# Critiquing an Image

Jim Samanen
3-Nov-20

1. How to make a good photo even better – with Dick Greenwood, Print Critique Group
2. How to offer constructive feedback

# Critiquing an Image

- Differentiate a snapshot from a good photograph from a work of art
  - **Technique** – What makes for a good photograph
  - **Impact** – What makes the image memorable
  - If the image has both, it will be a work of art

# Critiquing an Image

Technique vs. Impact

- A photo with great **Impact** may be forgiven for some issues with **Technique**
- A photo with great **Technique** will not be as memorable as a photo with great **Impact**
- An issue with **Technique** may obscure the **Impact** – get technique “out of the way”
- **Impact** should be more important than **Technique**, but we photographers pay more attention to Technique
    - In critiquing an image it is important to comment on Impact first, and then comment on how Technique can make the image even better

# Differentiating a snapshot from a good photograph from a work of art - 1

**Impact**

- Display of Emotion
- Storytelling
- Iconic Moment
- Juxtaposed/Contrasting Concepts
- Unique Lighting and Color
- Attention to Detail

https://www.slrlounge.com/techniques-10-characteristic-of-great-photos/

# Differentiating a snapshot from a good photograph from a work of art - 2

**Impact**

- Display of Emotion
- Storytelling
- Iconic Moment
- Juxtaposed/Contrasting Concepts
- Unique Lighting and Color
- Attention to Detail

- It's there or it is not
- Change the scene
- Wait for a more impactful moment
- or move on

https://www.slrlounge.com/techniques-10-characteristic-of-great-photos/

# Differentiating a snapshot from a good photograph from a work of art - 3

**Impact**

- Display of Emotion
- Storytelling
- Iconic Moment
- Juxtaposed/Contrasting Concepts
- Unique Lighting and Color
- Attention to Detail

**Technique**

**Compositional Element**

- Simplicity
- Separation
- Rule of Thirds
- Symmetry vs. Asymmetry
- Negative space
- Leading lines
- Flow
- Framing
- Source of Light
- Foreground, Middle Ground, Background

**Method**

- Depth of field (Aperture)
- Positioning Camera to Subject
- Cropping (Zooming In)
- Cloning and Selective Darkening, Coloring & Blurring

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https://www.ephotozine.com/article/9-top-photography-composition-rules-you-need-to-know-17158

# Differentiating a snapshot from a good photograph from a work of art - 4

**Impact**

- Display of Emotion
- Storytelling
- Iconic Moment
- Juxtaposed/Contrasting Concepts
- Unique Lighting and Color
- Attention to Detail

**Technique**

**Compositional Element**

- Simplicity
- Separation
- Rule of Thirds
- Symmetry vs. Asymmetry
- Negative space
- Leading lines
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- Source of Light
- Foreground, Middle Ground, Background

**Method**

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# Differentiating a snapshot from a good photograph from a work of art - 5

**Impact**

- Display of Emotion
- Storytelling
- Iconic Moment
- Juxtaposed/Contrasting Concepts
- Unique Lighting and Color
- Attention to Detail

**Technique**

**Compositional Element**

- Simplicity
- Separation
- Rule of Thirds
- Symmetry vs. Asymmetry
- Negative space
- Leading lines
- Flow
- Framing
- Source of Light
- Foreground, Middle Ground, Background

**Method**

- Depth of field (Aperture)
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# Differentiating a snapshot from a good photograph from a work of art - 6

**Impact**

- Display of Emotion
- Storytelling
- Iconic Moment
- Juxtaposed/Contrasting Concepts
- Unique Lighting and Color
- Attention to Detail

**Technique**

**Compositional Element**

- Simplicity
- Separation
- Rule of Thirds
- Symmetry vs. Asymmetry
- Negative space
- Leading lines
- Flow
- Framing
- Source of Light
- Foreground, Middle Ground, Background

**Method**

- Depth of field (Aperture)
- Positioning Camera to Subject
- Cropping (Zooming In)
- Cloning and Selective Darkening, Coloring & Blurring

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# Differentiating a snapshot from a good photograph from a work of art - 7

**Impact**

- Display of Emotion
- Storytelling
- Iconic Moment
- Juxtaposed/Contrasting Concepts
- Unique Lighting and Color
- Attention to Detail

