feeling, and the anticipation of the oncoming onslaught of people. Every single chair will soon have a hungry person on it wanting to be waited on, fed, and watered. Every single cup will need to be filled multiple times. The calm before the storm...

Kelley has produced a very aesthetically pleasing image – where the composition techniques help tell the story.

Repetition is a theme in this photo that helps tell the story. The mass of parallel lines and subject items are virtually unmissable. The overwhelming size of the tables dwarfs the maid. Being front and centre ensures she is the clear subject. The wide angle captures

the relationship perfectly – she is the focus, but you get a sense of the enormity of the picnic lunch about to happen.

The figures in distance, still setting up, help highlight the overall size of the scene. I often struggle with composition in these situations – either the main human subject ends up being too small or it underplays the size of the complementing scene.

Finding ordinary people in extraordinary visual situations takes patience. Most of the time, this theme plays out with a small subject contrasted against a massive and relatively plain architectural or natural backdrop.

There is a nice quirk at the top end of the second table – one of the chairs is different and provides a point of interest to balance against the maid.

Lessons :

1. Use a wide angle lens to capture a wider, massive scene, whilst maintaining focus on a human subject in the foreground.
2. Repetition and parallel lines are a strong visual theme.
3. Ordinary people in extraordinary scenes.
4. Capture moments “before the storm” hits.



Photographer : Herbert Gehr

An amazing photo, considering the lighting conditions.

There are clearly defined “light edges” (ref Fan Ho techniques here) along the footpath, creating interesting angles other than 90 degrees. The group of three men is accentuated by the shadow that falls from their figures. The rather ominous single figure under the Bar sign on the corner provides a counter to the man bottom right who is moving along the footpath.

“Nothing good happens after 2am” is the mantra of many professional sporting clubs – the image looks as though the fun and sociable part of the night is about to come to a close. The scraps of paper on the footpath, and the lack of women in the image suggest the night is getting quite old. The time has come when those who do not want any further “excitement” have gone home and to bed.

The photographer has captured the image from a high vantage point, which creates a point of view that is not ordinary or expected.

My Melbourne Silver Mine buddies talk about “little dude” subjects – images with small silhouetted figures, normally a single person, but in this case, many “little dudes”.

Little Dude works because of the lack of recognisable facial features – where the viewer can easily project themselves onto the subject. They can imagine being in the scene.

Lessons :

1. “Little Dude” subjects are generally only silhouetted and do not have recognisable facial features.
2. Find an interesting angle.
3. Look for areas of high contrast between light and dark – creating “light edges”.

Read part two of this article [here](#).

Idea Prompt : Fight Urban Monsters

Sunday, July 27, 2014



Find ordinary machines and objects, and shoot them as you would a monster.

Life Magazine Photographers – Lesson 2

Sunday, July 27, 2014



Photographer : Walter B. Lane

Lane's image of a plain office style building encouraged me to reassess my view on urban landscapes. I avoided scenes without clear human subjects for a long time.

The image offers a view into the world of others. Each window gives a small part of a wider story.

Cropping the image removes the visual references that a building would normally have – an entrance, street frontage, sky and other surrounding buildings. The crop enables the brain to switch gears and see the image as something other than a building wall.

The image has been captured at an unusual angle – I suspect Lane was in a position elevated from street level. Perhaps in another building or other higher vantage point. The normal angle of view would be looking upward, whereas this is taken from close to a 90 degree angle to the wall.

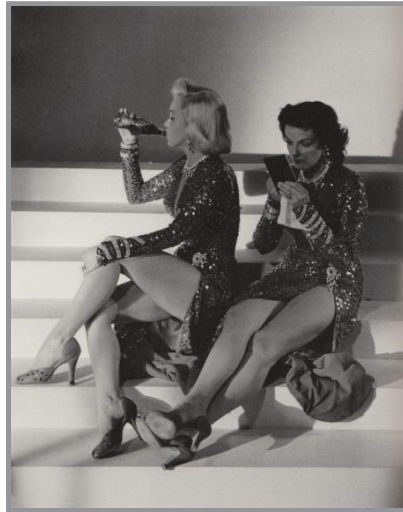
The tree branches provide some interest at the bottom of the image. The image becomes gradually less busy towards the top, as the proportion windows with the blinds down increases.

Repetition and parallel lines are a critical part of this composition.

Lessons :

1. Find an angle from which people would not usually view your subject from.
2. Repetition and parallel lines are a strong visual theme.
3. Change the nature of a subject by cropping in an element.

4. Create an extraordinary image from an ordinary, everyday scene.



Photographer : Edward Clark

Wow, who could muck up a photo of Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell? This is almost the reverse of other images from Life – extraordinary people in a very ordinary moment. Contrast the absolute glamour of their costumes, makeup, and the set against the casual break time between scenes.

Contrasting a subject against an overall setting is a technique that can work in many different ways – colour, composition, movement, feeling, etc.

Like the photo of the maid preparing for the picnic in Robert W. Kelley's photo featured previously, this captures a moment of pause before a rush of activity. Both actresses are preparing for the next bout of filming.

Lessons :

1. Find a moment of pause before the subjects return to heightened activity.
2. Contrast the subject and the setting in different ways.



Photographer – Gordon Parks

Ingrid Bergman on location for the movie “Stromboli” in Italy. There are a number of compositional techniques combined in this image to create the overall effect.

The photo has been taken from a high vantage point – higher than the normal “head high” perspective we normally view the world at. The camera is looking down gradually at Bergman. The shot has been taken with a reasonably wide angle lens, which enables Bergman to be the key focus of the shot but still include high interest elements in the background. Probably not a super wide lens, as the background is still a bit tight.

There is a strong and obvious contrast of the beautiful actress and the dark older women in the background. She is dressed in white and they are all in black, with shawls covering their heads. The women in background almost look religious.

For me, there is also the suggestion of what Bergman will become – the women are looking at her in way that suggests they are waiting for her to “come with them”, to become older like them. Bergman can feel their eyes and gives off a very introverted vibe. The viewer can’t but help imagine what the women are thinking.

Her eyes are following the direction of the path which bisects the image diagonally. The women are following the path to the exit path of the photo in the top right corner. There is also tension between the direction the two parties are expected to travel in the next moment. The women are going to continue down the path to the top left, and Bergman looks as though she is going to move along to the bottom left corner.

Lessons :

1. Movement of subjects in opposite directions can provide tension.
2. Find contrast between two subjects in an image.
3. Keep an eye on Depth of Field. The wider you have your lens open, the less distinct the background will be.
4. Take your shot from an interesting perspective – something other than head height.

You can read part one of this article [here](#).

Idea Prompt : People at Work

Monday, July 28, 2014



Look for people at work.

Changing Perspective

Friday, August 01, 2014

One of the hardest things to avoid in street photography is “same same” perspective. The nature of the activity – walking around and instant opportunities – results in the photographer mostly bringing the camera up to to the eye at head height.

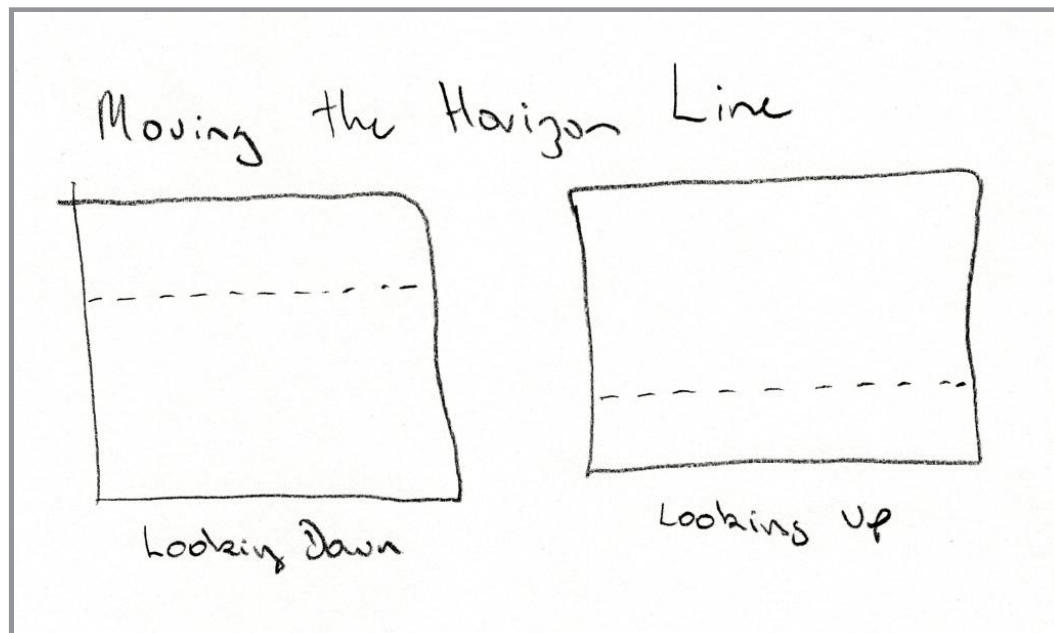
We see the world around us, every day, at head height. We are used to seeing from a perspective that is roughly 5ft up from the ground. If your images have a sameness about them, consider the perspective that you have taken them from – have they all been taking from a standing position with the camera at head height?

One of the easiest and simplest things that can immediately create interest in images is changing up the perspective. Get higher or lower, move left or move right. Any vantage point that is not where you would normally see your subject from.

How can you change height easily?

- Get down on one knee
- Step up on some stairs in a doorway
- Step up on a sitting bench
- Look for stairs that are lower than a walking thoroughfare, and stand a couple of stairs down
- Sit down on a bench, or a ledge

Changing the vantage point where the camera is shooting from also moves the horizon for impact.



Sorry about the sketchy sketches – I am not much of an illustrator.

Consider the two images below.



Head Height Perspective



Low Perspective

They are test shots for something else I have in mind, but you can see there is a subtle difference. The image on the right was shot from a low perspective – I knelt down on one knee and got the camera pointing slightly upwards.

The low perspective shot is more interesting and the eye is drawn more to it than the image on the left which was taken from head height in a standing position. The lower angle brings a more dynamic relationship to the subject and the signage in the background.



The image above is also a good example of getting lower to increase the interest – this was taken from a kneeling position.

Value of a Notebook

Saturday, August 02, 2014

Ever felt a bit flat about your photography? Like you are taking the same groundhog day shots every time you go out? Last November, I made a commitment to take another step forward with my pursuit of creative growth. I had slipped into a groove which had rapidly developed into a rut. As photography is not a professional activity, interest comes from constantly improving and trying new things. Doing the same shots every day is something for commercial photographers – weddings, kids etc. – where predictability of the outcome is the objective.

I have a personal viewpoint that creativity is born from discipline. A commitment to invest time on a regular basis in a structured manner needs planning and intent. Most people that give up on a creative endeavour do so because of the lack of a structured approach.

Firstly, you have to realise that something is “learnable” – just pointing a camera without an understanding of composition is unlikely to consistently deliver a good result.

Secondly, you have to commit the time required to learn and practice the skill.

For me, the best way to achieve this is through taking notes. If it isn't written down, it didn't happen. Writing stuff down in a notebook ensures that it “happened”. Writing things down lock them into memory, aiding the learning process.

What kinds of Notes and Notebooks?

1. Learning and Review Folder

What kinds of things do I note down?

After each shoot, I print out contact sheets of the final “maybe” images on a crappy little laser printer. I go through each image and make some notes on why the image works, and what could have been improved.



When I find another photographer's work that I love, I try and pull apart their creative technique, and then start working up ways to learn it through execution. A great example of this is the series on Fan Ho.

I keep notes on technical stuff like developing results, new gear notes, etc.

Structuring out future shoots to ensure new techniques will be covered off.

Learnings from books and the internet. I keep summary notes on all kinds of relevant subjects from Gestalt Vision to Composition and beyond. Anything and everything that might help.

My favourite kit for this is Moleskine A4 binders paired with Moleskine lined and unlined hole punched inserts. You can buy them here :

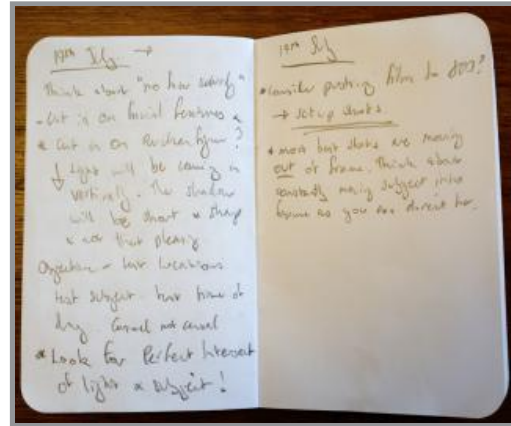
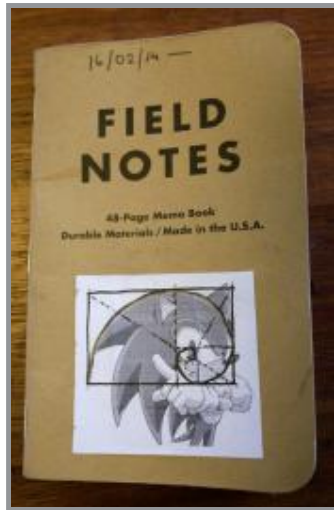
Lined Inserts

Unlined Inserts

Ring Binder

Yah, I know they are a little pricey. Quality stationery is motivating – I love putting pencil to paper, and look for opportunities to take notes. It makes it easy to want to “study”.

