



# Learning to See

It is very important to learn how to analyse photographic images. The critique is an integral teaching method that we use throughout our Masterclasses.

Always look carefully at the image, and be as objective as you can, addressing the properties in each category that seem important.

Below is a basic format for looking at and talking about photographic images. Use this in conjunction with your "Basic Elements" handout.

## Visual Elements within the Photograph

### Light and Shadow

Does the light seem to be natural or artificial? Harsh or soft? What direction is the light coming from? Are they subtle or do they create strong contrasts?

### Tones

Is there a range of tones from light to dark? Squint your eyes. Where are the darkest and the lightest values?

### Focus

What parts of the image are clearly in focus? Are some parts out of focus?

Note: The range between the nearest and farthest objects that appear in focus defines the photograph's depth of field (DOF).

### Space

Do overlapping objects create a sense of space? Is the space shallow, deep, or both?

### Shape

Do you see geometric or organic shapes? Are there positive shapes, such as physical objects, or negative shapes that represent voids between objects?

### Line

Are there thick, thin, curvy, jagged, or straight lines? Do any of these act as visual pathways?

### Scale

Does the scale or size of objects appear to be natural? Has a wide angle or telephoto lens been used?

### Colour

If it's a colour image, what colours do you see, and is there a predominance of warm or cool colours?

### Texture

Do you see visual textures within the photograph?

## The Design of the Photograph

### Composition

What rules of composition have been used?

### Angle

From what vantage point was the photograph taken? Imagine the photograph taken from a higher or lower angle or view. How does the angle affect the photograph?

### Framing

Describe the edges of the view. What is included? What does the framing draw your attention to in the photograph? Can you imagine what might have been visible beyond the edges of the picture?

### Dominance

Close your eyes. When you open them and look at the photograph, what is the first thing you notice? Why is your attention drawn there? Are there other centres of interest? How are they created? How do the focal points help move your eye throughout the photograph?

### Contrast

Are there strong visual contrasts - light and dark areas, textures, solids and voids, etc.?

### Repetition

Repetition of visual elements can create unity, a sense of order or wholeness that holds the work together visually. What elements are repeated? Do they contribute to a sense of unity?

### **Variety**

Variety often creates interest. Can you see a variety of visual elements such as values, shapes, textures, etc.?

### **Balance**

Is the visual weight on one side of the photograph about the same as the other? How about top to bottom and diagonally?

### **How the Photograph was made**

What can you infer anything about the photographic techniques that are pertinent to the work?

### **Visual Language - Feelings/Mood**

Based on what you have seen, what do you think the work is about? What does it mean or communicate to the viewer?