**Technique**

**Compositional Element**

- Simplicity
- Separation
- Rule of Thirds
- Symmetry vs Asymmetry
- Negative space
- Leading lines
- Flow
- Framing
- Source of Light
- Foreground, Middle Ground, Background

**Method**

- Depth of field (Aperture)
- Positioning Camera to Subject
- Cropping (Zooming In)
- Cloning and Selective Darkening, Coloring & Blurring

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# Differentiating a snapshot from a good photograph from a work of art - 8

**Impact**

- Display of Emotion
- Storytelling
- Iconic Moment
- Juxtaposed/Contrasting Concepts
- Unique Lighting and Color
- Attention to Detail

**Technique**

**Compositional Element**

- Simplicity
- Separation
- Rule of Thirds
- Symmetry vs Asymmetry
- Negative space
- Leading lines
- Flow
- Framing
- Source of Light
- Foreground, Middle Ground, Background

**Method**

- Depth of field (Aperture)
- Positioning Camera to Subject
- Cropping (Zooming In)
- Cloning and Selective Darkening, Coloring & Blurring

Drama or Nostalgia

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# Differentiating a snapshot from a good photograph from a work of art - 9

**Impact**

- Display of Emotion
- Storytelling
- Iconic Moment
- Juxtaposed/Contrasting Concepts
- Unique Lighting and Color
- Attention to Detail

**Technique**

**Compositional Element**

- Simplicity
- Separation
- Rule of Thirds
- Symmetry vs Asymmetry
- Negative space
- Leading lines
- Flow
- Framing
- Source of Light
- Foreground, Middle Ground, Background

**Method**

- Depth of field (Aperture)
- Positioning Camera to Subject
- Cropping (Zooming In)
- Cloning and Selective Darkening, Coloring & Blurring

Drama & Nostalgia

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# Self Challenge – Critique your own images - 1

Look at one of your own photos

- How <u>impactful</u> is this photo, really?
- Which of these elements of good <u>technique</u> are weak in the photo?
- If you can critique your own photos you are on your way to figuring out
  - which photos are winners
  - how to make the weaker photos better.

## Differentiating a snapshot from a good photograph from a work of art

| Impact | Technique: Compositional Element | Technique: Method |
|---|---|---|
| • Display of Emotion | • Simplicity | • Depth of field (Aperture) |
| • Storytelling | • Separation | • Positioning Camera to Subject |
| • Iconic Moment | • Rule of Thirds | • Cropping (Zooming In) |
| • Juxtaposed/Contrasting Concepts | • Symmetry vs. Asymmetry | • Cloning and Selective Darkening, Coloring & Blurring |
| • Unique Lighting and Color | • Negative space | |
| • Attention to Detail | • Leading lines | |
| | • Flow | |
| | • Framing | |
| | • Source of Light | |
| | • Foreground, Middle Ground, Background | |

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# Self Challenge – Critique your own images - 2

- Don’t be too hard on yourself!
- If you see issues with your photos – that’s not a bad thing, that’s great!
- Next time you pick up your camera you will keep these lessons in mind.

## Differentiating a snapshot from a good photograph from a work of art

| Impact | Technique: Compositional Element | Technique: Method |
|---|---|---|
| • Display of Emotion | • Simplicity | • Depth of field (Aperture) |
| • Storytelling | • Separation | • Positioning Camera to Subject |
| • Iconic Moment | • Rule of Thirds | • Cropping (Zooming In) |
| • Juxtaposed/Contrasting Concepts | • Symmetry vs. Asymmetry | • Cloning and Selective Darkening, Coloring & Blurring |
| • Unique Lighting and Color | • Negative space | |
| • Attention to Detail | • Leading lines | |
| | • Flow | |
| | • Framing | |
| | • Source of Light | |
| | • Foreground, Middle Ground, Background | |

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# Critiquing an Image

- In the rest of this section we will critique of some examples of my own work in terms of Impact and Technique and then show what I did to improve the images