2. Field Notes Notebook

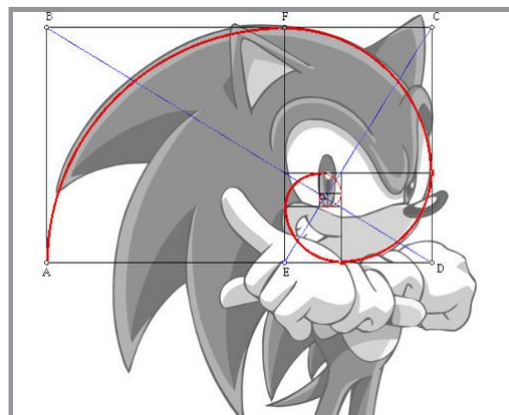


Most of the time my camera bag contains

1. Field Notes Notebook
2. 4B pencil
3. Eraser
4. Sharpener

Field Notes are a small, soft covered notebook that easily fits into most camera bags or even in your pocket. They are perfect for the field being light and compact. The paper could be a bit heavier, but as I use pencils for most things, it is fine for double sided notes.

I also often glue in some ready reckoner notes that I have not yet committed to memory. For example, notebook in the picture is not a Sonic special edition... It is a small diagram illustrating the Golden Ratio to remind me to keep an eye out for natural occurrences of the same.



Before leaving the house and jumping on the train, I try and identify a couple of key things I want to explore regarding either technique or subject. Sometimes it will be a very narrow focus, other times it could be five or six different things. Having a purpose can help kickstart a day where things are a bit "meh".

I usually sit down for ten minutes or so, once or twice during a shoot to review what I

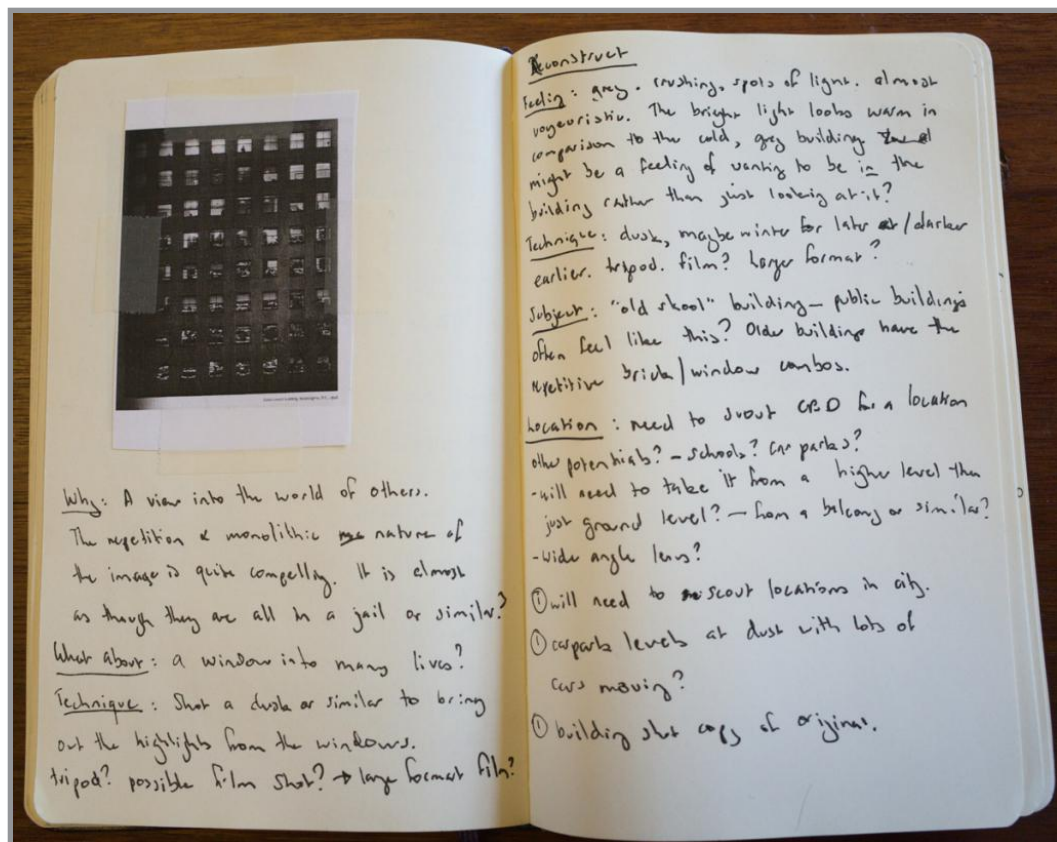
wanted to learn, and if I have been achieving the learning objectives set prior to heading out. The notebook also provides a more satisfying way to keep notes on locations and subjects etc. for follow up on future shoots.

Make sure the sharpener is a self contained unit – you don't want graphite dust and pencil shavings messing up your bag.

You can buy Field Notebooks here.

3. Moleskine Notebooks – what I used to use.

Moleskine Notebooks are wonderful to write in. They have a hard cover and come in a range of sizes. My first photography journal was a Plain Large notebook.



I regularly used the Moleskine Notebook for everything – planning shoots, reviewing results, learning, deconstructing photos I liked etc. Using it for everything meant it was perfect for nothing. It was a little small for desktop learning at home. It was too big and the structure rigid which made it difficult to live in a camera bag – the Field Notes have a soft cover and are flexible which helps them comfortably fit in most cramped bags.

It was still a pleasure to write in, and I occasionally refer back to it from time to time.

There is some more information around keeping notes at this post.

Idea Prompt : Any Perspective Except for Head Height

Tuesday, August 05, 2014



Take a relatively everyday subject and shoot it from a perspective that you would not normally see. Most photos are taken from “head height” – our whole lives play out before us from this perspective. Change it up by getting high, low, left, or right of where you would normally see a subject from.

Idea Prompt : Focus is Over-rated

Sunday, August 10, 2014



Don't sweat achieving sharp focus. See what happens.

Idea Prompt : Roll Down the Window

Sunday, August 17, 2014



Catch a cab or get your “significant” other to drive you around. Roll down the window and shoot what you see.

Idea Prompt : Capture Motion

Wednesday, August 20, 2014



Contrast motion with a stationary subject.

Nikon 50mm f1.8 – The affordable nifty fifty

Sunday, August 24, 2014

So, you just purchased a shiny new DSLR, despite my advice that you probably really *needed* a high end point and shoot compact camera... It came with a couple of lenses in the box, didn't it? They look pretty awesome. Maybe you could even offer to shoot your cousin's upcoming wedding with these new image weapons? Hmmm.

Well, I am not going to argue with all the ads on TV and that guy at Ted's that taking great photos is easy – just get that DSLR out of the box and start shooting pro photos!

Those nice looking lenses you got in the box with the new DSLR are technically most likely to be rated as “crap”. You can still compose great images with them, but they are not going to help you the way other lenses can.

Please do a deal when you buy your DSLR and get Nikon 50mm F1.8 to go with it.

You can pick one up for about \$150 local retail [here](#) or for \$125 or so on Ebay [here](#)

This lens has one of the most reliable zoom functions of all time. Your feet. Yep, if you want to zoom in, take a couple of steps towards your subject. Want some wide angle action? Guess what you have to do...

This lens has a fixed focal length. Lenses with a fixed focal length are generally always better quality than a zoom lens at the same price.



The beauty of this lens, and why you will learn to love it, all has to do with that funny F number 1.8. The aperture opens up to 1.8 which enables two things :

1. The maximum amount of light hits your sensor, allowing for better results in lower light conditions. Your DSLR probably does not have a high end sensor in it, so that f1.8 becomes a great way of producing non-grainy images in low light.
2. The very low aperture (2.8 and below is awesomeness) enables you to get that blurry background (or foreground) that so many people love. Open that lens right up to 1.8 and

let 'er rip. You will be on your way to impressing friends and family on facebook very quickly!

Yes, this lens is a bit plasticky like your kit lenses, but remember – for the same money, a fixed focal length will win hands down every time!

Using a fixed focal length lens can really help you focus on your composition. Instead of twiddling with the zoom on your plastic kit lens, you have to look through your viewfinder and learn to spot the shot.

Stop Taking the Same Images Over and Over

Saturday, August 30, 2014

Ever found that you have started taking the same image over and over? A particular type of composition that you find particularly pleasing – so you start to see it everywhere. And photograph it over and over.

I found late in 2013 that I was losing my photography spirit. I had reduced the number of outings I would go on, and started to be less and less satisfied with the results. There was little purpose in what I was doing. Without purpose, activities become meaningless.

I stopped shooting for a couple of weeks and reflected on what had happened.

Something had to change.

I decided to start work on another exhibition – but to do so in a more purposeful way. I have to thank Eric Kim's fantastic website for the inspiration here. Check it out [here](#). I made a list of things I needed to do.

Set a Goal

Chapter One from every self help book ever written. Still, no matter how obvious it is, I had forgotten this. I had no reason to shoot, apart from keeping my flickr stream active. Funny thing is, I have never been a "like" hunter. I was mainly on flickr for the communities – which they have successfully destroyed in the pursuit of becoming Instagram.

I decided to start working towards an ambitious exhibition – either solo or at most with one or two other photographers. In the end, I decided to work with another Melbourne photographer who (along with his wife) are both a source of inspiration to me, and has really helped my creative development over the years.

Once I had set the bar high by having a lot of exhibition space to fill, things started to fall into place.

Develop a Routine

My personal interests can be somewhat disorganised compared to what happens in my work life. I needed to get into a routine to make sure I was going to have enough images to shortlist from. A routine developed – Catch the train every Saturday morning into the CBD and shoot at least a few rolls, return, develop, scan, and then upload to lightroom.

I developed a disciplined filing system – for the first time ever – for both the negatives and how they were stored in Lightroom. Every negative went into sleeves and into folders, with each roll tagged in lightroom. It felt great to finally do this after years of just chucking the negatives. Doing low res scans as a first pass sped things up. They are fine for viewing on screen and printing at the local photo kiosk.

Discipline and routine have resulted in being able to shoot 163 rolls since November, a mix of 35mm and 120mm, all in black and white. The current shortlist is now down to 123 images. And shrinking. Once I have the final images, finding the negatives will be easy

with my filing system.

Delay Gratification

Delay and patience are two tools I have learned to leverage. The one piece of constructive criticism that I have received over the years is that I am a better at photographing images than I am at curating them. Kim recommends to stop posting images on Facebook, Flickr etc for a year. I have not really posted much of my work since November 2013 apart from the occasional competition image to support Melbourne Silver Mine.

Delay has helped in two areas of shortlisting and curation. Firstly, once scanned and uploaded to Lightroom I go through two or three cull sessions for each group of images over two weeks. Referring back to them on multiple occasions has been valuable in developing an understanding of which images have depth and interest. If an image holds my interest and avoids being deleted over three viewings, it is probably an OK image.

I have been going back over the images on a quarterly basis and curating the “possible” pool. Going back over images time and time again has been quite a revelation for me, helping me curate with dispassionate ruthlessness. Letting time lapse between each review overcomes the natural tendency I have to over-rate images.

Not posting anything to social media or photography has stopped the tension created by the cycle of shooting, scanning, and quickly editing to get something up for people to look at. I have time to review all images critically on multiple occasions. It still creates tension – creative tension around making sure only my best images are going to be seen by the public.

Forced Choice

Whilst I don’t have a specific target for culling, I approach the decisions aggressively. I like to get each roll down to four to six images tops. Many rolls have ended up as empty folders in Lightroom. If I find that I have more than four or so images resulting from a roll, I know I need to go harder.

Limit the Variables.

Kim recommends just shooting with a single camera and lens for an extended period, to try and give consistency and focus on a particular focal length. I like shooting on different cameras, so this didn’t really roll for me. The thought did resonate with me though. I decided that when I walked out the door each time, I would only take a single lens, or two tops. Keeping it simple helped keep me looking for image opportunities rather than twiddling around with the lenses in my bag.

The one area I have absolutely limited is film selection. I had a few hundred rolls in my film fridge, a quite broad selection of everything across C41, E6, BW, BWC41, and infrared. All different speeds. Here are a few of the “for sale” pics.





The paradox of choice was working against me here. Everytime I wanted to go out and shoot, I had to make a film selection from some of the above. Just making the choice was already draining the energy out of me before I even got to pack my bag. Sometimes the more choice you have makes it harder to make a decision – and the fear of taking the wrong film out often led to me taking multiple types of film and speed. I was wasting headspace on complex film decisions.

The first variable I limited was type of film. Being red-green colour blind results in me being a bit iffy reoutching colour film scans. So, I made the call. From this point onwards I was not going to shoot any colour at any time. I sold all the film that was clogging up my fridge and my mind. It instantly felt liberated. I have not shot colour since November 2013, except for some digital stuff – family, kids etc.

