The Art of (Judging) Street Photography

All the technique in the world doesn't compensate for the inability to notice.

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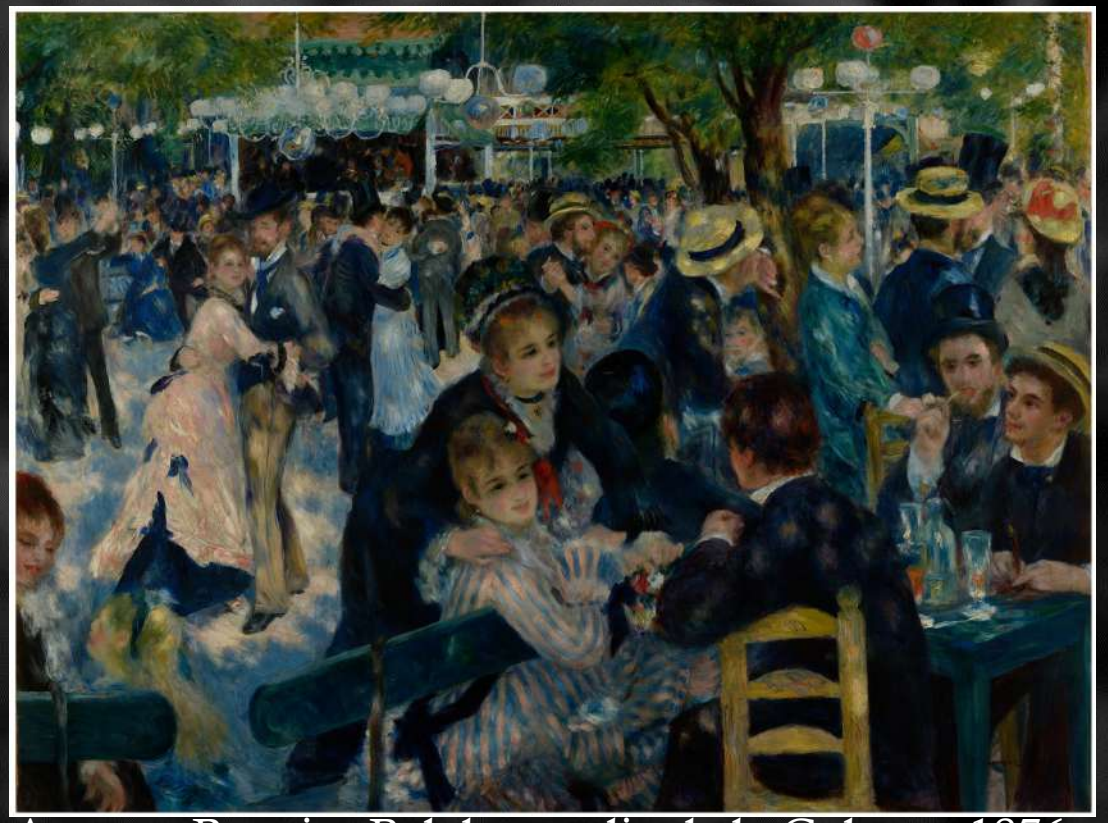
My Street Photography Quest

- Street photography is a popular genre (yet again)
- I was confronted with judging street photography and did not know much about the genre
- The definition could lead to misinterpretation
- Little thought is given to the basics of photography
  - Composition
  - Exposure
- In my “research” I found that modern street photography is very different from those of the masters, yet they get quoted very often

Setting the Scene

- By the turn 1900s' century, Paris's open spaces and street cafés were very popular
- These street scenes were very often documented by Impressionism artists.



Auguste Renoir - Bal du moulin de la Galette - 1876

Setting the Scene

- The birth of street photography could be linked with the arrival of more portable photographic equipment (especially the Leica I in 1925)
- Observing and documenting everyday life in the streets of Paris was thus also made possible in photography.
- Andre Kertez, for one, bought his first Leica in 1927.

Andre Kertész - Le Dôme Café, Montparnasse, Paris -1928

Setting the Scene

- We all aspire to Henri Cartier-Bresson's photographic style
- One of his famous quotes are "*Whatever we have done, Kertész did first*".
- International Center of Photography describes Kertész' s photography as *"Kertész combined a photojournalistic interest in movement and gesture with a formalist concern for abstract shapes; hence his work has historical significance in all areas of post war photography".*

André Kertész - Paris, A Bird Market near the Hôtel de Ville, 1926

André Kertész

Egredere Non Omnis, 1928

Bosckay Ter, Budapest, 1914

Les Pont Des Arts

André Kertész

André Kertész Paris 1931

Defining Street Photography

- Pinning down a finite definition of street photography is very difficult.
- Most definitions are based on the following phrase:
  - *Street photography records un-posed scenes in public places. The primary subject is people and/or symbols of people, at rest or in motion, alone or with others, going about their everyday activities.*
- *PSSA's definition add that it is a sub-genre of photojournalism.*
- *I like Larry E. Fink's version of the definition.*
  - *It is a branch of realistic fine-art photography that—traditionally—records un-posed scenes in public places (streets, parks, restaurants, stores, museums, libraries, airports; train, bus, and subway stations, etc.)*
- He then stated that it is
  - Not Portraiture
  - Not Documentary Photography
  - Not Photojournalism

Defining Street Photography

- Not Portraiture
  - The primary subject is people, at rest or in motion, alone or with others, going about the every-day activities of life (walking, sitting, standing, waiting, reading, eating, talking, listening, laughing, daydreaming, greeting, parting, working, playing, shopping, etc.).
  - But it is not portrait photography. The identity of the people in the picture is less important than their value as composition elements or representations of archetypal figures: fathers, mothers, children, lovers, tradesmen, etc.

Defining Street Photography

- Not Documentary Photography
  - The primary emphasis is on capturing a fleeting composition, a temporary, unrepeatable arrangement of lines, forms, textures, and tones–within a rigid frame.
  - While such photographs often document clothing styles or automobile design, these details are subordinate to the artistic elements; whereas, in strict documentary photography, content is more important than artistry.

Defining Street Photography

- Not Photojournalism
  - Nor is it pure photojournalism (news photography) because there's nothing "news-worthy" happening in these pictures, rather the endless repetition of daily activities.
  - On the other hand, street photography at times appears in news publications for its "human interest" value.

Defining Street Photography

His final comment is:

Regardless of approach,
composition and timing
remain the primary challenges of street photography.

Street Photography Classification

- Fink suggests that we return to the masters to learn how to approach street photography.
- He put them into 2 broad categories;
  - "First Generation" Street Photographers
    - Andre Kertész; Robert Doisneau; Henri Cartier-Bresson; Willy Ronis; Edouard Boubat; Vivian Maier; Helen Levitt
  - "Second Generation" Street Photographers
    - William Klein; Robert Frank; Gary Winograd; Lee Friedlander

Robert Doisneau

Henri Cartier-Bresson

Helen Levitt

Vivian Maier

Street Photography Classification

- "First Generation" Street Photographers
  - Cool distance from subjects ["invisible" photographer]
  - Undeniable empathy with subjects
  - Classical sense of composition
  - Implied narrative
  - Anecdotal detail

Robert Doisneau

Henri Cartier-Bresson

Helen Levitt

Vivian Maier

Street Photography Classification

- "Second Generation" Street Photographers
  - Closer to subject; wide-angle lens; "in-your-face" presence (especially William Klein)
  - Imbalanced, chaotic composition
  - Tilted framing (blind shooting–especially Gary Winograd)
  - Cluttered, multi-layered, sometimes obstructed views (especially Lee Friedlander)
  - Darker themes; less empathy; more satire

Lee Friedlander

Gary Winograd

Robert Frank

William Klein

Sam Abel – National Geographic Photographer

- His father told him photography:
  - *Take a low angle - . Low angle, more impact*
  - *Look for strong graphics*
  - *Look for the S-curve or powerful diagonals*
  - *Keep the sun to your back.*
  - *Remember, bad weather makes good pictures*
- Of this photo he says (that he took of his father when he was only 15)*:*
  - *When I look at this picture, I don't look at the train or the icicles, I don't think about the weather. I only look at that little space at the back of my father. It separates my father from the building. And allows that line to be almost an s-curve. Elegant and influence giving to the mood of this photograph.*
- In a photograph, there are three things to consider;
  - *Setting,*
  - *the expression*
  - *and the gesture*

Street Photography - Summary

- The competition world defines street photography as a sub-genre of photojournalism, but I hope you will agree with Larry E Fink (and myself) that the artistic efforts in creating street photographs is of more importance than in the other sub-genres of photojournalism.
- Follow Sam Abell's father's advice:
  - *"Sammy, in a photograph, there are three things to consider; Setting, the expression and the gesture."*
- and make Henri Cartier-Bresson's advice our motto in street photography:
  - *"Your eye must see a composition of an expression that life itself offers you, and you must know with intuition when to click the camera".*

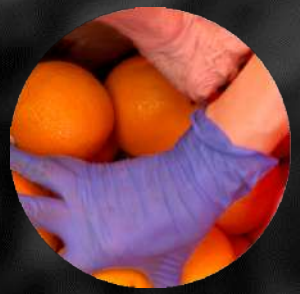
Themes

Colour

Silhouettes

Cubism

Graffiti



Anonymity

Bonus

Point of View

Low Angle

High Angle

Wide Angle

Judging Tips

The Shoulder Tap

Composition

Contrast

Humour

Stories

Colour vs Mono

Theme: Colour

A splash of orange

Theme: Colour

- Colours have strong associations for us:
  - Blues and greens are calming; they are organic colours with natural and earthy associations
  - Reds excite us visually; they have strong associations with blood, love and passion
  - Yellows and oranges are warming.

- Remember, colour is powerful;
  - If an element does not add to the image, it detracts from the image, and no element does so more than colour.

Theme: Colour

A splash of orange

Theme: Colour

Pink Lady

Theme: Colour

A Splash of Yellow

Theme: Colour

The Water Extension

Theme: Colour

The Takeout Delivery Guy

Theme: Colour

Rain Rain Go Away

Theme: Colour

On Patrol

Theme: Colour

Speedo Lady

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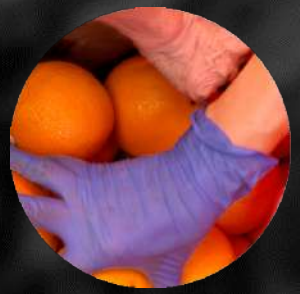

