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Step-by-step to cheat light and create better photos with expert techniques

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BIGFEATURE ▶ **OUT OF THE SHADOWS**

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Josie Reavely discovers the art of seeing in black and white, revealing industry secrets from the pros on creating stunning works of art

Out of the shadows

IN-DEPTH
FEATURE SPECIAL
Black and white
**12-PAGE
GUIDE**
Monochrome images needn't be dull if
you know the right techniques to produce
something truly special and unique

KINGTHORPE

"Something I have finally come to terms with is to find set pieces and keep going back to them. This scene is only four miles from home and I keep an eye on the light each time we pass. I like the way the trees glow and stand out from the sky"

Shot details: Nikon D70 at 34mm and f6.7, 1.5sec, ISO 200, infrared filter

Leslie Alsheimer is a fellow expert on black-and-white photography, having accumulated numerous awards and published several books on the subject during her career to date. She has a wonderfully poetic vision of the importance of good lighting in black and white, musing: "Ahhh... the proverbial



“Finding your own voice is essential in making an artful image”



GIRLS LAUGHING

The vignette keeps the focus on the joyous characters in the centre of the frame, while the harsh crop adds a sense of spontaneity
Shot details: Nikon D200 at 23mm and f4.5, 1/500sec, ISO 200

▶ good light. Architectural and landscape photographers must have it, portrait and fashion photographers create it themselves, and situational and photojournalist photographers must make do with what they have... The answer therefore depends on what you photograph. I tend to make do with what I have, but I do make every effort to see the light in every situation. The light can be what draws me to photograph, but more often than not it's the people themselves that draw me: their gestures, emotions and spirit. As my life teachers, their gracious gifts in shared life moments, friendship and profound trust for communicating their stories have touched my heart and soul with the most sacred honour of my life."

She continues: "In my early photographic education, I was taught that good photography was about learning and following the formal rules of composition, design and process. These rules were established as proven aesthetic principles to assist in the organisation and creation of successful imagery. Without question I thought that a good photographic image must be properly exposed and sharply focused. I knew that composition should fall into the 'rule of thirds', and the elements of line, shape, form, texture, light and shadow were essential to good design. A sharply focused image with a proper range of exposure values, composed with one or more of the standard elements of design can indeed be a worthy goal. However, no matter how rigidly one may apply the rules, there are no guaranteed steps for the successful creation of a stunning photograph. The serious photographer must be able to recognise when originality and creativity should take precedence over the accepted standards or techniques, and be ready to break the rules with intention."

Leslie is keen to share her advice on developing prize-winning images like her own, revealing: "Compositional guidelines and rules exist as suggestions to assist us in organising the elements of a scene to safely achieve predictable results on a consistent basis. But predictable results – however technically perfect – produce predictable images. Predictable images will not win awards nor get



EXPERT ADVICE
LESLIE ALSHEIMER

Web: www.lesleialsheimer.com

Leslie Alsheimer, author of *Black and White in Adobe Photoshop CS4* and *Photoshop Lightroom*, is an internationally published and award-winning photographer and author. She was recently honoured at Photoshop World 2008 as a NAPP Photoshop GURU Awards recipient, with the Vincent Versace Award for Photographic Excellence. Leslie is best recognised for her documentary projects with non-profits and NGO's addressing the human condition worldwide. Her work – spanning editorial, fine-art and documentary genres – has appeared in the Corcoran Gallery of Art as well as numerous books and publications including *PDN*, *Nikon World* and *B & W* magazines. Leslie's professional and personal work celebrates the beauty and splendour that can be found in humanity – regardless of circumstance. With images, she creates metaphors that honour the richness of life that accompany the enduring human spirit, celebrating life, play, family, culture and community through the joy, pain and love of everyday living.