The next variable was ISO. I shot some 100 and 400 speed, and scanned it up. All the ISO400 images looked fine, so I decided to shoot it exclusively.

The final variable was brand. I shot some 400 Tri-X, Agfa APX, Fomapan, and Ilford HP5. I love 24 frame rolls as they are much easier to process at home – they are short enough that the end doesn't hit the floor when I squeegee them. The Agfa only comes in 36 frame rolls, and only in 35mm. The Tri-x and HP5 both come in 120 and 35mm formats, and both brands have 35mm in both 36 and 24 rolls.

The Agfa is a great film, and Tri-x is a legend. The Fomapan went OK too. I decided to go with the Ilford HP5 for a number of reasons. They have a great range of matching developing chemicals available, and appear to be in film for the long haul. I couldn't detect any discernable difference in the quality between the Tri-x and HP5, so the decision came down to which company I wanted to support with my cash. Ilford are a film and photography company – Kodak don't seem to know what they are.

Kodak keep deleting films and just seem to be milking us for as long as they can make a buck. They do not appear to be investing anything into film. They will keep making film for as long as it suits them. I can't remember the last time Ilford deleted a film? I love those guys. They are keeping the dream alive in a positive way. When I was trying to learn how to develop film at home, their website had up to date information and guides.

95% of what I shoot now is Ilford HP5 iso400, developed in Ilford chemicals.

Print Real Photos as Part of the Process

Analogue photography is a throwback to the past, but one I have come to love. You

would think that someone who spends so much time developing and scanning film would naturally love prints. Photographs should end up as a print, rather than just living on a computer screen.

The final step in curating images for me is now getting cheap 6 x 4 prints at Officeworks and laying them out on the floor. Prints make it much easier to see which are working and which are not. The prints are only a few cents each, and printing them brings them to life.



I have now completed shooting for a November exhibition, and have printed all 123 on the short list! It is tough, but I am slowly going to bring it down to 30 or 40 images to send off for high res scans. Give it a try – get your images off the computer, onto a USB stick, and down to the nearest photo kiosk. You will not be disappointed!

Consciously Develop New Techniques and Skills

I had quite a few compositional tricks in my bag, but my photostream had become quite uninspiring. Nothing new was happening in the images. I had stopped learning and was just repeating the same image compositions over and over and over.

I mistakenly thought that I was continuing to develop as a photographer just because I was still taking photos regularly. The honest, and very critical assessment of my work over the prior 12 months was not much fun...

Learning is something that has to happen consciously. Again, Kim's website was very helpful. He recommends reallocating some of your gear spend towards photography books. Books featuring images from the masters such as Henri Cartier Bresson, Vivian Maier, William Eggleston, Magnum Photographers, Fan Ho, and others started arriving via Fedex in time to make it under the Christmas Tree.

I have been slowly reading these books over the last six months, making sure nothing is

rushed. One book at a time, making notes on each photographer's style and techniques. Next, summarising it into a set of key pointers to consciously apply next time I am out shooting.

An example of an analysis is here.

Here is an image from Fan Ho compared against the image I shot inspired by his technique.



Fan Ho's image



What I shot in response...

And the importance of notes here.

I regularly refer back to my notebook during the day, as I am shooting, to make sure I am consciously looking for opportunities to use the new techniques. At the end of the day, going back and printing out contact sheets and making some notes, comparing what I wanted to learn and how it all went helps keep me learning.

Improvement required me to make a conscious commitment to learning new techniques.

Conclusion

Since completely changing up my approach to photography, I have found it as rewarding as I ever have. Working towards the exhibition in November in a planned and disciplined manner has been exciting – particularly at a time when the Flickr groups I was active in have dropped off a fair bit. I have not been spending as much time with other photographers, which has been a constant source of creative stimulus in the past. Despite this, I have been incredibly engaged.

Discipline may sound counter-intuitive to the creative process – but without it my photo stream was becoming an example of Groundhog Day.

Exploring New Places

Sunday, August 31, 2014

Take the path less travelled. Some of your best images are waiting to be found in places you wouldn't expect.

A fundamental purpose of photography is to show people something they might not ordinarily get to see. An experience, a moment in time, a place... Sometimes the most ordinary of places can be hoarding something special. And then, only if you have your camera with you.

After walking up and down Melbourne's laneways, I noticed an entrance to an arcade that I vaguely recognised. It was the Nicholas Building on Swanston Street. Now, if I were a more "on trend" photographer, I would say that I had been there before to visit the Retrostar Vintage Clothes store – but I am not. I recalled it from a visit with my wife to Buttonmania... A button shop.

Following my feet through the building, nothing really presented. But then the doors of a seemingly ancient elevator creaked open to reveal the interior, complete with an operator inside. There is simply no way I could have planned the shot. It just happened because I had taken a new path.

Being decisive in taking your opportunities is also necessary. I quickly checked with the operator, and he agreed to pose – he was a little bit "meh" about the whole thing, but I got the shot.

The shot below was taken as the Circus was packing up near my house.



I had driven past the carnies packing everything up on the way home from work. As soon

as I walked in the door, I grabbed a camera and headed down on foot. I tried to keep out of the way, but at the same time get into position. Pretty sure I was not actually supposed to be there, but I just kept out of the way and kept shooting.

It's not one of my best shots – I kinda wish I had stayed a bit longer now...

Starting in Film Photography on a \$350 budget.

Saturday, September 06, 2014

So you have decided to have a crack at film photography?

Here is my recommend "first go" kit for under \$350.

What do you need?

1. Film Camera Body (featured above)
2. Lens (featured above)
3. Film
4. Someone to develop and scan OR scan yourself.

1. Camera Body.

Well, there is some good news and bad news here. The good news is that you can purchase second hand film gear for much less than what it cost new. You can buy a pro level film camera for a fraction of what it would have cost during film's heyday. The bad news is that they ain't making them any more. The second gear in the market right now is all that is ever likely to be. So buy your dream camera now. Gear in the market is just getting more and more worn out.

The exceptions to this are a few rangefinders from Voigtlander and Leica, along with one or two Canon and Nikon models, which still seem to be in production.



Nikon FA with 50mm F1.8 – complete with pimped Nikon eyecup!

First Camera

- 35mm SLR – You won't need to spend much and the camera layout and operation should be familiar to you.
- Nikon or Canon – There are plenty of them, plenty of accessories, and plenty of lenses. Don't be tempted to go "off brand" yet!
- Aperture Priority Mode – Give yourself the option of not having to worry about setting everything manually as a minimum.
- Full Auto Exposure Mode – Make sure you get this feature if you are a little tentative about managing all your exposure settings manually. You can always set the camera back to manual if you choose.
- Auto Focus or Manual Focus. To start with, experience the joy of manual focus. It is more fun than you would imagine.
- Keep it Cheap – work out what you like first before you invest in some serious gear.

Recommendations :

I shoot Nikon in 35mm SLR, so I am going to stick with what I know here!

Get a Nikon FA body. \$100 on Ebay.

The FA is an affordable piece of Nikon perfection. Lots of metal, lots of stainless steel or black. Everything feels on it feels like it will last for 100 years, if you get one in decent nick. The FA feels nice and heavy in your hand. They look fair dinkum as well.

The FA has everything you need

- Aperture priority mode
- A nice, big viewfinder – you might need to give it a bit of clean with a blower as all older cameras will have visible dust in the viewfinder.
- Hefty, durable dials and levers.
- Manual film wind – again, you might be surprised how fulfilling it is to wind on the film after each frame.

You might also want to consider an FM or FE – but be prepared to pay a little more. The two best manual focus Nikons ever made, in my opinion, were the F3 and FM3A. Check them out on Ebay. You will need some serious cash for one in good condition though!



Some Nikon F3 Camera Pron

2. First Lenses

- Stick with single focal length lenses – use your feet to zoom in and out. Single focal length lenses are always better value for money than a zoom at a similar price.
- Go with a big aperture lens. Minimum F2 largest aperture. Don't get sucked into buying a zoom that has a rubbish minimum aperture of F4.5 or above. The F2 will help you in low light conditions and give a beautiful bokeh effect which will look arty and impress your friends!

- Buy new or second hand – the new lenses recommended below are not super expensive, so buy new if you can afford it.
- 35mm focal length is the most useful and broadly used lens for street photography. Go with a 35mm lens if you like broader scenes, but the starting price will be over \$300 for a good one.
- 50mm focal length is also worth considering. It will be a little cheaper, too. Go with a 50mm if you prefer tighter shots that focus more on people's faces.
- Do not buy Nikon "DX" lenses. Don't be tempted by how modern they look. These are not the droids you are looking for. They are designed for cropped 35mm digital sensors. Your new film camera has the equivalent of a "full frame" digital sensor – the same as a \$3000 digital body. The film frame is the same size as the digital sensor. The lenses you want are designated "FX".

Recommendation :

Nikon AF Nikkor 50mm f/1.8D Autofocus – \$130 brand new. The f1.8 aperture will smash any lens under \$500 in low light performance, and deliver beautiful Bokeh creamy smooshed backgrounds. The manual focus works fine, but is not quite as precise as a \$500 plus lens. You can also pop this lens on most Nikon DSLRs as well – with full autofocus. This is simply the best first lens you can purchase.



Buy This

You can find out more about this lens here. This is an incredibly affordable lens that produces super images.

The 50mm is great for street photography, bringing the focus a little more to people's faces than broader scenes. A lot of street photographers prefer the wider 35mm or 28mm lens – but they will tend more towards larger, wider scenes.

If you would like to see the difference, log onto Nikon's Lens Simulator at

<http://imaging.nikon.com/lineup/lens/simulator/> and just plug in your lens focal length to see the difference it makes vs another lens.

Some images from the simulator :



50mm Focal Length



35mm Focal Length



28mm Focal Length

Here are three examples – just roll over the image to see which lens took which shot.



50mm Lens



35mm Lens



28mm Lens

3. Film

Part of the experience is developing your own film. OK, if you need to chicken out, you can buy some colour negative film. Let's spend a moment decoding what the different film types are.

C41 – “Negative” film. Processed by all labs still in operation. This is the film you may have shot as a kid. Normally colour. There are a couple of Black and White films that are set up to be processed using standard colour C41 chemicals. These were designed to enable people to get black and white developed at their local KMart with minimal fuss. C41 films are easy to use, and are more forgiving of exposure misses. Difficult to develop at home.

E6 – “Positive” slide film. Now only processed by a very limited number of labs. Expensive to buy and process. E6 films produce beautiful slide images you can produce

prints from or do an old fashioned slide show with! E6 films are very “fussy” and need quite precise exposure settings to get the best result. Virtually impossible to develop at home.

Black and White – traditional film. Processed by only a handful of labs – mainly because it is so easy to develop yourself at home! Is forgiving with exposure – similar to C41 films.

Chicken Starter Film :



Kodak Portra 400 is an easy to use film that will produce great results. Anywhere that is still developing film will be able to handle this for you. Start with this as it is the least hassle. It is also very forgiving in terms of exposure.

I get all my films direct from BH Photo in New York for \$US7.35 a roll – but beware of the shipping costs if you are only buying a few rolls...

You might like to try Film For Sale in Australia. You can find Portra here for a little under \$10 for a roll of 36 exposures.

If you like this, next step will be to shoot Black and White to develop at home!

4. Scanner

If you are going to have a go at film, it can get very expensive very quickly if you get the lab to scan your films.

Most people who find they enjoy the whole film experience eventually experiment with larger format films. So buying a scanner that will handle at least medium format films will save money in the longer run.

We promised to go cheap here, and there are some very cheap options out there – I have not tried any of them, but I suppose for the price, there is not much risk. This Kaiser Bass Photomaker retails for \$70. I had a look on Flickr and the resulting scans that other people have made look ok for \$70!

Otherwise, just get your developing lab to do scans – but beware that most labs do a rubbish job of it.



Your “Starting Out” Shopping List

- Nikon FA \$100 Ebay
- Nikon AF Nikkor 50mm f/1.8D Autofocus – \$130 brand new.
- Box of 5 Rolls Kodak Portra 400 \$50
- Kaiser Baas Photomaker Scanner \$70 Officeworks
- Developing at a photolab \$10 per roll
- Total : about \$350

Now, this assumes you can't find an old SLR kit in your Uncle Arthur's wardrobe. There are plenty of old SLR kits out there, just waiting to be discovered. People find it very hard to toss things that once cost a lot of money. Ask around, and you might be pleasantly surprised!

Position and Timing

Sunday, September 07, 2014

"There are the two basic controls at the photographer's command – position and timing – all others are extensions, peripheral ones, compared to them."

David Hurn

Allan Jeans once said Aussie Rules footy is simple. Either they have the ball, we have the ball, or the ball is in dispute. Both Hurn and Jeans have a skill in distilling a situation into a simple framework for making a decision. The only things a photographer can control for certain in a street photography situation are position and timing.

Position.

There are many posts already about finding the right position. Let's talk more philosophically about position.

Whilst you cannot control the sun and the clouds, you can choose your position from which to shoot to maximise the light conditions. In urban settings, keep an eye on the Sun and the direction that it is travelling in. Are you better shooting on streets that are running east west, or north south? Try and see how the light is changing over the time you are out shooting, and thinking ahead.

