



Drawing the Eye

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In this lesson, we're going to take a look at how we can direct the viewer's eye through our photographs. Know that this topic will be split up into two lessons. In this first part, we will focus on the shooting process and things to consider when you're behind the camera. In the second part, we'll look at how to direct the eye using post-processing techniques on the computer.

Let's take a look at the general concepts that influence where you look in a photograph how you might be able to use those when you're out shooting.

HIGH CONTRAST

I find that the eye is first drawn to the area that is brightest and has the most contrast in a picture. When an area has high contrast, it means that there are really bright areas adjacent to really dark areas.

COLOR

After contrast, the eye is drawn to the areas that have the most color, and it tends to look at the warm colors before the cool colors. Warm colors would include yellows, oranges, reds, etc. Cool colors would include blues, greens, cyans, etc.



When I look at this image, I find that my eye first goes to the bright water on the left side of the waterfall. This is the brightest, highest contrast area. It then moves to the warm pink part of the sky.

TEXT

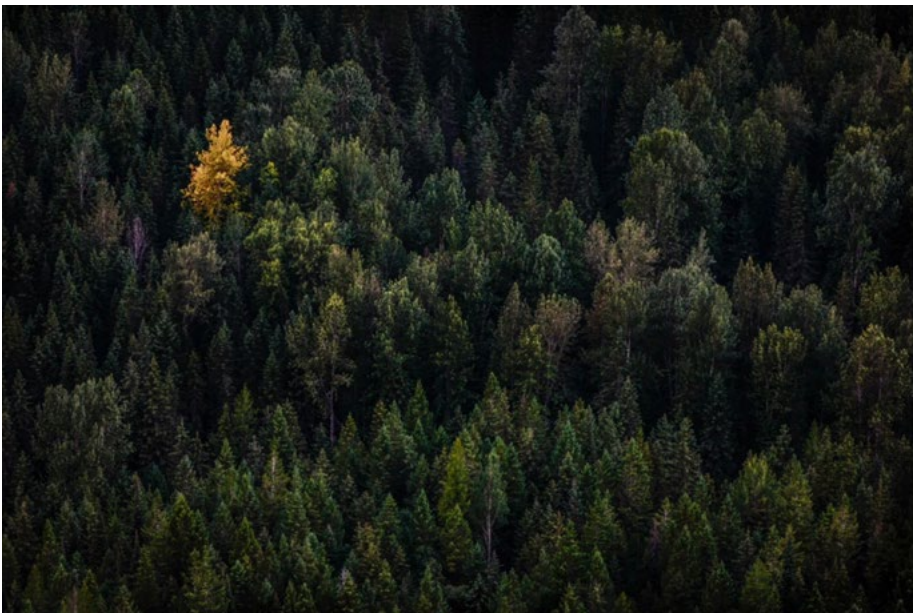
The eye is also naturally directed toward text. If an image includes text (that's in a language you know), you generally will not be able to help but read it.



The eye is immediately drawn to the high-contrast bright area of this image, but it quickly makes its way to the text. Any text that appears in an image will always be read.

AN INTERRUPTION IN THE IMAGE

The eye is also drawn to any kind of interruption to something that's regular. For example, if you have a repeating pattern that is interrupted by an object of a different shape or color, the eye will naturally be drawn to that object.



In this image, the yellow tree is not only the area with the highest contrast, but it's also the only area that deviates from the repeating color in the photograph. This causes the eye to be drawn right toward it.

GRAPHIC SHAPES

This concept is similar to the idea that the eye is drawn to areas of high contrast. If you have an element that is so dark that it becomes a silhouette (or close to it), the eye will be drawn to the area because it is a graphic shape. I use this concept a lot when I'm out shooting. If I see a subject that I think would look good as a graphic shape, then I'll look for a bright background on which to place them and then I'll underexpose the image until that subject becomes a silhouette.