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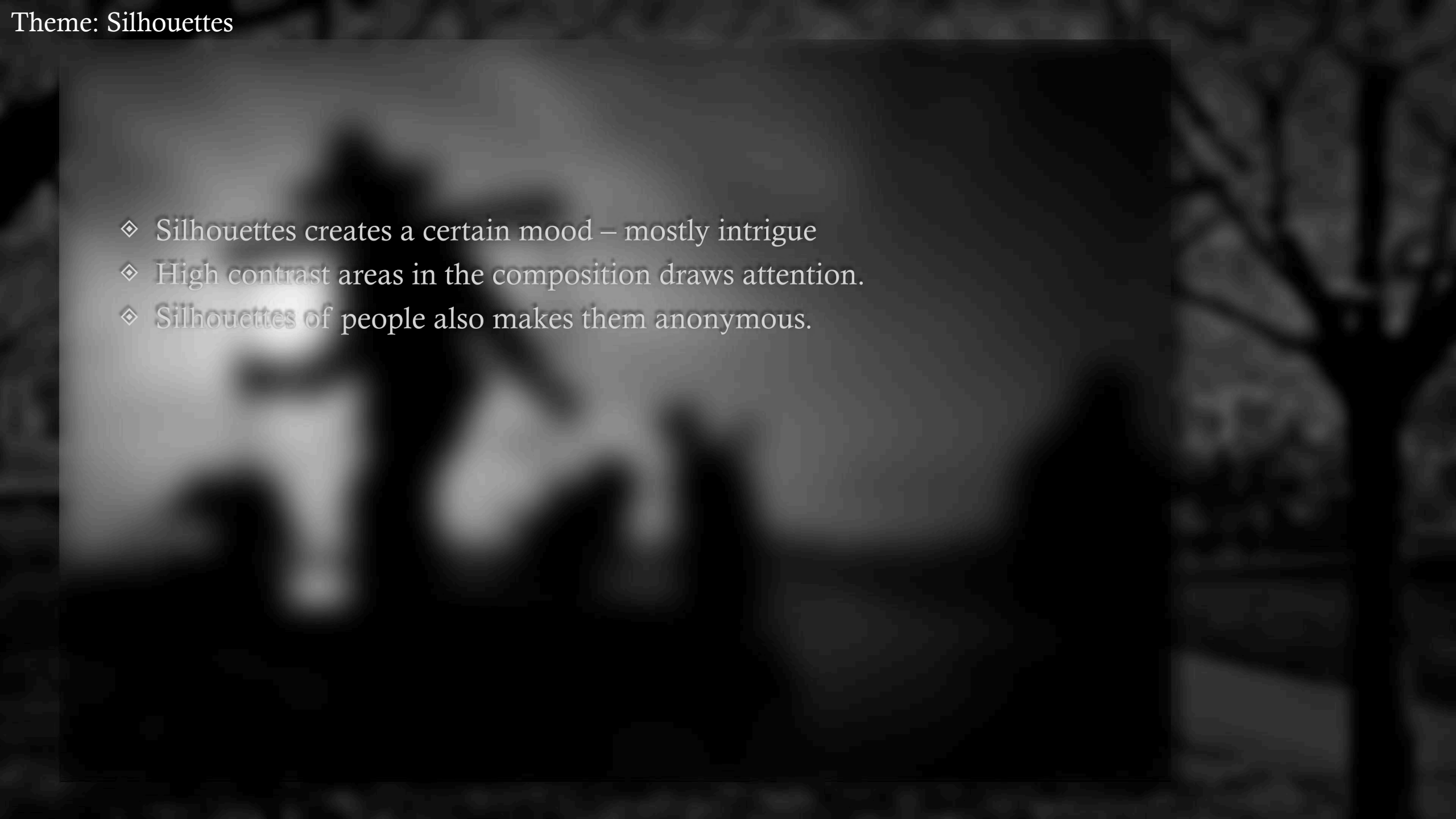
Theme: Silhouettes

At the Harbour

Theme: Silhouettes



- Silhouettes creates a certain mood – mostly intrigue
- High contrast areas in the composition draws attention.
- Silhouettes of people also makes them anonymous.

Theme: Silhouettes

At the Harbour

Theme: Silhouettes

Drying the Rice Harvest

Theme: Silhouettes

A World City

Theme: Silhouettes

The Commuters

Theme: Silhouettes

A Winter Morning

Theme: Silhouettes

I'm out of here

Theme: Silhouettes

The Shop Window

Theme: Silhouettes

Almost 10 O'clock

Theme: Silhouettes

Smoke brake

Theme: Silhouettes

The Transaction

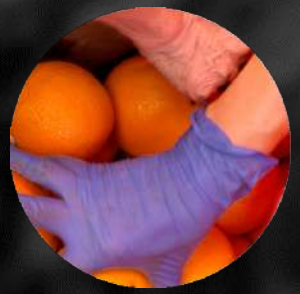
Themes

Colour

Silhouettes

Cubism

Graffiti



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Colour vs Mono

Theme: Cubism

In Love

Theme: Cubism

- In its most simplistic form, it may consist of compartments or cubes, each with its own portion of a bigger scene.
- In its real form, it is a style of art which aims to show all of the possible viewpoints of a person or an object all at once.
- As an artform, it is more abstract by nature.
- The problem with cubism in photography is that, by its nature, it will normally be a manipulated photo, thus not qualifying for street photography.
- But it is possible to find natural scenes that may fit the definition of cubism.

Theme: Cubism

In Love

Theme: Cubism

Snippets of Conversation

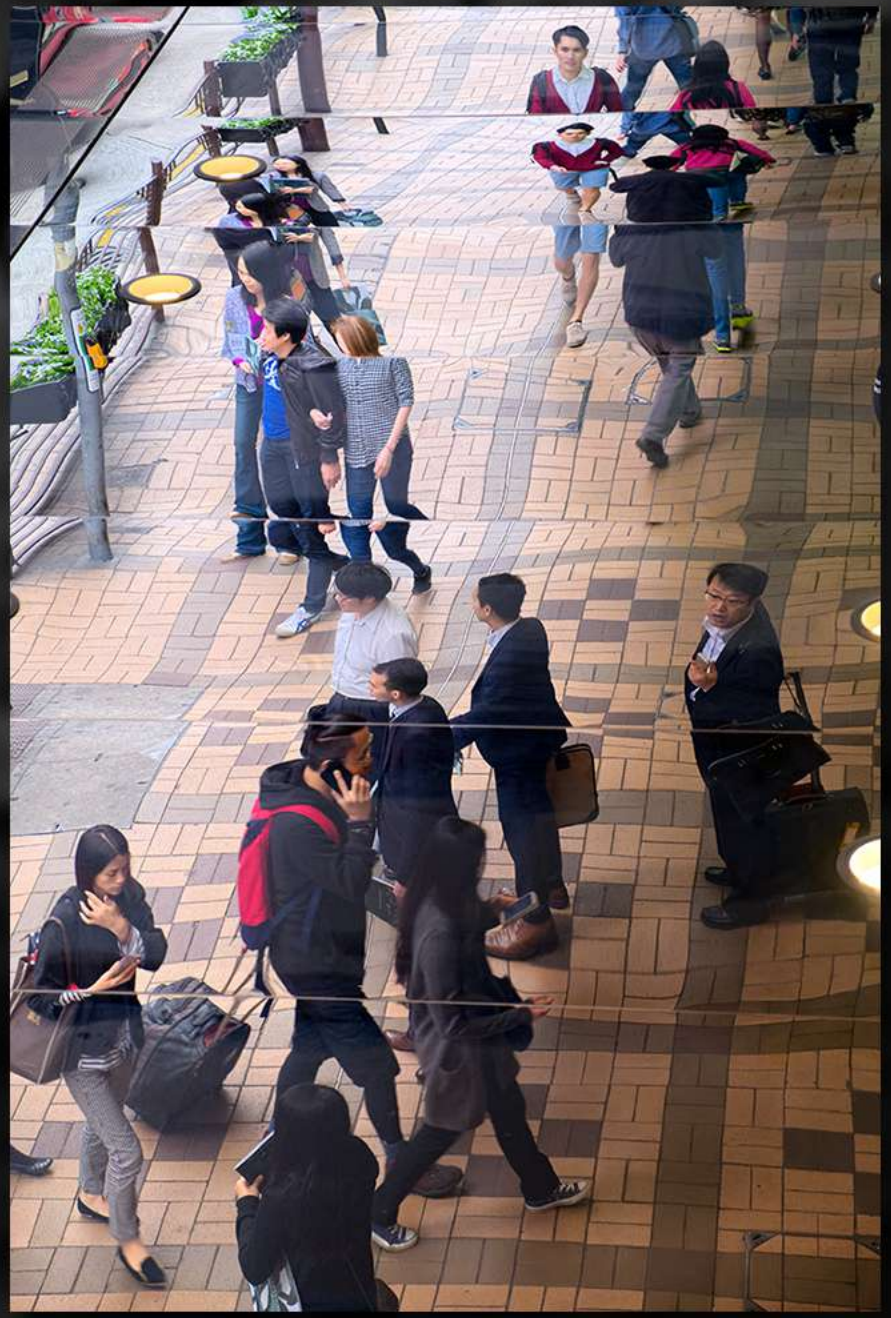
Theme: Cubism

The Party

Theme: Cubism

Peek-a-boo

Theme: Cubism

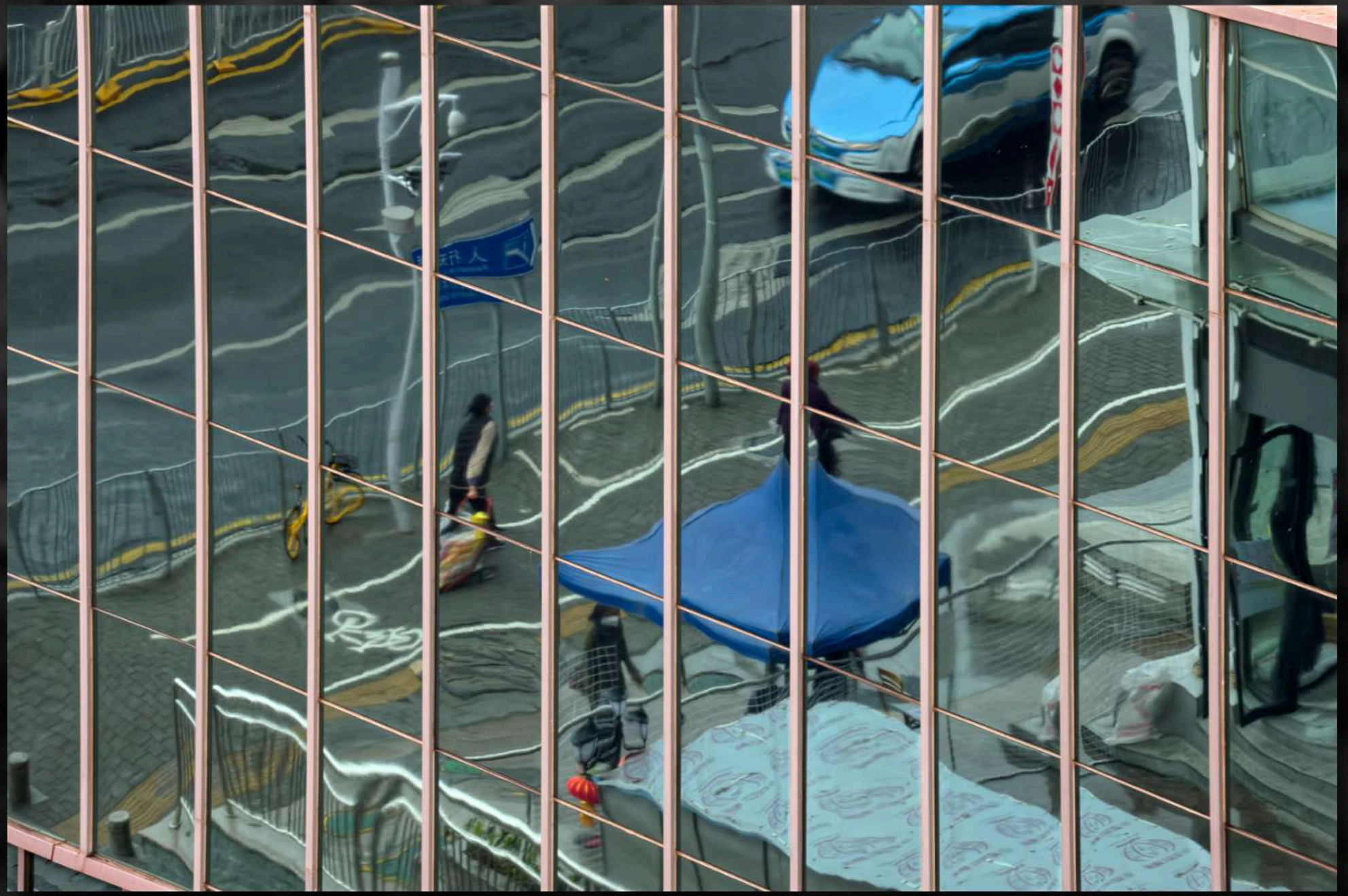


The Passers-by

Theme: Cubism

A Rainy Day

Theme: Cubism



The Check point

Theme: Cubism

The Dining Room

Theme: Cubism

Waiting

Theme: Cubism

In The Mall

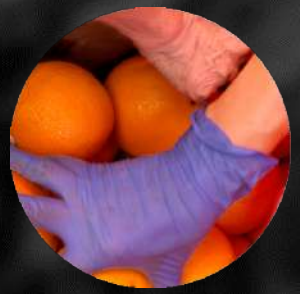
Themes

Colour

Silhouettes

Cubism

Graffiti



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Colour vs Mono

Theme: Graffiti

No Time for Romance (Irony)