Consider the position from which you take the photo and how the light might look different from these various perspectives. Take the time to think it through, and maybe walk around a bit to start "seeing" the opportunities. If you move position, will light hitting a different part of the subject reveal itself?

Position is part patience and part clairvoyance. Be prepared to sit it out when you find a great spot. Think ahead and imagine the shots that may happen ahead of time. Often, it is a two part process.

1. Find the context.

Look for the right background, environment, framing etc. – identifying the potential of the scene. The process can end here if the shot is an urban landscape.

Timing

2. Wait for the right subject.

A human subject can add interest to an image, so "camp" out and wait for the right person to enter the frame, in the right spot.



For the image above, I had spotted the background from across the road. I only had an 80mm lens on a medium format camera, so had to spend a bit of time working out the right framing – 80mm is not very wide, so it took a while until I was happy. I framed up the image, set the focus, and then waited.

The spot was next to a telegraph pole, which helped distract from my presence when observed by potential subjects. I was also at a 90 degree angle to their field of view, which helped my inconspicuity. I smoothly pulled up the camera as they entered my prepared frame, clicked the shutter button, and then put the camera back down.

It all happened so quickly, without jerky movements, that the subject didn't let on that they had noticed me. A tip at this point is to let any other people nearby pass through the frame – they have probably seen you take the shot and may be a little self conscious. Wait until new potential subjects come by that haven't seen you take a shot.

I took three or four shots with varying success over a ten minute period. Patience and clairvoyance.

There is more about position and inconspicuity here.

Idea Prompt : Abstract Buildings

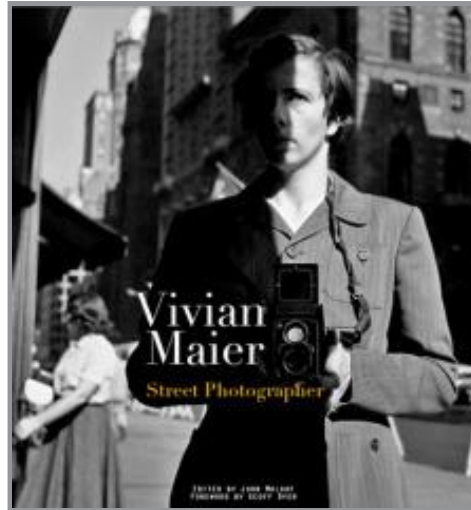
Sunday, September 14, 2014

Look for abstract shapes and compositions amongst buildings all around you.

Vivian Maier – Composition Ideas – Intro

Sunday, September 14, 2014

Vivian Maier was a Chicago based street photographer who was only recently discovered after her death in 2009. I have been reading the book “Vivian Maier – Street Photographer” which features some of her best work.



Maier's work includes some travel photography, self portraits, and street photography. You can read more about her [here](#).

I was drawn to the image featured in a slower, less intense way than usual. I didn't really notice it much to start with, but it gradually became one of my favourites from the book.

The framing of the fence works for me, and provides a separate plane of vision at the front which contrasts to the couple at the "rear" of the image.

The older couple appear to have just gotten married, seemingly finding each other later in life.

Once you see the couple, then the viewer's eye moves to the casual disregard of the man reading the paper, and his casual disregard of the couple.

The contrast of the hopeful, if slightly desperate looking couple to the guy who cannot even be bothered looking up from his newspaper to the couple is a strong theme.

Forgive me a quote from the wonderful movie "Streetfighter" starring Raul Julia.

Chun Li: [to Bison] It was twenty years ago. You hadn't promoted yourself to general yet. You were just a petty drug lord. Huh! You and your gang of murderers gathered your small ounce of courage to raid across the border for food... weapons...

[indicates her binds]

Chun Li: ... hmph. Slave labor. My father was the village magistrate. A simple man with a simple code: justice. He gathered the few people that he could to stand against you.

[laughs]

Chun Li: You and your bullies were driven back by farmers with pitchforks! My father saved his village at the cost of his own life. You had him shot as you ran away! A hero... at a thousand paces.

Bison: I'm sorry. I don't remember any of it.

Chun Li: You don't remember?

Bison: For you, the day Bison graced your village was the most important day of your life. But for me, it was Tuesday.

It sums up the contrast nicely.

What have I learnt from Maier's image?

1. Find contrast between very different levels of intensity shown by subjects.
2. Accentuate the contrast by placing each subject on a different plane in the image.
3. Find subjects who are hopeful and happy.

More to come once I have spent some more time reviewing Maier's work.

Vivian Maier – Composition Tips Part Two

Friday, September 26, 2014

I have spent some more time now with Vivian Maier through the book “Street Photography”. As you tell by all the tabs, I love a lot of her photos!

Maier is a fascinating person in her own right, but I am sure you can googlify her to read more.

There are plenty of things you can learn from consciously studying her body of work. Here are some of the things I have picked up...

Spot reflective surfaces, frames, and windows to include in compositions.

Maier appears to have led a solitary life, disconnected to others in her spare time. Whilst she worked as a Nanny there are few cues to suggest she was a social person outside of her work responsibilities. Maybe this is how people who wish to profit from her work now like to portray her? Not sure.

Her wonderful self portraits are both moving and cleverly composed at the same time. There are many featured self portraits – starting with the cover of the book itself. Whilst I am not personally pursuing self portraits as a creative avenue, her use of a wide range of reflective surfaces, frames, and windows inspires me to have a crack at incorporating these into my own street images.





The first two images combine reflective surfaces with framing to create very striking images. Maier is not afraid to bare herself in the images as she appears in every day life. There is no pretense to the images. They are just her out with her camera. Both images offer some ideas for street photography outside of self portraiture.

The third image is an iconic Maier image. Great use of shadows, reflection, and the TLR. Holding the camera at waist level and being able to look directly into the reflection creates a strong feel for the person you might imagine her to be. I only include it because it is such a great self portrait – simple but unforgettable.

The fourth image is a spectacular combination of persistence, patience, and the ability to spot an opportunity and set up for it in time for it to happen! Maier's work shows an uncanny ability to see into the future – to spot an opportunity and take the shot as the moment happens. I can't imagine the workmen stopped for very long, if at all, for her to compose. The angled mirror presenting her reflected image in the composition is masterful.

[Click here to read part one.](#)

Vivian Maier – Composition Tips Part Three

Saturday, September 27, 2014

Wow, so much from one single image! It is not in Maier's typical grittier style. The image gains a dreamy quality from the lack of importance placed on image sharpness. Focus is not always necessary to create an aesthetically pleasing image. Think Robert Capa on D-day...

Find Portals to Another Time

Whilst it was probably taken at the time when the elements were fresh and modern, I love this image because of the "time capsule" feel it has. The dress and the car instantly date the photo – giving you a window into the past.



There is an "urban elegance" to the image.

Finding unexpected opportunities to visit the past when you are out walking are rare, but always welcome. One of my favourite all time images was one I spotted in Oakland USA. I had decided to take my Holga with me to work for a whole day and capture different things that I saw.

I was out looking for a place to have lunch and this car lurched by – and in front of a old school architecture "Bank of America". The holga style combined with the setting to create an instant window to the past.

Keep an eye out for reminders of the past.

Isolate subjects against plain, non-distracting backgrounds.

Very similar (if not the same as) to the concept of figure-to-ground ratio. Is the subject clearly definable and obvious against the background. The concept goes back to why you don't wear busy shirts with busy shorts... Wear one busy and the other plain to avoid a fashion implosion as people cannot work out where to look.

Maier isolates her subject by contrasting the white dress with the darkness of the night, obscuring the background detail to make it simpler and less distracting. It also brings the presence of the car into the viewer's observation, without overtly drawing attention away from the subject. I did not even notice the car on first viewing, flicking through the book.

The subject is lit from above, casting a contrasting shadow underneath the subject – a dark “halo” of sorts.

Suggest a destination for the subject.

The car in the image reveals itself in the image slowly. At first, it is just a background that seems distant to the subject. But then my mind started to make the connection. The subject in the party dress is heading towards the car, raising questions in the viewer's mind.

Who is waiting in the car for her?

Is it the end of the night or is it only just beginning – is she on her way home or on the way out?

Where is she headed?

Her isolation also makes the car seem slightly sinister. Being such a feminine dress, the natural conclusion I drew from it is that someone is going to be driving her. Or is she driving herself? So many questions.

The suggestion of a destination for the subject creates a single panel story for the image, inviting the viewer to think more deeply.

[Click here to read part one.](#)

[Click here to read part two.](#)

Featured Melbourne Image “Five Ways” –...

Friday, October 03, 2014

Dee's print “Five Ways” is an excellent example of toy camera photography. It was taken on a Holga using Kodak Ektar iso 100 negative film.

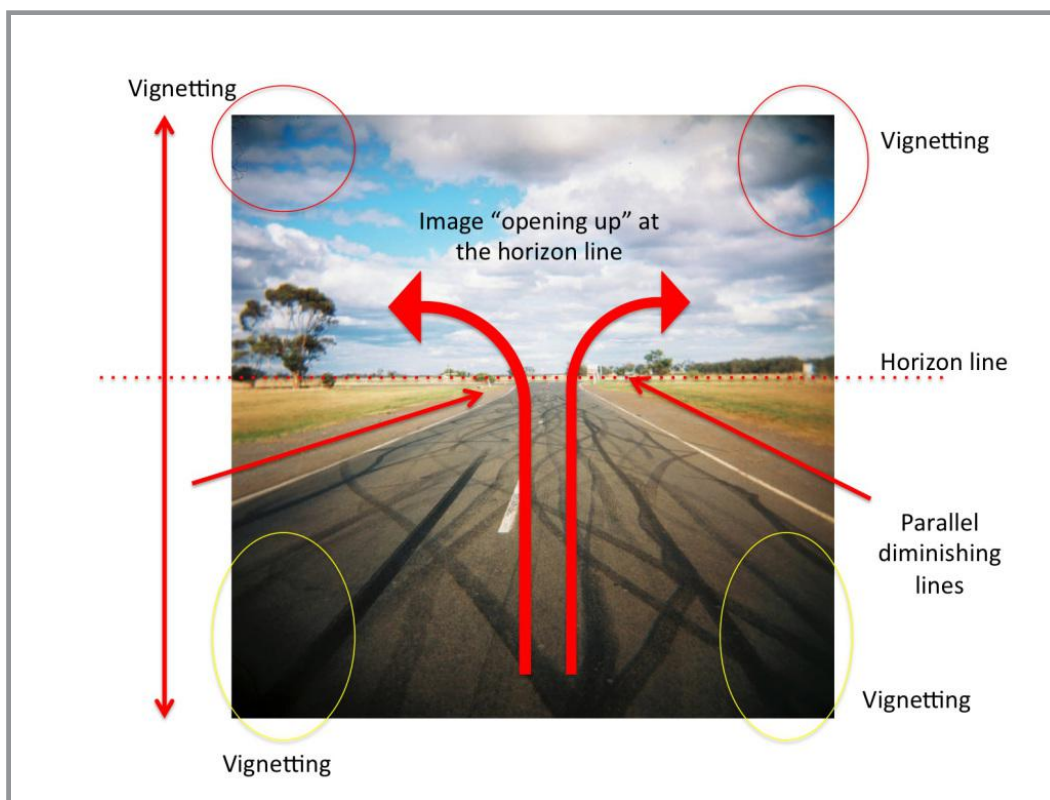
I picked up Dee's print at the recent Melbourne Silvermine analogue exhibition “Unensored 2014”. The exhibition is annual event aimed at demonstrating the art of film photography lives on!

You can check out more of Dee's work at her website <http://sugarberry.com.au/>

The dreamy quality of the plastic lens is obvious and aesthetically pleasing to the viewer. The lack of sharpness around the edges of the image – see the tree on the left as an example – add to the effect. The classic Holga vignetting is subtle, but pushes the viewer's eye to the vanishing point of the road nicely.

The road is banded with white lines and the gravel shoulder- forming parallel lines that diminish as they reach the horizon. The final slight curve of the lines out to the T-intersection open up the image again for the viewer.

The standard rules of composition don't always apply to square format photography – the Holga is a 6×6 medium format. The rule of thirds suggests subjects should not be placed in the dead centre of an image. Dee's composition demonstrates that rules are begging to be broken in life and art. The road runs straight up the middle and looks great!



The horizon has been located at about the 60% mark. The only rule for horizons is to be careful not to have them split the image in half without a good compositional reason. The horizon in Five Ways balances out the road, opening up the image as the road ends. The road is almost like a funnel, constricting gradually until it ends at the intersection and then the eye is drawn out laterally across the image by the horizon, giving a sense of freedom.

The clouds add a “ceiling” to the image which continues the focus of the horizon as the natural exit point for the viewer.

The criss crossing tyre marks visually contrast with rural landscape suggesting it is more likely an outer suburb than true “country” location.

The image is a simple, uncluttered execution. Holga cameras are perfect for capturing these kind of urban landscapes – the plastic lens brings the interest to the right composition. Decay is a theme the Holga was built with in mind. The tyre marks suggest this theme to me.

A overall excellent example of Toy Camera photography :

- Simple, uncluttered composition to highlight the softness of the plastic lens.
- An interesting subject – the tyre marks.
- Diminishing parallel lines to the horizon.