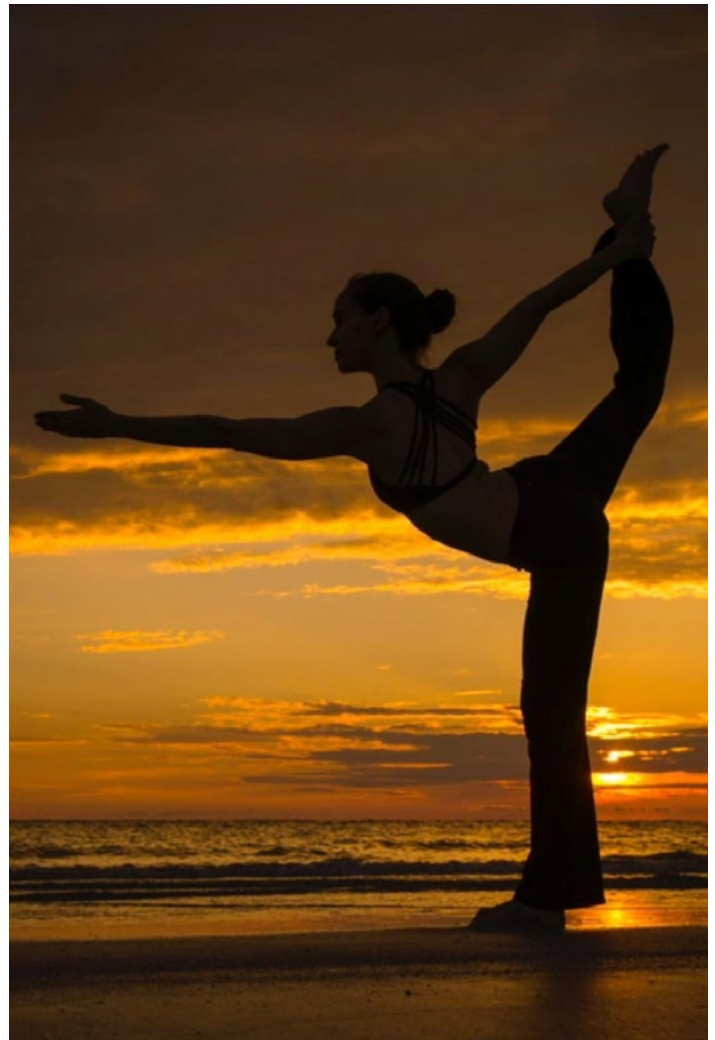
In the example image of the statue silhouette, you can see that the composition was planned very purposefully because the sun was perfectly positioned behind the subject in order to create that really high contrast.



The eye is naturally drawn to the graphic shapes in these images. In the statue example on the right, you can see that the composition was planned very purposefully because the sun was perfectly positioned behind the subject in order to create that really high contrast.

MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS

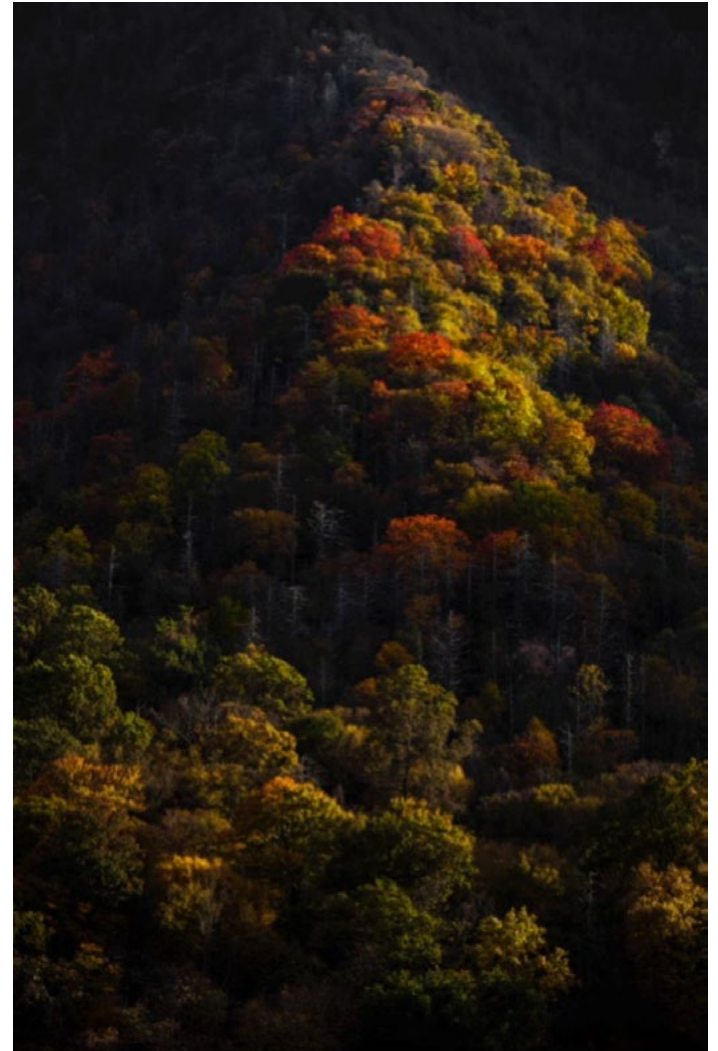
If there are distracting elements that are not contributing to the image, they can easily draw the viewer's attention away from the subject. If you see distracting elements in your frame (Ex: tourists in the background), try to recompose in such a way that eliminates them. This might involve getting the camera higher or lower, or you could reposition yourself and/or your subject in order to find an angle that doesn't include the distractions.



