Expressions

Conversations in landscape photography

JOURNAL 11

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Well, that is 2025 done and dusted, and here we are with Expressions Volume 11 to open the new year. We hope you have all had an enjoyable Christmas. We would like to extend our best wishes for a Happy and Prosperous New Year for 2026. Even though we are halfway through our winter and soon enough the days will be noticably longer, and spring will arrive, we still have the best that winter has to offer and enjoy.

January and February can offer some amazing frosts and snow, and hopefully, the wet portion of the winter we have been experiencing will pass us by, and we will be rewarded with good conditions.

As always, we have a wide variety of topics for you to enjoy in this volume of Expressions. Our Featured article is one written by Michael Pilkington and he explores how much of us as photographers appear in our work. Beyond familiarity and influence comes self-expression and how this individuality should be grasped as a means of making our work our own.

Our Featured Photographer this time is plural! David and Jan Harris are a married couple with many years of experience and exploration shared together. We ask how the rarity of a married couple pursuing photography as their chosen hobby brings similarity in their work, but also differing directions when visiting locations together. We found the results fascinating indeed!

In this volume, Paul Gallagher shares with us two very different topics. Firstly, he tries to understand that winter is often one of the most unforgiving and challenging seasons. What is it that makes landscape photographers so driven to get out there, and what are the qualities presented to us that we passionately want in our work? Lastly, Paul is a photographer who is constantly looking for new ventures and ways to express himself. This time, it is not 'in with the new', but 'in with the old' as he shares his newfound fascination with using vintage lenses and relishes the distinct qualities they display.

As always, Expressions is free to everyone, so if you know a budding photographer or a visual artist you would think would enjoy what we are offering here, then please share this link with them **aspect2i.co.uk/downloads/expressions**

Self-portraits in landscape photography

by Michael Pilkington

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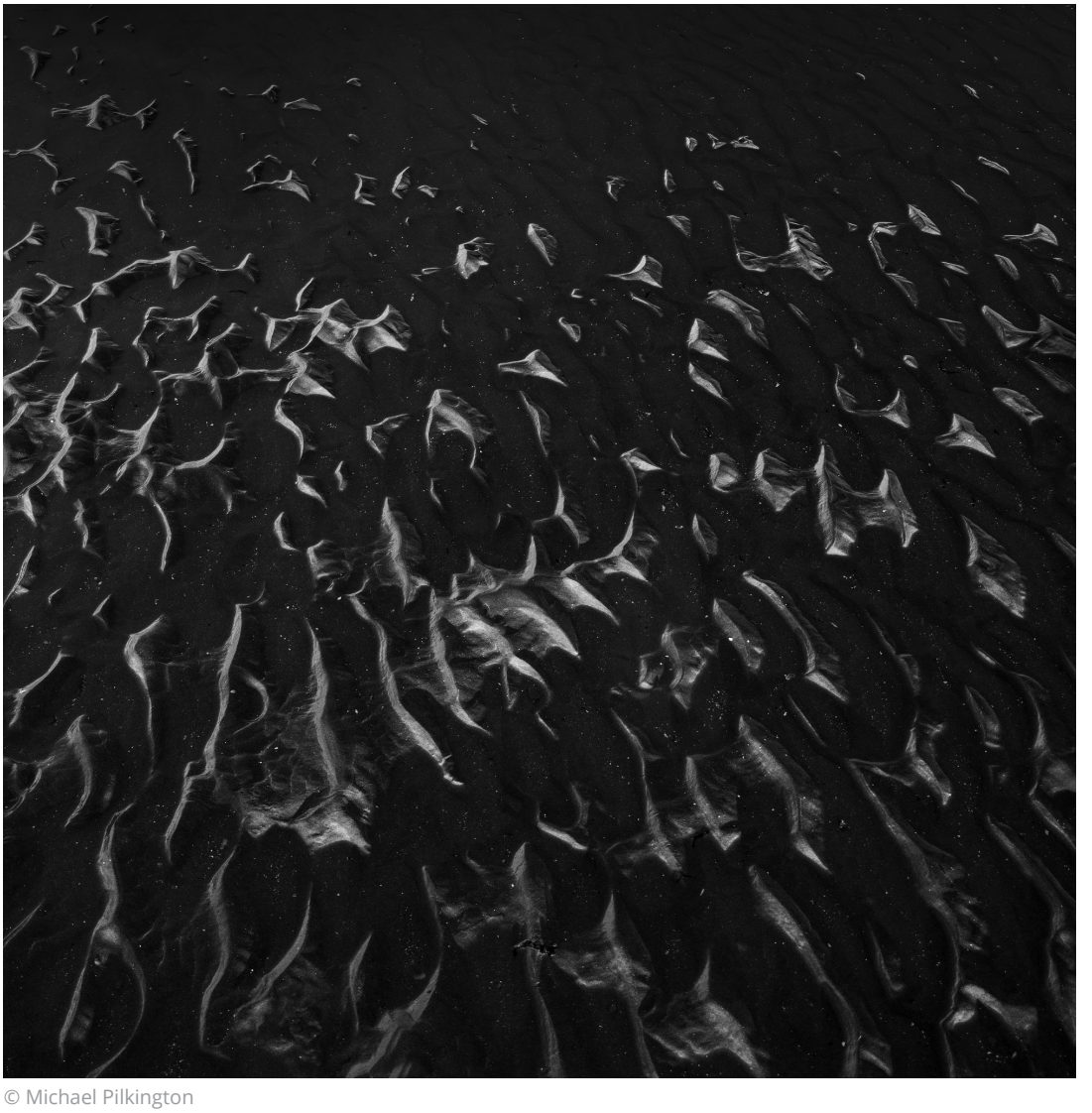
I remember many, many years ago my wife asking' 'Why are all your pictures so dark?'. I just replied, 'Because I like them that way'. It was true that the subjects and most definitely the editing tended towards the sombre, the dark and dramatic. I didn't really reflect on that too much at the time, but, of late, I have been contemplating the evolution of my photography. Today, what I photograph is pretty much the same, but the way in which I approach it, from in the field to the final print, is quite different. There is a clear evolution. My images are no longer dark, and they are more celebratory of the landscape and what is within it. In the main, they are lighter, not just in brightness but in character.

Let's go back to those dark images my wife commented on. If I am honest and open with you, those days were darker for me. I have always tended towards the glass-half-empty end of the scale. Back then, it was three-quarters empty! I could sum up that the way in which I photographed and presented my images reflected me then.

We each bring a unique and personal perspective to the act of photography: a melange of memories, values, experiences, doubts, desires, and fears. When we step into a landscape with our camera in hand, we are not just reacting to what is out there, but unconsciously seeking resonance with what is within ourselves. A certain tree catches our attention, not merely because of its shape, but because it embodies something we recognise: resilience, solitude, grace, defiance. A veil of mist stirs more than aesthetic appreciation; it evokes ambiguity, mystery, loss or perhaps peace, stillness, and calm.

In this sense, landscape photography becomes less about what we see and more about how we see it and what we are drawn to reveals something essential. As photographers, we are not passive recorders of the landscape. We are interpreters, distillers, and translators of our own experience. The image becomes a connection between the outer and inner world, a self-portrait made in the language of rock, tree, water, and light.



