

# Expressions

Conversations in landscape photography



JOURNAL 8

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Conversations in landscape photography



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Variety is one ingredient that delivers inspiration in the pursuit of photography. Without it, we feel we stagnate, and the resulting work can begin to become uninspiring and formulaic. To break that mould can be tricky as we have to leave behind what feels comfortable and explore new avenues, even if the subject matter remains firmly within the same genre of photography.

Talking to photographers who have been through this process, or at least, happened upon a new direction in their photography is always enlightening and often illuminates the rut we find ourselves in. This issue of Expressions shares some of the experiences of photographers that, for one reason or another, have diversified and embraced their enquiring minds.

Paul Gallagher shares with us his experience of ignoring the beauty of the surrounding countryside in which he lives in Lancashire, having had his vision overwhelmed by visiting rich and diverse landscapes around the world. By embracing change, his photography and love of the county changed for good.

Chris Cullen tells us of a place of sanctuary and beloved familiarity, the coast of East Lothian. This somewhat overlooked part of eastern Scotland is a place he makes a pilgrimage to almost every year close to where he was brought up, and the images he shares depict why.

We are regularly blown away by the work photographers create whilst on our tours and retreats, and we are pleased to invite Judy Longthorn to be our featured photographer in this issue. She is a photographer who not only embarked on a journey into a new genre but mastered it!

Sometimes, adversity can force us to uncover a part of us that we never knew lay latent within our creative selves. During the lockdown days of the pandemic, Andy Phillips saw beauty in small objects within reach and set himself the challenge of making photographs that communicate these qualities. His work speaks for itself.

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/journal](https://aspect2i.co.uk/journal).



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# Working from home

*by Paul Gallagher*

## Working from home

by Paul Gallagher

I cannot simply throw myself into my photography; it takes me time to adjust and feel that what I am doing is worthy. This level of self-doubt is good for me. I have consistently been self-critical, which leads to doubt, but when I reach the point in what I am doing and I believe in it, then little will convince me otherwise. I don't mean this in an arrogant way, but in a way that enables me to cut out what is around me and any association with other opinions.



© Paul Gallagher

Much of my work is in places that I am familiar with and love to be. Even if I go off into the wilds of another country, which I do often, I usually have some understanding of what I am about to experience, which, in a way, prepares me for the moment I am there with a camera. I usually spend over 160 days a year travelling, so to be at home is often rewarded by an overwhelming sense of comfort and warmth. This, in turn, has led to 'home' meaning one thing and my photography becoming something entirely separate.

I live in a very beautiful part of England called Lancashire which is a large area mostly consisting of open farmland that stretches from the Pennine Moors down to the coast. As you would expect, there are paths aplenty, and you can literally walk for miles far from the roads and truly escape. As I have associated home with a separation from photography, I have hardly ever headed out with my camera in anger, so I have never entered a state of mind that has led me to connect and 'see' what is around me. I simply enjoyed being there.



Several years ago, I was fortunate to have a good, lengthy break at home over the Christmas period, and I did plenty of walking during that time. As ludicrous as it may sound, I had been overloaded with the grandeur of some of the most staggering landscapes I had been fortunate to visit during my year of travel, so sought out and began to relish the sparse winter landscape surrounding my house. I live on the edge of a protected valley park which covers an area of 800 acres and is made up of woodlands and meadows, through which, the River Lostock runs.



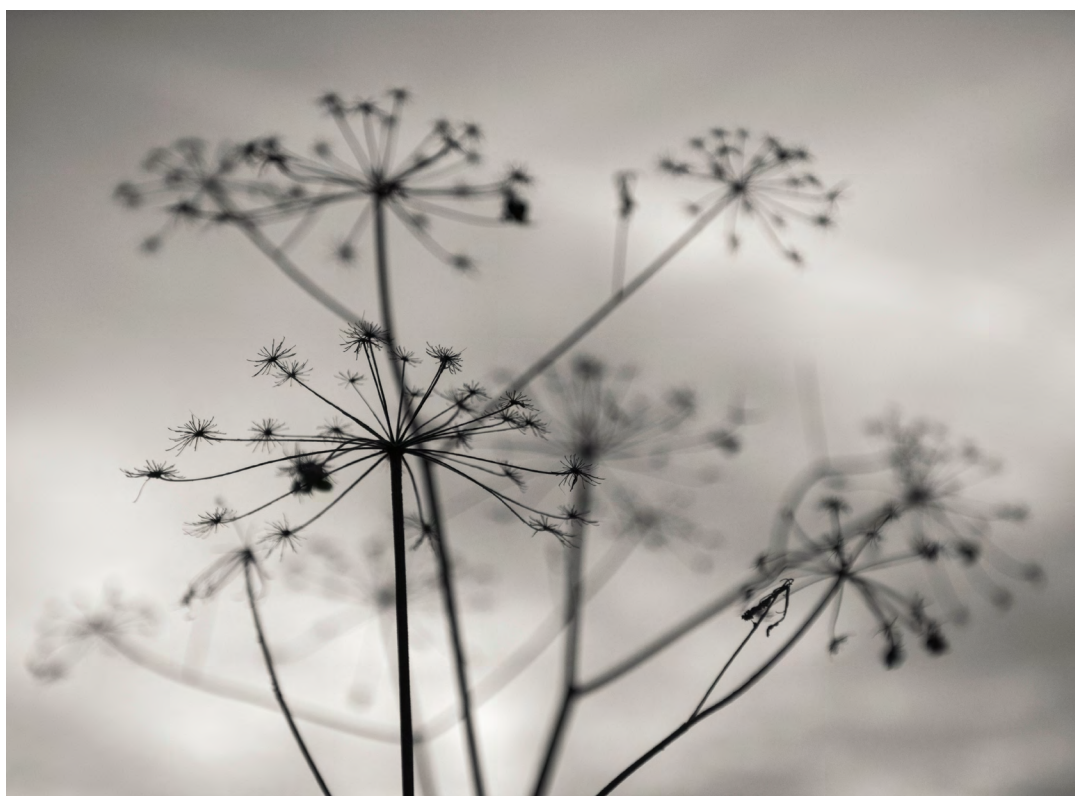
© Paul Gallagher

After all the years of living here, I began to look around me and slow the walks down a little. It became therapeutic, and as I had the time to truly relax, I began to see my surroundings differently. I recall walking the little bridges over the river, stopping for a while and noticing how the river flowed and how the grasses bent in the breeze. Even after a lot of walks, it took some time to commit to going out with my camera. In a way, it was two things I recall that troubled me. Firstly, as much as I knew I was so fortunate to live in such beautiful surroundings, it felt in some way slightly insignificant compared to the environments I often travel to. Secondly, this doubt became a challenge as I often questioned



how I could make photographs of something that I thought of in such a way. Being this self-critical and harbouring self-doubt was what was stopping me.