After capturing the image at left, I repositioned my subject so that I could eliminate the distracting people in the background.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE SUN

When considering the elements that draw a viewer's eye, it is always useful to pay attention to what the sun is doing. The early morning and late afternoon sunlight is very warm and directional. If you find it falling on a worthy subject, you will achieve both the contrast and the warm colors that draw the eye.



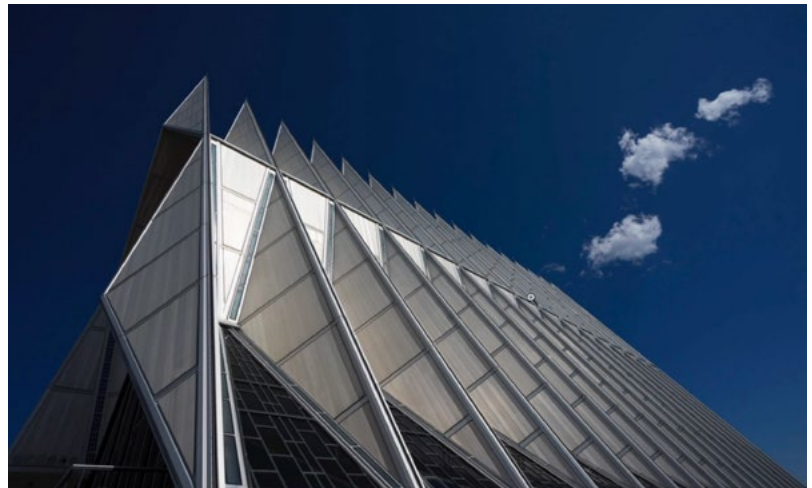
Both of these images were achieved by paying attention to where the late afternoon/early morning sun was falling. When this type of light kisses an interesting subject, the results create a beautiful warm and directional light.

LEADING LINES

You can also use lines in your image to lead the viewer's eye. The eye tends to follow distinct lines and you can use them to lead the eye toward the subject. When it comes to lines, horizontal and vertical lines provide a more grounding and stable feel, while curved and diagonal lines make the image more dynamic.



The color and contrast in this image immediately draw the eye to the subject. There are also many leading lines here. The angled leg and curved line of the bridge also point the viewer toward the subject.



ABOVE: Diagonal lines tend to make an image more dynamic. LEFT: The diagonal lines created by the subject contrast with the vertical lines of the building.

SUBJECT IN SUN, BACKGROUND IN SHADE

Here is a technique for ensuring that you get the greatest contrast between your subject and its background. If you have control over the placement of your subject, place them in the sun, set against a shady background. This will ensure that the subject has lots of contrast in comparison to the dark background and that the viewer's eye will go right toward them.



There is a lot of contrast between the subject and the background because the subject was placed in the sun and the background is in the shade.

BREAK UP A REPEATING PATTERN

We mentioned above that the eye is naturally drawn to a break in a repeating pattern. If you have many elements that are similar (in color, shape, etc.), and then you throw in one item that is different, that different element will call for attention. You can use this as a way of drawing attention to your subject. Find an area that has several repeating elements and then position your subject such that it breaks up that repeating pattern.



In these images, the subject is placed such that she breaks up the repeating elements in the scene.

SUBJECT LOOKING INTO LENS

If you want to keep the eye from exploring the background, have the subject look directly at the camera. Whenever the subject is looking directly at the viewer, it tends to grab their attention and hold it.



The subject holds the viewer's attention more when they are looking into the camera lens.

MAKE THE SUBJECT SHARP AND BACKGROUND BLURRY

The eye is interested in detail and it will therefore pay attention to sharp areas more than blurry areas. One way to call the attention to your subject is to keep them sharp while making the background blurry. This can be best achieved by using a wide aperture and a longer lens.