© Michael Pilkington

This journey from seeing to expressing is not linear; it is developmental. I have long found it helpful to conceptualise this as a spiral, a creative evolution that moves through three phases: Influence, Intuition, and Expression.

Influence is where we all begin. We are drawn to the work of others: photographers we admire, styles we want to emulate, compositions we try to copy. This phase is essential; it feeds our enthusiasm and

helps us build the technical foundation for image-making. However, too often, photographers can become trapped there. They collect images like postcards, replicate scenes already seen, and unconsciously adopt someone else's vision and style as their own. Without self-enquiry, influence becomes repetition.

© Michael Pilkington

In such an environment, photography becomes reactive rather than reflective. The pursuit of applause drowns out the quiet voice of self-awareness. And so, the spiral of development stalls.

This is not to say that those early influences are shallow or misguided. Quite the opposite. They often resonate with us precisely because they echo some part of our own internal landscape, even if we are not yet fully conscious of it. A beginner drawn to the quiet minimalism of Michael Kenna or the luminous serenity of Ansel Adams may be responding to a yearning within themselves for stillness or clarity. In this way, influence can serve as a mirror, even in its borrowed forms.

Intuition is the next turn in the spiral. It is the stage where we begin to feel our way into the work. We start to recognise what draws us in a scene before we can articulate why. We stop chasing locations and start responding to mood, atmosphere, and form. The images become less about external validation and more about internal satisfaction. Composition becomes instinctive. Editing becomes a dialogue, not a formula. In this phase, we begin to photograph not just what we see, but what we feel. But it is still somewhat largely subconscious.

© Michael Pilkington

Expression is the final turn, where intention and intuition align, and the photograph becomes a vessel for something deeply personal. Expression doesn't mean grandeur or novelty. It may manifest itself in a subtle curve of light, an unconventional crop, or a quiet scene that others might overlook entirely.

The camera, though mechanical, can function as a mirror. It reflects not only the world in front of it, but the sensibility behind it. In this way, even technical decisions - lens choice, time of day, tonal range, depth of field, plane of focus - become expressive tools. A preference for shadow or mist, chaos, or order isn't random. It becomes autobiographical. What matters is not what the image contains, but what it communicates. Expression is photography with a voice.

It is here that photography becomes less about the landscape and more about the photographer. It

means revealing something of your own outlook, sensibility, and even temperament through the work. A landscape image that moves others, that has an emotional or reflective dimension, is almost always a self-portrait in disguise.

© Michael Pilkington

Whilst I present this as successive stages, it is, in fact, iterative. Sometimes, when I do not feel connected to the landscape before me, I might revert to influence or intuition. I find that being expressive is not something that you can do all the time. I don't believe that you can be original and creative all the time. It is not possible for any artist.

The critical ingredient that propels a photographer from influence to expression is not time or technique; it is self-enquiry.

Self-enquiry is the willingness to ask yourself why you are drawn to a particular scene; what are you responding to? Is this saying something about how I see the world, and how so? It could be just an innate appreciation of the beauty of nature, that is to say, joy or contentment. What do I want to say and to whom?

These are not questions with quick answers. They may not even be fully answerable. But they orient us toward depth. Without them, we risk becoming derivative, formulaic, or merely producing decorative images. We simply collect images. Questioning yourself results in your photography beginning

to acquire a voice and a meaning. Yet, self-enquiry seems to be increasingly rare in photography. Many photographers remain stuck in the influence stage, not because they lack talent or passion, but because the wider environment rewards imitation over introspection.

© Michael Pilkington

Speed and validation, likes, shares, and camera club praise have become the currency of photographic success. Slowing down, questioning one's intent, risking failure or obscurity; these are not encouraged. But they are essential if we are to produce work that truly expresses who we are. Photographers that nestle in the world of influence take comfort in consensus, a place of little risk and one that welcomes you in.

For those at the beginning of their photographic journey, it's easy to feel that you must first master gear or technique before expressing anything meaningful. But self-enquiry doesn't require mastery - it only requires honesty.

The photographs you're drawn to now, even if heavily influenced by others, already contain the seeds of your voice. The key is to stop and ask: Why this image? Why this feeling? These small acts of reflection open the door to something deeper.

© Michael Pilkington

So how can we cultivate this deeper engagement?

- Photograph without intent to share. Not everything needs to be posted, submitted, or judged. Give yourself space to explore and fail.
- Write alongside your photography - about why an image speaks to you or why it doesn't can open surprising insights.
- Return to familiar places. When novelty fades, deeper layers often emerge. Familiarity breeds nuance and is extremely powerful.
- Study your own work. Lay out twenty of your favourite images from the past few years. What do they have in common? What do they say about you? What was your mood when you took the photograph?
- Allow photography to be an act of feeling, not just seeing. Let your mood guide your choices: subject, light, colour, tone.

In time, these practices build a kind of inner compass. You may still photograph landscapes, but they will not be anonymous. They will be yours.

© Michael Pilkington

Some photographers work with bold drama. Others with serene quiet. Some seek chaos, others simplicity. These are not just aesthetic preferences. They are clues to something deeper.

In my own work, I've been told that there is a certain softness, sometimes even a hint of grief, that underpins many of my images. I did not set out to create melancholic photographs. But I have always found refuge in nature. It is a place of solace and reflection. Therefore, it is understandable that this emotional undercurrent is reflected in my work. Equally, my favourite subjects are mountains and woodlands. Mountains are enduring and timeless, slowly adapting or being formed by the forces of nature. They are resilient. Woodlands are chaotic and messy, much like life, and my impulse is

to derive some kind of order. This is not a strategy; it is a sensibility. In truth, we cannot hide from ourselves in our photography. Sooner or later, who we are is revealed, whether we intend it or not. The camera does not just record what we point it at. It records how we are in the world.

© Michael Pilkington

Ultimately, to pursue landscape photography as a form of self-portraiture is to embrace it as a practice of becoming - not merely capturing what is, but discovering who we are through what we choose to see and share. It asks that we go beyond the frame and encompass the framing mind.

This does not require grand statements or obvious symbolism. It asks only that we pay attention. That we treat our images as questions, not answers. That we allow the land to reflect not just the light, but something of ourselves.

And perhaps, over time, what we produce is not just photographs, but traces of where we have been,

of what we have felt, of who we are becoming. In that sense, the landscape is not simply a subject. It is a silent, enduring witness in our attempts to say: This is how the world looks to me. This is how it feels to be here. That is the evolution that I have seen in my own work.

© Michael Pilkington

So, we begin to create something that is not just technically competent or compositionally pleasing but expressive, honest, and unmistakably ours. It reflects our style. I would caution against seeing it as a rigid or singular visual identity. True photographic style is not a formula or filter applied to every subject; rather, it is a consistent sensibility that evolves. It may shift with the seasons, change with our circumstances, or deepen as our inner life matures. The expressive photographer does not pursue sameness but cohesion – personal insight that manifests differently depending on the moment.

In the end, photography is less about the final image and more about the path we walk to get there. If we are attentive, honest, and brave enough to listen, our photography and the landscape, will teach us not only how to see, but how we see ourselves.