Theme: Graffiti

- Graffiti may create a great setting
- In judging competitions, I often see photos where the graffiti wall and the subject has no relation
- In fact, in most cases the subject spoils the beautiful graffiti
- This is my approach:
  - Take some time to study the graffiti
  - Think of ways to use it in a photo.
    - Can you photograph somebody to mimic the graffiti?
    - Or can you use the message in the graffiti to draw attention to the people?
- Then wait for the right people to complete the setting
- Even if it means you will not get any other photo that day

Theme: Graffiti

No Time for Romance (Irony)

Theme: Graffiti

The F- Word (Humour)

Theme: Graffiti

Holy Smokes (Effective Motion Blur)

Theme: Graffiti

Wow (Enhancing the photo)

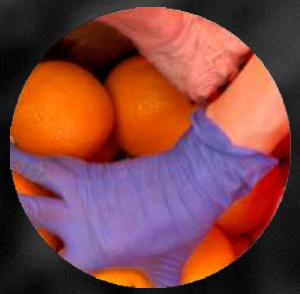
Themes

Colour

Silhouettes

Cubism

Graffiti



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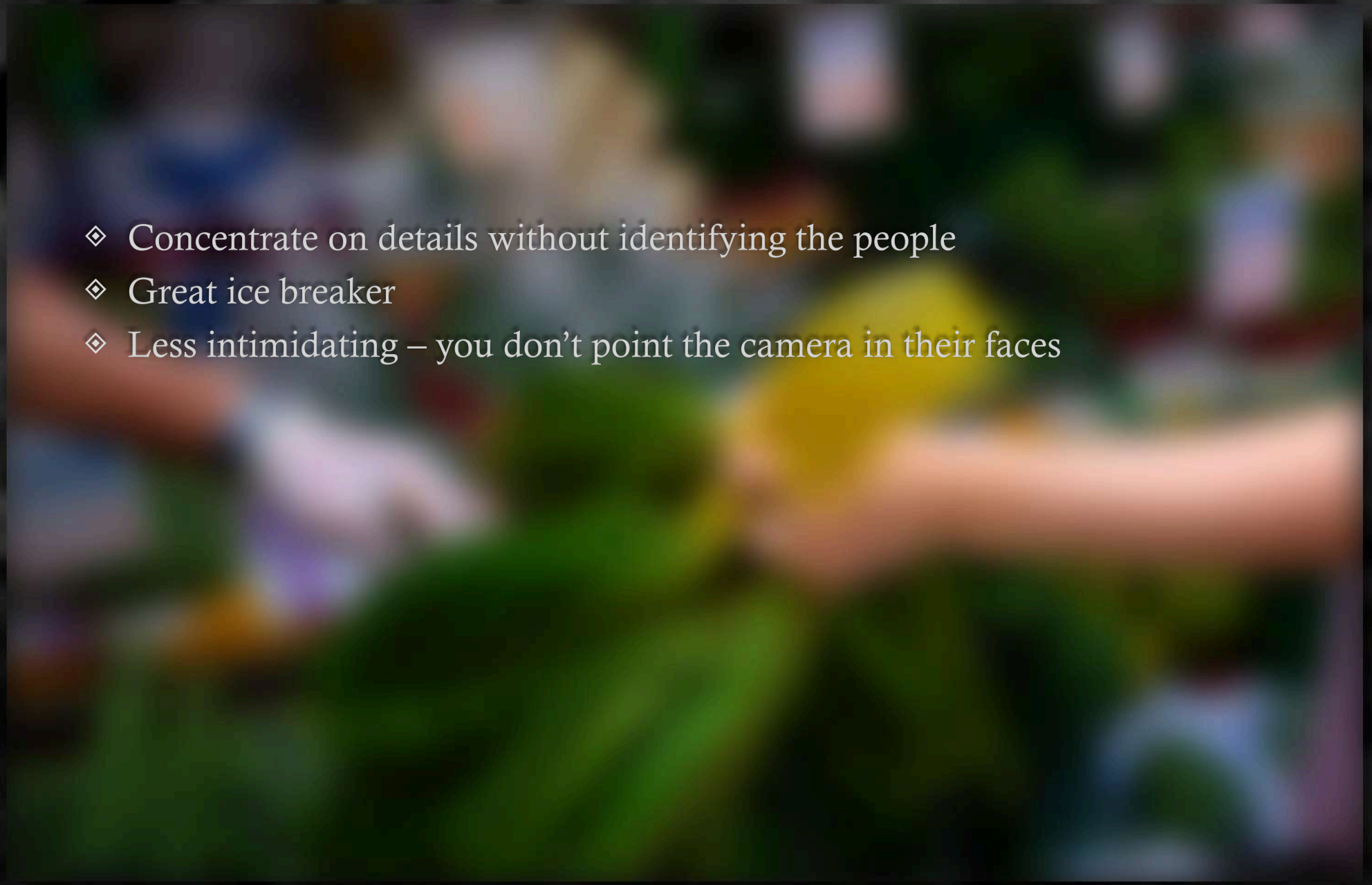
Colour vs Mono

Theme: Anonymity

Buyer and Seller

Theme: Anonymity



- Concentrate on details without identifying the people
- Great ice breaker
- Less intimidating – you don't point the camera in their faces

Buyer and Seller

Theme: Anonymity

Buyer and Seller

Theme: Anonymity (Money Changing Hands)

Let the Show Begin

Abracadabra

Theme: Anonymity (Money Changing Hands)

Buyer and Seller

Seller and Buyer

Theme: Anonymity (Money Changing Hands)

Buyer

Buyer

Theme: Anonymity (Money Changing Hands)

Buyer

Seller

Theme: Anonymity (Money Changing Hands)

Zhao Cai Mao

Theme: Anonymity (Intimate Moments)

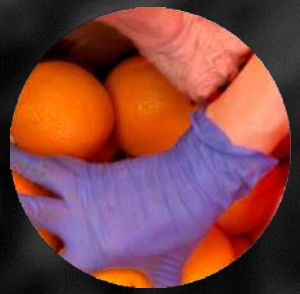
Themes

Colour

Silhouettes

Cubism

Graffiti



Anonymity

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High Angle

Wide Angle

Judging Tips

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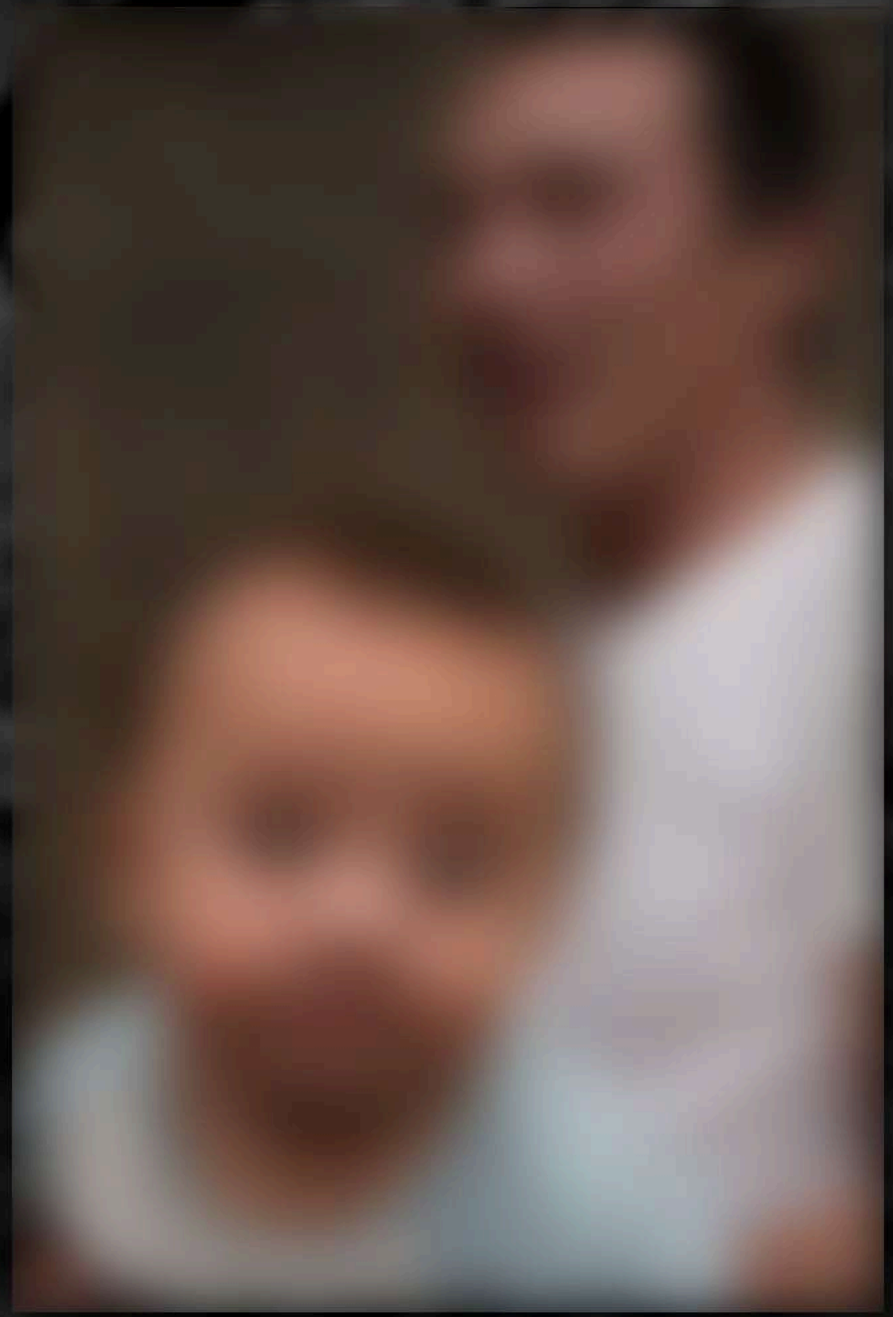
Colour vs Mono

Theme: Low Angle

Busy Baby

Theme: Low Angle



- Going low places your subject in a prominent position in your frame, normally larger than in real life
- Because it is an unusual point of view, it creates some uniqueness in your photograph
- People or objects may look more surreal as they get distorted - especially if you are also using a wide or ultra wide focal length lens

