**Using Compositional Tools to Create Intimate Landscapes**

**Cleveland Photographic Society**

**January 17, 2025**

**Intimate Landscapes:**

* Puts a frame around a small part of the world and draws our attention to something we might not otherwise notice.
* Intimacy implies a degree of involvement, closeness and familiarity
* A personal and emotional interpretation of the things being photographed, and their unique qualities, that draw the artist’s eye
* Allows you to create images that are uniquely your own
* Tells a story
* Typically encompasses a narrow field of view, lacking the sweeping nature of a grand landscape or the magnification of a small subject in macro photography.
* Need to utilize the abstract qualities of the elements portrayed rather than their magnitude - lines, shapes, light, patterns, repetition, textures, color, etc.
* **Seeing these details requires:** Exploration, Observation, Contemplation, Distillation of a scene, “Looking down!”

“Photography is an art of ***observation***. It has little to do with the things you see and everything to do with the way you see them.” ~Eliot Porter

**Intimate Landscape Photographers: Eliot Porter,** Sarah Marino & Ron Coscorrosa, David Ward, Charlotte Gibb, Hans Strand, Guy Tal

**Equipment for Intimate Landscapes**

* Mid- to long-range telephoto lens to isolate your subject
* Sturdy tripod – L-Bracket
* Polarizers and Neutral Density filters
* Remote cable release
* Reflectors, Flash, LED lights, Diffuser
* Ground cloth, Kneeling pad, Knee pads
* Frame card – small piece of mat board cut with an opening proportional to your sensor
* Focusing cloth
* YOUR FEET!

**Tips for Photographing Intimate Landscapes**

* Minimize expectations and be open to possibilities
* Be willing to take some photographic risks and experiment
* Be willing to fail and embrace the learning that comes along with it
* Don’t be self-conscious
* Practice on a regular basis
* Pursue your own path
* **Return to familiar locations**
	+ New places can inspire fresh ideas
	+ But familiar locations inspire experimentation and exploration
	+ The challenge is to find something different that hasn’t been done before – experiment, try new things
	+ Inspires creativity
	+ Can be responsive to special conditions
* **Create order from chaos**
	+ Isolate elements
	+ Learn to see through your lenses – and how your camera sees
	+ Consider what drew you to the scene in the first place
	+ What pulls your eye?
	+ Visualize your final image
* **Simplify, simplify, simplify!**
	+ Break the scene down to its essence
	+ Eliminate distracting elements
	+ Check edges of frame
* Decide what to include – and what to exclude
* Get close and personal
* **Don’t be afraid to crop**
	+ Frame it in the field in the camera
	+ Crop in post processing to simplify the scene even more
* **Eliminate the sky**
	+ Plays a role in large landscapes
	+ But can be distracting in an intimate landscape
	+ Bright areas can draw the viewer’s eye and dominate the image

**Three Essentials Concepts**

* Seeing abstract qualities – lines, shapes, light, patterns, repetition, textures, color
* Arranging the composition within the frame
* Refining the composition – pause, review your composition, make improvements
* But there is no perfect composition or photograph – often there are compromises and trade-offs when working with subjects out of our control

**Composition**

* Composition is the arrangement, interaction, and flow of elements within the image frame
* Composition tools or concepts are the building blocks used to bring together all the elements in a scene
* There is no “right” way to compose a scene
* Your vision, goals, visual preferences and connection with the scene should drive your decisions

**Composition Is About…**

* Literal things – rocks, trees, clouds
* Abstract things – lines, shapes, patterns, repetition, textures, color
* The space around and between visual elements
* Light – how it illuminates visual elements, the direction, color, how it reveals highlights and shadows

**What Affects Compositions?**

* Your distance from the subject
* Your height relative to the subject (up or down)
* Your position relative to the subject (left or right)
* Your focal length (what does it include or exclude)
* Light and shadow
* Your point of focus
* Depth of field
* Exposure
* Don’t plant your feet!

