

## **COURSE OVERVIEW**

*"The real voyage of discovery consists  
not in seeing new landscapes, but in  
having new eyes."*

- Marcel Proust

## **PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION**

Photographic composition is defined as the nature of a photograph's ingredients; the way in which a whole image is made up. This is distinct from the subject or content of a photograph. During the process of making a photograph the photographer makes numerous subtle and at times not so subtle decisions about what elements to include in the frame and how each element is placed within it.

## **COURSE PURPOSES & DESCRIPTION**

In addition to the study of composition this course has been designed with the intention of familiarizing participants with the basic operation of the DSLR camera. The choice of lens, its aperture and focal length, the camera's shutter speed and ISO all contribute to the specific appearance of any photograph. The course will cover all camera and lens controls and the aesthetic effects produced by the manipulation of those controls.

## **WEEKLY SCHEDULE**

**Week 1** Introduction & Overview: *Statement of the course's goals. Lecture/image presentation of historical and contemporary examples of photography and the importance of the composition of each one on its effectiveness.* Under the broad heading of photography there are many areas of specialization. Commercial applications include portraiture, product, architectural, automotive, food, real estate, music, theatrical, movie stills, technical, glamour, photojournalism, sports, fashion, advertising, aerial, and so on. The list is long and varied. Just as rich is the history of fine art photography. This course has been designed to expose participants to as many of those specialties as possible while describing the basic concepts, tools and techniques common to all forms of photography.

Assignment: Be an Urban Explorer. Pick a location from which to start and walk for at least 90 minutes, taking photographs as you go. What and how you choose to shoot are entirely up to you. Post 4 images from your session.

**Week 2** The Camera & The Lens: *Lecture/image presentation of various camera settings and their effects.* At their most basic, all cameras control imagery through the length of time the shutter is open (shutter speed), the size of the lens' aperture, and the sensitivity of the sensor (IOS). These three controls affect how your images will look in very distinct ways. At shorter settings movement of camera and subject can be frozen, whereas longer exposures are likely to show the effects of movement of either the camera, the subject or both. The size of the lens'

aperture determines the depth of field of an image, the distance between the closest to the furthest objects that will be in focus. The ISO can be adjusted to accommodate the shutter speed and aperture, but not without the consequence of possible degradation of image quality.

Assignment: Faces in the Crowd. Take your camera to an area with lots of people and photograph them. Post 4 images from your session.

*"When we see a part of the moon  
covered by a cloud, or a tree, or a weed,  
we feel how round the moon is. But  
when we see the clear moon without  
anything covering it, we do not feel that  
roundness the same way we do when we  
see it through something else."*

- Shunryu Suzuki

**Week 3 Light:** *Lecture/image presentation showing the effects of different types of light on a variety of shapes and surfaces.* The word photo•graph is from the Greek words phos or photos, which means light and graphos which is drawing. Thus, "light drawing." All photographs are engaged in the act of recording light striking a light-sensitive surface. For most of its history this had been done through the use of light sensitive film and paper, but is now primarily accomplished with digital sensors.

Assignment: Stalk Shadows. Make images in which light becomes a demonstrable subject. Be aware of shadows and/or light sources as possible subjects. Post 4 images from your session.

Quiz: A brief multiple choice or true/false test based on material presented during lectures 1-3.

**Week 4 Still Life / Product:** *Lecture/image presentation of gexpressive tableaux and advertising campaigns.* Because of the extremely long exposures required, virtually all of the earliest photographic experiments involved fixed objects as subject matter shot with cameras on tripods. Compositionally speaking the act of shooting still life subjects has not changed. Although the tools and aesthetic sensibilities employed have altered radically the process is still a matter of arranging objects in front of the camera and controlling the light that strikes them.

Assignment: Set the Table! Take a set (or sets) of silverware and sell it visually. Ask yourself: How much of the frame will the subject take up? Will it be the only object in the frame? If there are other objects, what will their relationship be to each other? Will the depth of focus be deep or shallow? What will the background consist of? Post 4 images from your session.

**Week 5 The Digital Darkroom:** *Lecture/image presentation of what can be done with images after they've been shot.* Where photographs were once kept in the form of either physical negatives, transparencies or prints, they are now stored as digital files on computers, hard drives, DVDs or in the cloud online. Retrieving specific physical images after they had been shot was always a challenge, made easier through careful identification and storage and the same is just as true of their digital counterparts. The digital darkroom is also where image manipulation takes place with programs such as iPhoto or Picasa at the rudimentary end, and

Lightroom, Photoshop or Aperture at the more advanced level. But whatever applications you choose to control your images there are some basic criteria you'll want to employ.

**Assignment: Alter Reality!** Choose 2 of the images you've made since the beginning of the course and apply whatever effects available to you to substantially alter their appearance. This can include combining them with other images. Post both of your original images and their altered versions.

**Quiz:** A brief multiple choice or true/false test based on material presented during lectures 4-5.

**Week 6 Photojournalism:** *Lecture/image presentation of exceptional published photo stories.* Historically, people found out about what was happening in the world at large by reading newspapers. With the invention of offset lithography in 1875 photography could be easily reproduced and stories began to be told with cameras as well as words. Today, virtually anyone can document their lives in great detail and broadcast them to the world at will. But simply taking lots of pictures doesn't constitute true photojournalism. We'll explore what it takes to tell a meaningful story with a camera alone or as an adjunct to the written word. Sometimes a story can be told in a single image, whereas most require a sequence of images to explain what has happened. Editing is as important to this process as it is to the written word.