© Michael Pilkington

What is it with winter?

by Paul Gallagher

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It is a reasonable question to ask landscape photographers, and one I often ask myself. During the months of summer, I cherish nothing more than throwing open the bedroom windows as I rise and inhaling that first breath of sweet morning air from the woodland close by. It is a treat to walk into the garden with a morning coffee and feel the warmth of the sun on my face, wearing a thin cotton shirt and shorts. I close my eyes and listen, in a mellow state of calm, to the gentle harmony of birdsong which often begins long before I open my own eyes.

The pace of life seems to take more of a back seat, and daydreaming is plentiful, and you know, there are many hours of this bliss left before the sun begins to head toward the horizon. You will notice in the words that I have chosen that any reference to photography has also taken a back seat.

Summer, in all its generosity, asks little of us. Its pleasures come freely and immediately with warmth, colour, abundant life, long days and languid evenings, and a richness that requires no little interpretation. Photography in summer is often a photography of ease: observational and soaked in

green. The land is, quite literally, open. There is no struggle to see, no tension in the experience, no sense of wrestling with the elements or negotiating with the season.

Before summer comes spring, the season of beginnings, of quiet unfurling, of the world returning to itself. Spring is seldom dramatic in the way autumn is. Instead, its beauty reveals itself gently. The land wakes slowly, in soft greens and tentative blossom, and daylight grows longer. For photographers, spring can be a season of subtle optimism and full of promise. It invites us to notice small things: the first leaf, the first warm breeze, the first suggestion of colour.

Yet spring, a season of transitions, a landscape caught between states. Mud clings to boots, storms arrive unexpectedly, and the clarity of winter's stark forms begins to dissolve beneath new growth. Photography at this time often feels like an exercise in patience: moments are fleeting, conditions change quickly, whilst the land is still assembling itself. Spring offers hope, renewal, and a sense of the world stretching awake, but it rarely offers stillness.

Autumn carries with it a very different kind of celebration. Here, the land performs with extravagance - gold, crimson, russet, copper - each tree seemingly trying to outdo its neighbour before the leaves fall. Everything can feel urgent: a fleeting peak, a palette that shifts by the hour, the annual drama of transformation, which can come and go very quickly. Nonetheless, autumn seduces us with spectacle.

Yet for all the richness of summer, the restlessness of spring and the festival of autumn, a curious truth remains: many photographers feel the strongest pull toward winter. And not only photographers - walkers, writers, painters, naturalists - so many people express a fascination that seems at odds with the season's reputation. Winter is cold, dark, colourless, often harsh, and sometimes inhospitable. It strips the landscape of comfort. It removes so much of what we claim to love during the rest of the year. So, what, exactly, is it with winter? Why does it hold such an enduring appeal, particularly for those of us who willingly choose to head out with cameras into the damp, the cold, and the skeletal world the season presents?

To answer this, you must acknowledge the most obvious point first: winter is the great reducer. It simplifies.

Where summer offers abundance, sometimes too much of it: too green, too colourful, too bright. Winter does the opposite. The land is quiet, and life is on hold. Trees stand skeletal; their form revealed without the distraction of foliage. Hedges thin to the bare architecture of twigs. The countryside takes on a monochromatic, or at best subtly coloured, character. Heavy rains saturate the ground. Frost glazes fields in a delicate, crisp veil. Snow arrives and transforms everything, often without warning, bringing with it a bright and enveloping silence. Even the air feels reduced - colder, cleaner, sharper. In this purposeful reduction lies the first clue to winter's attraction: the land is whispering.

To work in winter is to tune yourself to quietness, to subtleties, to faint tonal shifts and long shadows cast by a sun that never climbs high. The season forces the photographer into an increased state of attentiveness. You look more carefully because there is less to see. You listen more deeply because there is less to hear. You become more receptive because the landscape requires it. And with this attentive state comes a sense of calm that is very different from the easy relaxation of summer: a mindful calm, a calm born of careful noticing.

Then, of course, there is the feeling of winter. Part of the appeal lies not only in what we see but in what we feel in our bodies. The cold, the isolation, the slight vulnerability that accompanies slippery ground or the knowledge that daylight is in short supply, these sensations make us more alive to the moment.

© Paul Gallagher

They give the experience an edge, and winter can be risky and uncomfortable. But stepping into that discomfort is invigorating, even liberating. There is a sense of adventure simply in being out there, wrapped against the wind, breath clouding in the air, camera cold in your hands.

© Paul Gallagher

Winter strips away the nonessential. It does this not only to the landscape, but to us as well. We become more purposeful and our attention narrows. We move through the world with greater clarity. Different landscapes articulate winter in their own distinctive ways. Consider the coast. Here, the season is wholly unapologetic. Bitter, unrelenting winds sweep across open bays; rolling waves surge and crash onto the shoreline, clouds break and fierce light glances across the water in fleeting bursts.

Winter by the sea is not gentle; it is elemental. And because of that, it is thrilling. To photograph a winter coastline is to be in conversation with movement, power and volatility, experiencing a raw performance of weather and water.

Move inland to the valleys, and the mood changes once more. Some valley floors spend days or even weeks in permanent shadow. Hills and mountains collect early snow that lingers, dusting ridges and plateaus while the lower ground awaits its turn. Winter valleys are contemplative places, quiet and slow-moving. The muted colour palette encourages photographers to work with tone and form rather than colour, embracing the space between illumination and shade.

And then there is woodland. If any landscape transforms most dramatically in winter, it is here. On dark, cloudy days, woodland feels damp, foreboding and mysterious. The absence of leaves means light behaves differently, falling in narrow shafts or glowing softly across moss, bark and wet ground. When the light is right, the woods are illuminated from within; a soft radiance that is neither autumn's splendour nor summer's warmth but something altogether quieter. Winter woodland can be eerie, skeletal, even unsettling, but it has an emotional depth seldom experienced in other seasons. It asks

us to enter rather than simply admire, to listen rather than look.

© Paul Gallagher

Beyond the physical qualities, winter resonates emotionally. The season has always carried metaphors of stillness, endurance, reflection, and renewal. These are not romantic associations imposed upon the land; they are inherent in the experience itself.

Winter is the season when nature withdraws and wildlife retreats into hibernation or migrates. Plants conserve energy underground. The landscape enters a profound pause, a state of waiting. And in that waiting, we, too, are invited to slow down.

In photography, this internal shift matters. Winter encourages us to look not just at the land but into ourselves. Its simplicity acts like a mirror. With fewer external distractions, our emotional state becomes a more active ingredient in the image. A lone tree on a frost-covered field may speak not only of isolation but of resilience.

A defining characteristic of winter is scarcity. Light is scarce. Colour is scarce. Time is scarce. Wildlife is scarce. And this scarcity heightens appreciation. When a shaft of low sun breaks through clouds after hours of dull grey, it is astonishing. When frost crystals catch the first glow of morning, we notice every glimmer. When snow transforms the land overnight, we step outside with a childlike sense of wonder. Because winter offers less, everything offered feels significant.

© Paul Gallagher

This is one of the reasons photographers are drawn to the season: its restraint elevates the ordinary. Winter permits us to explore minimalism, abstraction, subtlety, and negative space, the very things overwhelmed by summer abundance or autumn colour. In a sense, winter trains the eye. It teaches visual discipline. It nurtures an appreciation for nuance. It reminds us that photography often depends not on what is present but on what has been removed.