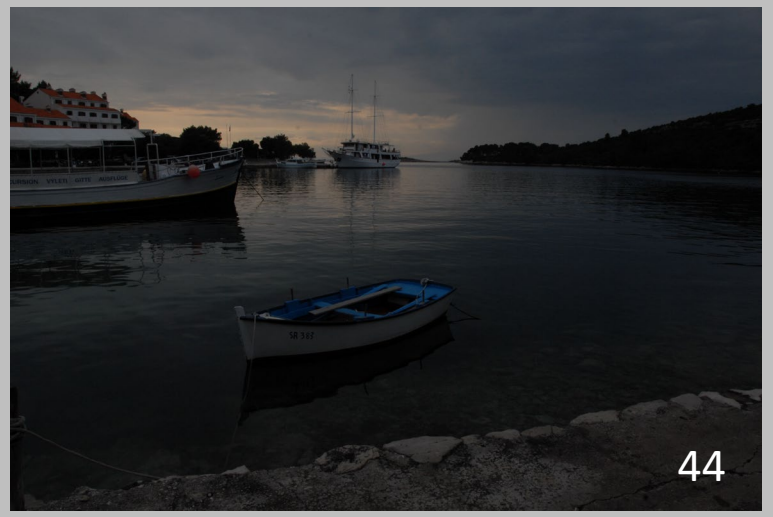
# Blue Boat off Mjlet Island

Jim Samanen

# Mjlet Island, Croatia - 1

# Mjlet Island, Croatia - 2

# Raw photos



# HDR, all six images

# Let’s Critique This Image - Impact

Impact:

- Blue boat – great color
- Super clear water
- Reflections – pull the three boats together
- Triangle of boats

# Let’s Critique This Image - Technique

Technique

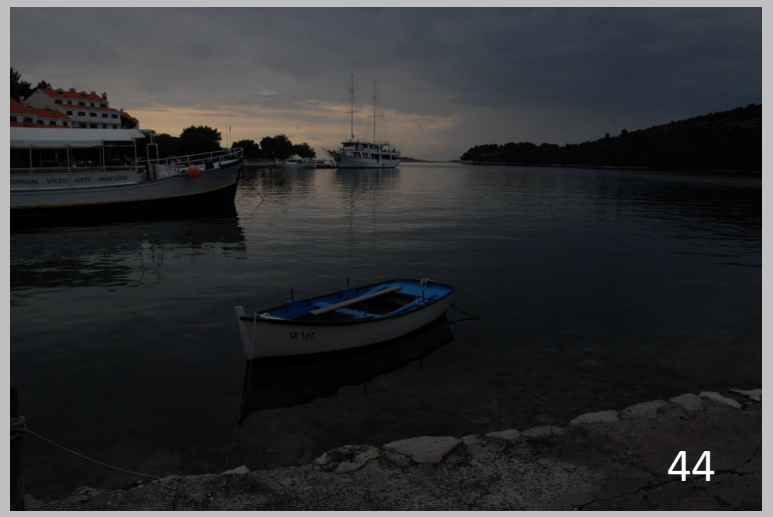
- Too much of boat on the left – crop in fr. left
- Right side of image doesn’t add to image - crop in fr. Right
- Rope & post in lower left leads eye out of picture
  - Trapped triangle!

DSC_0043_4_5_6_7_8_9

Close-up showing lack of detail in the boat
– boat probably moved slightly in the six image burst

# HDR, all six images

# Raw photos



# Tone Mapping Single Image (Num 46)

- Detail extractor (Nik Filters)
- Increased saturation slightly

46

# Better Detail

# Tone Mapping Single Image – showed to Print Critique Group

# Tone Mapping Single Image – suggested crop

# Final image

First Place Open Color Print
CCCC, November 2013 -

- “The three boats lead you to the horizon and the reflections of the masts on the back boat lead your eye back to the blue boat.”
- “The bits of red reinforce the eye movement.”
- “The important masts are aligned to the rule of thirds concept”\

Sold twice in art shows

# What made the image better?

- Working up a single image reduced the noise compared to the HDR composite
- Cropping in close to zoom in on the important parts of the image