Theme: Low Angle

Busy Baby

Theme: Low Angle

Waiting for the Lion Dance

Theme: Low Angle

Don't Drink and Drive

Theme: Low Angle

The Pink Tai Chi Ladies

Theme: Low Angle

Off Season Repairs

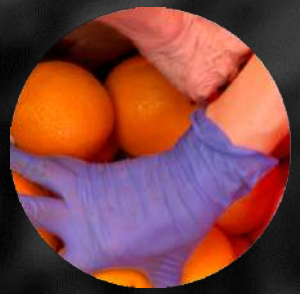
Themes

Colour

Silhouettes

Cubism

Graffiti



Anonymity

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High Angle

Wide Angle

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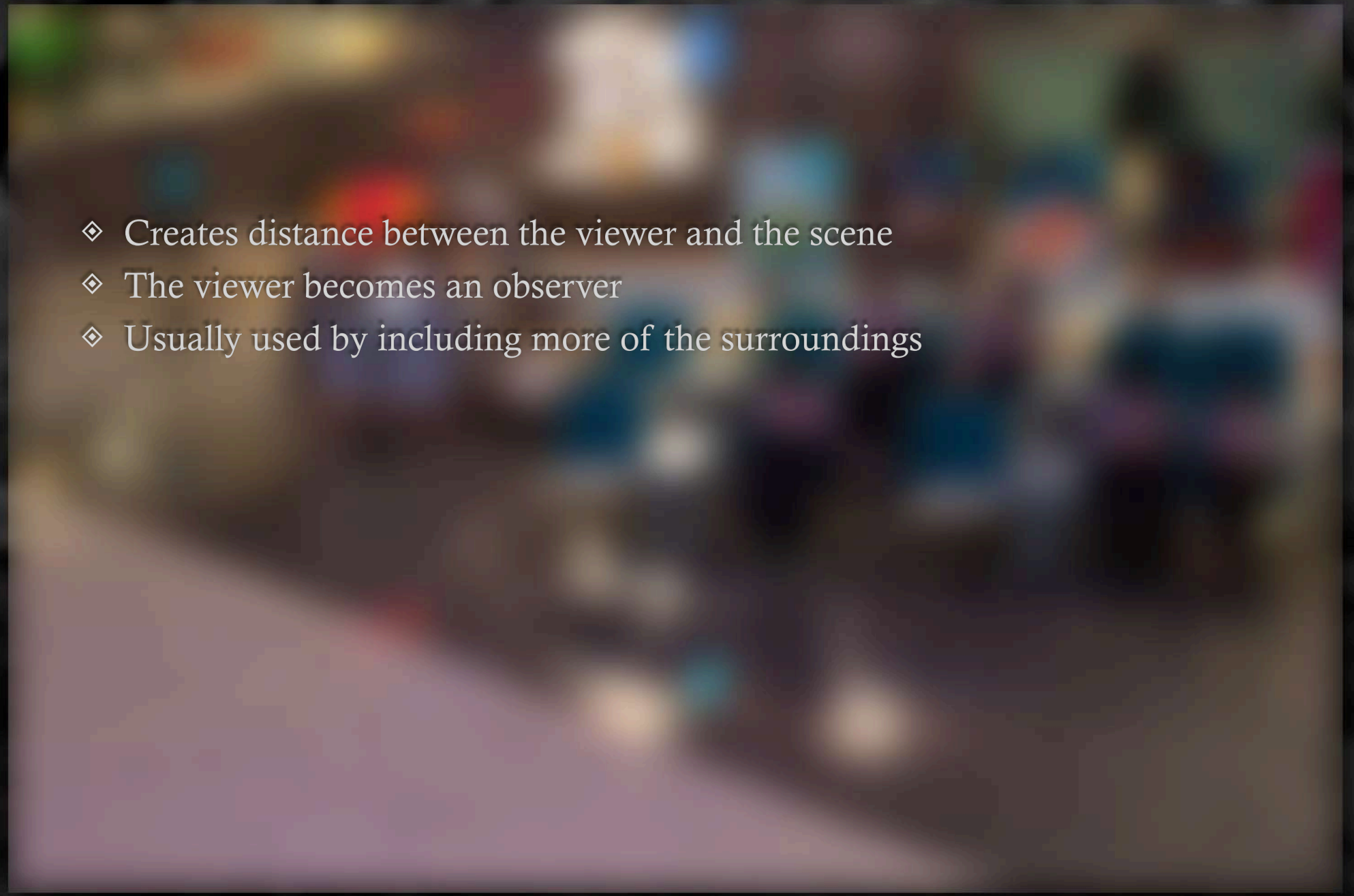
Colour vs Mono

Theme: High Angle

The Exquisite Team

Theme: High Angle

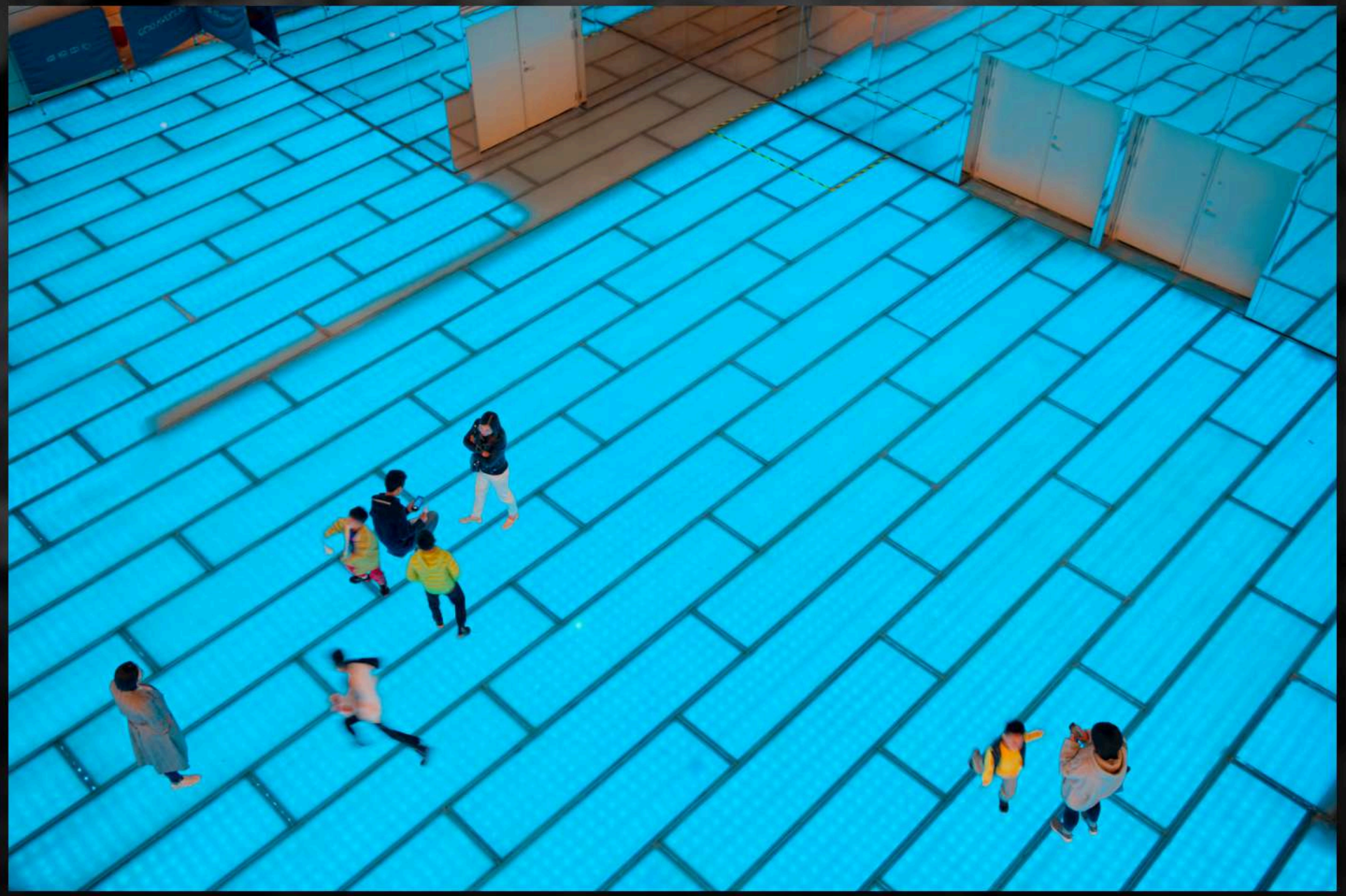


- Creates distance between the viewer and the scene
- The viewer becomes an observer
- Usually used by including more of the surroundings