This point of realisation meant that only one thing was to be done, and that was to go out with my camera and at least try. The difficulty at first was one of emotion and pressure. This was different to most environments I had worked in because I was so very familiar with this parkland that I was trying to understand how I could transcend this state and become a photographer in it. I came to one conclusion very quickly. In much of my work, I try to make order out of chaos. This is, in most cases, a mechanism of distilling the elements of a composition and simplifying it. For me, here at home, it did not seem essential to do this. A lot of the smaller trees and thickets in the parkland would have made this almost impossible, so I accepted this as an ingredient, and the pressure began to wane a little. A little chaos felt right! I also allowed myself to see the parkland in sections. I began to compartmentalise the individual elements that started to fascinate me.



© Paul Gallgher

Because of the winter conditions, there were very few leaves left on the trees, but the ones that shimmered looked fragile. The bare trees against the dark winter storm skies took on a new meaning to me, and the larger beech trees became muscular arms reaching far above me. Another feature of the parkland is the ponds that appear regularly. Although I was familiar with them, having walked past them hundreds of times, I had not allowed myself the time to see their reflections of the surrounding trees or how the reed beds changed over the seasons.



After these first outings in December, I decided the safest way for me to nurture this new relationship with the parkland was to make some prints. This, for me, is the completion of the journey and a way I can relate to my photography rather than just viewing images on a screen. For me, the finished print is the final expression. Still, to this day, I feel at ease with black and white photographs, so I decided to dedicate the initial parkland study to monochrome. Having printed out some samples, I realised that I had made a distinct connection whilst out there. The photographs revealed the very essence of the place, and more importantly, what I felt and how I interacted whilst making photographs. This led me to explore further, and as a result, I began seeing the seasons changing and sought out the opportunities as often as time would allow when I returned home.



© Paul Gallagher

Returning to a place again and again harnesses a relationship, and if you do this in a photographic capacity, it creates a greater understanding and emotional bond. After only a short time, I have now become familiar with many of the places I have photographed at different times of the year and how transformations during the seasons offer a plethora of opportunities for making photographs. A vital lesson learned is that you certainly do not have to be in exotic or dramatic places around the world to get excited about making landscape photographs. Now, I see the parkland as a place where I am very much at ease, and I feel no pressure at all to 'do it justice' This phrase has often baffled me as I have never fathomed what 'justice' should be. I suspect it is a photograph that will attain a certain reaction from the viewer that should align with what you felt when you were standing there. In the parkland, I just make photographs of things that I deem beautiful, photographs of subjects that moved me at the time, and I really don't care what others may think. This has been wonderful!



I now have a place to go from my front door that is not only close in distance, but close in a personal connection. It is not a place of icebergs and glaciers, dense forest or glen. Neither is it a place to hear crashing waves or see towering mountains, but a place of ponds, trees and paths that I once paced along, but now I wander slowly with an eye that sees so much more.



© Paul Gallagher



© Paul Gallagher



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# East Lothian's secret coast

*by Chris Cullen*



## Travelogue - A truthful account of an individual's experiences to or within a particular place

It's over 40 years since I lived in East Lothian. Life has moved on but my love affair with East Lothian and its coast in particular has never faded—it's a relationship built on years of happy memories, quiet awe, learning and exploration.

Through the years it always called me back. No matter how much time passes, the sight of the rolling waves, golden sands, rugged cliffs, and the clear horizon reignites my passion for it.



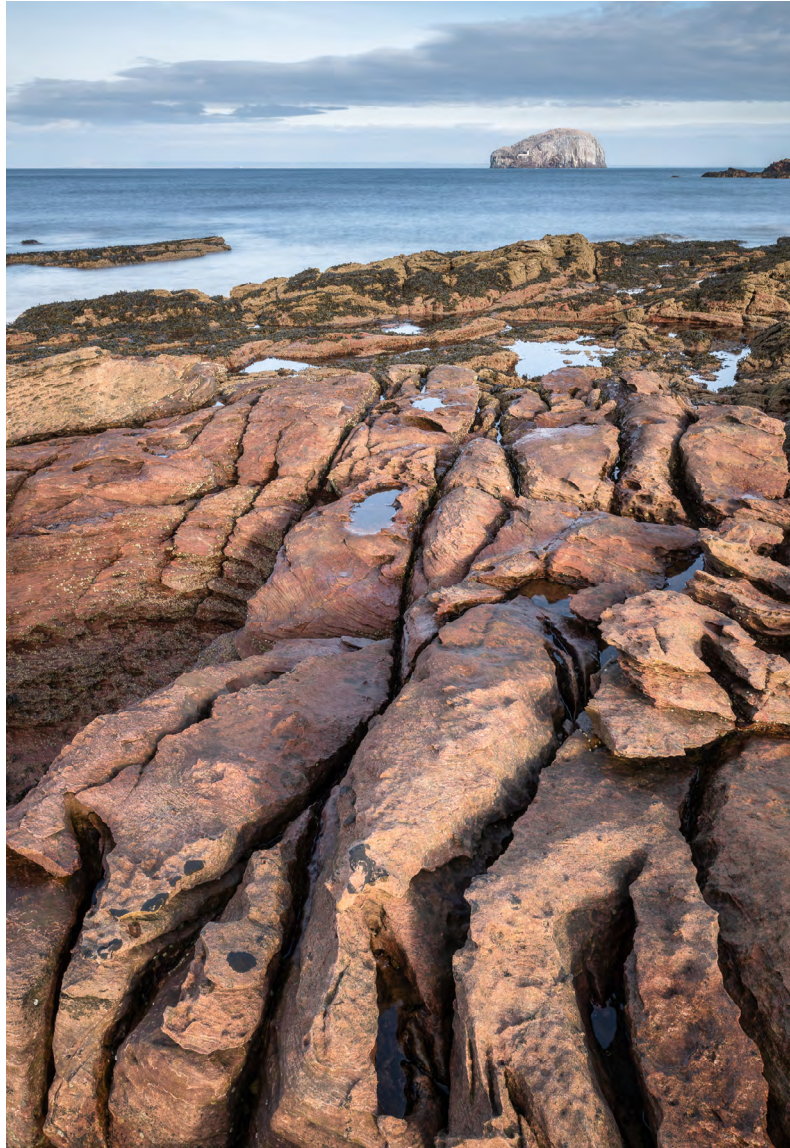
©Chris Cullen

The salty breeze, carrying the cries of seabirds, the sound of waves on the rocks, the sound of the tide on the broad golden sand beaches instantly transports me back. The moment I step onto the sand, the world slows down.