# Ridin’

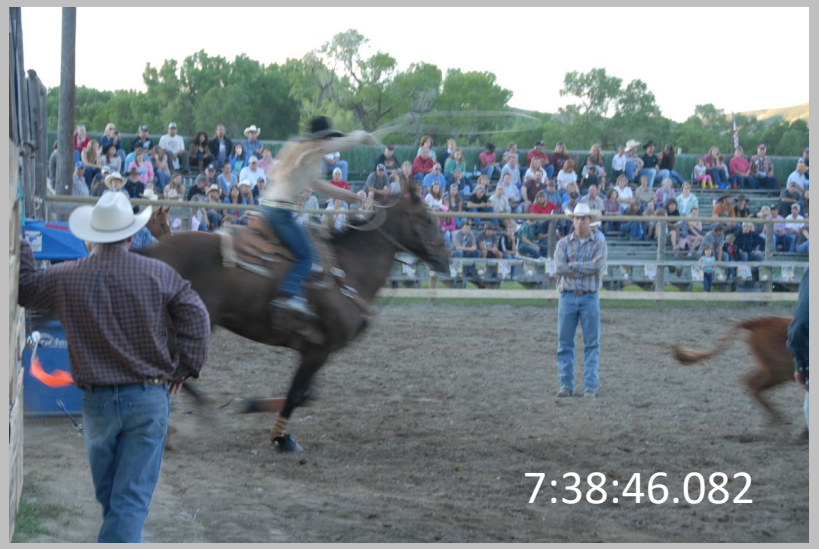
Jim Samanen

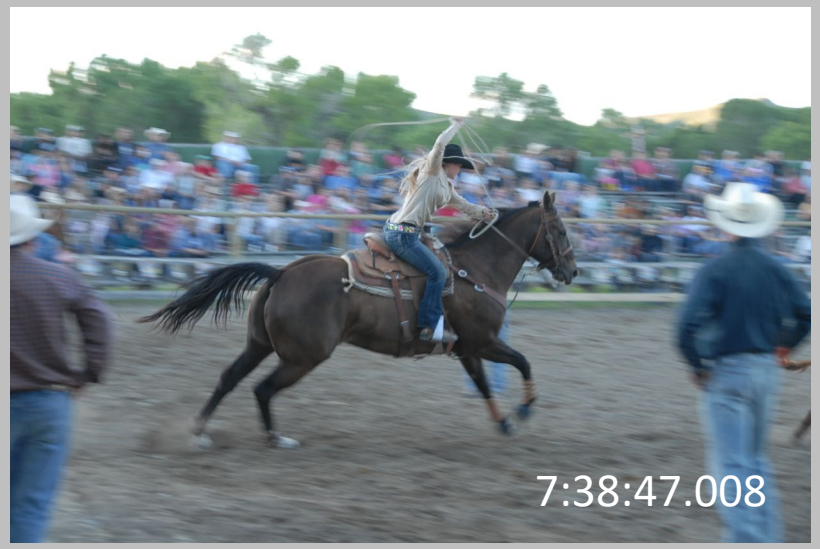
# Broncho Busting at Big Timber Rodeo 2010

# Barrel Racing at
# Big Timber Rodeo 2010

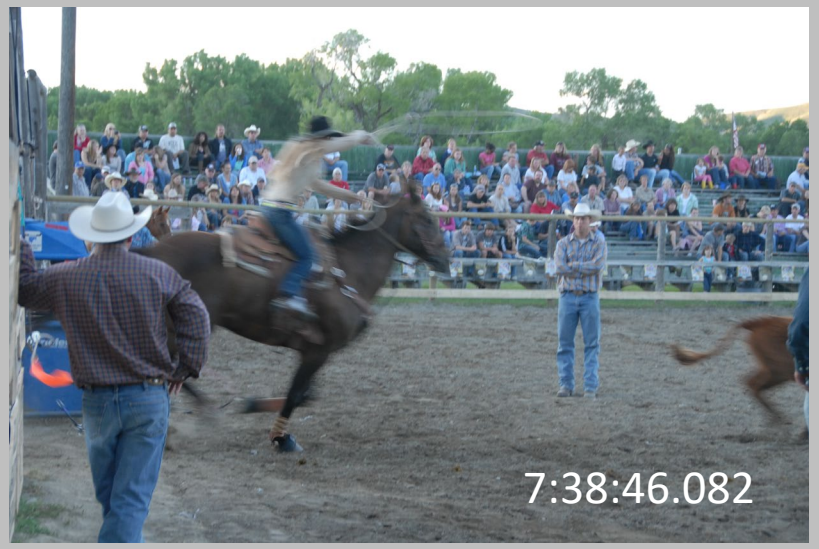
# Mutton Busting at Big Timber Rodeo 2010