You can read more about Holgas [here](#) and [here](#).

Thanks to Dee for sharing her work here.

Vivian Maier – Composition Tips Part Four

Saturday, October 04, 2014

Find an interesting perspective to shoot from.

Maier consistently captured her images from unusual perspectives. From above, below, or even breaking the fourth wall and getting behind the subject.

The single easiest thing you can do immediately to improve your street photography is to change your perspective. You can read more on this specifically [here](#).

In the image above, Maier has managed to capture a painter at work, from a window. Most pictures of window washers and painters are taken from the street, looking up. Something you can see anyday, walking through the CBD. By using another perspective, Maier is able to show how ordinary the painter is, going about his everyday work, despite the unusual location of his workplace.



In the above image, Maier has used a combination of both breaking the fourth wall

(coming around to the “backstage” area) and framing of the kid to create the image. Again, interest is created by showing a perspective not normally seen by the viewer. It also allows for the face of the kid, contrasting with the woman’s to create further tension. Light and shadow also make a significant contribution.

Allow the frame into shot if you are looking out a window to give context.

The final image could have been taken in Melbourne!



Maier seems to have taken it from a tram or bus, from a slightly elevated perspective. Could have been taken from the Melbourne free tourist tram as it goes past Parliament House?

On both this image and top image of the painter, Maier has included an artifact from the natural frame she was shooting through. For the painter, it gives context around where he is and what he is doing. It also obscures what he is looking at and painting, forcing the viewer’s mind to make the connection to “complete” the image story.

In the image of the woman directly above, a feeling of being in motion is derived from the frame being in shot. Maier feels to be moving towards the left of frame, whilst the woman

is looking to left of the frame. Including the frame in the shot gives context – Maier is in a tram or other vehicle, looking out – and suggest the movement.

The woman is also planted on the spot for this particular moment in time. The parallel lines of the stairs at building front accentuate this effect. The women moving left and right immediately in the background also highlight her fixed position. Both foreground and background to the woman are in motion.

[Click here to read part one.](#)

[Click here to read part two.](#)

[Click here to read part three.](#)

Vivian Maier – Composition Tips Part Five

Sunday, October 05, 2014

Maier's Typical Street Portrait.

Maier has a signature crop to her street portraits. In the image above, you can see the rough size relationship of the subject to the 6×6 frame of her Rolleiflex marked out. Below, you can see the rough dimensions / proportional relationship running consistently throughout the compositions. Even her self-portrait almost conforms to the signature crop.





Each composition includes a focus on the facial expression of the subject. Maier takes it further by also including their upper torso – from roughly just above the belly button upwards. By including the torso, Maier manages to incorporate the person's clothes, adding additional clues to their personality and what they might be feeling. With the passage of time, the inclusion of the subject's clothes becomes even more dramatic.

Maier's self portrait shows both a quite intense face combined with a very stern looking outfit, for example.

Most of the shots are taken from a slightly lower perspective than eye level – a function of the waist level finder on the Rolleiflex. Looking upwards gives a slightly more positive feel, maybe more upbeat, to the images.

[Click here to read part one.](#)

[Click here to read part two.](#)

[Click here to read part three.](#)

[Click here to read part four.](#)

Vivian Maier – Composition Tips Part Six – Summary

Wednesday, October 08, 2014



1. Contrast between experiences – a bored subject contrasting with an excited subject. Accentuate the contrast by placing the two subjects on different planes.
2. Look for hopeful “Hail Mary” passes! Subjects that are overly hopeful or optimistic.
3. Spot reflections, frames & windows to include in compositions.



4. You won't shoot enough to fill a book if you sit at home watching TV. Get out with your camera. Maier made her own luck by shooting often and always.



5. Find portals to another time.
6. Isolate subjects against plain, non-distracting backgrounds.
7. Capture subjects who have a suggested destination in mind in the frame.



8. Move your perspective – above, below, or behind the subject to capture a more interesting perspective.



9. Allow the “frame” into shot if you are looking out a window to give context.



10. Consider shooting subjects from the waist up to add body and clothing context to facial expressions.

[Click here to read part one.](#)

[Click here to read part two.](#)

[Click here to read part three.](#)

[Click here to read part four.](#)

[Click here to read part five.](#)

Book Review – The Street Photographer's Manual

Friday, October 10, 2014

A great little book to drive inspiration on those days where you are a bit ho-hum about it all. The author, David Gibson has written a whole book full of tasty little bits and pieces to get any street photographer fiesty and firing the shutter!

The book focuses on short profiles of street photography masters, along with twenty different projects to help stretch any photographer's bones.

The projects are particularly appealing as they are more conceptual or theme based than most. For example, there is a project called "Looking Down" (sounds familiar!). In four simple pages, Gibson explains the concept, gives some instructive examples, and provides a summary of tips. Perfect for short attention span monkeys like me.

Here is the sample chapter discussed – apparently I am better at taking photos than scanning... the book is crisp white with nice colours, not like my crappy Canoscan!

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

This book is going to end up quite dog-eared and falling apart on my bookshelf. To keep growing as a photographer, sometimes you need to surrender to a challenge. Do something you wouldn't normally do. Each project is perfectly tuned to provide an hour or two of learning out with your camera. Answer the call...

What project shall I choose at random for tomorrow's outing?

You can buy The Street Photographer's Manual here :

<http://amzn.com/0500291306>

Street Photography Etiquette – Buskers

Saturday, October 11, 2014

Was lucky enough to come across this guitar guy today, on the corner of Flinders Lane and Degraves – a case of the usual suspects, to some degree.

The subject was more than happy for me to poke around him for a minute or two, taking some great images. I don't often shoot buskers as they are a little too easy – all the skill around looking interesting is provided by them. This guy was so happy that I just couldn't resist though.

It will always serve you well to remember that buskers busk for money. They are there because it is a job for many of them. If you stop to listen or spend some time watching, you should put a buck or two in their hat.

This is doubly true if you cross the line and take a photo. If they are interesting enough that you want to shoot them, then they are acting almost as a paid model for you. Buskers can get pretty narky if you spend a few minutes sticking a camera in their face for free. They have spent a lot of time learning their craft, and have made the effort to get out and perform.

If you want the best from a busker as a subject, go up to them with some gold coins in hand. I recommend \$5 plus in Melbourne. Open up your hand like you are feeding a horse and ask "mind if I take a couple of shots?". If you get a nod, complete the "deal" by chucking the coins in their hat, and start photographing. If they are interesting enough to shoot, then it is worth getting on their good side by offering a few dollars.

This guy was happy for me to do anything for a few minutes to get the shot!

I also usually pop a card with my email address in it into their hat as well, in case they would like a copy.

Crossing Paths with Vivian Maier

Sunday, October 12, 2014

The Centre for Contemporary Photography has an exhibition of Vivian Maier's images on at the moment. Going to pop over to have a look today.

The details are :

http://www.ccp.org.au/exhibitions.php?f=Gallery_1

03.10.2014—26.10.2014

Centre for Contemporary Photography
404 George St, Fitzroy
Victoria 3065, Australia

E info@ccp.org.au
T + 61 3 9417 1549

OPENING HOURS

Gallery Hours

Wednesday—Friday 11am—6pm

Saturday—Sunday 12—5pm

Exhibition Review – Crossing Paths With Vivian Maier

Sunday, October 12, 2014

It is always very special to see real prints framed, and hanging in a gallery. Anyone interested in photography should pop along to see this wonderful exhibition.

The exhibition is a well thought out selection of Maier's images. All my favourites appeared to be on show – I cannot recall a particular image of importance missing.

The exhibition details are [here](#).

Sitting in the gallery thinking about her photography reminded me of a few things...

- Timing is everything. Many of the best images were directly attributable to Maier hitting the shutter at the right moment.
- Perspective can change an ordinary setting into something interesting.
- Move closer to your subject.
- Find a new way to show something ordinary.
- Self portraits are a challenge worthy of an investment of time.
- Make as many opportunities for photography as possible.
- A lifetime of photography might only yield twenty or thirty timeless images, and only then if you are lucky and incredibly talented!
- Square format is a composition shape that is aesthetically pleasing.

The overall exhibition has a theme of local artists "responding" to Maier's work. Luckily, Maier's framed prints are in the main gallery, mostly uncluttered by competing works. I am not sure why the CCP felt the need to add unnecessary distraction to such an impressive exhibition?

The additional works rest in a very dark shadow cast by Maier's masterful images. In particular, I was very confused by the CCP having some kind of looping performance art video that was kinda silly. It also came complete with scratching sound effects which was just plain annoying. I am at a complete loss in understanding how a 20 second looping video fits with an analogue photography exhibition of street images?

Despite my general grumpiness around the additional "curation", I intend to return to the exhibition before it finishes up on the 26th October. The printed images are worth it!

I tried my hand at some self portraits in honour of Maier at the Gallery... It is harder than it looks!



Featured Image – Matthew Joseph – Panoramarama

Friday, October 17, 2014

From the Photographer – Matthew Joseph

"This shot is a particular favourite of mine, I took it in March 2005 in Brisbane. I was wandering around the Queen Street Mall and walked into the Myers Centre, I used to come here when I was younger. I wanted to take some above view photos of people and came across this scene and took it. The "From Above" theme is something that I had been slowly continuing, stopped, and have recently started again, as you will find out soon..."

Matt was one of my primary inspirations to give panoramic compositions a try. Most of the time you will see a wide angle lens on Matt's cameras – so wide that it is not out of the realm of possibility that he can see things in other dimensions...

I have talked about panoramic composition before here. Panoramic format is very challenging first up for most photographers, with the tendency to still think in 3:2. Either get in close, or move further away is a good place to start. There is also the natural resistance to crop subjects, and to try and squeeze too much into frame, losing the subject.

Matt's image is a great guide to panoramic composition.

1. High Perspective

Images taken from a perspective other than head height drive interest. "nuff said...

2. Move Out

Matt has maximised the impact of the panoramic format by moving back from the subject (or in this case, up!). The combination of the high, downwards perspective and the size of the subjects has transformed them into a geometric pattern, rather than people. The tables and people become a pattern or repeating composition.

3. Natural Framing

The top left void space helps nicely frame the tabled area. The narrow table and chair space on the bottom left provides a natural entry point to the frame.



This is another one of my faves from Matt's Flickr stream. Parallel lines are evident throughout the image. I love the way the window frames continue in the shadows. The

central position of one guy is offset by the second silhouette exiting the image on the left side.

The panoramic format is emphasised by the long, narrow window panels bisecting the image.

Thoughts on Preparing for an Exhibition

Sunday, November 02, 2014

Only a couple of hours until the joint exhibition I am hosting with Roberts Birze opens. Thought it might be worth sharing some more thoughts in general on exhibitions.

1. Yes, You Should Hold an Exhibition.

No matter if it is putting up some photos in coffee shop with the permission of the owner or managing to talk the NGV to put your stuff up. Holding an exhibition is an important part of any photographer's artistic development. It makes you think more carefully about what you are doing.

Having to curate your images improves your self assessment skills and increases your awareness of what makes a great image next time you get out with your camera.

Selling a piece to someone you don't know (your family will always make at least one "pity purchase!") is incredibly validating. Someone liked your image enough to swap it for some cold hard cash they spent some of their valuable time earning.

Driving towards an exhibition date ensures that you get out and photograph as often as you can to ensure you have a shortlist of images. A pending deadline really can focus your efforts.

Even if you don't sell a single one, just seeing your images up on a wall will be more fun and motivating than you might imagine.

2. Go Hard, Go Early.

For the first time ever, I was completely prepared for the Urbanity exhibition this year. My framed prints have were in storage at Hogan Gallery for over two weeks prior to hanging day yesterday. There was no last minute rush, or panic, to get enough bits an pieces to fill the walls.

As all dodgy management books say, start with the goal in mind. I started shooting all new images for this exhibition late in 2013. Over the year, I was out shooting almost every weekend. The final count ended up at 163 rolls of 120mm and 35mm film exposed, developed and scanned.

Look forward 12 months and step out your deadlines. Based on my math, I shot around 3,000 frames of film to end up with just under 30 images – a 1% hit rate... There were at least a 100 I was happy exhibiting, so maybe the real ratio is more likely 3 or 4%. Best case prediction is maybe 5% of your images will be suitable. Now, how many shots are you going to have to take to get there?

Keep in mind that street photography is very hit and miss at an individual frame level. If you are a landscape photographer you might only have to shoot one roll for each image as your subject's location is

The constant cycle of shooting, processing, and curating got me into a sustainable rhythm for the whole 12 months. About 6 weeks out from the exhibition I had a tight

shortlist of about 100 images which was finally reduced to 27 images framed and hung in the Gallery.

There was no last minute scramble to fill the gallery walls. I was able to ease of the shutter button a bit in the last 8 – 10 weeks and focus on the final curation rather than descending into a blind panic.

3. Less is More.

I am talking co-exhibitors here... For each additional person participating, add one completely different opinion on everything! It is manageable up to about four people, but after that, someone has to call the shots as a benevolent dictator.

Partnering with Rob, a long time photo buddy, made it very easy. We both have very different approaches and values, but always seem to be able to make the right compromises together to keep it tight.