Theme: High Angle

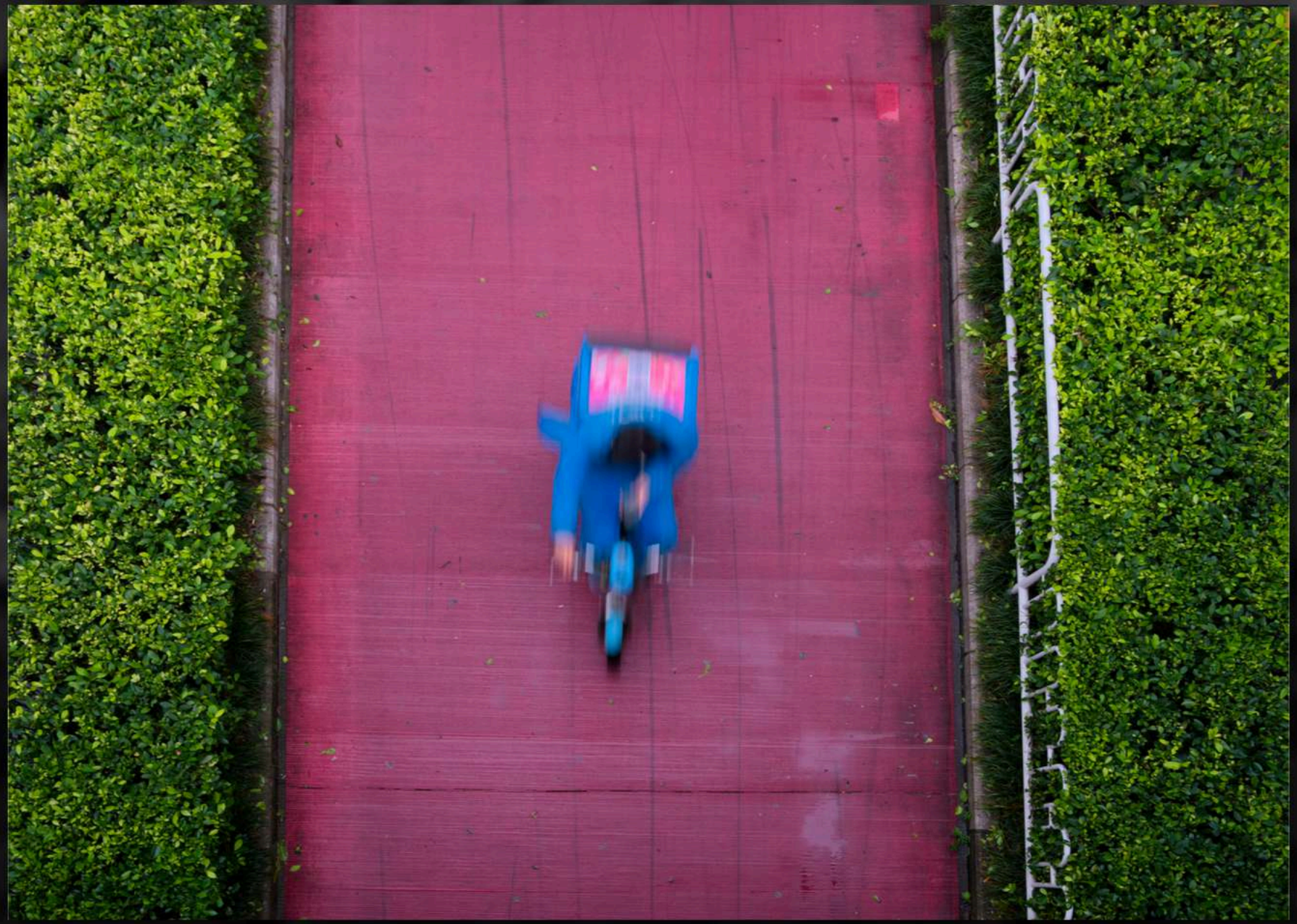
The Exquisite Team

Theme: High Angle



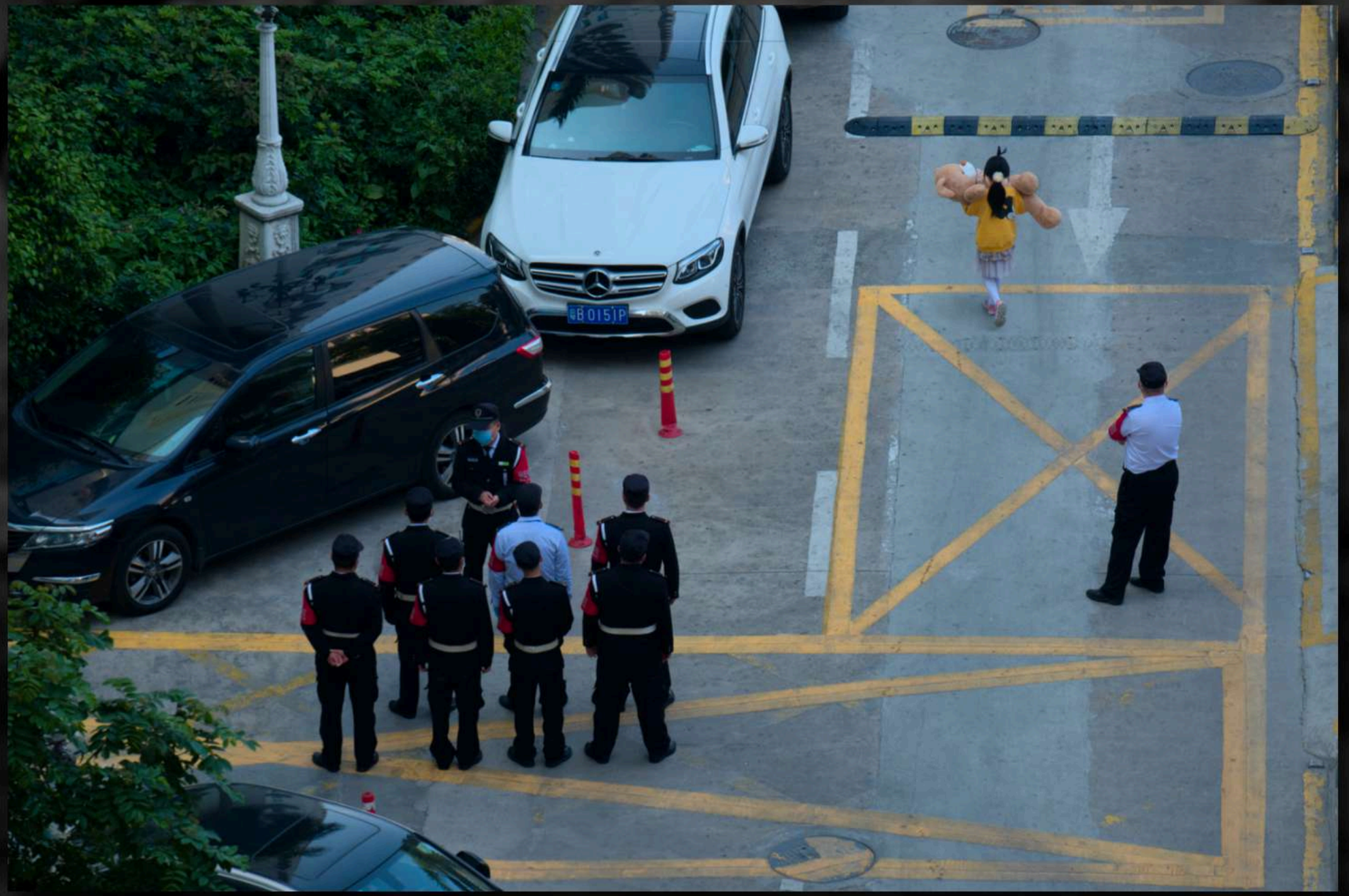
The RGB Floor

Theme: High Angle



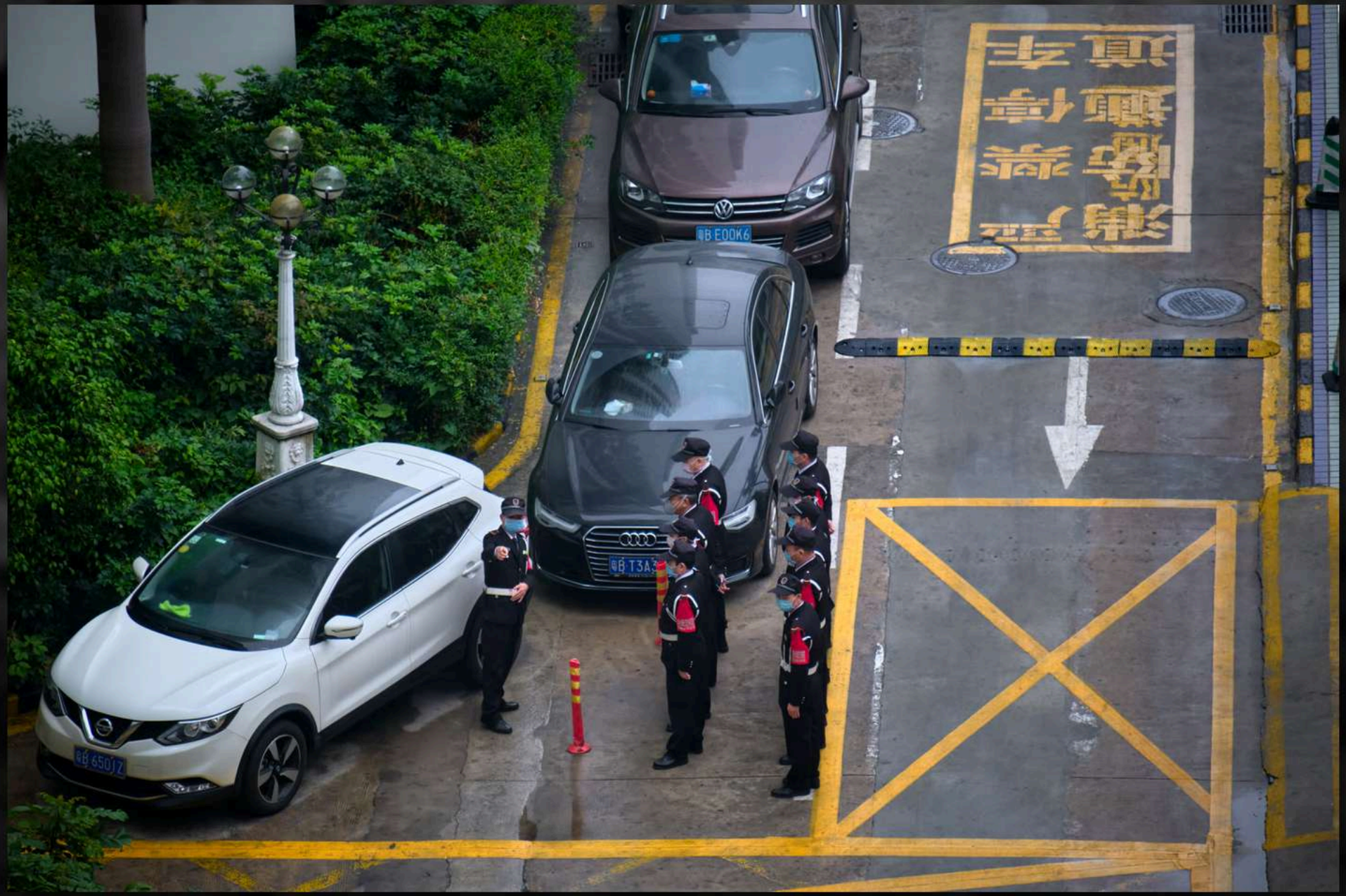
Express Delivery

Theme: High Angle



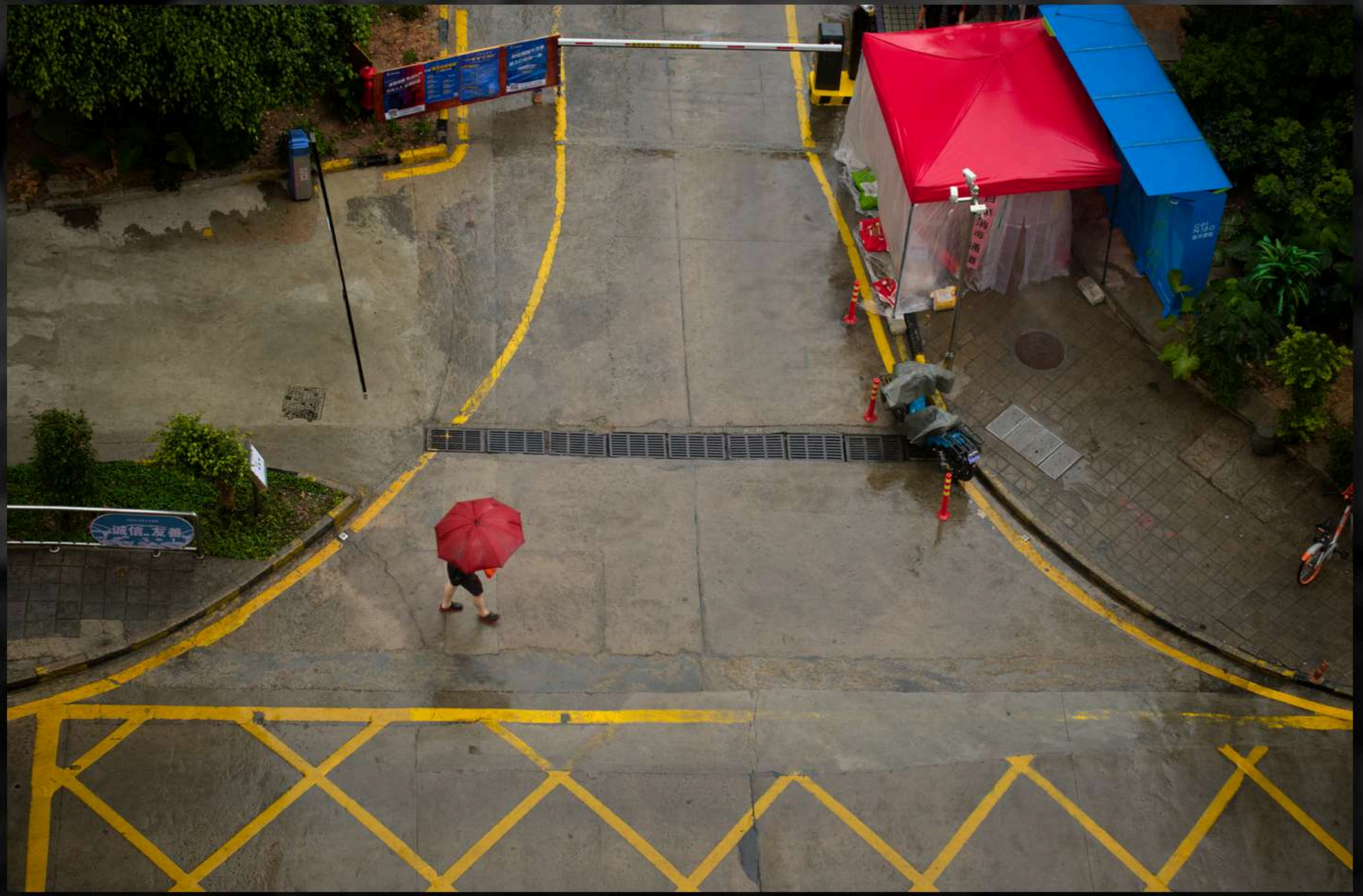
The Case of the Fleeting Teddy

Theme: High Angle



Start of the shift

Theme: High Angle



Crossing the street

Theme: High Angle

Hang on there

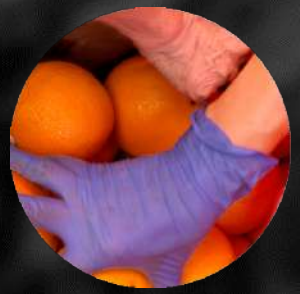
Themes

Colour

Silhouettes

Cubism

Graffiti



Anonymity

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Point of View

Low Angle

High Angle

Wide Angle

Judging Tips

The Shoulder Tap

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Contrast

Humour

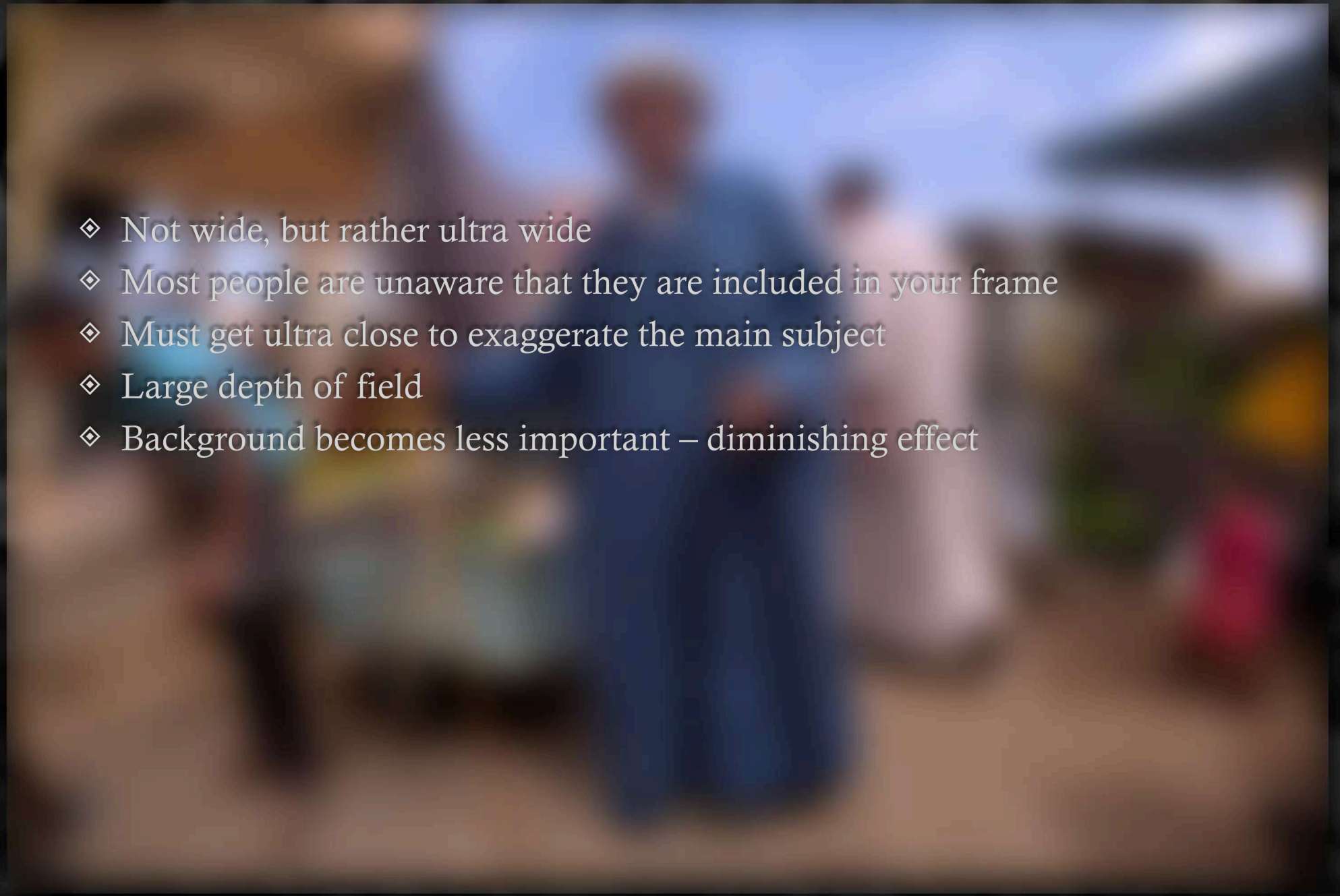
Stories

Colour vs Mono

Theme: Wide Angle

The Wise Man

Theme: Wide Angle



- Not wide, but rather ultra wide