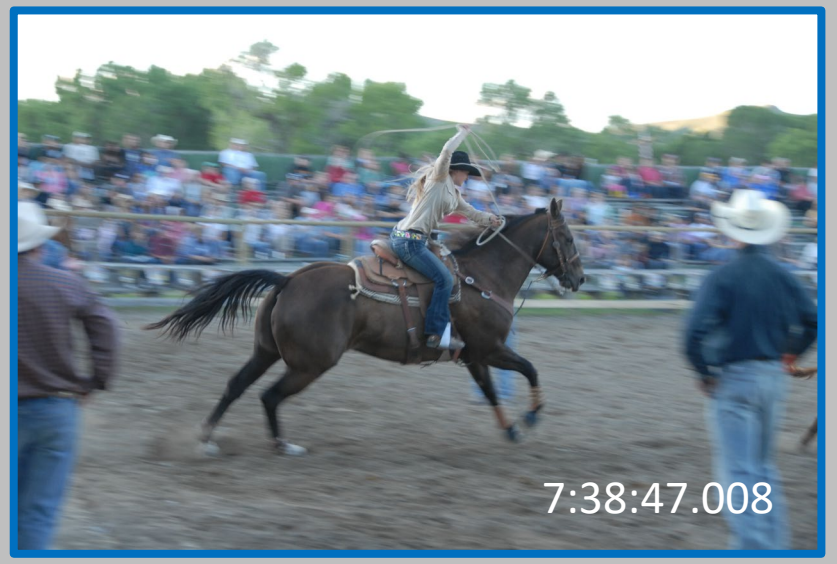
# Calf Roping at
# Big Timber Rodeo 2010 - 6 images in 1.044 seconds



# Calf Roping at
# Big Timber Rodeo 2010 – Third Image



# Image Selected

# Let’s Critique This Image - Impact

Impact:

- Tremendous action captured by freezing rider & horse, and the crowd is blurred
- Lariat motion caught in action
- Rider is having fun
- Intensity of the horse

# Let’s Critique This Image - Technique

Technique:

- Sky blown out
- Lots of red in crowd
- Relaxed postures in foreground are distracting
- Blue jeans of guy behind the horse

# Cropping

# Cropping in close

# Dealing with distracting Color

- Lots of red in crowd and on the rider's belt
- Lack of color in the rider's khaki shirt
- Lightroom color sliders would work
- But I wasn't doing Lightroom in 2010

# Monochrome version (Desaturated)

# Ridin’

- 1st Place CCCC digital image competition theme Americana
- Accepted into PA Center for Photography Americana exhibit 2016
- Sold twice in art shows

# What made this a better image

- Cropping in to remove or reduce extraneous elements and emphasize the interesting in-focus parts
- Going to monochrome to remove distracting colors

# Ice Melt Reflections

# Valley Forge River Trail, March 2015

# Valley Forge River Trail, March 2015

# Let’s critique this image! - Impact

Not so great

- Trees end of winter dull
- Ice layer – more interesting
- Color of trees in the reflection?

# Let’s critique this image! – Technique - 1

Selective Cropping

- Trees?
- Melting Ice?
- Tree reflections in the pond?