**Composition Concepts**

* Arrange elements to lead the viewer’s eye through the composition
* DOF – how much do you want in sharp focus?
* Decide what to include/exclude
* Simplify – communicate a clear, concise message
* Pay attention to distractions, details, imperfections
* Tell a story

**A Quick Review of Compositional “Tools”**

* Foreground – Middle Ground - Background
* “Tool” of Thirds
* Centering
* Rule of Odds
* Lines – Diagonals, Leading, S-Curves, Zig-Zags
* Repeating Elements or Patterns
* Use of Frames
* **Use of Color**
* Color is a tool just like lines and shapes
* Color is only a single element in a composition, but it is often the loudest or lead element, if not the one that sets the overall feel
* Color can create emotional responses
* Colors will change in their appearance and how we react to them because of the other colors around them
* **Attributes of Color**
* Soft light reveals all colors
* Bright light saturates primary colors
* Warm colors advance (R,Y,O); cool colors recede (B,V,G)
* Warm to cool transitions in a photo will enhance the image
* **Photographing colors when they fill the frame**
	+ Red -2/3
	+ Blue Dark -1 Midtones -2/3
	+ Yellow +1
	+ Orange -1
	+ Violet -1
	+ Green -2/3
	+ White +1 or more
	+ Black -1 or more

**Use of Light In Intimate Landscapes**

* Embrace shade
* Low contrast, soft light
* Overcast days
* Fog, misty rain, snow – can help isolate the subject in a scene
* Can shoot any time of day

**The Importance of Backgrounds**

* Backgrounds are always a choice, don’t just let them happen!
* Use your background to set off your subject clearly within the photograph.
* Make sure there are no distractions that take away from your subject or overall image.
* Make sure the background integrates with the subject.

**Eliminating Distractions – Check for:**

* Background problems
* Edges of frame – “Border patrol”
* Undesirable elements
* Merges
* Do some “photo gardening” if needed
* Simplify your composition

**Intimate Architectural Landscapes**

**Intimate Waterscapes**

* **The shutter speed needed to blur the motion of water will depend on:**
* How fast the water is moving
* The volume of water
* Focal length of lens
* How close you are to the water
* The amount of light on the scene

**Creating Flower “Portraits”**

* Get down to the “eye level” of the flower
* Use a simple background
* Use a background that contrasts in brightness with your subject – either brighter or darker, or a difference in color
* Keep a tight framing that totally emphasizes the flower
* Keep subjects from being too centered
* Focus in on the details
* Show the plant or flower within their environment

**Creating Environmental “Portraits”**

* Get down low enough to your subject to incorporate interesting aspects of the background and the environment around it
* Incorporate enough of the environment in the background that the viewer of the photograph can understand the location
* Use enough DOF to ensure the background is recognizable – but it doesn’t have to be too sharp
* Be sure your subject stands out from the background by looking for ways to contrast it with the things behind it

**Abstract Intimate Landscapes**

“One should not only photography things for what they are but for what else they are.” ~Minor White

* Focus on qualities like lines, shapes, patterns, repetition, color, motion and texture, or some combination of those attributes
* Light and composition still play a role
* Concentrate on the abstract, not literal, properties of a subject
* Create unique and creative images
* Isolate abstract elements
* Use intentional camera movement and multiple exposures

**Point-Counterpoint**

* When two (or more) elements in a scene are in contrast to each other or create an important relationship with each other
* Contrasts add to the power of an image
* The more contrast, the more powerful the image
* Point – the main subject; Counterpoint – the second subject
* Can have two focal points if both are strong – creates a visual tension
* If the two focal points are on a diagonal line – creates image flow as well
* **Point-Counterpoint: Color**
* **Warm-Cool Tones**
* **Textures**
	+ Strongly influenced by light and shadows
	+ Need low angled light
	+ Arouses emotion – sense of touch is ignited
	+ Texture is a detail and attracts viewer’s eye
	+ If in the background, needs to contrast with main subject with color, brightness/darkness, tonality or physicality
	+ Good as a foreground element in landscapes
	+ Often part of a pattern image
* **Static element vs. element in motion**
* **Large vs. Small or Size Differences**
* **Shape Differences or Straight vs. Curved lines**
* **Animate vs. Inanimate or Nature vs. Man-made**
* **Right Thing – Wrong Place**

**What Will You See?** There is an amazing world of unusual, interesting, and unique subjects up close. It doesn’t matter where you live, the time of day, or what the weather conditions are – you can always find the small scenes to photograph. So get out there, start looking for the small stuff, the details, the scene within the scene.

**Practice! Practice! Practice!**

**Homework Assignment #1**

* “Roll of 36”
* Learn how your lenses “see” and capture a scene
* Don’t be lazy!
* Don’t be afraid to fail – it’s how we learn
* Make reminder note cards
* Take notes in the field

**Homework Assignment #2**

* Look at a grand landscape photo you have taken
* What are some abstract qualities of the scene?
* Use your crop tool and look for five examples of possible small scenes within the photograph that you could have taken

**Homework Assignment #3**

Using the same subject:
 \*Photograph a “large” landscape
 \*Photograph an intimate landscape

Susan Milinkovich

www.susanmilinkovich.com

s\_milinkovich@yahoo.com

513-478-8894