Having less team mates increases the risks if one decides to pull out without notice. But is more than compensated for by less hassles.

After hanging the gallery yesterday, only having two styles up on the walls (one on the north and the other on the south wall) looks super cool. There is no visual conflict as you explore either body of work.



4. Unless it is Your First Time.

If you haven't participated in an exhibition before, I highly recommend hornning in on a syndicated exhibition. If you shoot film, this one is perfect. Just pick your best shot, get it framed professionally, and put it up on a wall. This will deliver all the exhibition buzz without the heartache.

Very quickly, you will come to terms with the decisions you need to make for larger exhibitions.

Do I hang images I like or ones that I know others like? This is a classic dilemma faced

by many photographers. I am always surprised by the images that are favoured by others, and disappointed when the ones I love seem to go unnoticed and unappreciated!

How do I like my images printed? Printing and framing 27 pieces for the Urbanity Exhibition was not a cheap exercise. I have learnt what I like, and who are good operators in printing and framing over the years by preparing for other exhibitions. For example, one year, I had a lot of black and white shots which the Lab printed using their colour printer instead of a “true” black and white printer. They looked black and white and fantastic, but had a tiny purply cast to them. The lab would not reprint as it was my confusion that led to the issue, and I couldn’t afford to reprint them. Needless to say, all the BW prints for Urbanity were all printed in true black and white!

What kind of framing do I like? Black mats? White mats? Mounted to foamcore? and so the list goes on. And on. And on.

If you must frame your own prints using an Ikea frame, at least you will learn if you can get a result you are happy with on a single image instead of ending up in tears the day before you open a big solo exhibition!

Learning to deal with other “artists”. You will either be surprised how finicky and picky other photographers can be, or you might be the finicky type and have to work out how to deal with more “relaxed” characters. If you can’t work with a particular type, you will work it out in a syndicated exhibition.

5. It Will Cost More Than You Think.

No matter how tight fisted your tendencies are, exhibitions always end up as a bit of a money pit. Be prepared to pony up a fair bit of hard earned... Have a think about the following as a budgeting guide :

Gallery : \$2000 for two weeks is a fairly representative rate. This should include having someone “sit” the gallery. You can probably find something cheaper if you are prepared to manage the space for the duration of the exhibition, but remember that means sitting in the gallery every day for the whole day!

Prints : I find that a decent print costs around \$30 for about 30cm long edge and a good economy professional framing of each print needs an investment of about \$50. So each image is going to run you up about \$80. There is also the option of mounting to foam board which makes transporting the images easier as they are very light.

Opening Night : It is customary to shout the punters who show up a beer or a wine on opening night! Say another \$250 – \$500 depending on how boozy your crew are!

Time : No matter how many exhibitions I participate in, I always forget how much extra work is involved. Setting up facebook invitations, organising prints, picking them up, hanging them, etc.

I highly recommend contact Bryan at Hogan Gallery if you are considering holding an exhibition.

<http://hogangallery.com.au/>

Bryan can frame your prints, sits the gallery, and has a great little bar. The gallery gets a lot of passing traffic as well.

You can read more about selecting images for an exhibition [here](#).

Book Review – “Steal Like an Artist” ...

Wednesday, November 12, 2014

I was in need of a quick self directed creative workshop, so I downloaded a copy of “Steal Like an Artist” by Austin Kleon for my Kindle App. I missed the tactile nature of a book and kinda missed out on the groovy pics and graphics that seem to always work better in the print version.

Kleon subscribes to a philosophy of artistic development founded on “fake it ’til you make it” – learning from others who are already doing a great job in your preferred creative pursuits. I found my head nodding in agreement throughout the concise volume.

Kleon recommends becoming a curator of ideas and then using them to influence and guide your work.

“Don’t steal the style, steal the thinking behind the style. You don’t want to look like your heroes, you want to see like your heroes.”

I find great inspiration in looking at the work of great photographers and then dissecting the image to identify what it is that I like about it. These are the lessons to take with you on your next shoot. And make sure that you review your actual results against what you planned to learn!

The book is an extremely quick read – I got through it, including making annotations, in an hour or so – which was exactly what I was looking for. Maybe it is all The Simpsons and Family Guy episodes that have reduced my attention span?

The most important lesson I took out of it was to get back to my notebooks more often. Over the last two months I have been preparing for the Urbanity Exhibition and have probably slacked off a bit on planning, reviewing, and learning.

You can check the book out at Kleon’s website here :

<http://austinkleon.com/steal/>

The Easiest Way to Develop B&W Film. Ever.

Saturday, November 15, 2014

You no longer have an excuse. Stand Developing is virtually impossible to muff. Have a crack at it, and be surprised at how easy it can be!

Developing your own Black and White film is part of the whole analogue experience. Messing about with chemicals, reels etc can be a little daunting at first. Most people find it easier to start using a technique known as “Stand Developing”. It is super easy, and the process is, by its nature, very forgiving of any mistakes. Mastering the art of stand developing is a great introduction to processing films at home.

Film

Commit to black and white for a few weeks for the experience. Developing at home horrified me for so long. Just like going to the dentist, the experience is not anywhere as bad as you imagine. I find developing at home quite therapeutic on the weekends!



If you want to try black and white without committing to developing at home, then grab some Ilford XP2 – a black and white film that can be developed by any lab who still develop film. Ilford XP2 uses the same chemicals and process to develop as a standard colour negative film – the C41 process. It is a beautiful film, which I find works exceptionally well for portraits.



Taken using Ilford XP2

Instead of taking the safe path, why not just jump in to true black and white? Get some Ilford HP5 Plus 400 or Kodak Tri-X 400 and start shooting. I personally lean towards Ilford HP5. I can't really tell the difference between Tri-X and HP5, so I base my decision on who I think will support film ongoing for the longest.



Ilford feel like the right size boutique manufacturer who is likely to stick with film manufacturing, whereas Kodak just seem to be milking it until the cow keels over. A lot of people disagree with me, so pick either. Tri-X is the stuff of legends – so many of the greats used it.

Either way, you can't go wrong. Some people will recommend you go with a slower film – an ISO 100 vs the ISO 400 of the films recommended here. There is a difference in grain – the 100 speed films should be less grainy, but the versatility of ISO 400 speeds across a whole range of light conditions more than makes up for a bit more grain for me.

Stand Developing at Home

What you will need.

1. Paterson Tank.

Tanks are what you develop the film in. Buy one without reels as the Paterson brand reels can be difficult to load film into. I would recommend getting a tank that holds multiple reels. The Multi Reel 3 holds 3x35mm films, or 2x120mm films. It can get pretty frustrating being able to develop only one film at a time! Get them at Vanbar here.

2. Samigon Reels

Reels are what you load the film to hold it in the tank. You can buy Paterson brand reels, but I personally recommend Samigon reels – they have much larger guides to help load film. Get them here from BH Photo. They are more expensive than Paterson brand reels, but simply work much better. Samigon reels are designed to fit in all Paterson tanks. They are also adjustable to take both 35mm and 120mm film.

3. Rodinal (Adox Adonal)

Rodinal is the chemical that develops the film. You can buy it here from Vanbar. You only need a small bottle to start with. Rodinal is no longer made by AGFA, Adox Adonal is the modern replacement.

4. Ilford Fixer

Fixer completes the developing process. Buy it here from Vanbar as well!

5. A Drying Hanger

Go to Daiso and purchase a laundry drying rack for \$2.80.

6. Optional – Change bag.

These are lightproof bags you slip your arms into to open your film and load it onto reels and then into a tank.

Steps:

1. Load the film into the reels and into your tank. Make sure you do it in a change bag or under your doona. Just make sure it is pitch black.
2. Pre soak the film for 5mins if you are developing medium format film – it has a coating on it which needs to be dissolved. If you are developing 35mm film, you can skip this step. Cold water out of the tap is fine.
3. Mix up your developer at a ratio of 1+100. If you are preparing 1000mls, then mix 10mls of Adonal with 990mls of water. Try and get the water temperature around 20 degrees if you can. Anywhere from 18 – 22 degrees is probably going to work fine. If you need less than 500mls of developing solution, make sure you don't use any less than 5mls of Adonal in the mix.
4. Pour in the developer into the tank.
5. Gently agitate the tank for a minute by spinning the reels with the twisting tool. Alternate between clockwise and anticlockwise. There is no need to tip the tank upside down etc.
6. Leave the tank to stand for about 30 minutes.
7. Agitate the reels again gently for about a minute.

8. Leave the tank to stand again for about 30 minutes.
 9. Pour out the developer.
 10. Fill the tank with tap water and pour out.
 11. Pour in the fixer (after preparing it to the correct mixing dilution 1+4. So for 1000mls use 200mls of Ilford Rapid Fixer with 800mls of water).
 12. Agitate for the first minute continuously, then for ten seconds each minute. Total of five minutes. Pour out the fixer into a storage container – Ilford Rapid Fixer is reusable and has a chemical colour marker that will show purple when it is exhausted.
 13. Rinse the film thoroughly. Fill the tank with water, agitate and empty 5 or 6 times. Leave the tap running into the tank for about 10 minutes.
 14. Squeegee off the water with your (clean) fingers and hang to dry.
- Now, all you need is to get a cheap film scanner and get to it!

Thanks to James Ruff for starting me on my home developing journey. These instructions are adapted from the originals he sent to me. You rock James! Check out his stuff [here](#).

Ricoh GR Digital Compact

Friday, November 21, 2014

Mid to long focal lengths have been my preferred lenses to reach for when heading out to see what is out there to photograph. My absolute favourite (which will probably change next week – like my fave camera of the week) is 135mm on 35mm. Long enough to get closer, and still short enough to let some of the background into the shot. Seeing people's faces and how they are responding to the environment around them is a very popular subject on my photostream.

A lot of my photographer pals are into wide angles. Sometimes down to 14mm and below, to capture some wonderful images. Being a slave to art fashion, the idea of having a crack at wide angles took a deep hold in my mind about 6 months ago – but instead of going out and buying a 17mm or similar lens, I wanted to make it even more interesting by taking a less well trodden path.

Go with a compact digital point and shoot.

Fuji X100 cameras seem to de rigueur at the moment. Lovely stainless steel metal, Leica look, and a great lens – who wouldn't want one? If I was going to do something different, I needed a camera that wasn't same same (anyone who owns an x100 or x100s please know I am still a big fan!). Enter the Ricoh GR.

A camera with a famous film heritage – and pocketable to boot! If you want to read more about why the Ricoh GR film versions are one of the best compact 35mm cameras ever – you can read more about the GR film cameras [here](#).



The new Ricoh GR digital has some great positives :

- Small, inconspicuous camera. One that the eye is not naturally drawn to.
- The GR must have smoked a lot as child as its growth has been seriously stunted. It has an APS-C large-size CMOS sensor underneath the stealthy matt black finish. That is probably the same size as the sensor in your DSLR at home unless you spent over 2k on your happy snapper.
- Contrary to what Ken Rockwell says (he slammed it without even picking one up), the GR has mostly manual controls. A command dial for aperture or shutter, and two “+ and -” buttons for exposure compensation ISO control. Hmmm, works just like my DSLR. It is easy to learn to love the intuitive controls on this camera. *Update* Since writing this, I have spent a little more time with the manual. The toggles and dials are very nicely positioned – I wish my DSLR was as easy to change up!
- F2.8 lens – a prime lens on this camera can really help get the job done.
- Quick focusing, and focus tracking. It also has (inherited from it's film DNA) a setting for “Snap Focus” to predetermine focus distance so the shutter fires as soon as you press the button – no focus lag, just K-Pow, ready or not.
- After dragging around some kit that feels like it was designed by a bricklayer, the GR is virtually weightless. Walking around with the GR is a very different experience to schlepping around a big ass Hasselblad.
- Feels like it would stop a bullet – which is handy if you are not a particularly popular photographer...
- Something I have not come across before is T/AV function. Very, very useful. You can set your aperture and shutter speed, and the camera changes the ISO to suit. Shifting the aperture or shutter can be done simply using the great command dial or toggle. I often get frustrated using Aperture Priority when a slow shutter speed is selected without me realising it – and delivering a blurry result.



Downsides : So far only a couple of gripes.

- Battery life is crap, just as the reviews said it would be – the battery exhausts itself on one of my regular length walks. That said, when on the digital teat, I can take up

to 300 shots in two or three hours... I never claimed to be a good photographer – I am a better curator than one-shot Ansell Adams. And no battery charger – only a charger that you plug into the camera. Cheap.

- I need to go back and look at the manual. Gasp. The flash is tending to overexpose, and I still haven't figured out the best way manage demanding contrasty light conditions.



The great lens, pocketability, and sensor got me over the line. Oh yeah, that combined with it being a bit of an uncommon camera. There won't be too many GRs parked on the table next to the beers at the next Melbourne Silver Mine function – well, probably more so because MSM is all about film cameras.

If you can score one in a deal, the optical viewfinder adds some street cred – although there is zero information shared in the viewfinder. It ain't a fancy one like the Fuji!

Can it take an OK photo? Here is my favourite so far from the Ricoh...



Does Street Photography Matter?

Saturday, November 22, 2014

"At a time when fewer and fewer of the images we see are honest representations of real life, their [Street Photographers] work is more vital than ever."