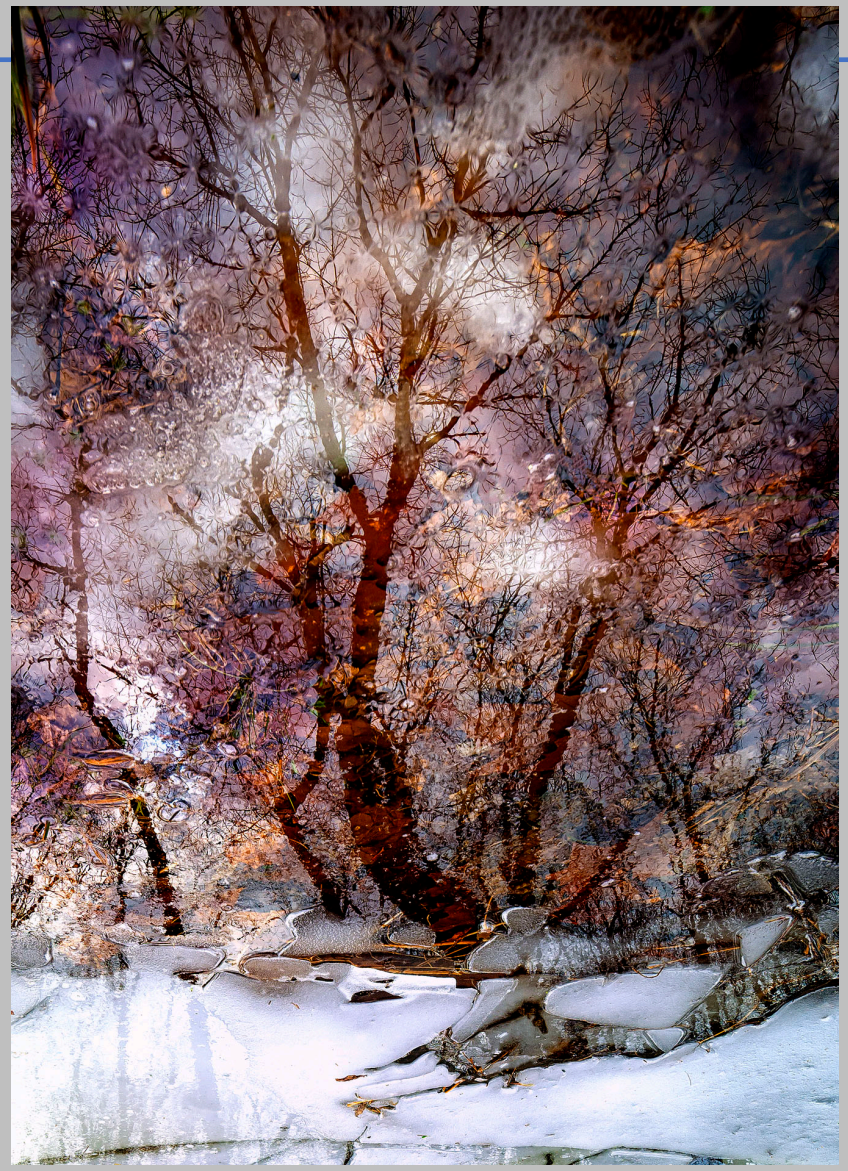
# Let’s critique this image! – Technique - 2

Selective Cropping

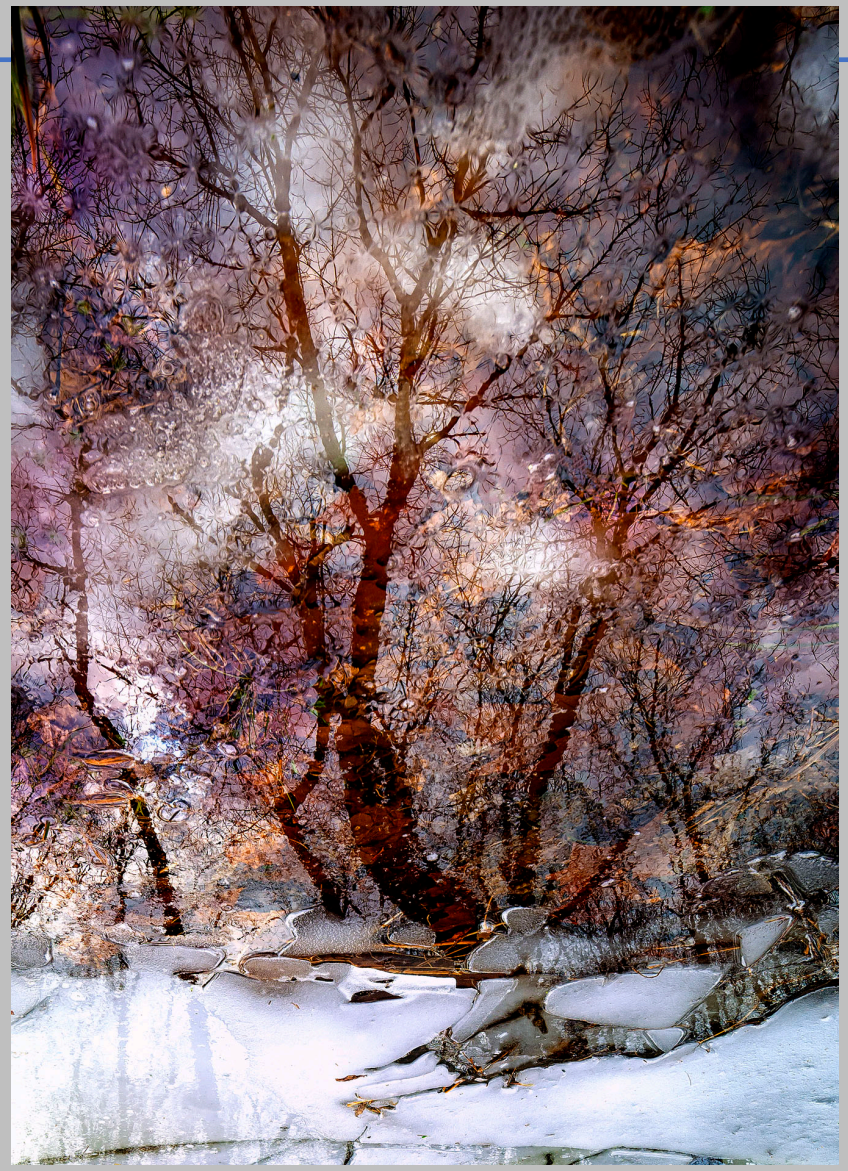
- Trees?
- Melting Ice?
- Tree reflections in the pond?

