

# Some Thoughts about Judging Images

By Bill Prosser

# What makes a good image?

Caveat: “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.”

But generally, a good image:

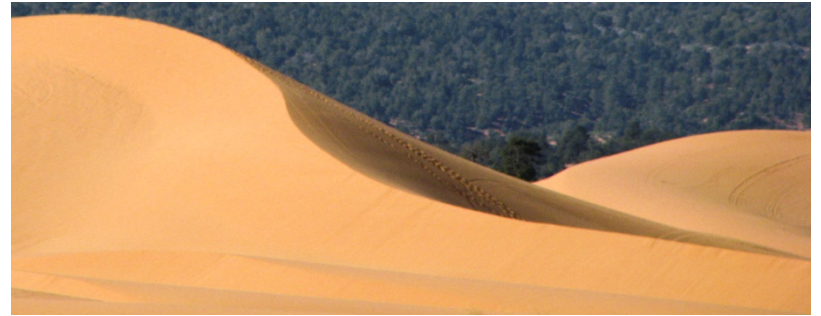
- Communicates a mood & message--tells a story;
- Shows (old & new) content in a creative way;
- Incorporates concepts of good composition/visual design and;
- Demonstrates craftsmanship in technique.

# Taking snapshots or making good photographs?

**This**



**Or this?**



# Good images:

- Make the ordinary, extraordinary and/or
- Show us something seldom seen before.

# Whether making (or viewing) a photographic picture:

Accept that the photographer: Is responsible for every element,  
color, and tone in the picture space.

S/he has to recognize the really important picture elements (light,  
tones, color, shape, and line) in the scene and the roles they  
play in the image;

must thoughtfully arrange the visual elements in the picture  
space;

and simplify the image to the extent possible.

“If it doesn’t add, it subtracts.” [Chuck Veatch]

“Simple is super.” [Joe Miller]

For a photographer (or judge),  
elements of a good image include  
appropriate:

Craftsmanship,  
Composition,  
Creativity, and  
Communication.

# Good Craftsmanship includes appropriate:

- Exposure,
- Sharpness,
- Focus and depth of field,
- Separation of subject from background,
- Bringing attention to the proper place,
- Little details, and
- Printing and presentation.

# “Keeping it Simple”

## Isolate and eliminate

- The **background**, and other parts of the image space, must be supportive.
- Where are the highlights and shadows? Do they support or detract? Are they blown/ blocked?
- What can be removed?
- Would a different camera angle/placement help?



# Good Craftsmanship also includes good computer (darkroom) work

- Appropriately retouched:
  - Colors (believable),
  - Tones (full range),
  - Spotting/rubber stamping,
  - Dodging/burning, and
  - Cropping.

# Whether you are in the field, darkroom, competition, or gallery:

- Always look at the image and think about:
  - What is(was) the nature and design of the scene?
  - Is(was) there a better vantage point?
  - How is(was) the quality and direction of light?
  - Can(could) the image be simplified? (Cropping—in camera and/or darkroom.)
  - Will(would) changes strengthen or weaken the image?
  - How? Why?

# Composition=Visual Design = Visual Communication

- To create a pleasing, successful image, use:
  - Lines, shapes, and forms;
  - Light, shadow, tones, and colors;
  - Textures, and perspective; and
  - Balance, dominance, proportion, repetition, rhythm, and patterns.

# Barriers to Seeing

- Monet said: to see, one must forget the name of objects and notice their shapes.
- (Squinting helps you do this.)

# The Primary Building Block of Visual Communication is Light

- Light creates lines, shapes/forms, texture, perspective, and mood.

## It's the Light, Stupid!

There is no good or bad light, per se; however, the right kind of light can make or break an image.

# Creativity:

Seeing an image in the mind's eye or in the real world,  
organizing and capturing the subject matter, and/or  
presenting the finished picture to the viewer  
so that the image expresses emotion and tells a story  
in a fresh, unique way.

# Examples of Creativity:

Showing mature subjects in a new way.

Making the ordinary---extraordinary.

Using new techniques.

# Communication:

In the final analysis, we all see beauty in our own different ways .

In order to have a successful image , we need to know who we want to please and how to express it.

A good image communicates to me  
when I want to hang on my wall and

expect it to stay there for a long time---  
it has “lingering power.”



# In my opinion:

Novices, generally, start with a scene and proceed from

- (a) struggling with craftsmanship to
- (b) concerns about composition, to
- (c) trying to be creative and expressive.

Advanced & professional photographers generally start with a pre-visualization of

- (a) a story they want to communicate,
- (b) worry about creative and compositional considerations, and
- (c) craft the image with efficiency and ease based on years of study and practice.

# Summing up, Photographers should :

- Paint with light--(it's the light, stupid.)
- Communicate a unique story--(a new point of view.)
- Use visual templates of design-composition--  
(simplicity, layering and separation, graphic use of lines & forms, perspective, balance/dominance, repetition, and textures.)
- Practice craftsmanship--(good technique.)
- Aim for simplicity--(if it doesn't add, it subtracts.)

Thank you!

Quick Questions?

On with the Critique

Bill Prosser

[www.pbase.com/prosserwm](http://www.pbase.com/prosserwm),

[prosserwm@aol.com](mailto:prosserwm@aol.com)