Another compelling aspect is solitude. In winter, we are often left alone with the land. Footpaths are empty and popular beauty spots fall quiet. This solitude can feel isolating, but it can also feel liberating. Many photographers speak of winter as the season in which they reconnect most deeply with the landscape, precisely because there is no competition for its attention.

However, we should not ignore winter's difficulties. The cold infiltrates gloves and boots, batteries drain faster and roads close. Ground becomes treacherous, days are short, and mistakes carry consequences. The weather can change suddenly and without mercy. But hardship is, paradoxically, part of the appeal. Overcoming adversity, even mild adversity, heightens satisfaction. When you return home after a difficult winter outing with a handful of meaningful images, the sense of accomplishment is greater. Winter asks more of us, and giving more in return deepens attachment to the experience. Winter strips away illusion and reveals structure, form, gesture, and tone. It allows us to see the skeleton of the landscape. Without the embellishment of colour or the distraction of lushness, we are

left with the essential elements of composition and light. Winter images can be bold, stark, and graphic or quiet, contemplative and barely there. The season supports both extremes.

© Paul Gallagher

As we reach the midpoint of winter, there is a sense of turning. The best, in many ways, is yet to come. The cold intensifies, frosts deepen, and snow becomes more likely. The landscape enters its most refined state of reduction. This is when winter often reaches its photographic peak. To stand in a silent snowfall, camera in hand, is to inhabit a rare moment of stillness and possibility and feels as though the world is suspended and waiting for you to respond.

And then, almost suddenly, the season loosens its grip, light returns and days lengthen. The great pause is ending. Do not arrive in spring only to realise you have not harnessed the opportunities of another year to explore winter's gifts. They are available now, waiting quietly, patiently, modestly.

We do not need snow as an essential ingredient for winter photography. The season's magic lies not in one phenomenon but in the whole palette of low sun, long shadows, enveloping greys, deep frosts

and mist-filled valleys. Winter is not the absence of beauty; it is beauty distilled.

© Paul Gallagher

Featured photographers: Jan and David Harris

Jan and David Harris

As we are sure you know, we have always had a fascination in the work of other photographers we meet and how they see the world and what their photographs say about it. In this volume of Expressions, we thought we would break the rules a little by inviting two photographers to be involved, and there is one simple reason. David and Jan Harris are a married couple, share the same passion for the outdoors, and they are both consummate photographers. For some, this may sound like a challenging combination, but since they met is all they have known and their work and how they interpret the same locations is one of diverse fascination.

When you first met, were one or both of you already photographers or did this shared hobby evolve over time?

DH. We met at the photographic society at university when Jan was studying for her degree, and I was working on my PhD. I started photography when my parents bought me an SLR for my eighteenth birthday and taught myself when wandering the canals of Birmingham, basically photographing anything that caught my eye. Jan was new to photography when we met and had recently bought an SLR and joined the society along with a couple of her friends.

Our shared interest in landscape photography then evolved together, forged in trips to the Lake District and elsewhere in our early years after university. We both developed a love for early morning mists in particular.

JH. David was the President of the university's Photography Society when some friends and I joined. I bought a camera for a trip travelling around in the USA one summer with one of my friends. I enjoyed taking photos, and my photography improved throughout the trip, so I decided that I wanted to continue with photography. When David and I became a couple, all our holidays revolved around photography!

© Jan Harris - Over the river

It is unusual to see a married couple share the same passion for photography, and you regularly share time together when out with your cameras. When deciding on a location to visit, is compromise sometimes employed?

DH. Generally, we like to visit similar places, so compromise is rarely required. The exception to this is that I enjoy photographing in woodlands, where Jan sometimes finds less inspiration. During the summer months, I can get up and go out to the woods early, while Jan enjoys a lie-in, and that way we are both happy! Places we are both happy to visit include the coast, usually in Pembrokeshire [Image example: Foaming], and, more recently, urban locations where we can produce more abstract multiple exposure work.

© David Harris - Support network

JH. I have more difficulty finding compositions in woodland than David does. We both have a love of the coast and rivers. We are both willing to explore new locations that the other is interested in. There is usually something of interest in any location.

© Jan Harris - Backlight

Given you are both individual photographers, how would you describe the main differences in your work?

DH. I think any differences are in degrees rather than absolutes. For example, a high proportion of my landscape work is intimate or abstract, whereas Jan has been moving in that direction also, but more slowly, so she works with wider landscapes more than I do now. I also work more in monochrome and infrared than Jan, who is more dedicated to colour.

© David Harris - Cut

© David Harris - Seeker after the light

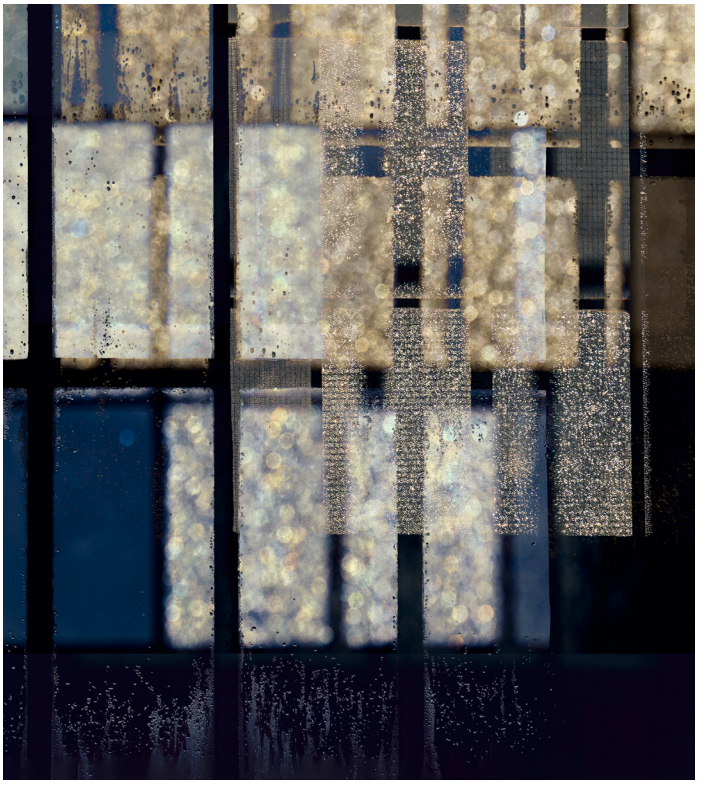
There are some specific differences, however. My work is more introspective and I spend a lot of time photographing "nothing much" [Image example: Cut] or complex, tangly subjects. I have a mantra that sharpness is overrated and often work with defocusing or very narrow depth of field where I aim to conjure magic, dream, or sometimes nightmare worlds.

© David Harris - Touch the magic

© David Harris - Choreography

Jan's compositions can be more elegant than mine and work more with intentional camera movement than I do, or at least she tends to have more success with it.

In the urban landscape, we both work with multiple exposures and produce somewhat abstract images. Whilst there is a stylistic difference between us, for example, Jan tends to employ stronger colour shifts than I do, it might be less obvious to others.



© David Harris - New light through old windows

Multiple exposure in the natural world can be difficult, but I have probably managed to develop this further than Jan, whereas Jan is better at working elegant multiple exposure compositions and sets of images in the urban environment.

