

PictureMaker



Mashonaland Photographic Society

2024 Issue 3

March



“Triptych”



“Pollinators”

By

Bridget Henderson

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Editor's Blurb:

Bridget Henderson

The Easter period was a time spent in greener, much wetter and distinctly colder climes than our home environment for me. Is the grass greener on the other side? This is a question one tends to ask when the going gets increasingly complicated on our side of the fence. Whilst I was fortunate to travel over continents and oceans and have the opportunity to absorb and photograph some astoundingly beautiful landscapes, and have memorable family time, I am grateful to call Zimbabwe home. Economically, politically and environmentally everywhere has significant challenges at the moment, so the grass is only greener in isolated patches of the external paddock in my opinion!

We are all aware that since the internet boom and more recently the Covid epidemic, there have been significant changes economically that have impacted business and society. When you visit a first world country looking for a camera shop on a street (Tottenham Court Rd to Oxford Circus), that used to be nothing but photographic and electronic equipment shops along its entire length, but now there are none, it hits home that our industry has radically changed. It is now not viable for staffed shops to hold copious stocks, paying rent for buildings that few people will frequent, because customers can shop for everything required online. When I finally did find a camera shop with at least some stock, I was shocked at the prices, because they have the overheads of a proper shop vs an online storeroom!

I was also fortunate to visit the World Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2023 and the World Astronomy Photographer of the Year 2023 exhibitions in London. The standard was incredibly high, as would be expected at that level of professionalism, but there were a couple of images that were questionable in terms of "what were the judges thinking?!" There were also a surprising number of winning/commended images that were taken by drones, showing that a different view point is appreciated in an industry where trying to find something "fresh" is becoming increasingly challenging. This prompted the editorial subject matter in this month's PictureMaker, being the basic rules of image composition. I feel that it is worthwhile for all photographers, novice and seasoned, to be reminded of some of the technical and artistic guidelines of our craft. Having said this though, it is important to remember that not all good images are technically perfect, photography is an art and a science, and the best photograph is a memorable one! Aim high and one day some of us could be exhibiting in those hallowed halls too.

In parting, just a word of advice to any fellow members, who like me, may not be diligent in regularly backing up their files onto a safe platform (be it a cloud, SSD drive or whatever), PLEASE take the time to save and bank your memories. Enough said.

Monthly meeting March:

24th April 2024

Venue: Meditation Centre

6 Borrowdale Lane,

Opposite Borrowdale Trauma Centre

May 2024:

President's Platter:

Still Life with Movement

and

Best Picture of 2023

Deadline: 6th May 2024

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From the President's Viewfinder - March 2024



Whilst proofreading this current edition of PictureMaker for Bridget (in particular the article on Composition) I suddenly lost my concentration for the job in hand and starting thinking about our little Society and its vision for the members. What is the vision for the Mashonaland Photographic Society? I've always understood it to be very simple and capable of being expressed as – 'To assist its members to take better photographs'.

Simple to state but perhaps not so simple to do. Whilst encouraging potential new members to join I've often found myself expanding on what we do in the Society and having been a member for so many years wonder if we are putting enough effort into what we say we do. Just how do we teach people in the art of taking better pictures so that they can grow in their photographic pursuits and feel that they are learning continuously and producing pictures which as Bridget says 'will one day grace the walls of exhibition venues in prestigious competitions'?

I endeavour to put myself in the shoes of a new member, having just invested in a camera which I believe will deliver stunning images and now ready for the next stage ask, what do I do next? Over the years we have had countless numbers of people join to learn more and after attending a few meetings have dropped away never to be seen again. Did we do enough to encourage them in their quest or was their expectation of the Society totally different and unrealistic? Their introduction to the Society is to come along to one of the monthly picture review evenings where they have the opportunity to see other members' work and hear how the judges critiqued their pictures with advice as to what could have been done to improve same to produce a more technically correct, impactful and creative picture. Add to this that they may join in an outing to a selected venue to photograph a particular activity, picking up advice as they go and that's about as far as we currently go with their introduction to photography. Is this piecemeal training? Surely, we need to get back to more formalized training, i.e. start at the beginning with the basics and grow it from there.

Bridget's article puts this into perspective and lays out the basis on which future pictures should be taken. If people want to get more out of their efforts than purely taking family pictures and holiday snaps, then initially they need to have a clear understanding of the technical basis for a good picture and the enclosed article on composition does just that. This is the essential expectation of a good picture before worrying too much about impact and creativity. This will come with experience and by developing a photographic eye for good picture captures and what ultimately produces that winning shot. To quote an often-said expression, 'it's not the camera that takes the shot but the person looking through the viewfinder'.