Every time I go back to my old haunts, I discover more to marvel at. I've been visiting the beaches, dunes, headlands and coastal woods here for several decades. Throughout my childhood, I perhaps took the magic here for granted. Didn't every beach boast a beautiful dune system and a broad sweep of golden sand? Didn't every headland boast a dramatic castle? Didn't every coastal path weave its way through magical mature woodland?



As you drive down to my favourite, tucked-away beach, the access track winds its way down through thick woodland, between cliff edges, past an ancient ruin. The beach that suddenly comes into view is immediately obviously beautiful. That is just the start! Its potential seems to have no limit. Each visit offers something different, every time a new discovery or feature. Put simply, a joy!



© Chris Cullen

East Lothian has some of the most beautiful, varied and dramatic coastlines in all of Scotland. Over 40 miles it boasts 8 award-winning beaches. There are wide expanses of golden-sand beaches backed by dune systems. There is also the most fascinating, complex volcanic geology: outcrops of basalt, multicoloured limestone and sandstone, volcanic vents and plugs. It's this mix of golden sands and colourful geology that makes the East Lothian coast so endlessly fascinating.



East Lothian is steeped in history from Roman times to WW2. East Lothian was the crucible for the birth of the the Saltire, the national flag of Scotland. The many castles were the scenes of great battles and sieges, none more so than the mighty Tantallon Castle perched on a cliff, right by one of the best beaches in Scotland.



© Chris Cullen

East Lothian has its place in literature and other arts. Robert Louis Stevenson spent much of his childhood here. The books *Treasure Island*, *The Wreckers*, *Catriona* among others are set there or were inspired by the area. Numerous other novels have been set here. Several famous artists have lived and worked here too.

East Lothian is very 'busy' geologically. It has a rich and diverse coastal geology, shaped over millions of years by tectonic activity, glaciation, and sea-level changes. Lots of volcanic activity with signs of many vents, outcrops of basalt rock and dramatic volcanic 'plugs' has left its scars.

The dominant geological feature of East Lothian's coastline is the Carboniferous rock formations, which date back around 300 million years. These rocks include sandstones, shales, and limestones, which were deposited in ancient shallow seas, rivers, and swamps.

There are basalt intrusions on the coast around North Berwick and Dunbar, especially the Bass Rock but also around St Baldred's Cradle and in places near Seacliff. Inland hills such as North Berwick Law and Traprain Law are basaltic too.



© Chris Cullen



Glaciation has also left its mark on East Lothian with glacial moraines and drift, striations (scratch marks on rock surfaces) and erratics. The glaciers carved out narrow, deep coastal valleys (also known as 'Denes') particularly around Dunbar.



© Chris Cullen

The mix of rock types has led to differential erosion. Harder rocks, like basalt and limestone, form resistant cliffs, while softer sandstones and shales erode more easily, creating flatter, more sheltered areas. This has resulted in a complex coastline with prominent cliffs, caves, and rock formations.

East Lothian's coastal geology offers a fascinating mix of ancient sedimentary layers, volcanic features, glacial landforms, and ongoing coastal processes. All this makes for abundant and very varied photographic opportunities.



There are so many varied beaches to be explored in East Lothian and I have spent many a happy hour on all of them.

The award-winning beach of Gullane Bay, backed by the dune system of Gullane Bents lies on the John Muir Way, a long-distance walking route. The beach faces across the Firth of Forth to the Kingdom of Fife. The Lomond Hills (a pair of almost identical hills in profile) are an easily identifiable feature across the water. Colourful outcrops of fissured basalt pavements and a very broad golden sand beach are punctuated in places by fingers of eroded sandstone.



© Chris Cullen



The popular Yellowcraigs Beach (or Broad Sands) has huge swathes of golden sand with an extensive dune system that was a great adventure playground when I was a child. Sitting across the narrow stretch of water called the Brigs of Fidra lies the little island of Fidra, with its lighthouse.



© Chris Cullen

The view of Fidra is supposed to have been the inspiration for Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Treasure Island'.



North Berwick, a very pretty seaside town, has two separate beaches as well as a little harbour and headland. One beach area has layered buff and pink flat rocks that are exposed at lower tides. The second beach has lighter coloured red volcanic ash rocks and offers plenty of photographic potential with either the island of Craigeith or the Bass Rock in the background.

A much less visited location is Canty Bay. The bay is actually split into two halves that are cut off from each other most of the time. Access is very limited (some of it definitely private). As well as a broad, sandy beach there are some great eroded rock features to be found. Beyond Canty Bay the cliffs are high and steep until you reach Auldhame and Seacliff Beach.