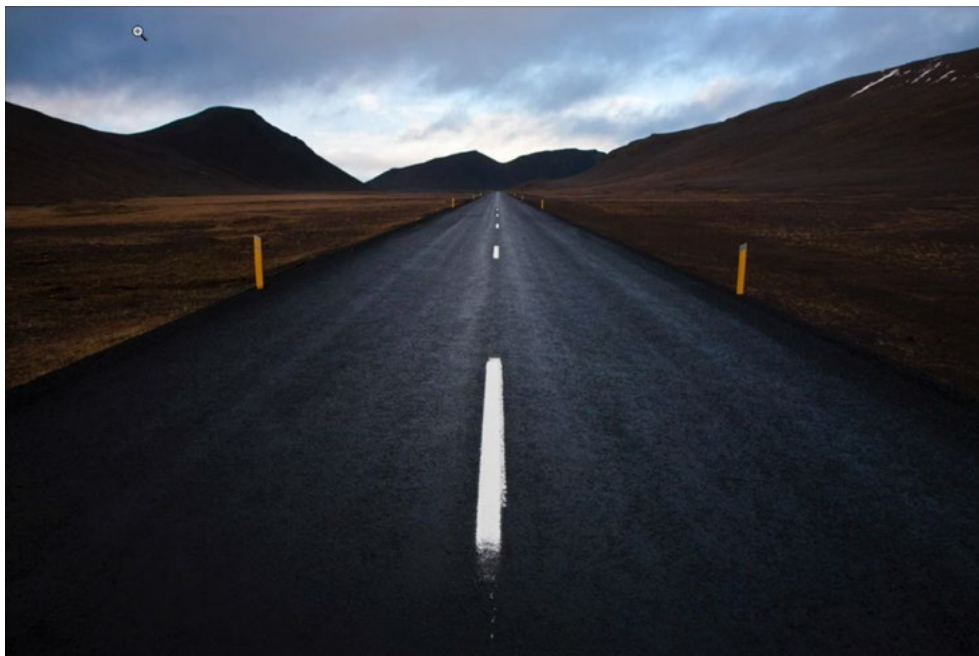


Attention is drawn to the subject here because the background is blurry. The eye is naturally more attracted to areas that are sharp, containing more detail.

MORE EXAMPLE IMAGES:



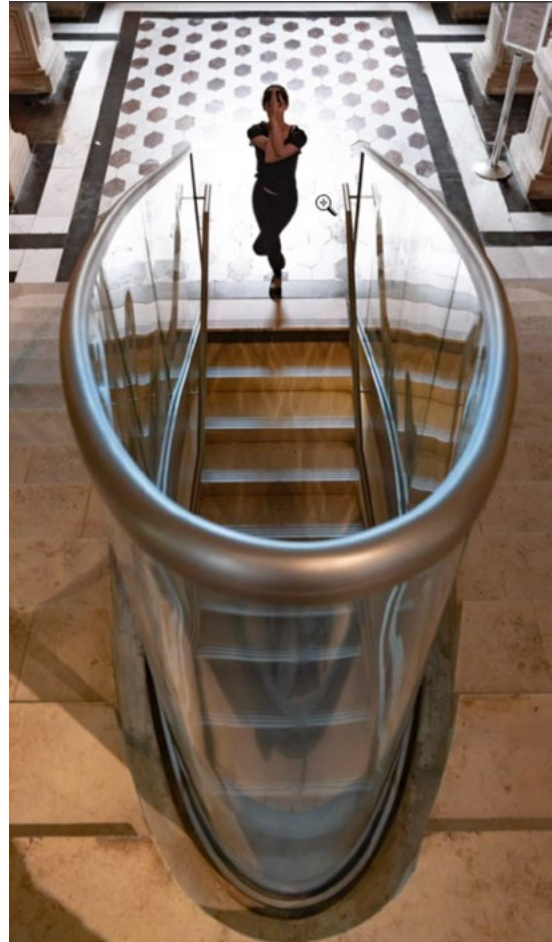
Leading lines draw the attention to the subject, and she is also wearing high-contrast clothing, which draws the eye as well.



The high contrast, bright lines on the road pull the eye in, and the angled lines lead the eye down the scene.



The dark cages against the bright background create a lot of contrast. The cages become graphical elements that draw interest.



The subject was perfectly placed in front of the brightest area in the frame. This creates a high-contrast silhouette. The curved lines of the railing also lead directly to the subject.



ABOVE: The diagonal line of the bridge leads the eye directly to the interesting building in the distance. When using leading lines to guide the eye, make sure there is a visual payoff at the end of the line.

RIGHT: The eye is drawn both to the bright sun and the graphical shape of the subject, placed against one of the brightest areas in the image.