So the emphasis is now on us, the members, to come up with a plan to achieve the above, i.e. better pictures for all our members so that picture evenings become more focused on the creative impact of a picture rather than the technical content which after a while for all of us should become second nature. Let's focus our ideas and plan for what's possible within our small numbers. The suggestion box is now open!

Already mentioned numerous times throughout this edition of PictureMaker is the calendar date for our two annual competitions, the 2023 Annual Best Picture and the 2024 President's Platter. Looking back in the records reveals a steady decline in entries over the past four years: 2020 ABP 41, PP 40, 2023 ABP 22, PP 27. Let's hope for a better entry this year. The rules remain the same: ABP three of your best pictures from 2023 between January and November, pictures must have been entered in a particular month (notated) and may be touched up in accordance with the judges' recommendations at the time of entering. PP is open to all, once more three pictures, and this year promises to be a real challenge with the topic of 'Still life with movement'. Don't ask me for an explanation, none will be forthcoming, go and look it up on the internet and give it your best creative shot. Both competitions will be judged by external judges who have had no previous sight of the 2023 entries. Good luck for both and look forward to seeing you all at the awards evening on the 29th May.

In photography, Nige

Photography Composition Techniques to Improve Your Photos

What is composition?

Composition in photography is simply the arrangement of visual elements within a frame. The term composition literally means 'putting together'. So, to get the perfect shot, the photographer must organize all objects in a scene. **A well-composed shot will stand out from the rest and aid in distinguishing a great photographer from a good photographer.** Composition is a technical and artistic component of the image and results in the viewer's eye automatically being drawn to the most significant and interesting parts of the image.

Why is Composition So Important in Photography?

Composition in photography is the equivalent of the skeleton in the human body. It keeps everything together, supports the weights of various visual elements, and makes the frame look dynamic. A chaotic skeleton wouldn't let your body function properly. Likewise, a chaotic composition wouldn't allow your photograph to tell a story.

Alongside the arrangement of the scene, photo composition is affected by camera settings, lighting decisions, and gear choices. It is a complex process that decides the tone of your visual story and impacts the message you want to convey.

To enrich images and make them more visually appealing, photographers utilize a variety of compositional elements. Patterns, textures, lines, shapes, forms, colour, tone, contrast, depth, frames, symmetry, asymmetry, depth of field, viewpoint, negative space, positive space, and visual tension are among them.

Here follows 10 of the most practised and well-known rules of composition. There are many others, which I will discuss in a future edition of PictureMaker.

Basic Rules of Composition

1. Rule of Thirds

This basic composition technique is based on the idea that placing your subjects off-centre yields a stronger, more natural-looking composition and allows you to make creative use of negative space. Following the Rule of Thirds also serves as the perfect opportunity (or excuse) to shoot your subjects from different angles. This will ultimately allow you to capture more unique images. With the rule of thirds, you have to train yourself to split your camera screen into a grid: imagine a 3x3 grid that divides your frame into nine equal sections (by two vertical and two horizontal lines). Then place the horizon, trees, and other focal points like the eyes and lips along the intersections and lines. This asymmetric composition in photography works well for any genre including landscapes, still-life photography, and portraits.

Most cameras come with a grid to aid you in composing your images this way.



2. The Golden Ratio/Spiral

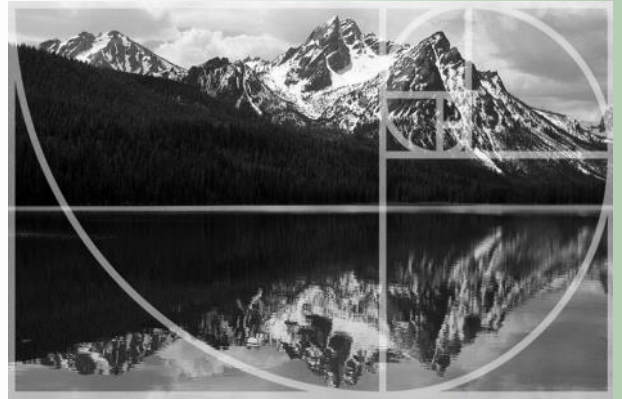
The Golden Spiral differentiates from the rule of thirds by the balance of the photograph. Here, the focus of the photograph is more towards the centre (with more details). The roots of this rule go back centuries and can be found in notable works of art. In essence, it is the perfect balance with a ratio of 1 to 1.618, and is widely used in photography, architecture, and art.

