

Composition 101

- **Session 1**
 - Definition
 - Framing and cropping
 - Balance
 - Some of the guidelines
- **Session 2**
 - Attractors
 - Sculpting with light
 - Leading the eye
 - Distractions

Composition

- “The organization or grouping of the different parts of a work of art so as to achieve a unified whole.” Dictionary.com
- “Good composition is the strongest way of seeing.” Edward Weston

Composition

- How the elements of image are framed and arranged.
- For more than 500 years, artists have developed techniques (“rules”) to appeal to human perception.
- Augmented by modern research.
- “Rules” can provide a starting place to strengthen the structure of an image.
- Think of these not as “rules,” but as guidelines. Don’t become a slave to them.
- The best composition is the one that works.

Framing

First decision you make based on subject and image format



Framing - Horizontal



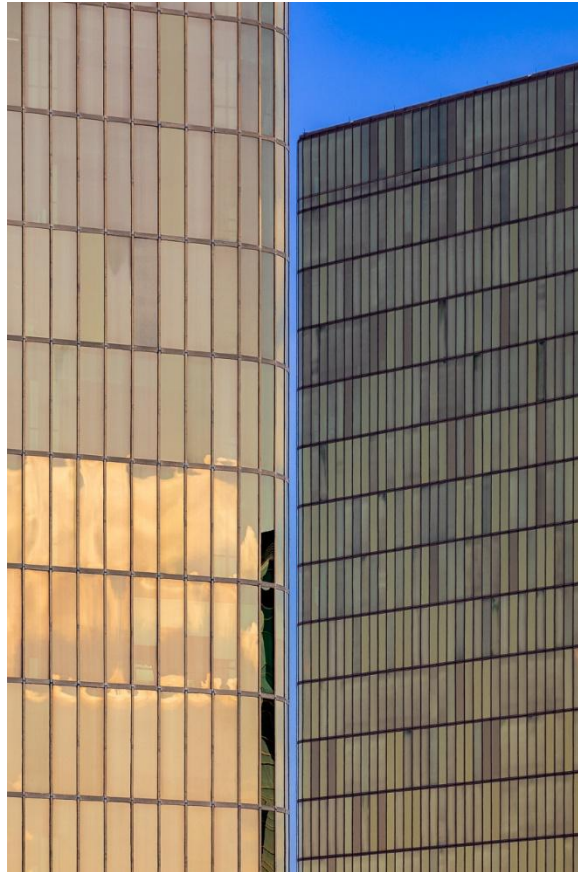
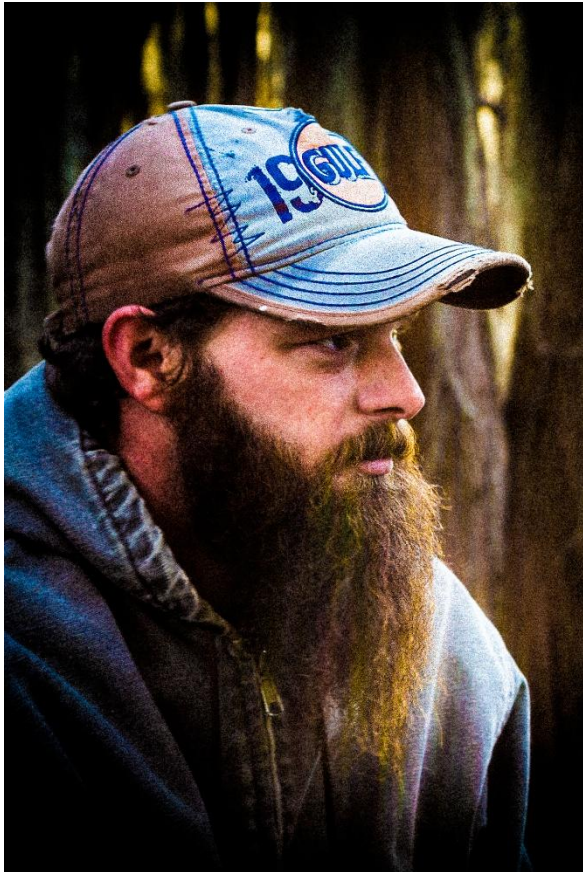
Also referred to as landscape