Sophie Howarth & Stephen McLaren, *Street Photography Now*

My focus has been so heavily weighted to preparing for the Urbanity Exhibition this year, that it has been some time since I thought about street photography in a more abstract, philosophical manner. This quote froze time for me last night. It stopped me writing notes from the excellent book referred to in the quote. Is street photography important for any other purpose than aesthetic pleasure?

Whilst I am not part of the media industry, my chosen vocation gets me pretty close. I also tend to see a lot of the "underbelly" of media stories, and how so little of what we read and hear is an accurate representation of the facts. Every reportage is "spun" according to the viewpoint of the author. One person's hero is another's villain.

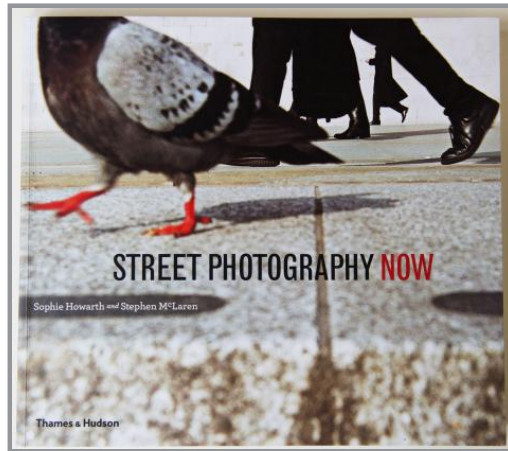
This is never more apparent than when you watch music TV. Pop stars in the 70's and 80's, and even a lot of the 90's were often quite "ordinary" looking. Compare that to the perfect looking specimens that dominate the airwaves today. Our media stars are mostly impossibly good looking. Fashion and beauty photography keep reaching new levels of perfect, limited only by the software version.

And so, photography, has also changed. Pictures are more easily manipulated now to suit the intention of the author than at any time in history. Every image is carefully managed and composed and edited to ensure alignment with the story the author wants to tell.

On Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram, we all feature a profile picture which represents the best versions of ourselves, not the versions that our partners and friend see most often.

Street photography plays an important role in capturing society completely candidly. There is no story. Only an instant, a single frame preserved forever. Building on this thought, I have come to believe that any more than a one second story changes it from street photography to photojournalism. I love photojournalism, but see it as different to street photography.

Street Photography gets past the stage management – and to a candid observation of everyday life. Whatever that may be for the individuals in frame. It can be a moment of high drama, or one of complete inertia and boredom. But it is just a single, independent moment.



"A good street photograph makes something very ordinary... seem extraordinary"

Sophie Howarth & Stephen McLaren, Street Photography Now

The manner in which the photographer captures the instant can and should elevate it as something worth looking at, into something aesthetically pleasing. Street Photography is a way to show people how wonderful and, frankly, awesomely cool we all can be, just going about our everyday business.

"Street photography is not about capturing reality as it is : it is about ...turning the mundane into the extraordinary."

Marie Laigneau

There is no such thing as a boring life – only boring people. Street Photography can help people understand just how much potential there is every day, no matter how mundane you believe it to be.

The "extraordinary" is delivered primarily through composition, mostly natural lighting (a bit of flash is OK!), position, and timing. A bit of post processing on the computer is fine too – a bit of exposure, maybe dialing up the colour a bit, or backing it off to a monochrome. These are all fine tuning the aesthetic.

The image moves out of the "honest representation" realm when the post editing changes it to something that doesn't exist in the real world. HDR photography is the perfect example of this. Whether or not you personally find it aesthetically pleasing is not relevant – it is no longer an honest representation of a moment. It moves the scene into the same universe that contains things like high fashion photography in orbit – where nothing in the image looks anything like the original subject photographed.

I suppose, based on this logic, you could argue that Black and White is the same? I don't consider BW to be inconsistent with the idea of "honest representation" as it does not show anything additional to what the eye would see. With HDR, the image shows more detail than the eye (or an individual frame) can see. The same rule holds true with high fashion photography – so much is added post taking the actual image / images that they bear no real relation to the original shoot.

The Microscope.

Remember how fantastical a slice of an apple looks under a microscope? Taking a tiny portion of something that is so very ordinary, framing it, and looking at it objectively from a new perspective reveals a completely different view of the apple slice.

Street photography is the same. Take a tiny moment of time of people's ordinary lives and prepare it like the microscope slide. Printing it out as a photograph changes the viewer's experience of the moment to reveal so much more.

The people I photograph are not prepared, made up, or been careful to wear "something nice". They are as they appear each and every day. Street Photography should be a true representation of society at a given point in time that cuts through story telling and image management.

The microscope analogy also feels good to me, considering my previously mentioned reluctance to shoot drunk / drug affected / homeless / mentally ill subjects. They are not experiencing what should be "everyday life" – there is a story – but it is for a photojournalist, not street photographer to tell it. There is nothing to be "elevated" beyond the ordinary with these subjects.

"I photograph things to see what they look like photographed"

Garry Winogrand

The story in Street Photography is delivered by aesthetics – making ordinary places, people, and things look extraordinary. For me, it also means that there is no underlying motivation or story or something the photographer is trying to "prove" or "change" or "fix" – it is about giving people a moment of immersion into someone else's everyday life.

This is simply how I see things – I love that you probably have a different point of view!

Creating Impact – Free Ebook Online – Review

Friday, November 28, 2014

Photographers who take the time to think about their technique, dissect it, and share it are my favourites! After doing some more web research recently, I came across Marie Laigneau's wonderful little ebook called "Creating Impact". You can tell how much I liked it by my copious notes captured in the image above...

Laigneau is a very accomplished street photographer with an inspiring body of work. The kind of body of work that kinda just makes me want to give up sometimes! But when someone as talented as Laigneau shares her vision for just a brief period of time, the feeling changes from one of dejection to inspiration. "Am I always going to suck?" to "I can't wait to get out with my camera tomorrow and try out some of her thinking"...

I often deconstruct the technique of other photographers that I love to try and understand how I can look at the world through their eyes. Laigneau makes it a lot easier by being transparent about her vision.

Her primary philosophy for learning is captured in the quote :

"Street Photography is a journey which starts with the willingness to see the world differently."

Some of the more interesting concepts from the book for me were :

- Developing a sense of awareness of the difference between subjectivity – connecting the viewer with the scene vs objectivity – distancing the viewer from the scene.
- Ideas and techniques around disrupting harmony in an image to involve the viewer more in the image.

Well worth a read. I took plenty of notes!

You can check out Marie Laigneau's website [here](#).

The free ebook is located [here](#).

Her freakin' awesome photo book is [here](#) on blurb. Buy it! (I did...)

Ricoh GR External Optical Viewfinder GV-2

Friday, December 19, 2014



I hardly ever pick up digital gear on my way out the door for a photo walk. Using live view on digital just doesn't get me excited. Call me an elitist, or whatever you like, but I just hate using live view and chimping.

When the awesome new Ricoh GR digital turned up in my mailbox at work, I knew I was going to have to get an external optical viewfinder as soon as I pulled it out.

The rear LCD is pretty good – plenty of unobtrusive information on the settings for your shot, and it is nice and large. Bright daylight can overpower most LCDs at some point, so having an optical viewfinder is great for these days. They always work!

The GV-2 has framelines for compositions based on the standard 28mm lens on the Ricoh. The outer limits of the viewfinder allow for those who add a 21mm wide angle adapter to the Ricoh. A bit gadgety for my personal tastes...

The viewfinder sits firmly on the flash shoe. It is bright, crisp, and sharp looking through the lens.

It is very well made – strong metal shell, with excellent optics. The frame lines are well marked.

To be 100% honest, the viewfinder is a beautiful waste of gear funds. It gives the camera a bit more cred, and I do like using it in preference to the live view. The issue being that there is no information coming through the viewfinder – no focus point, aperture, shutter speed or iso. All things that really assist in composing great images.

The other killer is the focus point confirmation – unless you just set it at a point on the screen and just consistently shoot with this in mind. Still, you can miss critical focus too easily using the viewfinder.

The thing retails for around \$250 plus on Ebay – the camera itself is only \$800 – \$900, so spending \$250 on a viewfinder that actually makes it harder to compose a decent image

is just silly. Lucky, I picked up a second hand one at a reasonable decent price. Ricoh also tend to occasionally wrap them up in a deal with the camera occasionally... so keep an eye on BHPhoto.

Buy one if it makes you happy to have an external optical viewfinder – it makes me happy!

Developing Black and White Film at Home. It's Easy.

Sunday, December 21, 2014

What do you need?

Gear

- Scissors
- Developing Tank with Reels
- Water hose
- Light-tight Change Bag
- 35mm Film Canister Opener (or Can Opener)
- Measuring Jug and Graduate
- Thermometer
- Timer
- Squeegee
- Storage bottles
- Drying rack
- Scanner

Chemicals

- Developer
- Stop Bath
- Fixer
- Drying Aid

Things I don't bother with

- Hypoclear

Here is a shopping list of specific gear that you can buy directly from BHphoto. This is what I use... The materials and chemicals are specifically chosen by me as a good balance between effectiveness, cost, and ease of use.

Developer : Ilford LC29

Developer reacts with the film to produce the image. It gradually “brings out” the image on the film. The developing stage is the only one which is super time-dependent. If the time is too short or long, the image will come out under or overexposed. The good news is that Black and White negative film is very forgiving if you get the time a little wrong.

Specifically formulated for small home use quantities. Mixes up at a ratio of 1 part developer to 19 parts water. Use as a “one shot” developer – use it once and then dispose of it.

Stop Bath : Ilfostop

Stop Bath stops the developing process immediately. Once you tip out the developer, the stop bath goes into the developing tank and halts everything. The Stop Bath time is not critical.

Ilfostop can be used multiple times. Mix it up in the same ration of 1+19 with water as LC29. When the active chemicals in Ilfostop are exhausted and longer effective, the solution will start to turn from yellow to purple.

Fixer : Ilford Rapid Fixer

Fixer just makes sure all the stuff that creates the image on the film is “set” or “fixed” in place, and comes after the Ilfostop has been tipped back into a storage container.

Ilford Rapid Fixer is mixed 1 part to 4 parts water. Time is not critical again, so long as your films get 5 minutes with Fixer in the tank. Ilford Rapid Fixer should be re-used multiple times. One litre of concentrate makes up 5 litres of Fixer. One litre of diluted fixer should be good for about 30 – 40 rolls. I keep track of how many rolls a bottle of diluted fixer has done by just marking the bottle with a texta.

Drying Aid : Kodak Photoflo

A drying aid helps the film dry without streaks etc. Some people use a bit of detergent. I recommend Kodak Photoflo.

Developing Tank and Reels

A developing tank is a light tight, and water tight container in which you put the film, and then pour the chemicals in and out.

I recommend Paterson Tanks. They are very easy to use and easy to find. You can either buy a single, or multi reel tank. I would recommend at least a System 3 tank – you can process 3 x 35mm films or 2 x 120mm films at once. Processing a film takes about 30 minutes, and you can only do one tank at a time, so choose a tank that will suit how many films you are likely to want to process at once

I use mostly System 5 tanks – 5 x 35mm films or 3 x 120mm films. I have a System 8 tank but find it very clumsy to use. It quite awkward to load in the change bag, and is very unstable standing upright whilst developing.

Film needs to be loaded onto reels before being placed into the tank. The best reels on the market are Samigon. Do not buy any other kind. Samigon reels have extremely large guides to make sure your film loads up easily. I personally find it very difficult to load film onto Paterson brand reels. Samigon reels fit perfectly into Paterson tanks.

There is an alternate system of stainless steel reels and tanks. The steel reels in these systems are not interchangeable with plastic reels and vice versa. I have a steel reel and tank and have never been able to load a film. Ever. So I don't recommend them.

Water Hose

The final stage of processing is rinsing. A connecting hose is not 100% necessary, but makes life much, much easier than doing fill, rinse, empty cycles for 10 minutes. A hose connects your cold water tap directly to the tank and drives water into the bottom of the tank for the most effective rinsing method.

Changing Bag

Some friends of mine just get into a wardrobe or under the doona to open exposed film canisters and load them up onto reels and into tanks. I prefer using a change bag – a bag that you can put your arms into that prevents light entering. Just chuck in your films, reels, tanks etc into the bag, seal it up, and then reach in and do what you have to do.

The best change bags have a "frame" like a tent. By giving the bag structure, it makes it easier to find and do stuff in the bag. It also reduces how much your hands sweat. Once your hands start to sweat, it is all over, becoming very difficult, very quickly, to load up a film.

Film Canister Opener

Yah, you can use a can opener that sorta works and save \$15. Or you can buy a purpose built 35mm canister opener that works in 5 seconds first time, every time.

Measuring Jug and Graduate

Just get a cheap but accurate jug. Try and match it to your Paterson Tank. Each 35mm film needs about 300mls of developer etc, and 120mm films require about 500mls each. So if you have a System 3 tank holding 3 x 35mm films, you will be mixing up 900mls of developer each time. So buy a 1 litre measuring jug. I use mostly System 5 tanks, and have a 2 litre jug.

