

# A FEW THOUGHTS ON THE CRITIQUE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

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# Photography

WHAT IS PHOTOGRAPHY ABOUT?

# Photography

## Quotations of some well-known photographers

*To me, photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event.*

Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908 - 2004)

# Photography

## Quotations of some well-known photographers

*Don't shoot what it looks like. Shoot what it feels like.*

David Alan Harvey (1944)

# Photography

## Quotations of some well-known photographers/film directors

*When you photograph a face  
you photograph the soul behind it.*

Jean-Luc Godard (1930)

# Photography

**The soul behind?**



# Photography

## Quotation of an un-known photographer

*A picture does not exist if it is not seen.*

# Photography

**Share it. Pass your message to others.**

- ▶ Not easy.
- ▶ We are all different and everybody interprets the image through their own experience.



# Photography

Share it. Pass your message to others.

*There are always two people in every picture:  
the photographer and the viewer.*

Ansel Adams (1902 - 1984)

# Photography

Share it. Pass your message to others.

*A good photograph is one that communicates a fact, touches the heart and leaves the viewer a changed person for having seen it. It is, in a word, effective.*

Irving Penn (1917 - 2009)

# CONSTRUCTIVE CRITIQUE

## Constructive Critique

To critique does not mean to criticise;  
it means to analyze.

# Constructive Critique

## Message

- ▶ Try to find out what the author wants to say through the image.
- ▶ Think whether the message is clear (even if it is only your own interpretation).
- ▶ Find out what distracts you from the message (if anything).
- ▶ A small change can make a big difference.

# Constructive Critique

**Message: Beauty of Nature**

Is the message well presented?



Original picture



Cleaned from distraction

# Constructive Critique

**Message: Beauty of Nature**

Is the message well presented?



Original picture



More light

# Constructive Critique

**Message: Beauty of Nature**

Is the message well presented?



Original picture



Changed hue/white balance



# Constructive Critique

**Message: Feeling Protected**



Posing



Natural interaction



Strengthened by a  
crop

# Constructive Critique

**Message: Mysticism of Classical Sculpture**



A classical sculpture in Jupiter Artland

# Constructive Critique

**Message: Mysticism of Classical Sculpture**



A classical sculpture in Jupiter Artland

# Constructive Critique

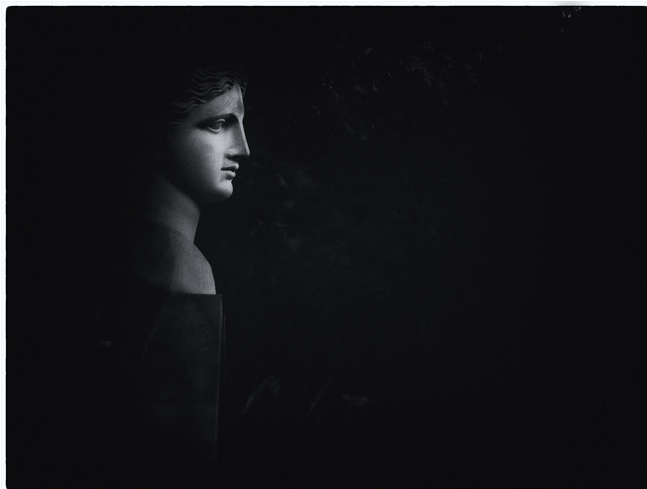
**Message: Mysticism of Classical Sculpture**



A classical sculpture in Jupiter Artland

# Constructive Critique

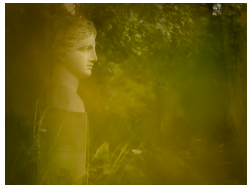
**Message: Mysticism of Classical Sculpture**



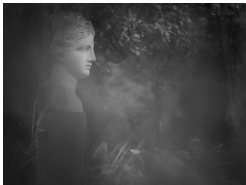
A classical sculpture in Jupiter Artland

# Constructive Critique

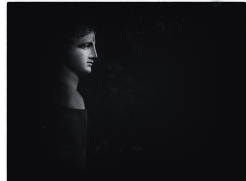
**Message: Mysticism of Classical Sculpture**