Tranquility, depth



Framing – Vertical

Also referred to as portrait
Strength, action, height



Framing - Square

Uniformity, symmetry

Hard to use



Framing - Panorama



Relaxed, peaceful

Horizontal framing
on steroids



Framing

**First decision you make based
on subject and image format**

- Horizontal – tranquility, depth
- Vertical – strength, action, height
- Square – uniform, symmetry, hard to use
- Panorama – relaxed, peaceful

Cropping

- Refine framing
- Focus attention on the subject
- Correct alignment and distortion
- Remove competing elements and distractions
- Some crop as desired to accentuate image

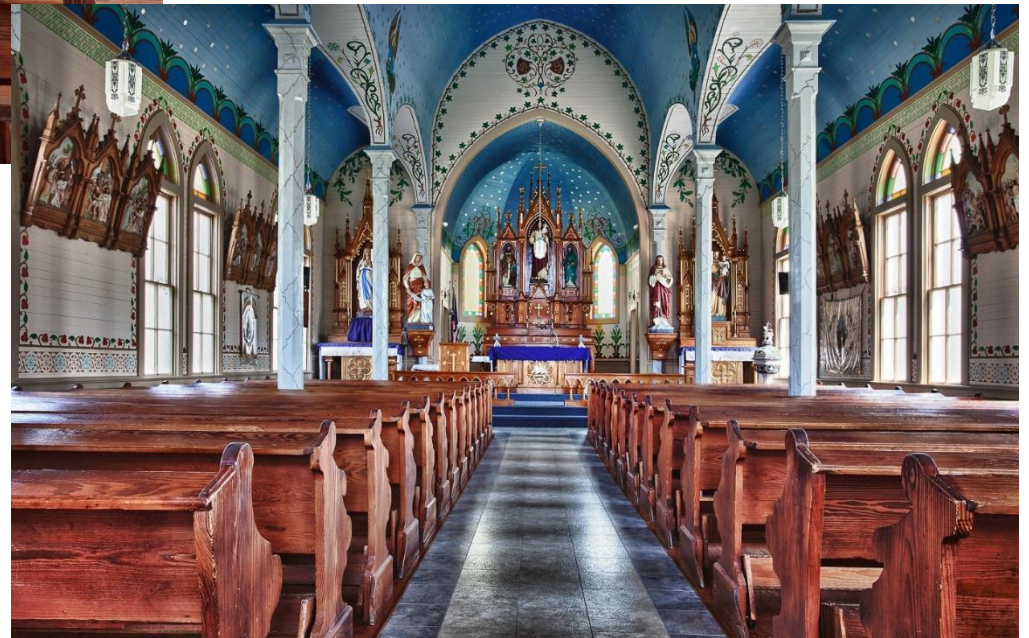
Okay to work to standardized mat or paper

Cropping To Focus on Subject



Cropping

Straighten Image Within Frame



Cropping To Remove Distractions



Visual Balance

- Striving for visual balance where elements feel comfortable within frame.
- Center of interest balanced with other elements.
- Or, off balance to achieve tension.

Visual Balance



Visual Balance



Visual Balance



Some Time-Tested Guidelines ("Rules")

- Fill the frame
- Keep it simple
- Rule of thirds, golden mean, sweet spot, power point...
- Odd numbers
- Repetition
- Textures and patterns
- Frame within a frame
- Space to move or look into
- Lines- leading, horizon, direction, straight, curved, implied
- Negative space
- Watch the edges
- Burning background and edges
- Perspective – vanishing point, keystoneing
- Foreground, middle-ground, background
- Remove distractions and competing elements
- Blur the foreground or background to separate
- Camera angle or vantage point
- Control perspective and distortion
-
-
-