- Most people are unaware that they are included in your frame
- Must get ultra close to exaggerate the main subject
- Large depth of field
- Background becomes less important – diminishing effect

Theme: Wide Angle

The Wise Man

Theme: Wide Angle

The Bean Seller and his Son

Theme: Wide Angle

At the Market

Theme: Wide Angle

The Visitor

Theme: Wide Angle

The Okra Seller

Theme: Wide Angle

Mending the Net

Theme: Wide Angle

Mending the Net

Theme: Wide Angle

Mending the Net

Theme: Wide Angle

The little Puppeteer

Theme: Wide Angle

The Poultry Butcher

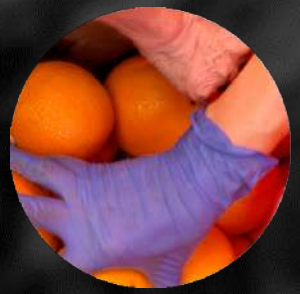
Themes

Colour

Silhouettes

Cubism

Graffiti



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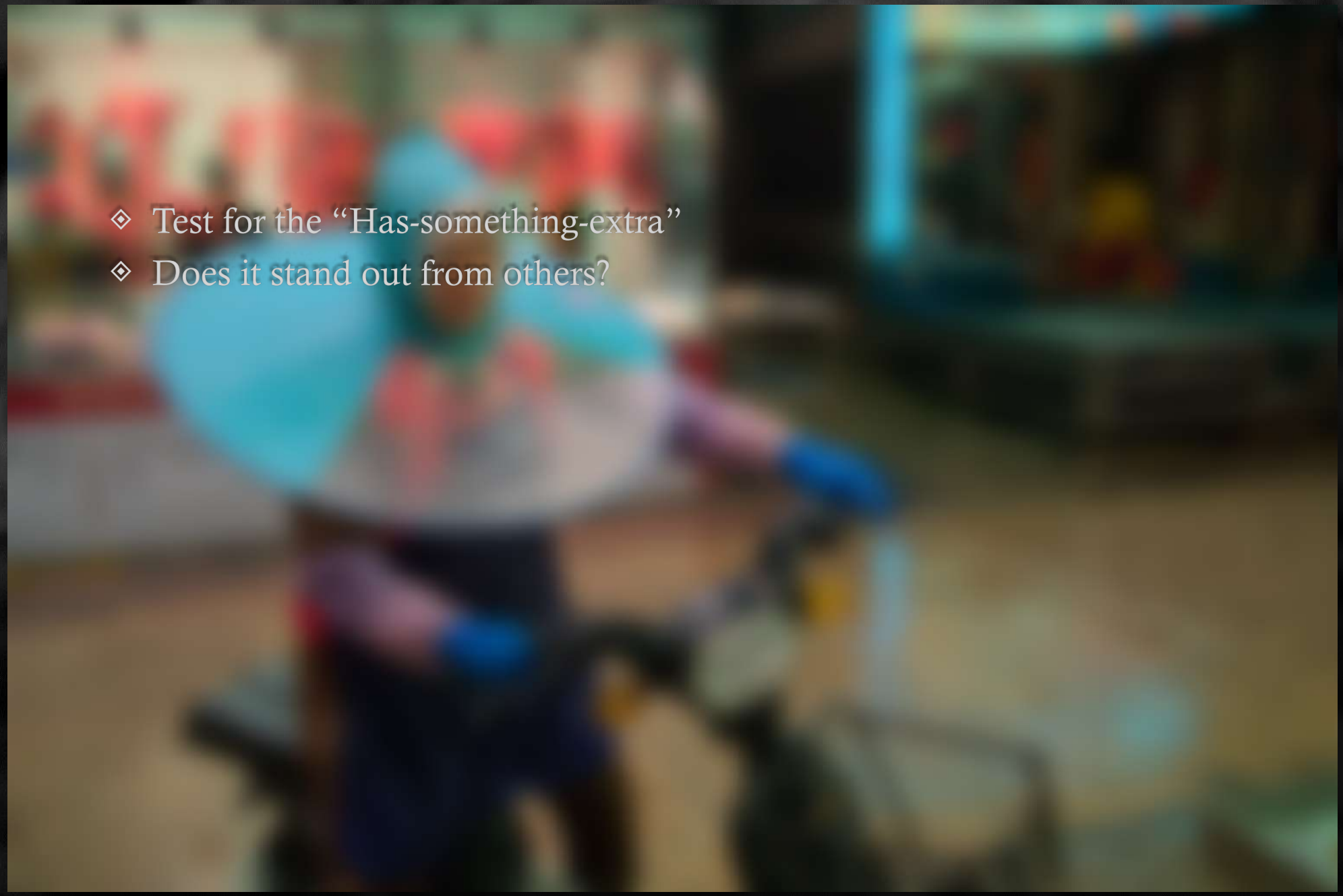
Colour vs Mono

The Shoulder Tap

The Shoulder Tap



- Test for the “Has-something-extra”
- Does it stand out from others?