Too busy;  
colour cast



Still too busy;  
a bit better



Cleaner;  
more impact

## Constructive Critique

*The trouble with most of us is that we'd rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism.*

Norman Vincent Peale (1898 - 1993) Dutch Reformed minister

# Constructive Critique

## How to do it?

### My DOs and DON'Ts

- ▶ Do not offend the photographer; voice your opinion in a friendly way.
- ▶ Do not discourage the photographer:
  - ▶ have in mind the experience of the photographer;
  - ▶ adjust your comments to it;
  - ▶ still, be honest in your critique.
- ▶ First think about the message you get from the image, then about the technicalities.
- ▶ Tell the message to the photographer (she/he may be rather surprised!).
- ▶ Say what you like about the picture (if anything).
- ▶ Say what could be improved (if anything).
- ▶ Say how could it be improved (if possible).



# Constructive Critique

## RPS Travel Group Blog

Good to get comments from more than one person.

# Constructive Critique

RPS Travel Group Blog



Frosty morning in Yellowstone

# Constructive Critique

## RPS Travel Group Blog

This certainly conveys how cold it was!

It is a lovely image and, for me, proves to be an effective exception to the photography guideline that odd numbers are to be preferred to even ones.

# Constructive Critique

## RPS Travel Group Blog

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# Constructive Critique

## RPS Travel Group Blog

I think this is great. **You don't have to follow "rules"**; for me they are just guidelines and very useful when you are starting out.

Here the two work very well and stand out well from the background which is very cold but not distracting. Super!

# Constructive Critique

## RPS Travel Group Blog

This is a really good image. Yet I can't help asking "How could it be made great?"

Certainly a single bison would stand out better, though you have got one of them looking at you (good) and the other looking extremely frozen (good, also).

Maybe with the background more out of focus or blurred (if your lens goes wider than f5.6?) or adjusting the levels for the right animal only, so it stands out?

# Constructive Critique

## RPS Travel Group Blog

I like it - **it makes me feel icy cold.**

There's a real sense of the bison trudging heavily through the snow.

**I don't feel strongly about the number of bison** but I agree it would also be a strong image with the right hand bison alone on the right of the image.

# Constructive Critique

## RPS Travel Group Blog

It certainly conveys a feeling of coldness well.

I'd have preferred a single bison much closer just framed by the foliage.

At present the animals and the cold branches have equal billing.



# Constructive Critique

RPS Travel Group Blog



Frosty morning in Yellowstone

# Constructive Critique

## RPS Travel Group Blog



Before



After

# Constructive Critique

## Rules

*There are no rules for good photographs,  
there are only good photographs.*

Ansel Adams (1902 - 1984)

# Constructive Critique

Please give me your feedback for this picture



Flood in Memphis

# Constructive Critique

Please give me your feedback for this picture



Flood in Memphis

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Flood in Memphis



# Constructive Critique

## Learning Process

*We don't learn from our good images;  
we learn from the ones that can be improved on.*

Jen Rozenbaum

# Constructive Critique

## Conclusions

- ▶ It may be a good idea to ask if a photographer wants to hear your opinion.
- ▶ Also, ask why they took the picture and what message do they want to convey.
- ▶ Try to give advice which would not change their message.
- ▶ Try to be objective, not too biased by your own style of photography.
- ▶ Avoid words like “should”, “has to”, “must”, “never”, “rubbish”.
- ▶ Adjust your commenting to the photographer’s level of experience.
- ▶ By definition, critique constructively and in a friendly manner.

# Constructive Critique

## Conclusions

- ▶ Constructive critique is not just saying that you like the image or you do not like the image.
- ▶ It is indicating what makes the picture work and what does not and why.
- ▶ Also, it is friendly to give advice on what to do and how to improve the image or how to avoid similar mistakes in future.

# Constructive Critique

## Conclusions

- ▶ Constructive critique is a skill.
- ▶ We improve the skill with practice.
- ▶ Improving the skill will let us analyze our own pictures more easily and more effectively.

# Finally

*One doesn't stop seeing. One doesn't stop framing. It doesn't turn off and on. It's on all the time.*

Annie Leibovitz (1949)

Thank You