Fill the Frame



Fill the Frame



Keep It Simple

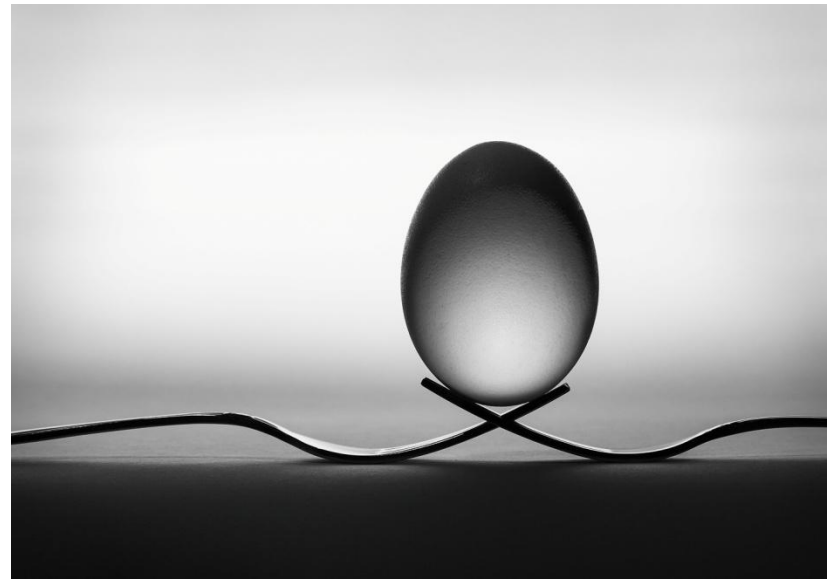
Focus attention and remove distractions



Keep It Simple But, Not Too Simple



Not so simple that it doesn't hold viewer's attention. Not so complex that viewer gives up.



Move Subject Off Center

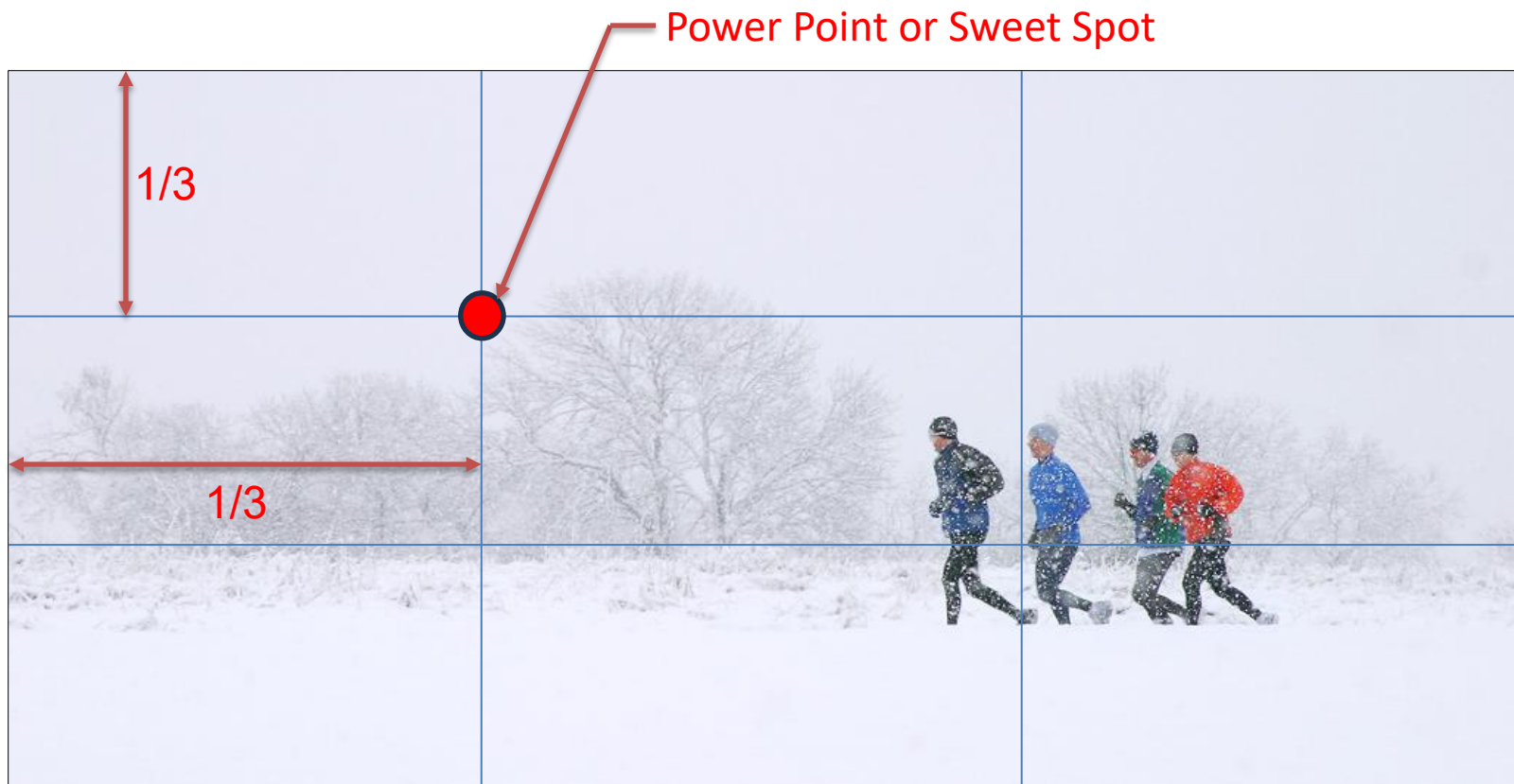
Rule of thirds, sweet spot, power point...