Instead of nine equal rectangles, the frame is divided into a sequence of squares that form a Golden Spiral, also known as the Fibonacci Spiral, which resembles a shell. The spiral guides the viewer's eye around the frame and shows how the scene should develop.



It all comes down to the long sweeping arc of the spiral. Putting your subjects along a curved line rather than straight grid lines draws the viewer's eyes around the picture, forcing it to go closer to the tight coil of the spiral where you've placed your point of interest. It's like a giant subliminal road sign pointing the eyes towards where you want them to go.

This image by Ansel Adams is a good example of the Golden Spiral composition technique.



3. Leading Lines

Take advantage of the structures and lines in landscapes. Use them in proportion to your subjects to lead the eye into the picture.

Everything can serve as leading lines: rivers, dunes, waves, roads, paths, bridges, fences, staircases, hallways, patterns, etc. Furthermore, leading lines do not necessarily have to be straight.



4. Balancing Elements

Placing your main subject off-centre, as with the rule of thirds, creates a more interesting photo, but it can leave a void in the scene which can make it feel empty. You can achieve a balanced composition and even out the main subject's "visual weight" by including another object of equal or lesser importance to fill the space. There are 5 different types of compositional balance used in photography being:

4a Asymmetrical Balance:

Also known as informal balance, asymmetrical balance involves the deliberate off-centre placement of the main subject in the photograph. To achieve asymmetrical balance, you must balance the visual weight of your main subject with a dissimilar object or objects on the opposite side of the frame, use two different or contrasting subjects or elements. They can be anything – two different objects, two of the same object that differ in size or colour, uneven yet balanced amounts of light and dark tones, or two different concepts. In some cases, negative space—the unoccupied area surrounding the main subject—can also work as part of asymmetrical balance.



4b Colour Balance:

Colour balance is a form of asymmetrical balance that contrasts bright, vibrant colours with more neutral colours. Bright colours have more visual weight than pastel or muted tones, and too much of one or the other can make the image feel unbalanced. You can achieve colour balance by juxtaposing a small splash of bold colour against a larger neutral, empty space, or vice versa.



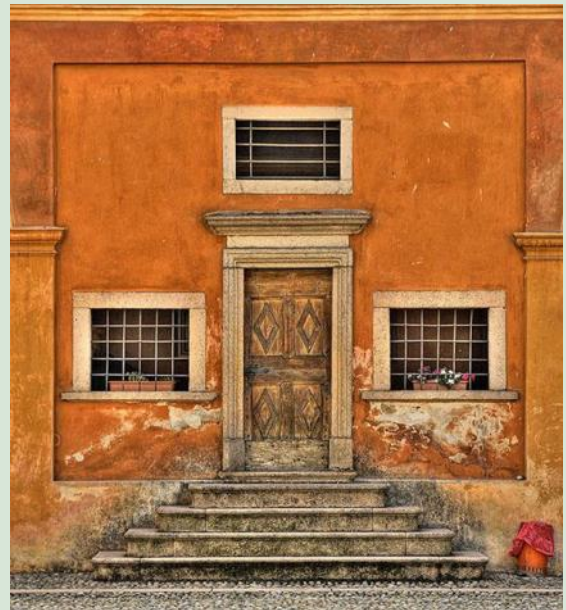
4c Conceptual Balance:

This technique relies more on the idea that's depicted by the photograph than the individual balance of elements. A conceptually balanced composition features two objects that are philosophical opposites. A photograph featuring a modern skyscraper on the left side of the image and a Victorian home on the right side is an example of conceptual balance.



4d Symmetrical Balance:

Among the most basic compositional techniques is symmetrical balance, also known as formal balance. We humans unconsciously look for symmetry in all things. A photograph with elements that are almost perfectly balanced usually makes for a very appealing image. Symmetrical balance requires the photographer to place the main subject at the centre of the image so that both sides appear symmetrical or as a mirror image if vertical lines are drawn through them. In landscape photography, a symmetrically balanced image might feature the reflection of a tree, bird or other object in the water.



4e Tonal Balance:

Like colour balance, tonal balance relies on juxtaposing dark images with lighter ones in black-and-white photography. Dark colours, like bright colours, have greater visual weight than lighter ones, so a tonally balanced photograph would feature images in black and darker shades of grey that contrast with areas of lighter shades and white.