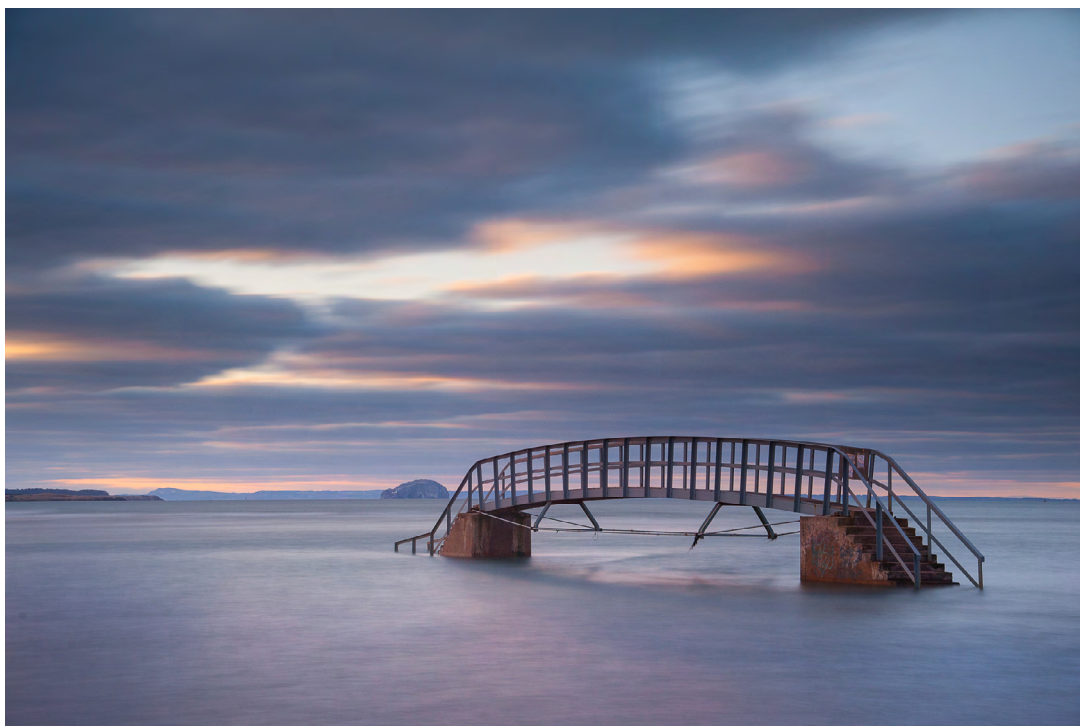
© Chris Cullen

At Auldhame, down a private track there's the hidden-away gem of a beach, facing directly towards the Bass Rock. Seacliff's beautiful deep sandy beach is flanked on both sides by amazingly varied rocks of different colours. There are several sections of this beach and there is a huge variety of subject matter here, some of it obvious, some needs seeking out! It's a wonderful feeling arriving at this lovely beach. It really does something different every time I visit it. Different parts of this beach are at their best at different tide levels, with many entirely inaccessible or invisible for much of the time. Local knowledge is useful! Some of my favourite ever work has been done here.

Above the beach you can investigate the ruins of the medieval Auldhame Castle, an ancient tower house and it became the site of top secret WW1 research and training.

The author Robert Louis Stevenson stayed with family at Seacliff regularly - 'Catriona' (his sequel to 'Kidnapped') was set here. His novel 'The Wreckers', also based here, tells the story of the Pagans of Scoughall who lured ships onto treacherous rocks. They would hang a lantern from a horse's neck but tie one leg to its neck too - then lead the limping horse along the top of the beach. In the dark, the movement of the lantern mimicked the nodding of a ship's lantern when anchored and tricked unsuspecting mariners towards the jagged rocks. The ships were then looted.

John Muir Country Park named after the famous naturalist and environmental philosopher who was born nearby can be found in East Lothian. It's a wonderfully varied, 8 mile wide, 1700 acre nature park and SSSI. Within the park there are two huge sandy beaches, dune systems, wetland habitat, beechwoods, pinewoods, exposed volcanic basalt rocks and intricate colourful eroded sandstone.



© Chris Cullen

Belhaven Beach is another award-winning wide sandy beach. It's another section of the John Muir Country Park. A big attraction for photographers is the frequently photographed 'Bridge to Nowhere' which connects Belhaven village to the beach. At high tide the path to and from it is entirely under water, so that the bridge alone is visible above the usually calm waters.

South-east of the cliffs and beach at Dunbar the coast keeps evolving. The limestone areas here have been studied extensively. In places, tiny coral fossils can be found, as well as smoothly eroded limestone forms and pock-marked rougher formations. Further down the coast at Thorntonloch, the limestone gives way to beautiful sandstone. At one end of the long sandy beach a beautiful colourful honey-coloured sandstone pavement starts, littered with an assortment of different coloured smooth round small rocks and pebbles.



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The coast of East Lothian is often referred to as the 'Secret Coast'. This is partly because it attracts less attention than other areas of Scotland, but also because many of its delights are hidden away, only to be revealed by persistent exploration. Away from the honeypot locations, a photographer is likely to make more personal images here - surely a goal worth striving for!

If you've never experienced the beauty of the East Lothian coast, you're missing out on something special. Come and take it all in: the soft pastels of the sky, the ebb and flow of the waves leaving ever-changing patterns in the sand, and the retreating tide slowly uncovering fresh subtle details, colours and textures in the endlessly fascinating rocks. It's had me hooked for many, many years!



© Chris Cullen



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# Featured photographer: Judy Longthorn



## Judy Longthorn

One of the pleasures of teaching landscape photography and sharing knowledge is seeing people flourish and become excited about their work. Many photographers we meet do very well and some produce beautiful work and occasionally we encounter a photographer that not only grasps the skills needed to progress, but positively master them and produce images that are the envy of the tutors. Judy Longthorn is one example of this. Having never even tried infrared photography, she was shown the basics, understood what subject she would explore, and utterly master every aspect of the genre. You will see from her work, the pictures don't really need words, but we just had to interview her about her journey.



© Judy Longthorn



### **What attracted you into photography in the first instance and was there any particular photograph or photographer that instigated this??**

I was given a point-and-shoot film camera in my late teens but didn't do much with it until I started going on holiday in my mid-twenties. I was the first in my family to take holidays abroad and it was how I could try to share the experience with them. Then in 1997, I had my first holiday to the USA, to Arizona, Utah and California. In Yosemite, I saw books and posters of Ansel Adams' black and white photographs of the South West and I think that was when I started to think it might be interesting to take images which were more than just a simple representation of what I could see.



© Judy Longthorn

It wasn't until 2003 when I bought my first digital camera, a Nikon Coolpix with a 2Mp sensor, that I felt able to experiment a bit more. The result was immediately available and there was no cost to trying lots of different compositions. However, I soon started to feel the restrictions of the point-and-shoot camera as I couldn't choose where I wanted to focus or change the depth of field. So, in 2005 I held my breath and bought an entry-level DSLR, the Canon 300D.

So, I had this camera and had no idea how to use it and didn't know anything about the technical side of photography. I didn't know anyone who used a DSLR so I joined a local photography club hoping that I could get some help but that didn't happen. This was before the days of the current abundance of YouTube videos, so I blundered along just referring to books and experimenting myself with iso, aperture and shutter speed settings.

It was a very slow process for me, but I kept going out there taking photos, trying to improve my camera skills. In my local area, I did mostly nature photography as I could usually find some birds,



© Judy Longthorn



© Judy Longthorn



plants, or insects to photograph while landscapes were more for holidays both home and abroad.

Joining my local photography club encouraged me to think about a wider range of subjects for photography as part of the program of competitions during my first few years there. This helped me to assess different styles and genres that I might be interested in but I found the competitions became a bit repetitive so stopped entering. I had finally reached the point of saying 'No, I want to take photographs for me, not a judge'. I think it was at this point that I started to take my photography more seriously.



