

Preface

When subject matter is forced to fit into preconceived patterns, there can be no freshness of vision. Following rules of composition can only lead to a tedious repetition of pictorial clichés.

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This book is about composition as I see it and as I practice it when I create my photographs. It is not about what I call the *traditional* approach to composition. Instead, it is about composition as I use it in my work; about what I call a new approach to composition. In this sense this book is about how I compose my images.

If you want to learn how I compose my images, then this book is for you. My goal when writing it was that it would open doors to new ways of seeing and composing images, doors that other books have not opened.

This book does not reiterate many of the compositional rules presented in books that approach composition from a more traditional perspective. I see no need to repeat what has already been said. Instead, I see a need to say what has not been said; a need to present a new approach to composition. In doing so, I see my purpose as enlarging the field of photographic composition to include subjects that have not, traditionally, been associated with composition. These subjects include how to compose images with color, with black and white, and with light; how to consider your future audience while creating a photograph; taking your color palette into account, and the nuances of grays you want to use; doing all this, and more, both while capturing a photo-

graph in the field and while processing your photographs in the studio.

In this book I cover taking notes in the field about the colors of the elements in your image, as well as the contrast, the light, and all the other visual elements so that you can later draw on your memory to recreate the emotions you experienced while in the field. Also covered are how color works and how the three variables of color—saturation, hue, and lightness—interact so that you can control the colors in your photographs as if you were a painter in control of your color palette rather than a photographer at the mercy of the camera. Finally, I explain how these elements of composition will help you develop a personal style. All in all, the subjects in this book include learning to control all the elements that have a visual effect in the photograph.

My approach to composition, while specifically addressing photography, comes from my study and practice of painting. In other words, my experience as a painter shapes my approach to photography and to composition. If this approach strikes a chord with you, and if learning to approach photographic composition with the freedom and knowledge of an artist appeals to you, then this book will be a delight. It is my sincerest hope that such is the case.

Composition is a vast subject. Unfortunately, this subject is too often narrowed down to what is referred to as “the rules of composition”. Certainly, rules are important. But to limit the entire subject of composition to a set of rules is to limit what composition is as a whole. These rules may also limit how photographers (both newcomers and experienced practitioners) perceive what the field of composition encompasses.

For this reason I prefer to refer to the subject as the *field of composition* rather than as just *composition*. The word “field” implies that there are multiple dimensions to the subject of composition and that, implicitly, composition is not limited only to a set of rules.

Composition is about much more than a set of rules. Composition is about how each photographer uses light, color, and contrast. It is about how each photographer sees the world and how each photographer wants to represent this world to his or her audience. In short, composition—when approached from an individual perspective—is about your way of seeing the world. It is about your way of sharing what you see with your audience; sharing what you see with those that will look at, study, and admire (or criticize) your work.