**Assignment:** Tell a story. Use public transportation to take a short trip (one hour each way) and document your experience: at your point of departure; aboard the bus, train or subway; at your destination. Be sure to look for what makes this experience unique. Post your story's highlights (no more than 6 images).

**Week 7 Portraiture & Fashion:** *Lecture/image presentation of remarkable portraits and fashion photographs.* One of the first things the earliest photographers wanted to do was record their fellow human beings. Even today it is perhaps the most compelling reason to take a picture. We will explore the many kinds and purposes of photographic portraits and fashion imagery.

**Assignment:** Photograph Someone You Know. Set up a session with a friend or a pet and take his or her portrait. It can be done indoors or outside. Be aware of the light, natural and artificial, direct and indirect, and manipulate it to achieve the ends you want. Post 4 images from your session.

**Quiz:** A brief multiple choice or true/false test based on material presented during lectures 6-7.

*"Seeing is forgetting the name of the  
thing one sees."*

- Robert Irwin

**Week 8 Sports & Action:** *Lecture/image presentation of sporting events and objects in motion.* Until Eadweard Muybridge proved how horses galloped (not by extending all legs at once) by photographing them in rapid succession with a series of cameras no one knew for sure. He won a substantial bet in the process. Ever since then, photographers have trained their cameras on animals and humans and sometimes humans in vehicles or interacting with animals in order to reveal some sense of what excellence in sports must look like at the moment of victory or defeat. At times the equipment and techniques devised to "get the shot" have been

ingenious and the contortions they've had to assume painful, all for a chance to land a cover of Sports Illustrated.

Assignment: Photograph a sporting event. The athletes can be still or in motion. Try different aperture, shutter speed, and ISO combinations for different effects. Where you choose to photograph them from will also be important to the outcome. Post 4 images from your session.

**Week 9 The Natural Landscape:** *Lecture/image presentation of the natural world.* The study of nature with cameras has been one of the great themes of photography from its outset. At the end of the Civil War, photographers who had plied their craft on battlefields were employed by the government to explore and bring back evidence of the wonders found in the territories west of the Mississippi in order to gain support for a system of nationally protected land preserves. Congress was duly impressed and the National Parks Service came into being. Today, each of us is capable of exploring the wonders of our own natural world, be it a nearby hill or mountain, stream or ocean, or the habitat that is our own backyard.

Assignment: Photograph the flora and fauna near you. It can be in your own back yard, at a nearby park or somewhere far away. Keep in mind that your photographs are not the things they depict, but new objects in and of themselves. Post 4 images from your session.

Quiz: A brief multiple choice or true/false test based on material presented during lectures 8-9.

*"To put something in the world that was not there before, you have to be able to see that which others before you have overlooked."*

- George Vaillant

**Week 10 Architecture & The Urban Landscape:** *Lecture/image presentation of the built world.* Before photographers went in search of the American west, European photographers packed up their gear and headed for exotic locales in all directions. With the advent of photography people became interested in seeing evidence of the "wonders of the world," which they had only experienced through suspicious written tales and unbelievable paintings and drawings. Some of the first of these adventurous photographers made fortunes creating attractive portfolios of what they had found in northern Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The best of them were as capable of composing arresting views of astonishing structures as their painterly cousins, but with the great advantage of seemingly undeniable truth on their side.

Assignment: Photograph a building, easily accessible to you, as if it were a recently discovered archaeological site previously unknown to the world. Post 4 images from your session.

**Week 11 Editing Your Work:** *Lecture/Image presentation of photographs in series form.* William Faulkner is believed to have said that he had to kill off his darlings, those passages that he loved that just didn't work in a larger context, in order to strengthen his work overall. He was talking about the process of writing a novel, but putting photographs into an effective framework involves the same kind of discipline.

Assignment: Sort through the work you have created over the previous ten weeks with an eye out for what you feel are the most compelling of your images. Begin looking for images that

connect or speak to one another regardless of their content. Think of compositional connections: color; line; shape; contrast.

Quiz: A brief multiple choice or true/false test based on material presented during lectures 10-11.

**Week 12 The Final Portfolio:** *Lecture/image presentation of the best of the medium in all its various disciplines. The central theme will be, "Is it Art or is it Commerce and does it Matter?"* In order for a portfolio, book or website to be outstanding, often difficult decisions have to be made about what stays and what goes, in what order, and at what size. Fortunately, via the Internet we can look at the work of many talented photographers to gain an understanding of how best to present a body of work. At the same time it's essential to keep in mind who the target audience is. Is the photographer looking for work in a particular industry or attempting to communicate creative concepts.

Assignment: Organize your work into a concise portfolio with visual impact. Include a total of no more than 24 images in a PDF, employing whatever graphic elements you feel will strengthen your presentation.

*"Let us not look back in anger or  
forward in fear but around us in  
awareness."*

- James Thurber