



## Capturing the Moment and Controlling the Emotion

Time and time again on our Masterclasses we see students struggling to reveal their desired previsualised image or essence of the moment. Why is this so hard to do? What is the secret to capturing that oh so elusive second in time? Even when the composition is good the photo can still lack that spark of emotion, so what is the key to success?

Looking at the psychology of how the brain interprets our surroundings might just give us a clue. The brain has the unenviable job of interpreting everything we see, hear, feel, taste and smell, and it has to do this every second of every day. Our brain receives so much information on a second by second basis, it needs a filter system. The brain is programmed to filter out information that it deems unimportant. This happens every second of every day. If you present the brain with something it can't recognise as useless, it will stop and look closer. It is in this moment that your photograph will become important to the viewer.

### Read the short passage below.

*Imagine that you are standing looking out across the sea. The gulls are crying over head, you can taste the sea salt on your lips and you can smell that recognisable smell of the sea. You watch as the sea crashes onto the shore, the strong coastal winds buffets you as it starts to rain.*

Now, anyone should be able to visualise the picture we have painted. In fact, we know some people will be able to remember a windy March holiday from their childhood, and possibly they will almost be able to feel the wind or taste the sea salt on their lips. If we were to show you a picture of this same vista we don't think you would have the same reaction or emotions. So how come we can evoke these images so easily within the mind's eye with words, but find it so elusive to capture the same reaction with the camera? If you read the passage again, you will notice that we actually tell you very little about the view, it is all about how you feel. When we have asked a class to

try this exercise and we also ask them to describe the picture, their answers are always different. Some are on a cliff, some are on a seawall and others fishing with their mates.

Rather than paint a picture we have given you keys to evoke memories or at least a partial memory, and hence the passage has become personal to you. This is the same reason why holiday pictures are only interesting to the people that went on the holiday, or have some personal reason for being interested. The rest of the audience just nod politely and hope that you didn't take too many pictures.

When you give to the viewer less information, they will have to interpret the image more; the more they rely on their own personal experiences to interpret the image, the more personal it will become to them. The old adage 'less is more' is one that is well worth considering when you have your camera in your hand.

There are many ways to control how much information you give to the viewer. The first and most obvious is to convert your image to monochrome (black & white). This will leave the viewer to totally interpret the feel of the image. Another way is to put less into the image to start with. A well known saying is "Get in as close as you think you need to and then take a step closer." These are very wise words. An image of a partial face can be immeasurably stronger than a picture of the whole face. Consider the partial face image again, but this time in black and white. Is it stronger?

Another consideration is what information you give to the viewer such as adding a colour cast to your image. By doing this you are controlling how the viewer will start to interpret the image. This initial interpretation is very hard to change so it is very important to get it right. Blue will add a colder edge to the image as well as the added connotations of sadness etc, whilst a red cast will add warmth and connotations of wellbeing and happiness; it is very hard to make a blue cast image feel warm.

### We would like to set you a short exercise.

Take an everyday object, it doesn't matter what it is, but you must be used to seeing it every day. We now want you to set a bit of time to one side, study the

object in detail, looking at shape, colour, texture etc. What does it feel like? Is it light or heavy? How do you feel about it? Do you like it? Is it aesthetically pleasing? Take your time at this stage, how you feel is very important for this exercise. Start to consider how you could make this mundane object interesting. Think about what angle you could shoot it from, what lens you could use, what information you want to include. Consider what you are trying to tell the viewer about the object. Try to previsualise your final images.

Only after you have gone through this process should you pick up your camera. Take a range of photos, but be frugal with the amount you take, and keep in mind your previsualised images.

### **Reflection**

How did you feel about the images taken?  
How have you added ambiguity to your images?  
How could this impact on your future photography?