- 1 BUILD A RAPPORT**
If your subjects are alive, create a connection with them.
- 2 WORK WITH YOUR SUBJECT**
Make photographs with them... not of them.
- 3 IF YOUR SUBJECTS ARE NOT PEOPLE...**
Create relationships within the frame. Identify your figure and ground and create a relationship between them.
- 4 CREATE LAYERS**
To add depth within the frame.
- 5 SIMPLIFY**

your photography noticed. Creating a prize-winning photograph necessitates finding an aesthetic to visually represent the subject matter in ways that we have never before seen, something that is new and exquisite. There's no formula for success in creating new and interesting imagery with magical results. The photographic artist must blend an understanding of composition and rules with personal interpretation and even technical experimentation. You must be willing to try the unusual, and even to risk failure in order to explore new ideas and techniques." She adds: "The difference between a good photographer and a great photographer is that the latter continually presses to create images that have not yet been imagined. A good photographer can make successful imagery by emulating images others have created (with slight variances), while a great photographer creates the images that others set out to emulate."

This underlines the importance of developing your personal style in your work, as Leslie reiterates: "Finding your own voice is essential in making an artful image, as it's your vision and your voice that has not yet been seen. In order to find your voice you will have to try new things – even if it means failing in the attempt. Experiment, play, and be willing to make mistakes. It is that which is uniquely you that creates the poetry in imagery, and it is this poetry, in your voice alone, that will bring you to creating your own personal work. Most people stop short of personal work because it requires a leap of faith, but it's the 'personal' in the work that often makes the most profound difference between taking pictures and making images." In order to begin expanding your creative skills, try Leslie's project (see 'Developing Originality').

Another professional with a particular affinity for black-and-white imagery is Bryon Paul McCartney. Like many of the best contemporary photographers, his route to professional practise was somewhat convoluted, starting life as a graphic designer and creative director for 15 years, as he explains: "My career started in Chicago in 1989, around the time Photoshop was being distributed in its original BETA version. Over the years, I



Developing originality with Leslie Alsheimer

Originality will forever be elusive in the medium of photography, but I believe a passion for innovation will always create new directions, and new directions make exciting work. To energise or re-energise your work, try taking a detour from the style of photography that you usually pursue. This is an assignment to step out of the mould and make images that are not for an art director, not for your portfolio, not for a client, not for impressing your photography teacher/instructor/mentor, not for a grade, not for the walls, not for a show, not for impressing your friends and not for your family album. This is an assignment to make images that are completely and entirely for you, and no one else but you.

To begin this assignment, you will want to listen to your instincts and make images from your heart and soul as well as your eyes. It may be very difficult at first, but you will need to try and forget every image you have ever seen – or made. Try and remember what it felt like to be a child with a camera in your hands. What would you photograph if no one else were looking upon or judging the imagery? Whether you come up with a preconceived idea, or you just go out and shoot intuitively, the most important part of this assignment is not to tell anyone about your project until you have decided it is finished, and even then, only if you want to.

PROJECT GUIDELINES

- 1** Commit to the project. Whether you commit for a week, a month, a year or a lifetime, make a commitment to create a body of work just for yourself.
- 2** Slow down. Stop for extended moments and look around you.
- 3** Look even harder, and keep reminding yourself to slow down and really look.
- 4** Try not to share your project with others until your project is complete.
- 5** If you do share your project with others it is really important that you do not get discouraged by what anyone else says or thinks, no matter who they are! (Remember that some of the most famous artists in history were once disparaged by others about their work.)
- 6** You don't have to be outrageous, unless you really want to be. Remember that sometimes the simplest notions can be most unique.
- 7** Allow your project room to grow.
- 8** Keep editing your work until you are really satisfied with it.

Submit your project online at www.santafedigitaldarkroom.com. We want to see it!

A BUSY SCENE

Careful composition and clever use of lighting is essential to make scenes like this work, something that Leslie Alsheimer has clearly mastered
Shot details: Nikon D200 at 24mm and f5.6, 1/320sec, ISO 250

Leslie Alsheimer & Bryan O'Neil Hughes's
LATEST BOOK
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