© Judy Longthorn



**We all have a first image that became a milestone in our photographic journey. If you had to choose one what would it be and why?**

Around 2015 I started to explore photography workshops as a means to expand and improve my skills. Some were simply designed to take you to subjects/locations to be photographed but I also found some which had an element of teaching e.g. black and white photography, long exposures, using a tilt and shift lens. These all challenged and developed skills but the 'milestone image' that led to where I am photographically today was not one of my own or even a completed image. In 2018 in Manesty Wood near Derwentwater I saw an infrared image of a beech tree in full leaf as it was being composed on the back of an infrared camera. I was struck by the beautiful, subtle, ethereal quality of that image; it was like no other woodland image I had ever seen. Before then I had only seen a few false-colour, IR images and they did not appeal at all. I decided I had to have a go.

After considering my options I had my back-up camera converted (a Canon 70D, 720nm) and within a few days of receiving my converted camera back in 2019 I joined a workshop – 'Introduction to Infrared Photography' in the Yorkshire Dales. (I have since had a full frame camera converted to achieve a wider field of view).

On that workshop I started to build an understanding of IR photography, how infrared light is reflected by different surfaces, where to try to position the histogram and basic processing. The workshop was in April so there were no leaves on the trees, but their structures and textures were brought out by the IR light. Similarly, I could see how stone wall textures and cloud detail were rendered as well as grassy hillsides looking like snow scenes.



© Judy Longthorn



After that I spent a lot of time just going out with the IR camera and exploring the possibilities in all sorts of locations and conditions. I found it was quite feasible to continue shooting right through the day and in all sorts of weather conditions. IR photography can work in bright sunshine, cloudy days, mist or even rain. I learned that IR light allows for incredible subtlety in the mid-tones of the image and I much prefer this to a scene with high contrast.

I discovered I got occasional hotspots but learned which lens was causing this and also how to remove them in processing. Some intensive help/tutoring in processing IR images has helped immensely. I enjoy photographing a range of subjects in IR e.g. historic buildings, landscapes, cities, sand dunes, seascapes, spectacular skies, but my favourite without doubt is woodland.



© Judy Longthorn

**Not only is your infrared beautiful and subtle, but also your passion for being in woodland. Many landscape photographers find woodlands somewhat chaotic and frustrating. What is it about woodlands that inspire you?**

Woodland is simply my 'happy place'; it lifts my mood. I have always liked to be outdoors and have most enjoyed walking in woodland. I like it at any time of year; there is so much to appreciate. The play of light through the canopy above, the scent of wild garlic or bluebells in Spring, wild honeysuckle in Summer or the dampness of Autumn. The shapes and structure of the trees themselves and their interactions in the space never fail to fascinate me. Small things like the drip of water on leaves in wet or misty conditions or the rustles, creaks, and groans from the tree limbs during a windy day, not to mention the almost overwhelming beauty of birdsong in spring and the arrival of flowers littering a woodland floor.

I think my love of woodland IR photography grew simply because I spent more time there with my



© Judy Longthorn



camera than anywhere else. I can see that over time my photographs have changed; earlier images tend to be wider views, but the scenes have narrowed and now I will often shoot a cameo or intimate view, picking out the details of the surrounding woods. I don't concentrate on looking for compositions; I tend to wander almost randomly and if something catches my eye, I'll then start to look for angles, lines of sight, light and shapes and try to find a composition. My woodland photography tends to be a solitary activity; it can be very slow, and I might suddenly disappear down a path or behind a clump of brambles which doesn't lend itself to a social activity but there are a small number of individuals who are on the same wavelength and enhance the experience.



© Judy Longthorn



### **How do you see your work evolving in the future and are there any projects you still have in mind?**

Last year I invested in a Lensbaby Velvet 56mm lens after I borrowed one for a morning and immediately fell in love with the effect. I have predominantly used this for IR woodland photography where I find it very much enhances the dreamy, ethereal effect. It also draws the viewer into the subject of the image even more via the blurred effect around the edges. It can give very nice images in dull light though they are harder to find. It is excellent on sunny days when the pools of sunlight coming down through the canopy light up details from individual leaves to full-size trees.



© Judy Longthorn

I was lucky enough to produce enough images that I liked late last summer to have enough to produce a book of some of those images. The photography club of which I am a member is non-competitive with no competitions, so I rarely print and mount my images now. I find producing a book is a pleasing way to make those images easily available to share, I enjoy the process of constructing the book too. I have almost completed a book of my favourite images of 2024.

I will certainly be continuing with my IR photography. There are several locations I have briefly visited that I would dearly love to explore in more detail as well as explore some different types of subjects. Maybe more historic buildings, cathedrals, abbeys etc? I may even venture into a modern city. I'm sure the Lensbaby will feature to some extent, but I feel I have only begun to discover what I might be able to achieve with this new item of kit. I would also like to explore choosing a subject/location and producing enough images to create a collection of more in-depth work on that subject.



© Judy Longthorn



# Exploring smallscapes

*by Andy Phillips*



## Exploring smallscapes

*by Andy Philips*

When you think of still-life photography, what comes to mind? Often, we envision product photography, flat lays, or a careful arrangement of everyday objects. But for me, still-life photography has become a modern canvas for creativity, a personal passion that I want to share here. It's an art form that connects perception, interpretation, and execution and I'd love to invite you into my world of smallscapes - the intricate worlds I've captured in my home!





Tabletop photography can encompass a wide range of styles. Or in my case I call them “smallscapes”, which focus on smaller, more intimate scenes. Smallscapes are my evolving style where everyday items, plants, or textures come together to tell a visual story. You’ll often find flowers, fruits, spices, and small props in my compositions.



© Andy Philips

It all started with a sense of play—tinkering with small objects when I couldn’t get out to capture the vast landscapes. My kitchen became my studio, and my love for gardening provided a steady supply of subjects. Through simple experiments, I began to refine my style and the techniques I now teach. Each image evolved from curiosity and a need to explore, eventually shaping my version of still-life photography.

One of the key aspects of my style is simplicity. The KISS principle - “Keep It Simple, Stupid”- has guided my work. For me, that means no artificial lighting. I rely solely on ambient manipulated light from one direction. My kitchen faces east, and this soft, diffused light creates the perfect base environment for delicate compositions. It’s all about subtlety, using just enough light to highlight the subject without overpowering it.