- Dynamic
- Provides sense of balance
- Symmetry can be static

Rule of Thirds



Rule of Thirds



Rule of Thirds



Rule of Thirds

(Rules can be broken)



Foreground, Middle-ground, Background



Key construct in landscape images

Adds depth

Lines

- Horizontal – horizon, baseline, restful, smooth
- Horizon Line – dominant graphic element, divides the frame, level
- Vertical – strength, height
- Diagonal – dynamic, active, leads the eye
- Leading Lines – provides path for eye to follow. Entry into and exit out of image
- Curved – movement, flowing, gentle, leads the eye
- Implied Lines – two points form a line

Lines and *Shapes* Invoke Feeling

- Horizontal – peacefulness, tranquility
- Vertical – power, strength
- Diagonal – dynamic, movement, excitement
- Random – conflicting, chaotic
- Curves – softness, femininity
- C-curves – leads the eye, flowing
- S-curve – flowing
- Spiral – natural, draws inward
- Zig zag- dramatic, active
- Rays – brilliance, sunsets, sunrises, fireworks,
- Leading lines - go to the main subject
- Circles – continuity, closure
- Semi-circle – arches, rainbows, pleasing
- Oval – feminine
- Cross – pulls elements together
- Triangle – stability, strength
- Rectangle – varying proportions
- Square – ridged, difficult to use

Horizon Line

- Rule of thirds – often used, generally safe
- Low – emphasizes sky, expansive
- High – emphasizes foreground, heaviness
- Centered – can be static
- Generally want horizon level