5. Background



How many times have you taken what you thought would be a great shot, only to find that the final image lacks impact because the subject blends into a busy background? The human eye is excellent at distinguishing between different elements in a scene, whereas a camera tends to flatten the foreground and background, and this can often ruin an otherwise great photo. Thankfully this problem is usually easy to overcome at the time of shooting – look around for a plain and unobtrusive background and compose your shot so that it doesn't distract or detract from the subject. Also make use of shallow depth of field to blur fussy backgrounds i.e. use your widest open aperture particularly for portraiture and images with strong focal points.

6. Framing

As you plan how to frame your shots, consider that outside structures can serve as natural frames. This can be things like windows, doors, or arches, so use them to your advantage! This composition in photography is also called frame within the frame. What makes a photograph like this interesting is that it is soothing to the eye. Note that frames don't necessarily have to fully surround your subject. You can also use tree trunks and hanging tree branches as a frame.



7. Fill the Frame

To fill the frame, your subject should occupy a significant portion of your image, leaving no or little space around it. This way, the photographer removes all distractions, allowing the viewer to focus on the main subject and explore every detail.

Get up close and personal with your subjects. Have them fill in the frame so that they are the focal point and the dominant feature of the photograph. We can fill the frame by using a zoom lens and getting close to our subject. But it's often better to “zoom with your feet” i.e. get physically closer to your subject. In post-processing, consider a tight crop on your subject to fill the frame.



8. Use the Negative Space Around Objects

Opposite to filling the frame is the use of negative space. Negative space is the use of the space between or around subjects as an important element in the image. It sometimes becomes its own subject with its own shape. Negative space can show scale or imply an “empty” feeling. Sometimes it’s difficult to see negative space because we’re so used to focusing on a subject. Try flipping your images upside down in post-processing. This will help you see space without being too focused on the details of your main subject. This type of composition is often used in minimalistic images and often has great impact.



9. Patterns and Repetition

There is a reason why we love patterns – they are aesthetically pleasing to the eye. In this example, a man-made pattern provides an attractive composition. However, you can look for repetitions and patterns created by nature, such as an alley of trees, dunes, or waves. Conversely another aspect to explore: include something in your photograph that interrupts a pattern, adding an element of surprise.

10. Add Depth or the Figure to Ground Rule

Photography compresses three-dimensional reality into flat, 2D images. It’s important that photos communicate a sense of dimension by building depth into their visuals. This can be done by playing with the scale of elements in a photo, maximizing the contrast between elements in the foreground and background. Try to focus on your subjects and make them stand out by narrowing in on the contrast between the subject and the background. The more contrast, the more dramatic your shots, and the more prominent your subject. A winning photo composition is one in which your main subject is isolated due to the contrast solution.



Don’t forget to break the rules occasionally! The very idea of composition may seem a little daunting because of all of the “rules”—but don’t worry! They’re not exactly principles that must be strictly followed. They are not cast in stone, and almost each one can be broken if you have good reason to do so. As with all art, you must know and understand the “rules” before you can break them effectively.

Ultimately the best photograph is a memorable one, even if it is not technically perfect.

March 2024 MPS competition results

“Triptych”

1st place SET SUBJECT :

“Pollinators”

Bridget Henderson

This image is composed of 3 different pictures, all taken at Mauhuradonha Wilderness Area on my Canon R5 with an EF 100mm f/2.8 L macro lens.



2nd place SET SUBJECT

“Sunflower Triad”

Chris Sheppard

Camera: Canon EOS 5D Mk iii

Lens: Canon EF 70-200mm L

Aperture: f/5.0

Shutter speed:

ISO: 100

Focal length: 200mm

Single image taken on a farm in Karoi.



3rd place SET SUBJECT

“Ardent Fishermen”

Bridget Henderson

Camera: Canon EOS R5

Lens: Canon EF 70-200mm L

Aperture: f/2.8

Shutter speed: 1/2500 sec

ISO: 100

Focal length: 140mm

Single image taken in Salt Rock, KZN, SA.



March 2024 MPS competition results cont...



1st place OPEN CATEGORY

“Lilac-breasted Roller”

Dave Dell

Camera: Canon EOS R3

Lens: Canon RF 100-500mm L

Aperture: f/7.1

Shutter speed: 1/4000 sec

ISO: 600

Focal length: 500mm



2nd place OPEN CATEGORY

“Tranquility”

Chris Sheppard

Camera: Canon EOS 5 D Mk iii

Lens: Canon EF 15- 35mm
f/2.8 L

Aperture: f/5.6

Shutter speed: 1/800 sec

ISO: 100

Focal length: 16mm

EV: -1.3



3rd place OPEN CATEGORY

“Hyena Hunting”

George Fleet

Camera: Canon EOS R6

Lens: Canon RF 600mm

Aperture: f/11

Shutter speed: 1/2000 sec

ISO: Auto

Focal length: 600mm

Important MPS Dates and Set Subjects 2024

This year sees a change in format for our set subjects in that there will be no rules applied on a monthly basis i.e. It will be up to the author's own interpretation of a particular topic as to how he or she sees it and produces a picture. Every month pictures may be in colour or black and white, manipulation is allowed. Images are due by Noon on the deadline date.