The Shoulder Tap

The Shoulder Tap

The Shoulder Tap

The Shoulder Tap

Theme: Graffiti

You Little People

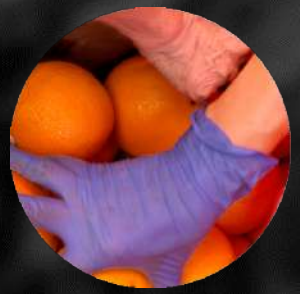
Themes

Colour

Silhouettes

Cubism

Graffiti



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Wide Angle

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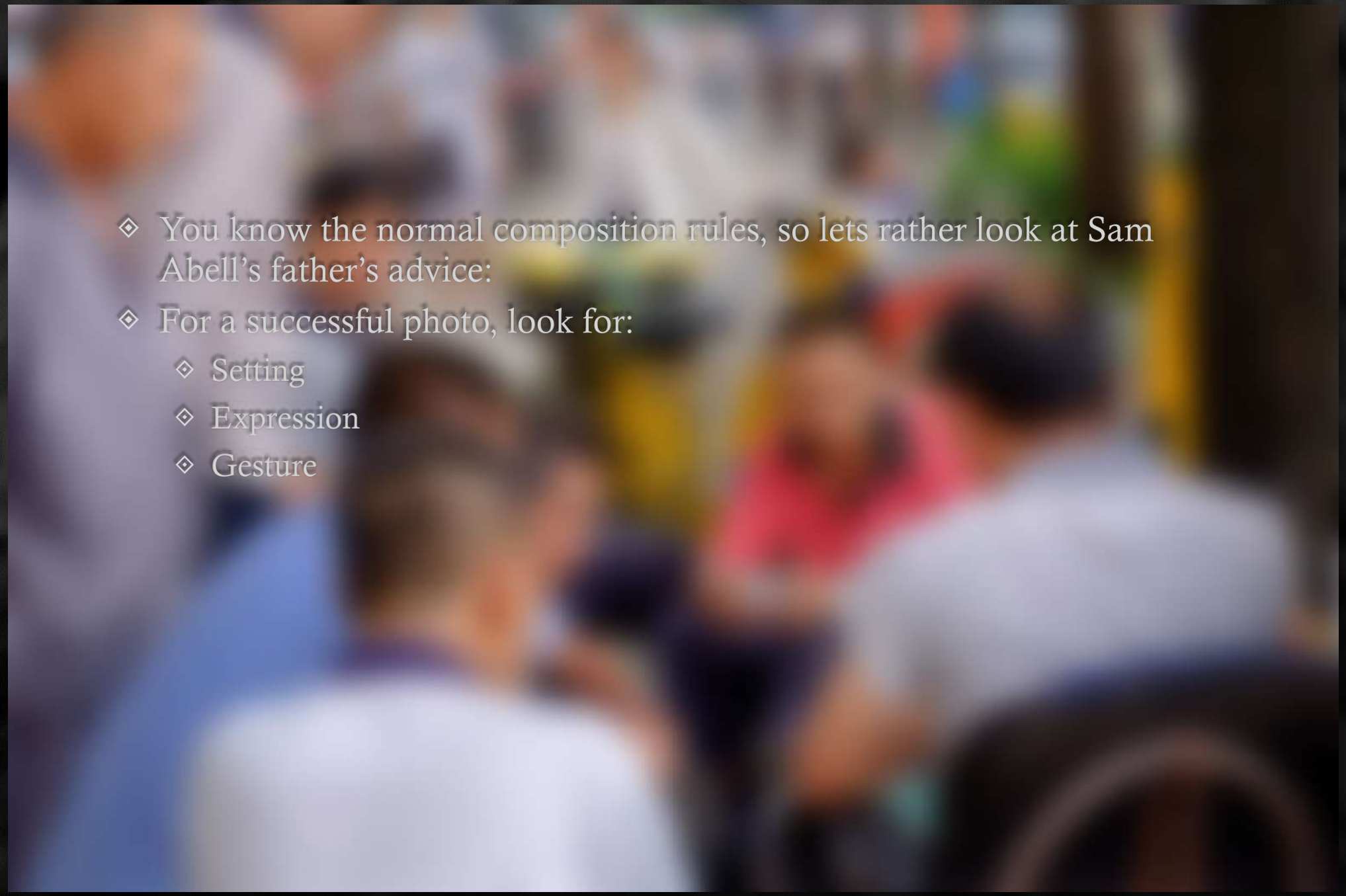
Colour vs Mono

Composition

Direction Indicators (Your Move)

Composition



- You know the normal composition rules, so lets rather look at Sam Abell's father's advice:
- For a successful photo, look for:
  - Setting
  - Expression
  - Gesture

Direction Indicators (Your Move)

Composition

Direction Indicators (Your Move)

Composition

Direction Indicators (The Reluctant Lover)

Composition

Complementary Curves (Balloon Seller)

Composition

Subject Isolation (Going Home)

Composition

Dynamic Triangle (The Tea House Host)

Composition

Framing (Sharing a Joke)

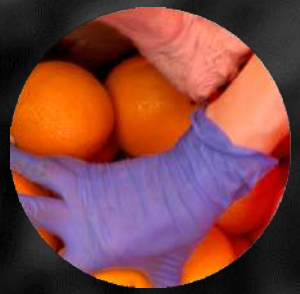
Themes

Colour

Silhouettes

Cubism

Graffiti



Anonymity

Bonus

Point of View

Low Angle

High Angle

Wide Angle

Judging Tips

The Shoulder Tap

Composition

Contrast

Humour

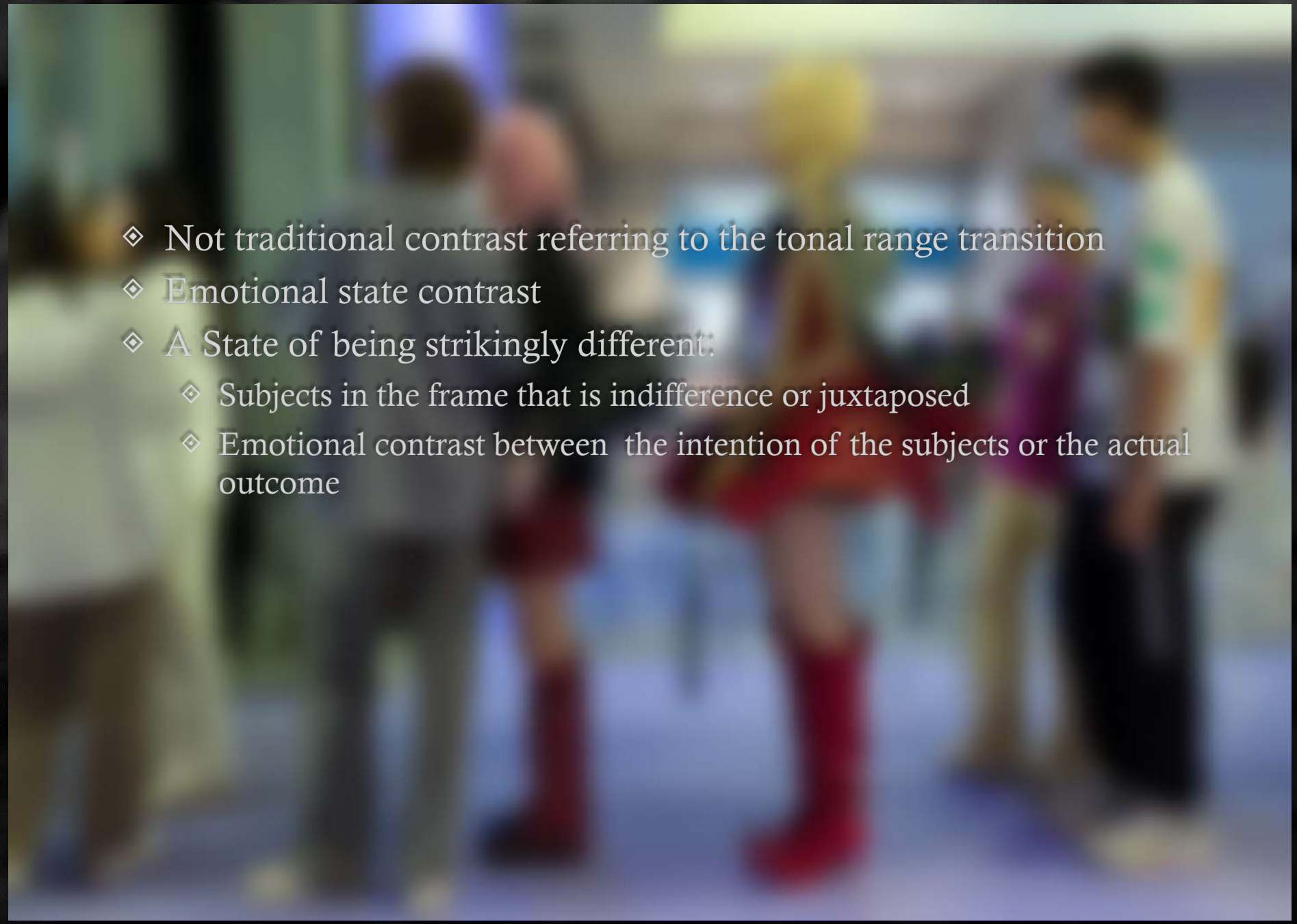
Stories

Colour vs Mono

Contrast

Fashion

Contrast



- Not traditional contrast referring to the tonal range transition
- Emotional state contrast
- A State of being strikingly different:
  - Subjects in the frame that is indifference or juxtaposed
  - Emotional contrast between the intention of the subjects or the actual outcome