© David Harris - Awakening

JH. Originally, our photography was similar, but differences evolved over time. At first, we both did mainly landscape photography. I tend to be more interested in the wider landscape, whilst David is more interested in intimate landscapes. I am more drawn to colour, whereas David enjoys monochrome and infrared photography.

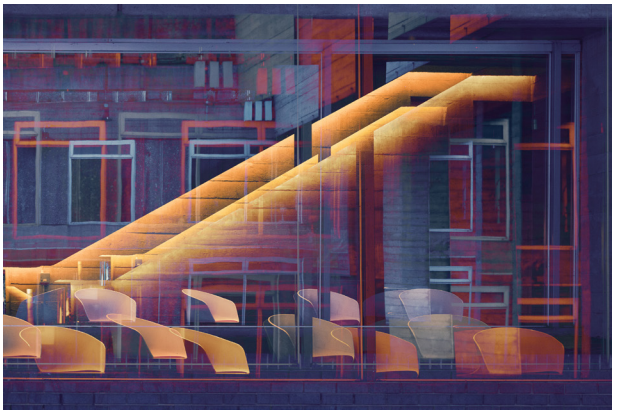
© Jan Harris - Thames sunrise

© Jan Harris - Strom over Marloes

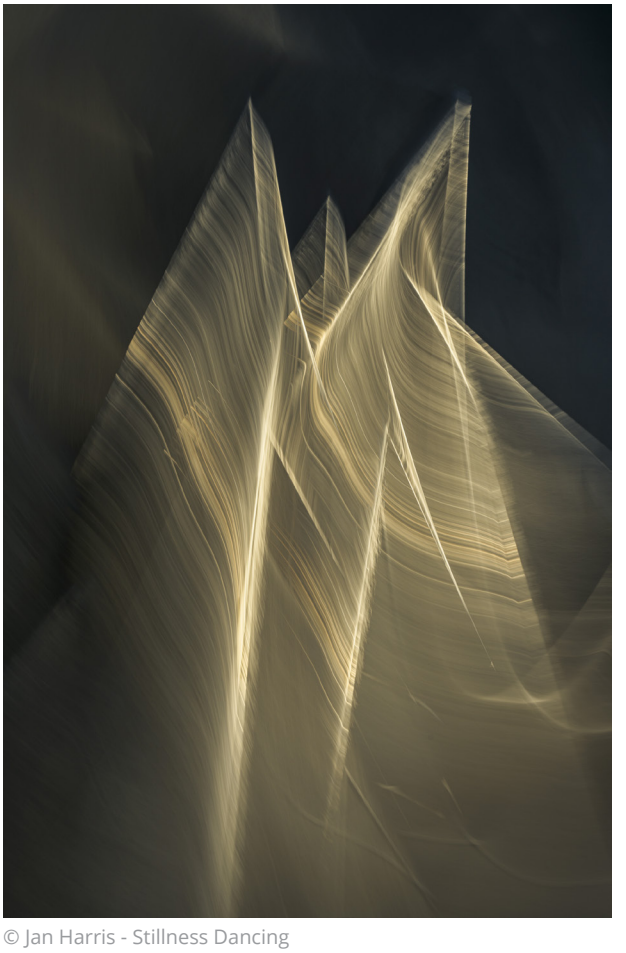
David now takes a lot of images with a very shallow depth of field, so only a small part of the frame is in focus. I have become interested in multiple exposure [e.g. 'Awaiting an Audience' and 'Gateway to Imagination'] and ICM photography and am happy to experiment with compositions until I get results that I like..

© Jan Harris - Gateway to Imagination

Although there are differences in our styles, looking at each other's images inspires us and sparks our creativity.



© Jan Harris - Awaiting an Audience



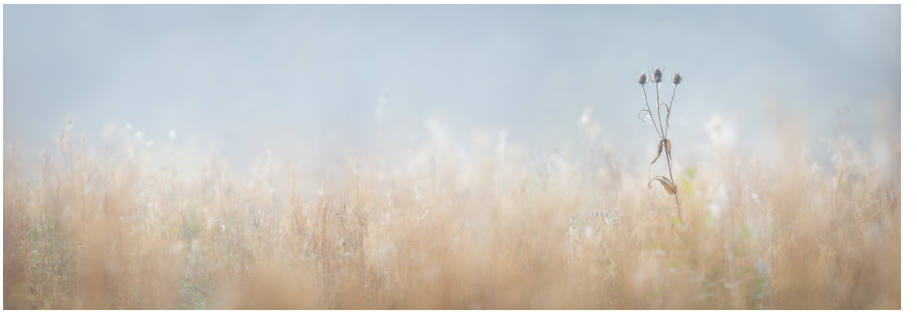
© Jan Harris - Stillness Dancing

Working closely with other photographers often results in an image taken at a particular place that you wish you had taken yourself. Can you share with us an image of each other taken at a location that demonstrates this, and why this was your response?

DH. It happens a lot, in both directions, though sometimes, when working with multiple exposure, one of us will suggest an approach that seems to work well for a location or subject, and we will inspire each other. The image I've chosen from Jan was taken at Luskentyre on a very windy day. I was fighting the wind and trying to find intimate compositions amidst the dunes, sand patterns and the edge of a stream, whereas Jan used ICM to show what the place felt like rather than looked like. The sweeping movements of the hills and dunes in this one form such elegant curves, so immediately evocative of the location. Somehow, this image is restful and yet one can sense the underlying energy.

© Jan Harris - Dune impressions

JH. The image I have chosen, 'Gone to seed', is an early example of David's shallow depth of field photography, that I enjoy and admire. The gentle colours of the foreground and background combine beautifully, and the single teasel provides a resting place for the eye. It is a stitched panorama taken on a walk locally, on a morning that I took no images worth mentioning!



© David Harris - Gone to seed

Although living and exploring photography together, do you have individual projects that you are hoping to pursue in the near future?

DH. I'm a big fan of working on projects. I often find the results to be more meaningful to me than individual images.

Recently, we worked together on a joint project, the first time we have done that. I have now stepped back from it, though to let Jan develop it further with a view perhaps to an RPS Fellowship submission.

Typically, though, our projects tend to be individual ones. Mine often focus (or defocus!) on elements of the environment that most people and photographers walk by. For example, I completed a project on a pile of discarded corrugated iron in a Pembrokeshire woodland. That project taught me a lot about the particular aesthetics that I most relate to. I followed it up with a project working on defocus.

© David Harris - Beeched

I particularly enjoyed a short project about the Icelandic sculptor Einar Jonsson, photographed in Reykjavik. Interestingly, I made two trips, a year apart, and there was a definite stylistic shift between the two trips.

© David Harris - Mourning Earth (first trip)

© David Harris - United in prayer (second trip)

© Jan Harris - Pareidolia

© Jan Harris - Rosamol

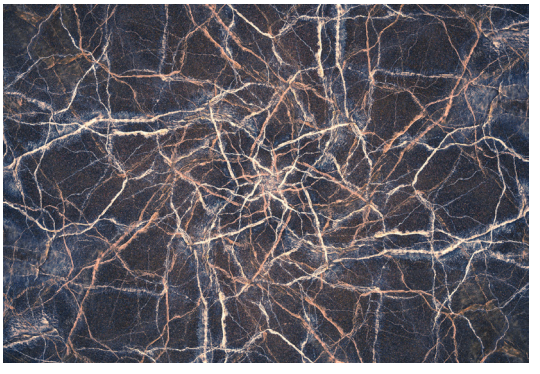
One ongoing project, photographing ferns, has been in progress for about 18 months; I'm not quite sure yet when I will end it. It's tricky to unite as it is a mix of intimate black and white and more abstract colour so I think it may need to develop into a book or zine.