# Cropping, Contrast and Saturation

# Inverted Image



# Ice Melt Reflections

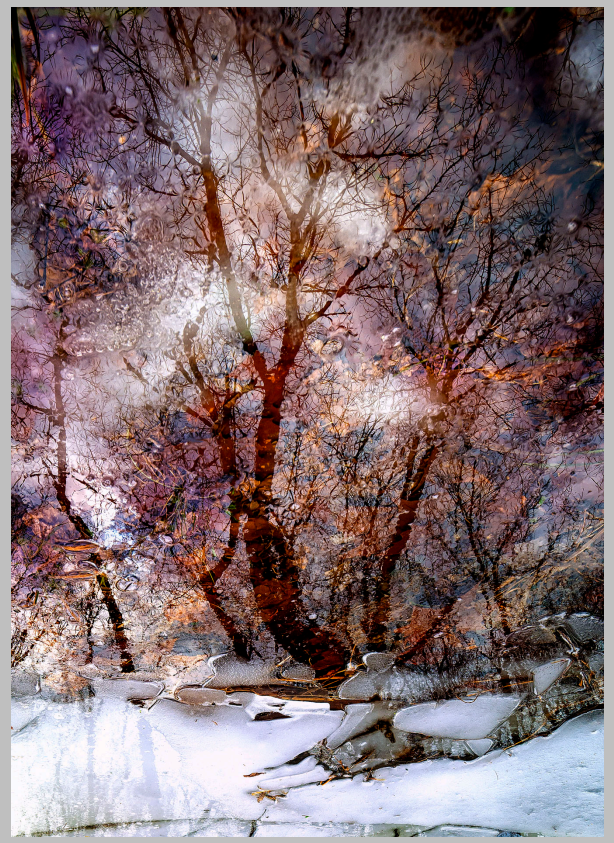


- Honorable Mention as a Color Print in the Club competition in March of 2016.
- Accepted into the Wayne Art Center Members Juried Exhibition in Fall 2017.
- Sold many times as framed or unframed pint in art shows

# Three Solutions

- Reworking the best image
- Cropping out extraneous detail

- Cropping out extraneous detail
- Going to Monochrome to remove distracting color



- Cropping out extraneous detail
- Increasing contrast and saturation
- Flipping the image to add mystery

# Differentiating a snapshot from a good photograph from a work of art

**Impact**

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- Attention to Detail

**Technique**

**Compositional Element**

- Simplicity
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**Method**

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# Questions?

1. How to make a good photo even better

# 2. How to offer constructive feedback – the Art of Critiquing

Image Analysis Workshop by Jon Fishback, sponsored by the Delaware Valley Council of Camera Clubs on April 25, 2015

# The Art of Critiquing - How to Couch Criticisms in a Manner that will Positively Impact the Photographer

- “One of the most difficult moments in the life of any photographer is hearing an analysis of his/her work”
- “The event itself may feel like watching your first-born perform in her first Christmas pageant.” If it goes badly, the feeling may be difficult to shake and may be around for years.
- “Properly done, the analysis can reduce the stress of the moment, and go a long way toward making future events much easier for the photographer”
- Improperly done and the photographer can be thrown into what he calls “Analysis Paralysis” – fear of submitting one’s photos for analysis.