You might wonder how my background in landscape photography plays into still life. Surprisingly, it’s been instrumental. The knowledge of perception, colour theory, and composition that I honed through landscape photography has translated perfectly into my much smaller-scale work. Just like capturing a landscape image, I approach each smallscape with careful consideration of how light, colour and form interact. The small details, like the delicate curve of a pear or the grain in a piece of wood, are just as vital as the sweeping vistas of nature.



The ability to create something out of nothing, using just a few items and a dash of creativity, is one of the most exciting aspects of this art form. I use smallscapes to offer a fresh perspective on the everyday objects around us.



© Andy Philips



One of the most powerful aspects of my still-life photography is that it's not done in an expensive studio. It's all created in my kitchen—a space I've transformed (when my wife allows!) into my creative hub. There's no need for pricey lighting gear. Just natural light, some simple tools, and a lot of imagination. It's a genre in which anyone can become involved, even without a large budget. If anything, I hope this demonstrates that you don't need fancy gear or a dedicated studio space to create compelling still-life imagery. With just a little time and creativity, you can create beautiful, striking compositions in your home.



© Andy Philips



Another secret to my still-life photography is that many of my subjects come straight from my garden. Gardening has always been a passion of mine, and I often use plants, flowers, and fruits from my backyard as subjects. There's something incredibly rewarding about photographing plants that I've nurtured from the ground up. In addition to plants, I've collected a variety of textures - everything from old spice jars to rustic objects - further adding to the charm and uniqueness of each image.



© Andy Philips



Textures are used in most of my smallscape work and collecting them is not as hard as you think. They will only be used in a reduced opacity in layers on Photoshop, so the quality is unimportant. Making your own textures is especially important if you do competition work. Shoot everything you see from the gravel at your feet to the clouds in the sky. Dedicate days to collecting just textures, and not only with your camera but your mobile phone too. The tricky part is deciding what textures to use on any image.



© Andy Philips

I also spend lots of time in second-hand and charity shops looking for fascinating objects and reclamation yards are wonderful if you have one nearby. My local reclamation yard is massive and has everything from old roof slates to a pair of oak canal lock gates. Look for interesting textures in old fabrics, wood, and metal pieces which can add layers of depth to your images.



While it's true that you don't necessarily need top-tier equipment to create stunning still-life photography, I do rely on a few key tools. My current smallscape gear list includes:

Nikon Z7 MkII + Nikon 105mm Macro and Nikon 24-70mm f/2.8 lenses and a tripod. I also use an Olympus EM1 MkII along with various prime lenses for flexibility and close-up work. The software I utilise is Adobe Camera Raw and Photoshop for post-processing, Helicon Focus stacking software for creating incredible close-range depth of field.



© Andy Philips

Colour plays a huge role in my work, and one of my favourite tools is the "Sessions College Colour Calculator". This free online resource helps you choose colours that harmonise well together, creating a pleasing and effective colour scheme. Whether you're shooting vibrant fruits or the earthy tones of spices, the right colours and tone of backdrops can elevate your still-life photography and bring forth another world. I cannot emphasize the importance of this enough. It will make or break your images.

If I want to achieve maximum sharpness in my images, I use focus stacking. As you probably will be aware, focus stacking involves taking multiple images at different focal points and combining them in post-production to create a final image with greater depth of field. I rely on Helicon Focus for this technique and it's specifically designed for focus stacking. This allows me to capture the finest details of my subjects, from the delicate veins in a leaf to the texture of aged wood.



Still-life photography isn't just about picking random objects and putting them together. Research and thoughtful composition are the key. One of my favourite resources is the great book by Niki Segnit, "The Flavour Thesaurus" which provides insightful pairings of foods and flavours. This same principle applies to still-life photography; objects should complement each other and work together visually. Whether it's a bowl of pears or a collection of vintage chess pieces, I pay close attention to how objects interact in the frame.



© Andy Philips



Tips for aspiring smallscape photographers :-

Consider using tracing paper as a backdrop for beautiful bokeh: Tracing paper can also help in ambient light manipulation and also create lovely blurred bokeh.

Go shopping! Get creative with supermarket finds: You don't need to spend a lot on subjects—supermarkets offer a wide range of visually appealing fruits, vegetables, and other items. I started this whole thing with a vision of garlic!!

Grow your own photography subjects: Planting specific flowers, spices and herbs in your garden with the intention of using them in your work can provide endless inspiration.

Make your own backgrounds: Don't be afraid to get crafty! Use wallpaper, watercolours, or other materials to create unique backdrops that enhance your subjects.

Over time, I've developed a visual signature that includes whimsical, often maybe serendipitous moments - like fruit bowls where a piece might fall over, or the signature rusty textures that have become part of my work's identity. These little quirks have led to memorable images that resonate with viewers.



© Andy Philips

I invite you to join me on this journey of discovery. Whether you're a budding photographer or a seasoned professional looking to explore a new genre., still-life photography offers endless possibilities for creative expression. Let's make photography accessible, inspiring, and fun - one smallscape at a time!



# New perspective

*by Michael Pilkington*



The Faroes is a destination that we have visited a few times over the years and a place that offers a stunning landscape filled with sea stacks, waterfalls and craggy mountains. There are few beaches as the islands seem to have risen vertically out of the sea in a hurry. The few beaches that you find are made of black volcanic sand, very similar to Iceland. Tjørnuvík is a small settlement at the head of a cove and is popular with surfers, though it is true to say that I have not witnessed waves of any magnitude there.

The beach here is small, with a river winding its way across the sand towards the sea. Two distinctive stacks appear at the end of a headland in the distance. The classic shot would be to compose your image with the river snaking away from the bottom of the frame and pointing towards the sea. However, walking along, I felt that removing the obvious curving shape of the retreating river would make for a different and more abstract image and that is what I did.