© David Harris - Dwarfed

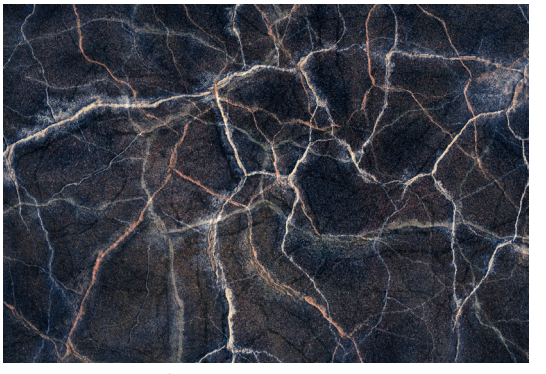
© David Harris - Garden of Eden

I am in the early days of a project photographing a fallen tree in my local park and I am also thinking about a project that uses multiple exposure to explore the underlying energy of modernity This started when photographing architecture on a short visit to Liverpool, but I think there is scope to develop it into a project. Generally, I let projects find me in this way rather than seeking them out and planning them in advance. Sometimes I develop sketches for a project, then forget about them.

JH. I have done several multiple exposure projects based on prompts, such as a quote, from an online group I am a member of for a project inspired by Japanese art. In the last year we have worked on a joint project 'Remembered Shores' – memories of seascapes created using ME phone images. I was considering submitting some of my images from the project for assessment for an FRPS, but unfortunately, the RPS has put assessments on hold whilst they restructure them. We have discussed producing a book about the project. I am hoping to start creating handmade books of images.



© Jan Harris - Create



© Jan Harris - Undercurrents

© Jan Harris - The bare bones of winter

Flaunt the imperfections

by Paul Gallagher

Flaunt the imperfections

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Since I began with photography, any talk of lenses seems to be distilled down to two main properties to be sought after: the speed of the lens and how sharp it is, in particular, sharpness. This is still the case to this day, with little changing. I challenge you to read in any photography publication extolling the virtues of new lenses that have been recently released, and they will, with many charts and numbers, set out how the lens performs at varying aperture settings, poring over the detail in the centre of the frame and certainly at the edge of the frame.

I, too, have followed this mantra and even spent decades using large-format cameras, fitting lenses with large image circles and top-quality optics made by renowned manufacturers like Schneider and Rodenstock. In fact, one of the main inspirations to migrate to the dizzy heights of large format was the crispness of 4″×5″ sheet film and those all-important camera movements, specifically lens tilt, that would enable tripod-to-infinity depth of field.

The pursuit of technical perfection is deeply ingrained in photography. It is measurable, comparable, and reassuring. Sharpness can be plotted on a chart; distortion can be corrected; chromatic aberration can be eliminated; colour can be standardised. Modern lenses are astonishing achievements of engineering, capable of resolving detail far beyond what most of us could ever need. And yet, somewhere along the way, something has been quietly lost.

© Paul Gallagher

Digital photography, for all its flexibility and convenience, has nudged us towards a particular aesthetic. Colours can appear enhanced rather than nuanced, and sharpness can become abrasive. Images can appear digital rather than grounded in the imperfect world we inhabit. When everything is corrected, optimized, and neutralized, the results can be strangely mediocre, technically flawless, yet emotionally dull. Perfection has become repetitive. The same clarity, the same tonal response, the same visual certainty repeated across different subjects until individuality begins to erode.

My recent exploration with antique and characterful lenses was not born from nostalgia but from a desire to reconnect photography with feeling rather than description. Photography, at its best, is not a forensic record of the world. It is a translation of experience - subjective, interpretive, and deeply personal.

© Paul Gallagher

The lenses I have been working with - the Lensbaby Velvet 56, a vintage Takumar 50mm f/1.4, and the Helios 44-2 - are everything modern digital lenses are not supposed to be. They are inconsistent, they flare, they soften, and they swirl. Their colours drift gently rather than snap to attention and they do not strive for clinical accuracy; and crucially, they cannot be neutralised. Each lens has its own aesthetic and visual signature. These characteristics are not 'defects' to be corrected later; they are integral to how the image is formed.

The Lensbaby Velvet 56 produces a gentle bloom at wider apertures, softening highlights and lowering contrast in a way that feels lyrical rather than imprecise. It has a natural affinity with woodland, intimate landscapes, and close-up details, where atmosphere matters more than edge definition. Stopped down, clarity returns, but never with the brittle hardness associated with modern optics.

The Takumar feels calmer and more grounded. Its rendering is natural and believable, with smooth tonal transitions and understated colour. It does not produce image files that demand attention; instead, the images are soothing and restrained. It encourages a quieter response to subject matter, one rooted in observation rather than effect.

The Helios 44-2, which is currently my favourite is wonderfully expressive. Swirling bokeh, and an incredible soft glow with sharpness just were you need it if accurate focusing is employed. Used with careful intent, it becomes a powerful expressive tool, capable of transforming ordinary scenes into something of a work of art.

There is something profoundly important about how these lenses feel. They are solid, mechanical objects: metal and glass with weight and resistance. Focus rings turn slowly and deliberately. Aperture rings click with intention. Nothing is automated.

This tactile engagement matters. It slows the photographic process and reintroduces physicality into what has become an increasingly virtual experience. Focus becomes an act of concentration rather than a by-product of pressing a button and exposure becomes a conscious, careful decision.

In slowing down, attentiveness returns. You notice more, linger longer, and respond less reactively. One of the most unexpected outcomes of working with these lenses is how quickly they retrain your eye. Because their behaviour is less predictable, you begin to look more carefully. You learn how each lens responds to light, where contrast falls away, and how depth of field shapes emotional emphasis.

The focal lengths (clustered between 50mm and 58mm) also matter. They sit close to what we often describe as natural vision, yet with fast apertures, they radically alter perception. Backgrounds dissolve, and attention narrows to what feels important rather than what is merely present. The images that emerge from these lenses are not dramatic in the conventional sense. They do not shout, they whisper. Contrast is lower, tonal transitions gentler, colours closer to memory. Ordinary subjects take on new significance with a shallow depth of field that allows fragments of the world to be isolated and elevated. What might once have been overlooked becomes beautifully compelling

Working this way changes not just what you photograph, but how long you stay with it. Without the pressure to capture quickly, you linger. You watch light move across surfaces, and you notice subtleties of tone and texture. This mirrors my experiences from the film era, when each frame carried weight and intention. The act of photographing becomes contemplative rather than reactive, and the resulting images carry that calm within them.

Choosing to work with imperfect lenses is not a rejection of craft, but a conscious creative journey.

It is a way of reintroducing uncertainty into a process that has become overly controlled. By trading some technical certainty, you create space for intuition and exploration.

