

The Art of Seeing

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I considered an article on the art of seeing for a long time. Although a subject very dear to me, it was difficult to start. When I sat down to write it I realized it is relatively easy to make an image; much more difficult to write about the thought process that goes behind making it. It is a soul-searching exercise to think about why I made different images. With that, let me start with some random thoughts.

Looking at a definition of art: "Art is a (product of) human activity, made with the intention of stimulating the human senses as well as the human mind and/or spirit; thus art is an action, an object, or a collection of actions and objects created with the intention of transmitting emotions and/or ideas. Beyond this description, there is no general agreed-upon definition of art, since defining the boundaries of "art" is subjective, but the impetus for art is often called human creativity."

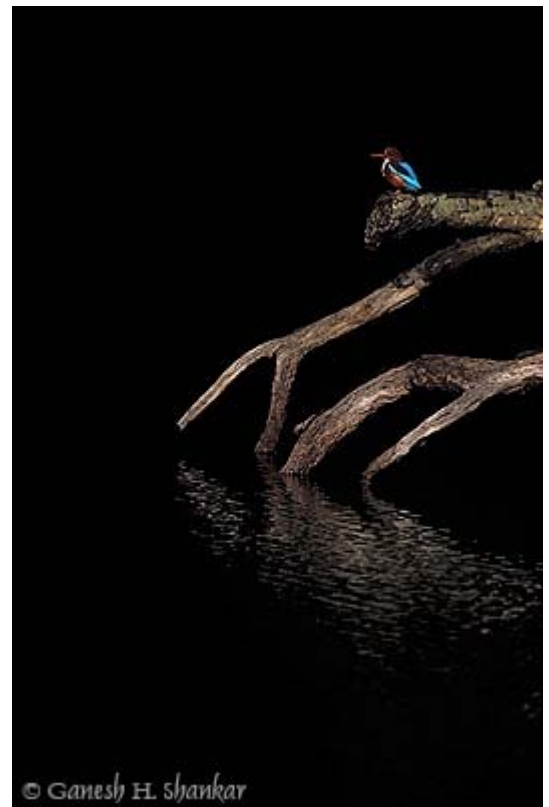
A summary of this definition of art means to me is there is no definition for art, which has been my belief all along. What is art to one may not be art to another. But the degree of art appears a useful measure of art.

"An artwork is normally assessed in quality by the amount of stimulation it brings about. The impact it has on people, the number of people that can relate to it, the degree of their appreciation, and the effect or influence it has or has had in the past, all accumulate to the "degree of art." Most artworks that are widely considered to be 'masterpieces' possess these attributes."

In a nutshell, we can't agree upon what art is but we know how to measure the degree of art - interesting. Similarly, seeing is a very personal act. There is no right or wrong way of seeing. I strongly believe that in nature photography we need not faithfully represent a scene. To do so imposes a serious limitation on our own creativity. My suspicion is that faithful rendering of nature by photographers is what has caused debate on whether nature photography (or photography in general) can be considered an art form. When I refer to faithful representation, I am not insinuating content manipulation, such as cloning the head of a tiger and placing it on lion using imaging software. I mean options such as using the limitations of recording mediums to our advantage, creative croppings, or choosing perspectives which may not be readily apparent.

Creating compositions becomes very challenging in wildlife photography since one has to act instantaneously in the field. I think some of it comes with practice, but some is inherent within us.

Let me try to explain this using a few of my images. This White Throated King Fisher was far away on the other side of a river in a wooded forest. Its background was shadows from trees, appearing dark due to more than 2-stops of difference in light compared the subject. As we know, no recording medium (slide/film/sensor) can capture the dynamic range in such a scene faithfully due to limitations. But I had the opportunity to use it to my advantage. Furthermore, while viewing a scene through the "50mm" eyes of a human, alternate compositions with other focal lengths may not be apparent. One of the lessons I learned over many years behind the camera is to look through the lens! When I was looking at this scene through the viewfinder with a 600mm f4 lens mounted, I backed off a bit for right size to suit my taste and made the image.



Sometimes we may pass by an opportunity in front of us without noticing it. It is not always possible to walk in the field seeing only through the viewfinder. A common subject may provide us with unique opportunities in an interesting context, provided we are able to quickly recognize it and react.



In the image of a bear and its cub, I must admit the composition as presented is an afterthought - a vertical crop of a horizontal image which contains the full face of the mother. While processing it I felt the eye of the cub, which appeared to be subdued by the dominant face of the mother, had the potential to hold the viewer in the frame with a bold crop to help emphasize the cub's eye. Seeing is also possible after the release of the shutter.



There are traditional composition guidelines, but there are also times to break these guidelines. More often than not, those of us with super telephoto lenses are eager to fill the frame with our subject, but chances are in focusing on just this sort of composition we are missing some different perspectives and unique opportunities. Sometimes the inclusion of the subject's surrounding environment can make an image more powerful. Tastes differ; when others don't see what we see, we need not change our views.

Image possibilities in shaded regions in forests may go unnoticed. A ray of light touching your subject can create an intriguing photograph. When one babbler in a group of them wandered into interesting light, I was quick to make some images.

Seeing can't be expressed easily in words as a lot of it is personal. Sometimes when we see nature or wildlife around us, the feeling we get may be difficult to express. But we may be able to translate a part of the feeling into images. I believe the key is to spend time considering and exploring possibilities, spend time with your subjects and pre-visualize. In the field it is compositionally easy to close the distance on your subject and capture close portraits. These may be superb, but there may also be other interesting possibilities to explore.

own vision!

I wish you luck in your journey towards creating images expressing your



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