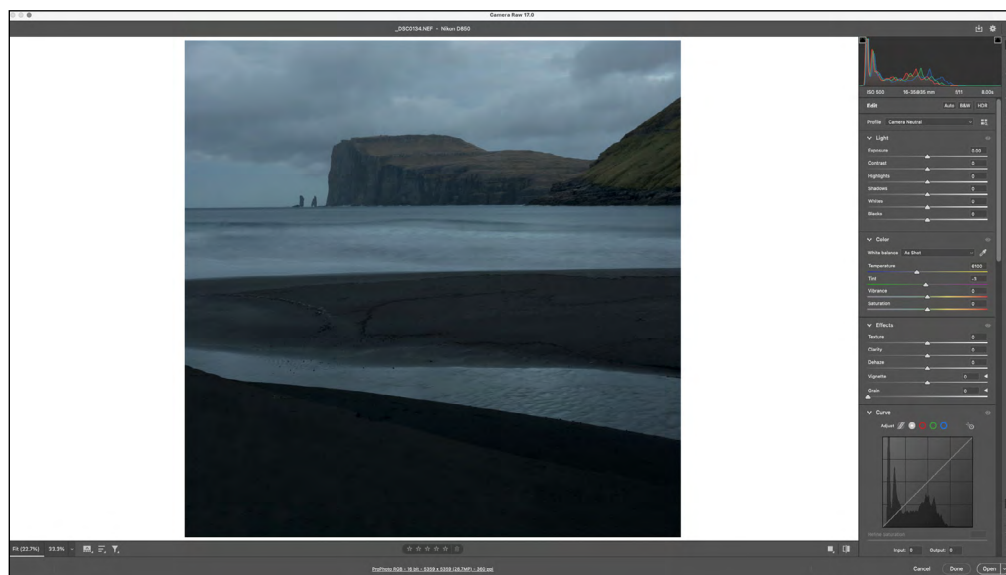


© Michael Pilkington



Before starting to edit, I straightened the horizon and removed numerous dog paw prints that were present in the sand at the bottom of the image. They belonged to a collie-type sheep dog that insisted on playing fetch as I was trying to compose my image. It was very charming. Repeatedly, it crouched down, waiting for a stick to be thrown, and then running to retrieve it only to return and drop it back at my feet. It took sometime for the novelty to wear off!

I chose a long exposure to remove surface texture from the running river and the waves in the bay, all to help enhance the abstract nature of the image.



Initial raw file

We can see that the image is somewhat under-exposed, so this will be one of the first things that we need to address whilst keeping the darkness of the sand in check. There is some detail in the sand – undulations revealed by the soft light from the overcast sky - which have to be made more visible. Lastly, the sky, river and sea will need to be brightened to strongly contrast with the blackness of the sand.

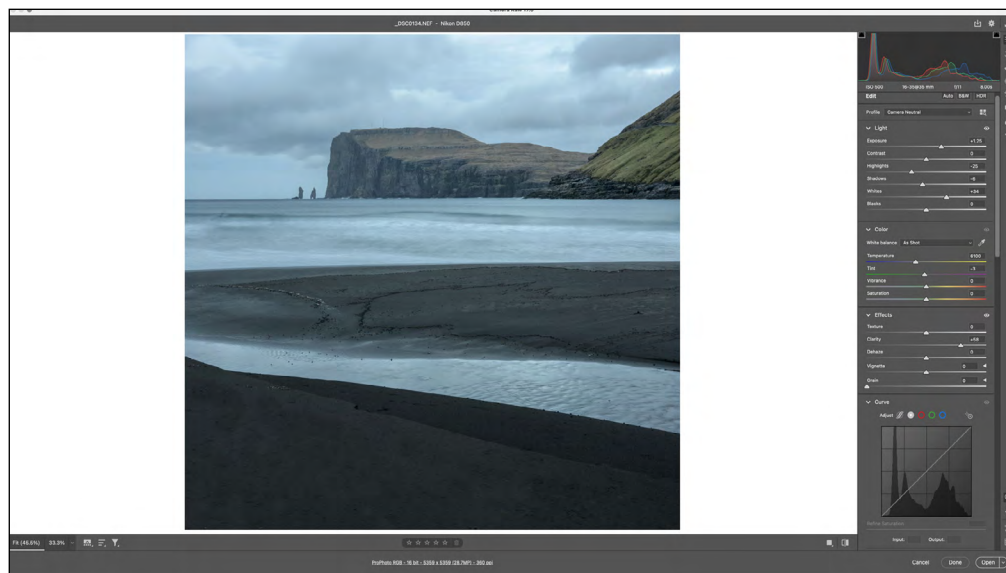
It is important to study your images before editing them. Assess the histogram and make a plan of action anticipating what can be done with global adjustments and where local changes will need to be made. Previsualizing the final image will inevitably result in a better outcome.



So to work. Bringing light into the image is done by moving the exposure slider to the right which moves a lot of the shadows into mid-tones and then using the white slider to move the brighter mid-tones into the highlights. If I were to use the exposure slider alone, the image would quickly appear washed out and lacking any contrast.



Initial adjustments

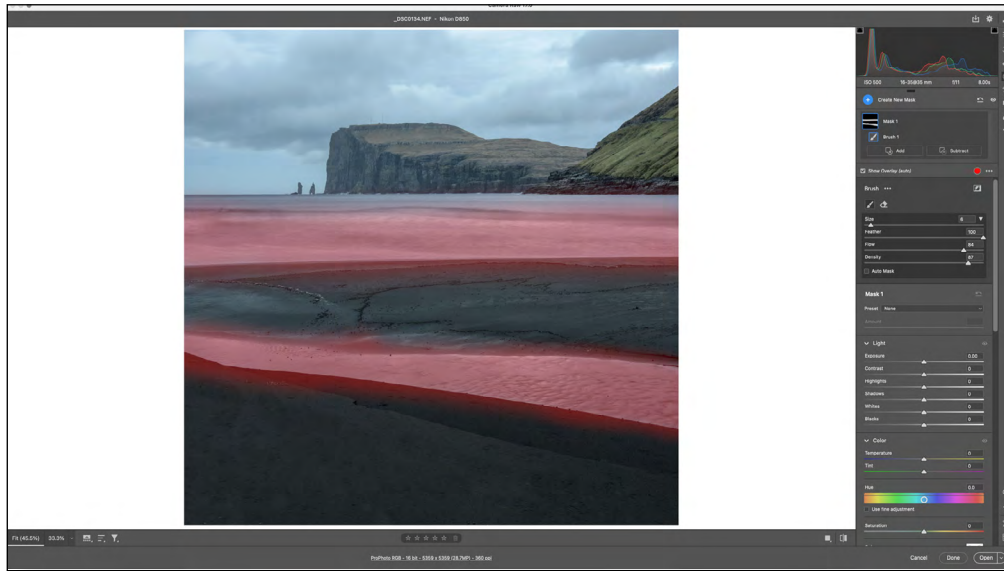


Bringing out more detail

Next, I reduced highlights by moving the highlight slider to the left and added clarity (which is mid-tone contrast) brings out the detail in the sky, river and sea. Pushing back the shadow slider holds the darkness of the sand in check.