These lenses demand commitment. You must consider how the background interplays with the main subject, and consideration must be given to where your focal plane is and how depth of field will influence the final image. This fosters a stronger relationship between intention and outcome, and even then, not every frame will succeed, but there is a freedom to experiment and to respond emotionally rather than technically.

© Paul Gallagher

There is an element of escape here. Not from digital photography itself, but from its prevailing look. I do not want my images to look like the world rendered perfectly by a sensor. I want them to feel experienced, interpreted, remembered. Antique lenses take the edge off the world. They soften not just the detail, they also introduce ambiguity, and this is what invites the viewer in.

Modern software can correct almost anything. Sharpness can be added, and noise can

be removed, but character cannot be added later, not convincingly. The inconsistencies of historical lens manufacturing, once considered flaws, have become opportunities for expression. This is not an argument against modern lenses; they are extraordinary tools. But expressive photography is not about resolving power. It is about resonance. When we allow imperfection back into the process, we create space for subtlety, emotion and meaning.

To flaunt imperfections is not to abandon craft. It is to recognise that expression often lives in the unresolved, the ambiguous, the imperfect. Working with antique lenses has opened a new door for me, a renewed sense of curiosity and freedom. They have reminded me why I picked up a camera in the first place: not to record the world, but to feel it.

Looking back, it is not entirely surprising that this exploration has resonated so strongly.

My early years in photography were shaped by film and large-format cameras, by processes that demanded care, patience, and intent.

Large format taught discipline. Film taught restraint. Both taught respect for the moment of exposure. Decisions were made slowly, deliberately, and with consequence. In many ways, working with antique lenses has reawakened that mindset within a digital context. Quality is no longer synonymous with sharpness or technical certainty. It lies instead in an understanding between what I saw, what I felt, and what finally appears in the image.

In embracing these lenses, I am not rejecting the progress of modern photography. I am simply choosing, at times, to step aside from it and allow ambiguity back into the frame. Perhaps that is the deeper appeal of imperfection; it reminds us that photography is not merely about what the world looks like, but about how it feels to be present within it.

Uniquely you

by Mark Lawrence

Uniquely you

by Mark Lawrence

Perhaps, somewhat arrogantly, as photographers we strive to create an image that is unique, distinctive and different. We may also hope that the image is admired and liked by others. After all, if others like our image, it must be good, right?

Well, maybe, but surely our photography is for us, not for others; it is a hobby and a means of escape from the world around us. To walk into the woods, or along the beach, camera in hand, is what it is all about. It is about the experience of watching gentle waves breaking on the golden sand or perhaps listening to the leaves rustling in a gentle breeze that brushes the woodland. That our camera offers us the opportunity to create a lasting memory of a time and a place is a bonus. Our primary task is to enjoy our surroundings, connect with nature and, as we take our time, we can see more of what surrounds us and how it makes us feel.

As we start to slow down and engage with our surroundings, we see things that perhaps initially we had not noticed. We begin to "feel" our surroundings and then think about how this might be distilled into an image. Sometimes we may quickly find a composition that tells the story of what we are seeing and how we are feeling – maybe light and airy, maybe dark and sombre. Sometimes, however, we may find that we are struggling to find a way of telling the story and capturing a memory. This has happened to me on more than one occasion. Sometimes my reaction is to take a rather ordinary image that I know I will probably never look at again, but sometimes I try to find a different way of

making an image that reflects what I am seeing and feeling.

Earlier this year, I was faced with a challenging woodland location and was struggling to make sense of a bright, sunny early spring afternoon in some Chiltern woodlands. Sunlight was dappling through the canopy, creating some lovely patterns of light but also some harsh shadows, whilst highlighting the beautiful shape of one of the trees. I decided experimentation was the order of the day! I have previously played around with the in-camera multiple exposure capability of my camera and obtained one or two pleasing, if somewhat abstract, results. I had not, however, tried this option on my Infra-Red converted camera and was intrigued to see what the result might be.

The resulting image was processed in Adobe Camera RAW and Photoshop, although the level of adjustments required was relatively minor. The result, for me, captured the feeling of light coming through the canopy in a way that a standard image simply did not. I'm not sure that even I could replicate the same result again, as I would doubtless select slightly different focus points and so feel I have managed to create something unique to me. This technique (and others, like ICM on a tripod) allows us to create images that are unique and perhaps more evocative of a time and place special to us. It is not a silver bullet, just another way of expressing how we see and feel at a moment in time.

For those not familiar with in-camera multiple exposure (ICME), you usually have a choice as to how many exposures to combine and what blending mode to use (typically average, lighten and darken). My Nikon D850 allows me to combine up to 10 exposures and offers the choice to keep only the blended exposure or both the blended exposure and the component images. My Nikon also provides the option to select the first frame in a multiple exposure, so, if you wish, you could take 10 exposures using the in-camera multiple exposure mode and then use the resulting image as the basis for a further multiple exposure using the "select frame" option.

As this was the first time I had tried ICME in infra-red I decided to stick with the average blending mode and decided to combine three separate exposures. I set up my tripod and framed the shot as I would have done for a standard exposure but took the three exposures at different focus points. The first was a standard image with the tree in focus, the second was slightly out of focus and the third was completely out of focus (the auto focus was turned off for the second two exposures). The latter image created some soft, out of focus, light "baubles". The lens used was a 70-200mm zoom at 200mm and with an aperture of f8.

The other blending modes of "lighten" and "darken" do what you might expect and take the lighter/darker part of each frame to use in the blend. You can, of course, vary exposure between each frame to increase the effect of your chosen blending mode. Different cameras have variations in blending capability, so it is worth exploring what your own camera's capabilities are before heading out to try this technique.

Image 1 - in focus

Image 2 - slightly out of focus

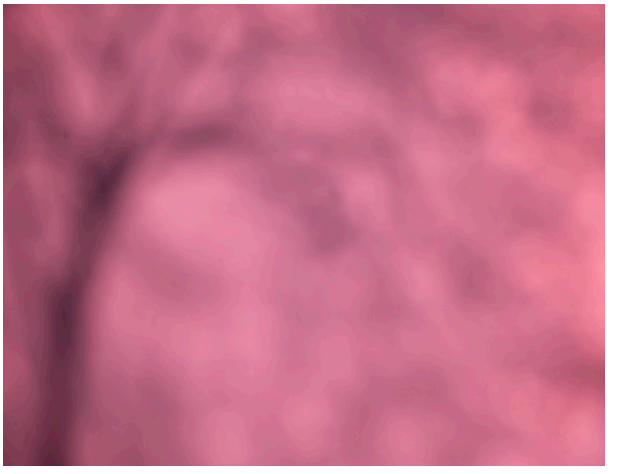

Image 3 - very out of focus

Still walking

by Peter Moore

Still walking

by Peter Moore

During a photography tour such as this one to Senja, it would be easy to get tunnel vision and concentrate on making traditional images of the land and the sea. On photographic journeys, I like to make images of a wide range of subjects, which enable me to tell the wider stories of the trip. I like to shoot my travelling companions, especially if I can capture them amidst a dramatic landscape or showing them battling with nature's elements during appalling weather conditions.