Image Analysis Workshop by Jon Fishback, sponsored by the Delaware Valley Council of Camera Clubs on April 25, 2015

# Terms that are palatable to the photographer - 1

- A good judge should be able to
  - Say something nice about a photograph and then
  - Explain how it could have been made better
  - Use terms that are palatable to the photographer
- If the judge fails to consider the palatability of the comments,
  - They may not be heard by the contestant.
  - Worst would be to give a participant a sense of failure
- The feedback should start with what is good about the photo, then describe what could improve the photo itself.

# Terms that are palatable to the photographer - 2

- Avoid emotionally confrontational statements that kill any potential for being constructive
  - "I hate these kinds of photos, but..." or
  - "this rule was broken“
- Use phrases that soften criticisms
  - “In my opinion", and
  - “You might consider…"
- Don’t be dogmatic about any changes you suggest
  - The photographer has the right to ignore the comments

# Terms that are palatable to the photographer - 3

- <u>If the judge is giving scores</u>, the score must be consistent with the verbal commentary.
- Wrong way - “This is a strong image, executed well… 16”.
- If the judge is going to give a low score and is struggling to say something positive, it is better to just state the score.
- If the judge is giving a score that is near the top but not quite high enough to win, the judge should explain what would have made the image a winner.
  - “I would have scored this higher if…”
  - “This could be a contender if….”
- Judges can have very different opinions
  - A photo that won one competition may not do as well in another competition

# Invite Criticism

- Your photos are your babies, your loved-ones. You work them up because you like them.
- But you may miss things about them.
  - Does the photo show what you intended it to show?
  - What elements of the photo are distractions that take away from the Impact
- Get feedback - show your photos to your family members, friends, fellow photographers
- As hard as it can be sometimes, take their comments seriously.
  - They aren’t going to put you down
  - They want to be helpful

# Some interesting observations about photos in competition - Jon Fishback - 1

Jon has studied eye movement on images with eye tracking cameras

- Eye movement is highly subjective and more random.
- He hasn't observed eyes moving off or being led off of a picture for any reason
  - because there is nothing outside of the picture to attract the eye.

Excess HDR can flatten an image.

  - Keeping some detail hidden or less obvious, can help add depth.

- Lack of space on one side of an image may be reduced by
  - cropping on the opposite side.

Image Analysis Workshop by Jon Fishback, sponsored by the Delaware Valley Council of Camera Clubs on April 25, 2015

# Some interesting observations about photos in competition - Jon Fishback - 2

- A strong competitive photo is not simply a static representation of a thing or a place.
  - There needs to be something happening in the picture.
  - Landscapes with people or animals in them do better.
- Birds, especially feathery birds do well
  - Even better - a chick being fed, or birds mating.
  - The more exotic the better - egrets better than blue jays better than robins.
  - Bird flying with food - excellent.

# Some interesting observations about Judges - Jon Fishback - 1

- Judges are chosen because they have seen thousands of photos.
- They aren't going to forget what they have seen.
- Your image will be compared to what they have seen in your competition or what they have seen elsewhere.

Image Analysis Workshop by Jon Fishback, sponsored by the Delaware Valley Council of Camera Clubs on April 25, 2015

# Some interesting observations about Judges - Jon Fishback - 2

Abstract photos are tough in competitions

The judge

- Has three seconds to like it - tough sell.
- May find an abstract image displeasing, trivial or be puzzled by the image.
- Either gets or doesn’t get it.

Confusion leads to a low score.

- The subject or story of the photo needs to obvious.

Image Analysis Workshop by Jon Fishback, sponsored by the Delaware Valley Council of Camera Clubs on April 25, 2015

# Join the (Print) Critique Group - 1

- Prior to the pandemic we would meet monthly in a colleague's home to present and discuss prints of our photographs
- Presently we are meeting online showing digital versions of our photos
- Each photo gets heartfelt honest feedback about Impact and Technique

# Join the (Print) Critique Group - 2

- When the weather is nice, we meet outdoors, respecting social distancing

- Many award-winning photos have been previewed in our group
- This is a vastly under-utilized asset for our members.

# Thank you!

# Questions?

1. How to make a good photo even better
2. How to offer constructive feedback