~~JANUARY~~

~~Emptiness~~

Completed

~~FEBRUARY~~

~~Back or side Lighting~~

Completed

~~MARCH~~

~~Triptych / Multi-frame~~

~~Deadline: 4th March~~

~~Meeting date: 27th March~~

~~APRIL~~

~~Cobwebs~~

~~Deadline: 8th April~~

~~Meeting date: 24th April~~

MAY: Two trophy events

President's Platter : Still Life with Movement

Deadline: 6th May

All paid-up MPS members may enter this Set Subject. No 'Open' in May.

Best Picture of 2023

Deadline: 6th May

For Members who entered from Jan–Nov inclusive in 2023, your best 3 entries. Indicate month entered for each entry.

Minor editing allowed to improve entries from 2023 in line with judges' comments.

Meeting date: 29th May



JUNE

Midday Sun

Deadline: 3rd June

Meeting date: 26th June

JULY

Creative Ice

Deadline: 1st July

Meeting date: 24th July

AUGUST

Surrealism

Deadline: 5th August

Meeting date: 28th August

SEPTEMBER

A Winding Road or Path

Deadline: 2nd September

Meeting date: 25th September

OCTOBER

Vanishing Point

Deadline: 7th October

Meeting date: 30th October

NOVEMBER

Sensational Summer

Deadline: 4th November

Meeting date: 27th November

Still Life with Movement

Deadline: 6th May 2024

May is the month in which MPS members get to submit pictures in two competition categories and the winner of each category gets awarded a trophy. The President’s Platter set subject category this month is “Still Life With Movement”. The trophy to be won is the Roy Maurer President’s Platter copper shield. There is no open category in May 2024.

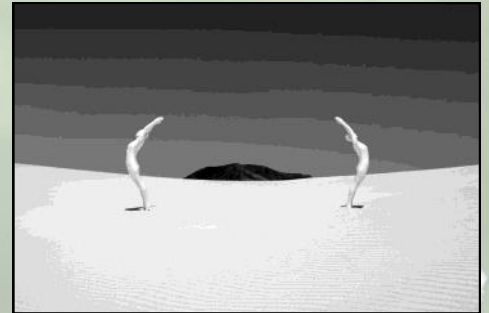
The second category is Best Picture of 2023: members who entered from Jan–Nov 2023 inclusive, can enter their 3 chosen best images entered in that year. On each entry the 2023 month entered must be indicated. Minor editing is allowed to improve entries in line with judges' comments at the time. The winner will receive the impressive Addecott Open Challenge Cup.

Still Life with Movement:

Now this is a set subject that requires a bit of thinking “outside the box” and is quite a challenge to interpret: it could mean an image of a static object with a component that is moving (e.g. the pancakes and pouring syrup photo shown below) or it could be a completely static subject that portrays movement in the shape of the object or flow of the image (the eye is led by light or lines within the image).

In any still life the key components are:

- Interesting subject matter
- Use light to highlight key areas of the image
- Make sure the background is not distracting
- Texture is important

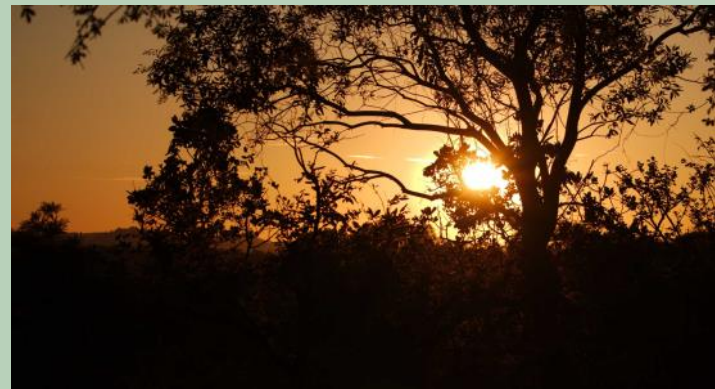


The entries in this one will be interesting!



March 2024 Triptych Montage





**March
2024
Open
Montage**