A measuring graduate is the smaller, very accurate container. Get one that measures out about 100mls. If you are mixing up LC29 Developer at a 1+19 ratio, you will need to measure out 45mls to mix with 855mls of water. Make sure you measure in increments of 5mls.

Thermometer

Any one will do.

Timer

Just use your phone. Or even better, buy the Massive Dev Chart app and it will time each step for you on your phone. I use the app on my phone every single time I develop film.

Squeegee

Not absolutely necessary, but a proper one is worth the investment. It simply aids removal of excess water at the end of the developing process. Some people use their fingers.

Storage Bottles, Drying Rack, etc

Daiso. Go to Daiso. They have so many bits and pieces for home developing. I particularly like their clothes drying racks designed for small apartments for drying films. They also have some great clamps and pegs that work perfectly to weight the bottom of the film whilst drying to keep the steady, and prevent curling.

Scanner

Unless you are going to do your own traditional wet prints in a darkroom, you will need a scanner. An Epson V700 or V750 flatbed scanner probably gives the best bang for buck. Not all scanners can handle film – so make sure you check this prior to purchasing. I have not used a lot of different scanners. Check out the reviews on Amazon.com to start with...

Righto, I Have All the Stuff – What Do I Do With It?

First, here is a summary to get everything in context.

1. Load film onto reels and into developing tank. Pre-soak 120mm films for five minutes in water and pour out.
2. Pour developer into tank for 6.30mins. Agitate tank continuously for the first minute. Agitate for ten seconds at the start of every following minute.
3. Pour out developer, pour in stop bath. Agitate continuously for one minute.
4. Pour out stop bath, pour in fixer. Agitate continuously for one minute, then for ten seconds every minute for a total of five minutes.
5. Pour out fixer, rinse film for 10 minutes.
6. Put a couple of drops of Photoflo in the tank and fill with water. Agitate until frothy.
7. Remove film from reel, squeegee with fingers or proper tool. Hang to dry.
8. Scan film!

Detailed Step by Step.

1. Load film onto reels and into developing tank.

Make sure everything is dry. The reels, tank, change bag, your hands. Everything. Moisture is your enemy – it makes film sticky and hard to load. Grab everything and place it in your change bag. If you forget something, it is a massive hassle to start again, so use a checklist when you are starting.

How many films are you going to develop? Make sure you have the right number of reels in the change bag.

– Scissors.

– Canister opener / bottle opener.

– Developing tank, centre column for the tank, tank lid.

If you are developing a lot of 120mm film – say 5 rolls, it makes sense to have a waste baggie for all the paper that will come off the rolls. The paper can become quite a tactile distraction in the bag, and get in the way.

Zip up the bag carefully, and pop your arms in. The further you can get your arms into the bag the easier it will be. Make sure you scratch whatever needs scratching before you put your arms in the bag. You cannot remove your arms until the films are fully loaded and the tank locked up and light tight.

Look up videos online to see how to load up a reel. It is pretty easy. Most of the videos will feature Paterson reels, but rest assured that the Samigon reels work the same way in winding on and changing between 35mm and 120mm format.

OK – first time I recommend you load the reel in daylight. Your hands will learn the skills much better if you do it first time whilst watching.

For 35mm, open the canister at the “flat end”, then poke the other “pointy” end to get the film out. Handle the film with your bare hands as little as possible. Hold the film by the edges as much as you can, but so long as your hands are clean, I have never ended up with fingerprints etc on my films. Some wear cotton gloves. I find that I need the touch of bare hands in a change bag.

There is a leader tab at the start of the film. Snip this off with the scissors. Feed the film into the reel. I like to push / pull it almost half way around the reel, past the little ball bearing holders. Then just wind it on (watch a video!). Keep guiding it into the feeder spot with your fingers on the edges.

When you get to the end of the roll, just snip off the end again with the scissors, being careful to not cut the wrong thing!

120mm film is a little more tricky. I definitely recommend sacrificing a roll to get the hang of it. As you tear away the sticky tab and unwind the film, the backing paper will come away. Keep unwinding until you hit the end of the roll, where there will be a tab of sticky tape connecting the film to the backing paper. Carefully peel this off and then cut the last 5mm or so off film to remove the film tab. Feed it onto the reel the same way. 120mm film can be a lot more fiddly though, and this is where the larger tabs on the Samigon reels are worth every cent.

Inside the developing tank is a removable centre column. Slide your reel onto this, making sure you push it all the way down. If you don't, the developer may not cover it properly. Yes, it has happened to me. Load all the reels onto the column the same way. Before you put the reels into the tank, just tip it upside down or have a feel around to make sure no rubbish from your films have ended up in there. Put the reels in, and twist the lid on. That's it. You can open the bag now.

2. Developing Stage

If you are developing 120mm films, the first step is to fill the tank with water and leave it

for 5 minutes. There is a protective emulsion layer on 120mm film which needs to be dissolved off the film prior to developing. After five minutes, pour out the water – it will be quite coloured by the emulsion that has come off the film. No need to do this on 35mm film.

Work out how much developer you need.

For every roll of 35mm you will need 300mls of developing solution. Using Ilford LC29 : 15mls of developer + 285mls of water.

For every roll of 120mm go with 500mls of developing solution. Ilford LC29 : 25mls of developer + 475mls of water.

The solution should be roughly 20 degrees Celsius. I find that 19 – 21 is OK. To achieve this, firstly run the tap for a minute or so to get a consistent temperature. Fill your measuring jug to about 200mls, chuck in the developer, and take the temp. I use the thermometer as a stirrer. A lot of the time it will be pretty close. Just add a bit of hot water or ice water from the fridge until you get there as you fill towards 300mls total. Probably worth having a couple of dry runs without developer. It's not hard once you get going.

Pour the developer in as quickly as you can, without being silly. If you are using a standard iso 400 speed film such as Ilford HP5 or Kodak Trix 400, the total developing time is six and a half minutes. Timing should start as you start pouring. Agitate for the first minute continuously. Agitate again for ten seconds at the start of each minute that follows. At the end of the six and half minutes pour the developer out.

Using Paterson tanks is a good choice as the agitation method is simply inserting the "twisting handle" into the centre column and rotating the reels left and right. I usually alternate with two twists in each direction. The idea is not to go crazy, but just keep the solution moving around.

Some techniques recommend agitating the tank by inverting and turning it. I just find this a massive hassle and have not seen any difference in results doing it this way vs the spinning agitation of the Paterson tanks. Inverting the tank always seems to end up with some solution leaking. Doesn't need it.

Don't be too vigorous with agitation. Just move the developer around.

If you are developing on a budget, just use any kind of timer. If you are cashed up, buy the app from the Massive Dev Chart guys.

Working stuff out for yourself?

Go to the Massive Dev Chart online. It is the app in the picture.

<http://www.digitaltruth.com/devchart.php>

Enter the film and developer, and the dev chart will tell you

- the right ratio for mixing developer with water
- the best temperature for your developer

– how long to develop

Some peeps like to reduce the concentration of their developer, which affects the time. Just use the quickest developing time guide.

The site also has a volume mixing calculator which is really handy – you just pop in the ratio and how much you need of finished solution. I stuffed a few up early on, and always use it now.

The App has all this info, but adds a step by step timer to guide you through the development process. For each film and developer combo, the timer tells you how long, when to agitate, how long to agitate, how long to stop bath – EVERYTHING. Just buy it already.

3. Stop Bath Stage.

Shake the last drops of developer out, and pour in the stop bath – Ilfostop. Use the same amount as you did with the developer. I always add a little extra, just to be sure. Agitate for one minute. Ilford say it only needs ten seconds, but what they hey? There is no down side to some extra time. I just like to make 100% sure the developing process has fully stopped.

Keep the tank light tight still at this stage. Pour the Stop Bath back into your storage container. A funnel can come in handy here.

So long as you don't live in the tropics, room temp should be fine for the Ilfostop. There is a school of thought that it should be 20 degrees, but meh. Doesn't really make much of a difference as far as I can tell.

Preparing Ilfostop is easy. Just mix up about a litre. Same ratio as the developer – so for a 1000mls : 50mls of Ilfostop with 950mls of water. It should be yellowish in colour, and turns purple when it is exhausted.

4. Fixer Stage

Wow, next stage is easy too. Just fill your tank with fixer. If you are super fussy, you can fill it to the same amount as the developer, but I just keep pouring until the tank is full.

The total time for Ilford Rapid Fixer is 5 minutes. Agitate for the first minute, then for ten seconds at the start of each subsequent minute. Pour the Rapid Fixer back into the storage container at completion.

To make a litre of Rapid Fixer, you need 200mls of fixer and 800mls of water. A litre should be good for at least 30 – 40 rolls. I mark the rolls down on the bottle as I go to keep count.

5. Rinse Stage

The film can now be exposed to light without impact.

The best way to rinse is to buy a water hose from Paterson for your tank. This connects to your tap, and pushes water to the bottom of the tank which then flows upwards and out

of the tank in a constant flow. I just stand the tank in a bath, and turn the water on to a lowish flow. Let it run for about ten minutes.

If you don't have a hose, then you need to constantly rinse the film in the tank by filling the tank, agitating for a bit, and then tipping out the water. Probably need to fill and tip out the water ten times or more over ten minutes.

Some people use Hypoclear at this stage. I don't bother. Doesn't seem to make a difference.

6. Final Wash and Squeegee

Open up the top of the tank. Empty any water. Put a few drops of Photoflo in the tank, and fill with water. Agitate the reels until the water is frothy. Pull out a reel. Split the reel into two halves and grab the film from an end where there is no image. Squeegee the film with your fingers or the tool. I have never actually squeegeed with my fingers, but I am assured this works by people who do it.

Do not rinse the film with water or rinse the tool with water. Photoflo is designed to help prevent watermarks in drying. Have a tea towel nearby to dry your squeegee or fingers on rather than rinsing with water. I also prefer 35mm rolls of 24 exposures to 36 exposures as they are much easier to handle. The extra 12 frames make the film a bit long for my short arms. You can buy 24exp films for bigger iso400 films.

I usually find 3 goes gets most of the photoflo solution off the film.

Hang the film to dry in a spot that is not too dusty. I used to dry film in the shower after some hard core recommendations. Now, I just dry them in an inside room and make sure I don't do the vacuuming or anything else that stirs up dust. The negatives will be OK to scan in 3 – 4 hours, less in a very warm environment.

Shopping List – Vanbar.com.au for Aussie based photogs.

Chemicals

Ilford LC29 Developer

<http://www.vanbar.com.au/catalogue/product.php?id=66950>

Ilfostop

<http://www.vanbar.com.au/catalogue/product.php?id=66860>

Ilford Rapid Fixer

<http://www.vanbar.com.au/catalogue/product.php?id=49732>

Kodak Photoflo

<http://www.vanbar.com.au/catalogue/product.php?id=50127>

Gear

Paterson Tank – System 5 (does not come with reels)

<http://www.vanbar.com.au/catalogue/product.php?id=50127>

Samigon Reels (not available at Vanbar)

http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/122989-REG/Samigon_ESA325_Multi_Format_Autofeed_Reel.html

Changing Bag

<http://www.vanbar.com.au/catalogue/product.php?id=12976>

Structured Changing Bag (like a tent – not available at Vanbar)

http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/41880-REG/Photoflex_AC_CROO1_Film_Changing_Room_25.html

Film Canister Opening Tool

http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/100728-REG/Dot_Line_DL_6060_DLC_Film_Cassette_Opener.html

Squeegee

<http://www.vanbar.com.au/catalogue/product.php?id=12978>

Water Hose for Paterson Developing Tank

http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/40389-REG/Paterson_PTP201_Film_Washer_Hose_for.html

Does Film Still Matter to Street Photography?

Sunday, December 28, 2014

The simple answer is “no”...

But why cling to the analogue aesthetic and process? I have noticed a few of my previous stalwart film buddies exiting the genre recently as well, leaving me both a little heartbroken and worried about film.

I am not going to prattle on about the dynamic range of film vs digital and the rest of the stuff that I don't really understand.

The reasons I still shoot almost exclusively on black and white film are a bit silly as I read them back...

1. Chimping

I have written about chimping here before. Shooting film helps me focus on how I see the world rather than constantly checking each image on an LCD. It stretches your imagination and sharpens your ability to see composition. Not having an LCD encourages the photographer to think about the next shot rather than live in the instant past.

2. Delayed Gratification

Not being able to see the picture immediately and having to process the film from developing to scanned image gives me a mental break that helps me better curate. The first look at the negatives as they come out of the tank is kinda exciting, and then peaks with the scan coming through.

3. Fix a Car / Garden / Make a Table

The only thing I can do with my hands, that is special, is develop film. The process of developing film is extremely relaxing and rewarding. The whole analogue experience is akin to what I imagine it feels like to make your own dining room table or create a garden. Yeah, I could go down to Ikea to buy a table or call Jim's Mowing, but there is pleasure and reward by creating something yourself.

4. Following in the Footsteps of the Masters

Most of my favourite photographers lived through the golden age of film. Using film makes me feel like I am seeing the world through their eyes in just a small way.

I have some very nice digital gear, but only use it when I need fast autofocus and want / need colour images. Usually a friend's or family kids.



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