Now, it is time to turn to some localised adjustments. I will work on sea and the river first. My intention is to exhibit more of the textures in these areas. The masks for these areas do not need to be precise as I will be using the white and highlight sliders primarily and as such the adjacent dark sand will not be affected.



Masking the sea and river

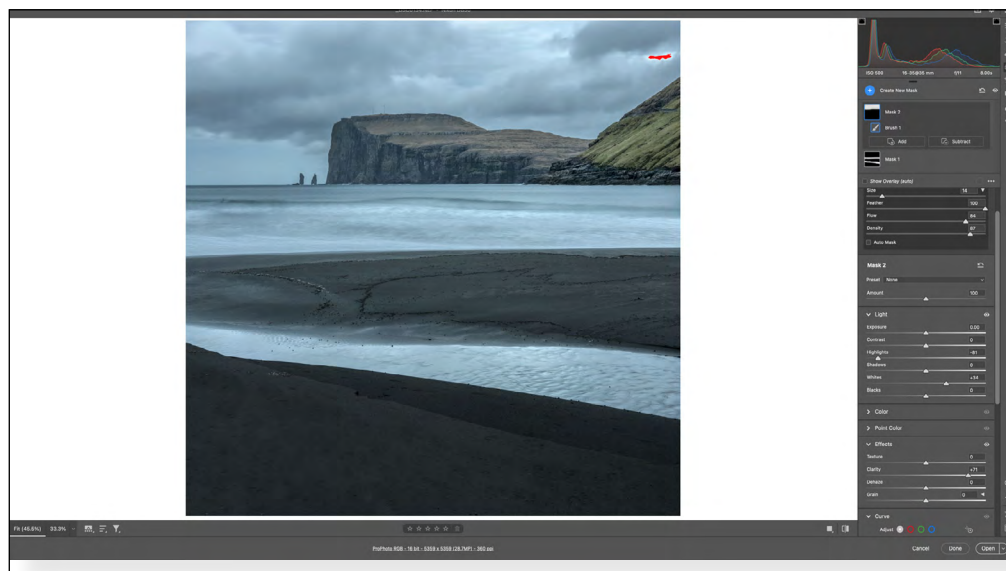


Sea and river adjustments

I have moved the highlight slider to the left and the white slider to the right. The result of this is to split out the tones on the right-hand side of the histogram. To emphasise this further, I have also added some clarity.



I have repeated the above actions in the sky. You will see that I have some highlight clipping in the sky. I am not concerned about this as I find this small bright area a distraction anyway and will be cloning over it in due course. I have also noticed that a halo has now appeared along the edge of the mountain. This often happens when separating tonality in an image, especially when using the clarity slider. These are easily removed, and I will do this when I have finished editing this image.



Sky adjustments

I make one last local adjustment in the upper left hand side of the sky, targeting the clouds hanging above the far mountain and darkening the top edge.



Further sky adjustments

## How I got the shot



I still find the image a little dark so, making global changes, I move the exposure and white sliders a little to the right, adding a small amount of clarity. It is usual, whilst adjusting your image in either Adobe Camera Raw or the Develop Module in Lightroom, to experience a colour shift; usually towards blue. This is removed using the Hue/Saturation/Luminosity sliders.



Final changes



# Hringvegur

*by Paul Gallagher*



## Hringvegur

by Paul Gallagher

Iceland is a place of fascination for me, and even though I have visited many times, there are still features of this incredible landscape that reveal themselves, be they man-made or of natural occurrence. I had begun my trip in the beautiful northern town of Akureyri and was heading east towards the lakes and volcanic lava flows of Myvatn following Route 1, commonly known in Iceland as Hringvegur (or Þjóðvegur in Icelandic).



© Paul Gallagher

As you leave Akureyri the road skirts the edge of the sea and then climbs steeply over the mountains, affording you beautiful views of the area from high above before levelling out and passing the lakes of Ljosavatn and Myvatn's smaller cousin, Masvatn. As much as this section of Route 1 is a pleasure to drive, your surroundings can be best described as largely featureless and are keenly passed through, making your way to more photographically appealing features of Iceland.

The clouds and light on this day changed precipitately, and as is often the way in Iceland in such an open landscape, a sense of vulnerability seeped in. As I reached the banks of Masvatn I drove into an area that had recently experienced heavy rain, and it was apparent that the skies were charged with more. The clouds and darkness were ample ingredients to beckon me from the car and make some attempt to catch this moment of nature's raw power.

Because Masvatn lake was so close, I first explored the relationship of the water, landscape and the transient cloud before allowing myself to see more of my surroundings, at



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which point I noticed the serpentine road that continued ahead of me and over the hill. Briskly, the skies above me darkened, and the only bright areas of the landscape were the paler clouds, the light from which illuminated the recently rain-soaked road surface.

Even as I stood there, I could see no plausible reason to retain the colour in the original image. The deliberate mass of almost black only serves as a supporting canvas for the sweeping road, and the clouds: Well, the clouds can look after themselves.



## End note

***“A camera merely records, but an artist creates”***

W. Eugene Smith

**A**rt is about freedom and the courage to express and embrace the autonomy of personal motives as opposed to influences. There have always been two halves to the journey of making images, both of which are equally important to the artistic pursuit.

The first is making the exposure after having decided on the composition and camera settings to be employed. For many, understanding the camera is something we can quickly teach, and clipping of histogram data and poor focus are remedied with relative ease. Before that, we are left with decisions and possibly dilemmas that only we, as the photographer, can resolve: the composition.

Computers have earned themselves a bad reputation. It has never been uncommon to hear photographers speak in quite undesirable terms when their photographic pursuits reach the desk. This is because here we are presented with more decisions and dilemmas about what to do with an image file that will almost certainly not resemble what we saw.

The difference between the camera experience and the computer is that, at least when we are using the camera, the very experience of being out is one of entertaining ourselves with a device we are quite comfortable using. The only portion of this activity that may dull our excitement is the complexity of what composition to consider, given the limitless choices.

The computer does not help us much because all that it offers are creative choices, the culmination of which, creates our final image. Often creativity is crushed by complexity, and for this reason, the balance of camera and computer remains in favour of the camera. As Chuck Kimmerle states, “A camera merely records”, which is very true but also poses a troublesome question. If we favour using our camera far more than sitting at our computers, are we really as creative as we think? Let’s ponder that question.

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 have had an experience you would like to share that you know others would be fascinated to hear, or 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 or equally leave a comment on our **Facebook** or **Instagram** pages.

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