Eye-Catching Photographs: Humor, Emotion & Personal
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Question: Whose work do you find stimulating, interesting, or eye catching and why?

This is an interesting question, because viewing someone else's work is such a subjective thing. What I may like, for instance, might not appeal to someone else. And what I see as being perfectly suited for advertising might not be my personal cup of tea. I will admit that it does take a lot to impress me, and with so many photographers out there, it takes even more to stand out from the crowd. Sadly, and all too often, we can say "I've seen it before" - because we have. So how on earth do you look remotely different or come up with something that hasn't been seen before?

Make Me Laugh!

Not long ago, I judged a photo contest and to be honest, for the most part I was not impressed with the overall standard of photography. In some cases, I was completely astonished by what was submitted as "contest-worthy." Of the few images that did stand out, many were the ones that made me laugh. Humor is a wonderful thing! Once a photographer has me laughing, they have already stimulated me and made themselves memorable. Now if they make me think, and then laugh again … even better, because each time I return to that image, I might laugh a little harder, or I might see something new and laugh a little more.

People remember good humor, and I don't necessarily mean obvious, cheesy humor. I'm talking about the more thought-provoking humor where perhaps the photographer has combined some truly bizarre elements together, which then turns into its own new visual story. One of my favorite examples of this is English photographer David Stewart. For years I had one of his images up on my notice board by my desk of a large rapper seated in the back of a limo next to a tiny little Chihuahua – the absurdity of the juxtaposition always made me laugh. And I still have the image too!

© David Stewart

Move Me!

For me, a good photograph is one that "moves" me in some way, and not just through laughter. There has to be an emotional response of some kind. All good imagery is going to do that - it will "move" you, startle you, sadden you, enrage you, puzzle you, and even make you cry. It could be a frightening image of war-torn Afghanistan, or a sumptuous series of luxurious chocolate deserts, perhaps an innocent baby asleep in its mother's arms, or a giant insect about to eat its prey … there's a whole host of possible examples of the powerful emotional pull of imagery.

One image that comes to mind is one I recently used in my newsletter, of a week-old puppy with the photographer's somewhat "gritty" assistant. Interestingly, this image also contains a wonderful juxtaposition that produces a beautiful photograph, but it is not there to be funny, it was not planned, instead it was a lucky moment that photographer Michael Brian, who specializes in dog imagery, was able to capture while on a shoot for Cesar's Way magazine at the North Shore Animal Shelter.
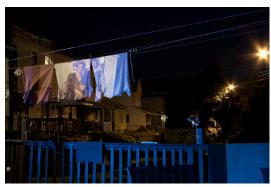

© Michael Brian

Keep it Personal and Make it Your Own – No One Likes a Copycat!

Sometimes it's very hard to distinguish yourself from all of the other photographers out there, but we each have a unique soul and sense of expression that is exclusive to us. So by keeping your work personal in some way, you are tapping into your inherent creative soul.

A photographer whose originality in approaching her idea and subject really stands out for me is Judi Stuffick. I met Judi through judging the ASMP Philadelphia chapter contest last year. Instead of simply shooting family portraits in and around the family homes, she decided to first sort through a myriad of family albums and then selected the photographs that best represented and spoke to the memory of her childhood including images of herself, her younger brothers, her parents and grandparents. Judi took these photos and turned them into slides, which she then projected first of all onto trees, and subsequently onto the homes of her grandparents, mother and father. I was very taken by this idea and personal exploration and found the results to be extremely satisfying visually even before I even knew the story behind them.

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