On this day in February 2024 in Senja, Norway, we awoke to a blanket of snow. The snow continued to fall throughout breakfast. Thankfully, Paul and Michael decided that we should venture out to a nearby village called Skaland. The journey was plagued by an almighty blizzard and very poor visibility. We arrived early morning. The sky was so dark with its heavy load of snow that the streetlights were still on.

Michael and Paul were taking shelter under the tail gate of the van while they examined the forecast. It was bad. They called us all back to the vehicles so we could attempt the return journey before the roads became impassable.

As I was putting my camera gear in the vehicle, I noticed two of our group appearing in the distance as they emerged from the snowstorm. I instantly realised there would be a great photo opportunity

as they trudged towards us through the snow. I grabbed my camera and set the shutter speed to 1/200s, (I also had to up the ISO to 6400 to achieve this), which I knew, was fast enough to freeze the motion of the snowflakes.

I made several RAW exposures as they approached. Following a quick review of the images on the camera monitor, I asked the guys nicely to go back 100m and I repeated the shoot. After the second approach and image review, I found one file that captured the scene as I had intended. The two photographers were perfectly positioned in the frame, the gait of their legs looked natural and crucially, the snowflakes were heavily obscuring their torsos, but not their faces. The histogram looked great, and the focus was spot-on. They were very willing photography models so thank you to them.

When I look at this image it transports me back to Senja and those moments in the snowstorm with my camera. I'm so pleased I had the idea to make this shot because it proved to be one of my favourites of the entire trip. It would be great to see snow and scenes like this in the UK this winter!

End note

"It's always around you. You just don't see it"
Jay Maisel

We could begin by asking the question what is 'it' that is all around us? One of the dangers of heading out with a camera is preconceptions. It is common for us all to head to a location because we have previously seen photographs taken there that have inspired us. The danger of preconceptions is somewhat two-fold. Firstly, the lighting and atmospheric conditions may not resemble at all what you saw in the image that enticed you to visit, and secondly, even if you are fortunate to experience similar conditions, will the images you have taken be as rewarding as the ones you have seen before?

The statement by Jay Maisel is one relating to originality, and also, the hardest thing for all of us photographers, seeing with a fresh pair of eyes. Everyone driven by the photographic pursuit have places they have been before many times, and for many of us, making the same compositions becomes tedious and hardly rewarding. If a photographer does this, at best, they may get better light than they experienced during previous visits, but perfect light and conditions are too much to hope for, and we must draw upon other aspects of photography.

'Seeing' is not 'looking'. When we look at a subject, we then need to allow ourselves the time to understand what it means to us. What will be what we find fascinating or beautiful, and it is these elements, given time, that reveal themselves to us. And there you have it; the most important word in the last sentence was time. None of us can be acquitted of the charge of arriving at a place and rushing off to get as many in the bag as possible. We must see the significance in the insignificant

It's not where we stand, or the setting that we use, that is important here, but the time we allow before we must concern ourselves with that. It takes courage and self-control to arrive somewhere, put your bag down and do nothing for a while. Photographers are challenged by the notion of doing nothing. The camera bag serves as a reminder to get the job done. Every fibre of us is charged with the energy to start shooting when that very behaviour prevents us making a communion with our surroundings. Time is the only element that will allow originality, images that will mean something to you personally and gently allow you to see that which is always around.

If you would like to comment on what you have read, you have something to add, or you have any questions that may help you on your way in your photography, then please get in touch. You may want to contribute as a featured photographer or submit an article. Just follow the email link below and feel free to drop us a line with your thoughts.

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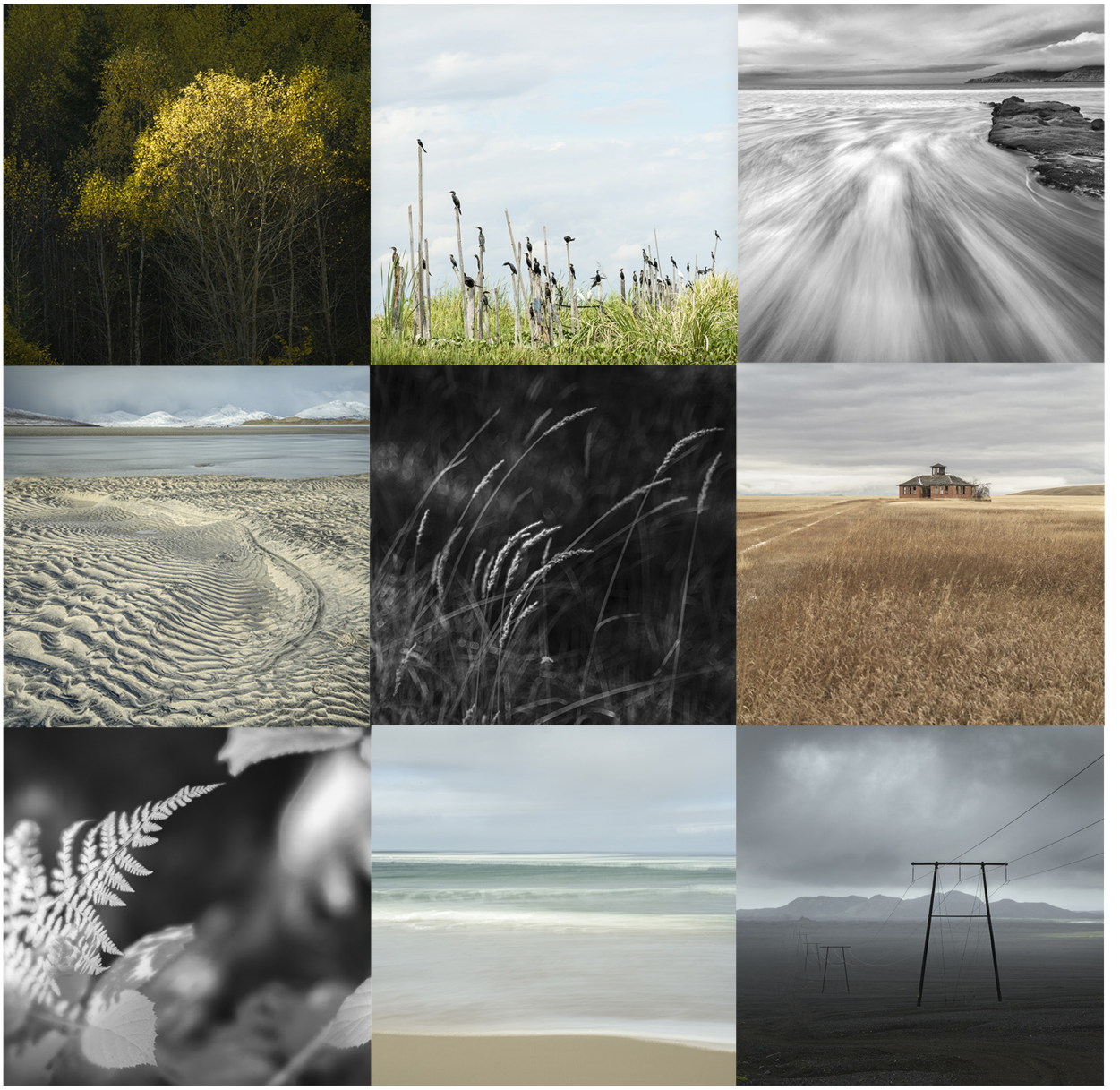

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