Fashion

Contrast

Fashion

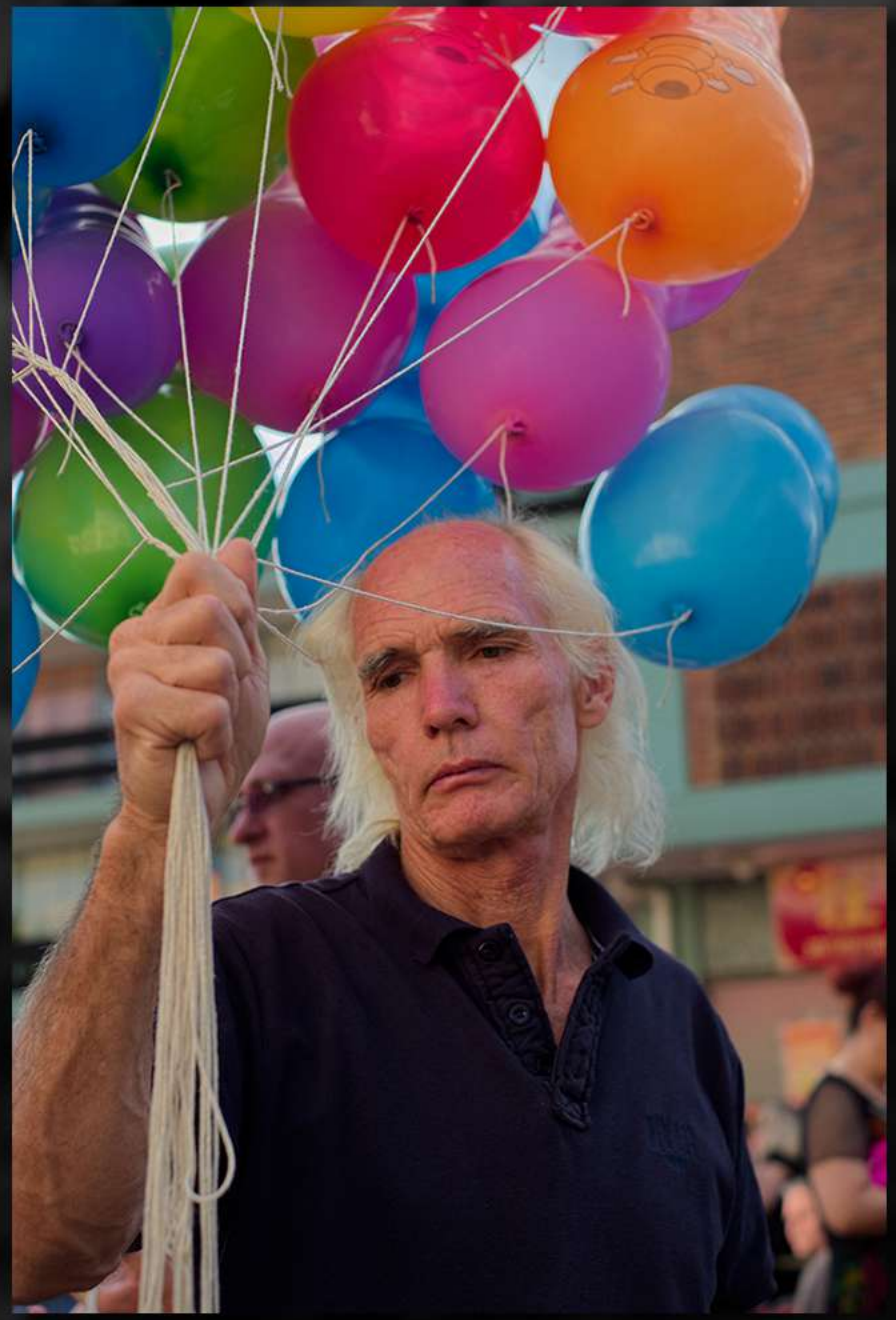
Contrast

High and Low

Contrast

I Wish…

Contrast



Selling Joy

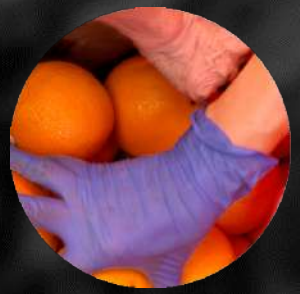
Themes

Colour

Silhouettes

Cubism

Graffiti



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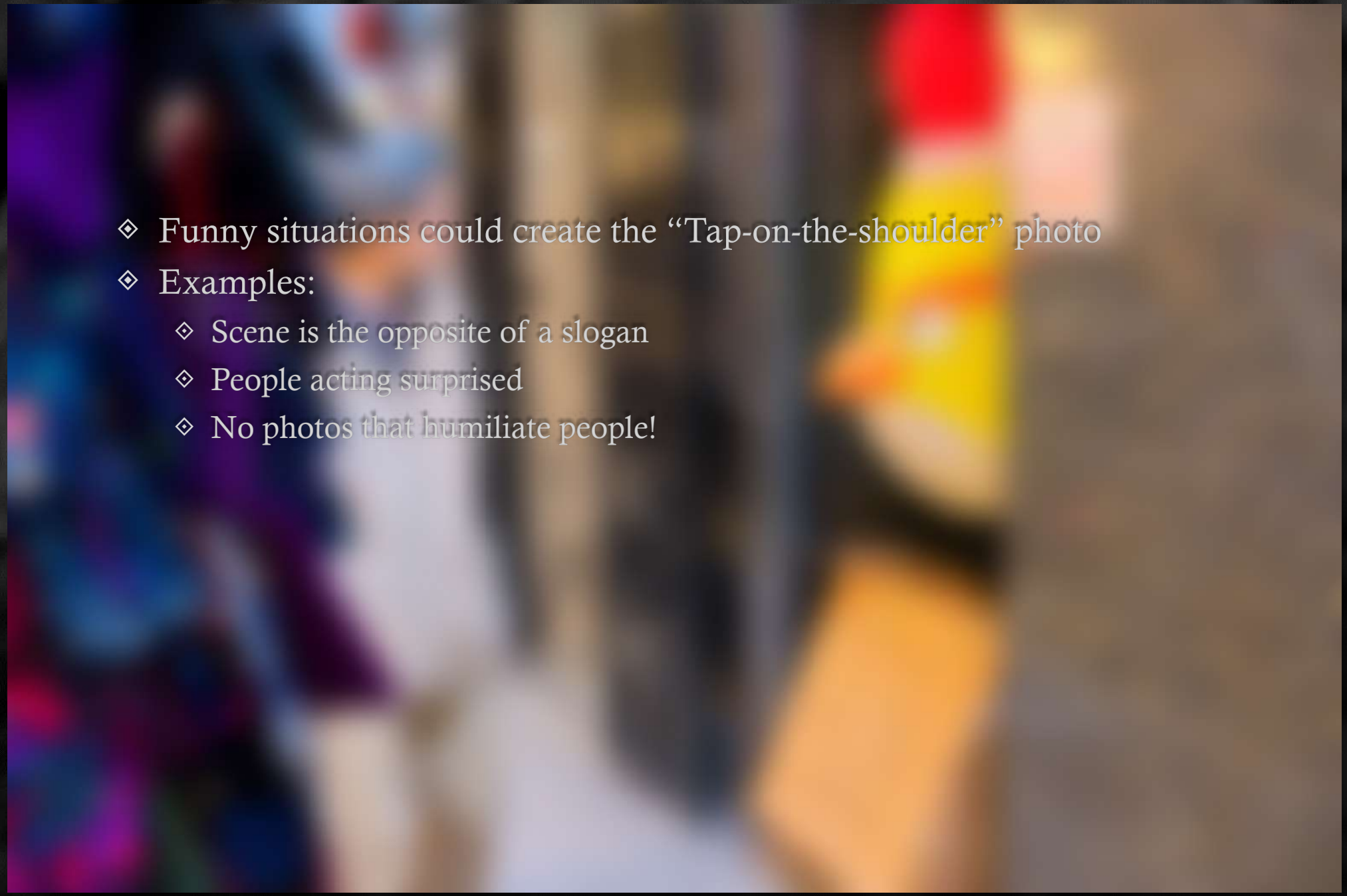
Colour vs Mono

Humour

So What?

Humour



- Funny situations could create the “Tap-on-the-shoulder” photo
- Examples:
  - Scene is the opposite of a slogan
  - People acting surprised
  - No photos that humiliate people!

So What?

Humour

So What?

Humour

RedBull gives you Wings

Humour

Get in Shape

Humour

Get in Shape

Humour

Get in Shape

Humour

Roaring Wild

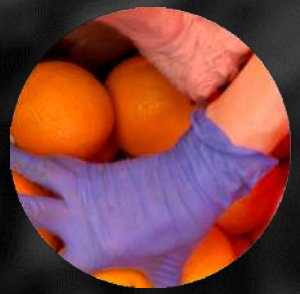
Themes

Colour

Silhouettes

Cubism

Graffiti



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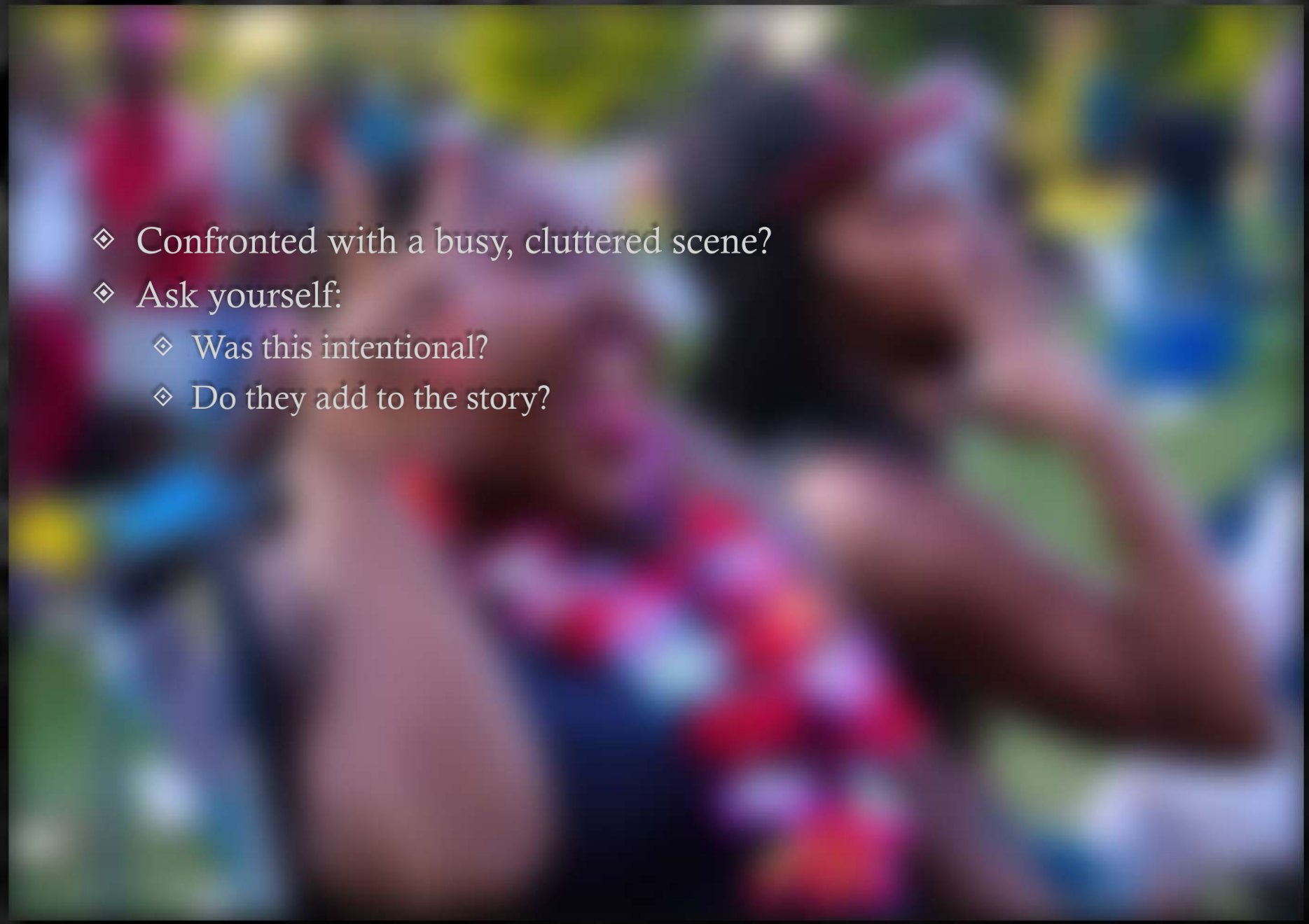
Colour vs Mono

Stories

The Good Times



- Confronted with a busy, cluttered scene?
- Ask yourself:
  - Was this intentional?
  - Do they add to the story?

Stories

The Good Times

The Miracle

Snapshot

Stories

The Benefactor

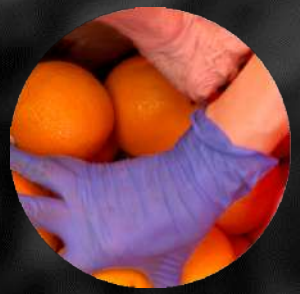
Themes

Colour

Silhouettes

Cubism

Graffiti



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Colour vs Mono

Colour vs. Black & White

Colour vs. Black & White

- Because there are no colour, it needs extra care to be successful
- Does the photographer understand the differences?
- Here are a few things to look out for:
  - How is the contrast handled?
  - What role are shapes, textures and patterns playing?
  - Is the placement of the elements in the frame successful?

Colour vs. Black & White

Colour vs. Black & White

Colour vs. Black & White

Colour vs. Black & White

Themes

Colour

Silhouettes

Cubism

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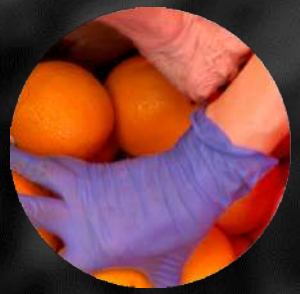

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Theme: Single Photos

Share the Love

Theme: Single Photos

Theme: Single Photos

My Assistant

Theme: Single Photos

Excitement of the Day

Theme: Messages

The Poet's Admirer

Theme: Messages

The Fading Message

Theme: Single Photos

A Long Day

Theme: Single Photos

A Long Day

Theme: Facial Expressions

You Said What!?

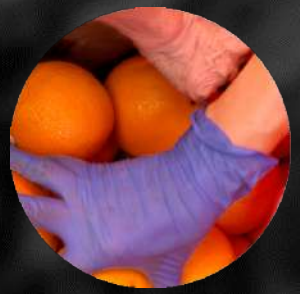
Themes

Colour

Silhouettes

Cubism

Graffiti



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The Art of Street Photography

- Final Notes
  - Don't Hurry
  - Be Observant
  - Remember your Composition
  - Do some Border Patrol
  - Connect with People
  - Enjoy
- Literature
  - As Judge, its important to know as much as possible about Street photography (or any category you are about to judge), so read as much as you can. Some of the books that helped me so far are:
    - **Bystander** by Colin Westerbeck and Joel Meyerowitz
    - **The life of a photograph** by Sam Abell
    - **Think like a Street Photographer** by Matt Stuart
    - **Fine art Street Photography** by Rupert Vandervell
    - **The Photographer's Eye** by Michael Freeman
    - **The Photographer's Mind** by Michael Freeman

When people ask me what equipment I use – I tell them my eyes

- Anonymous