Horizon Line – Rule of Thirds



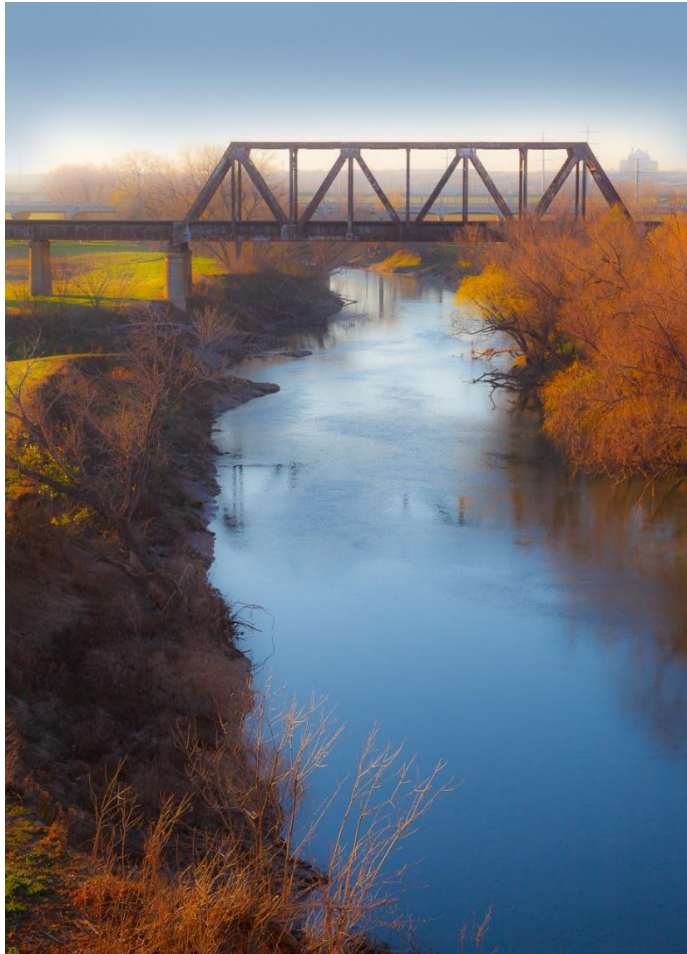
Horizon Line

Low Emphasizes What Is Above



Horizon Line

High Emphasizes Foreground



Horizon Line – Centered



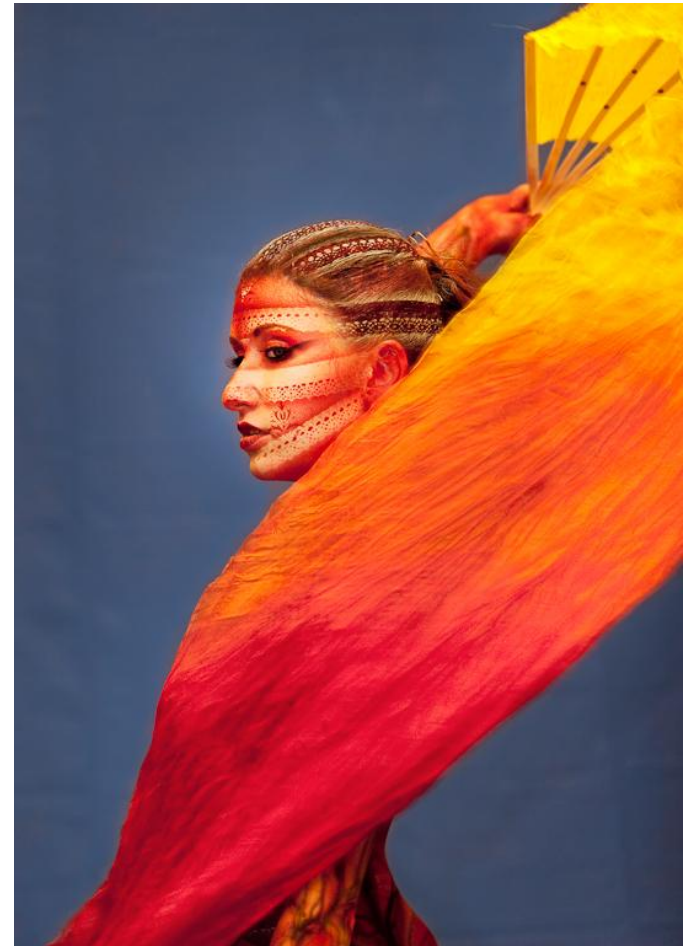
Usually static, but can work if have non-competing interest above and below the horizon



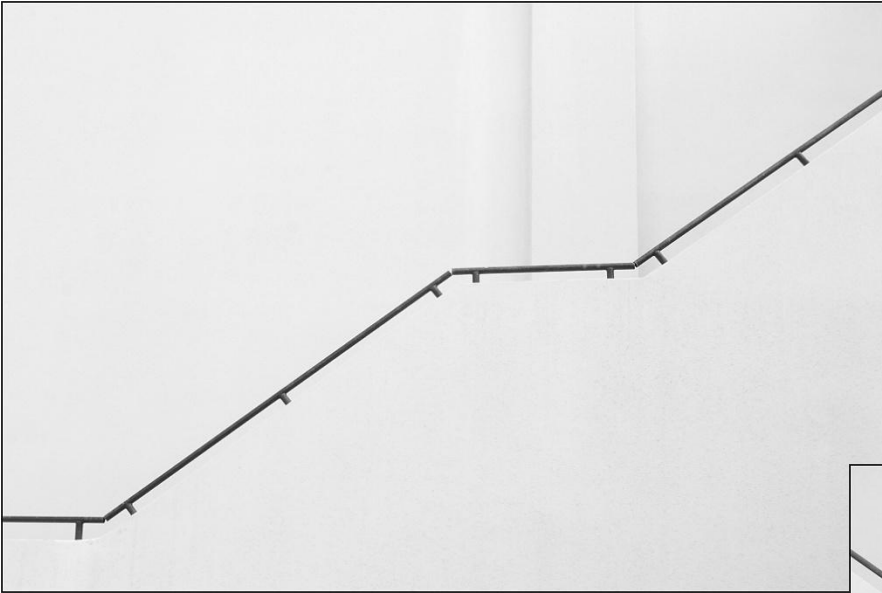
Horizon Line – Level



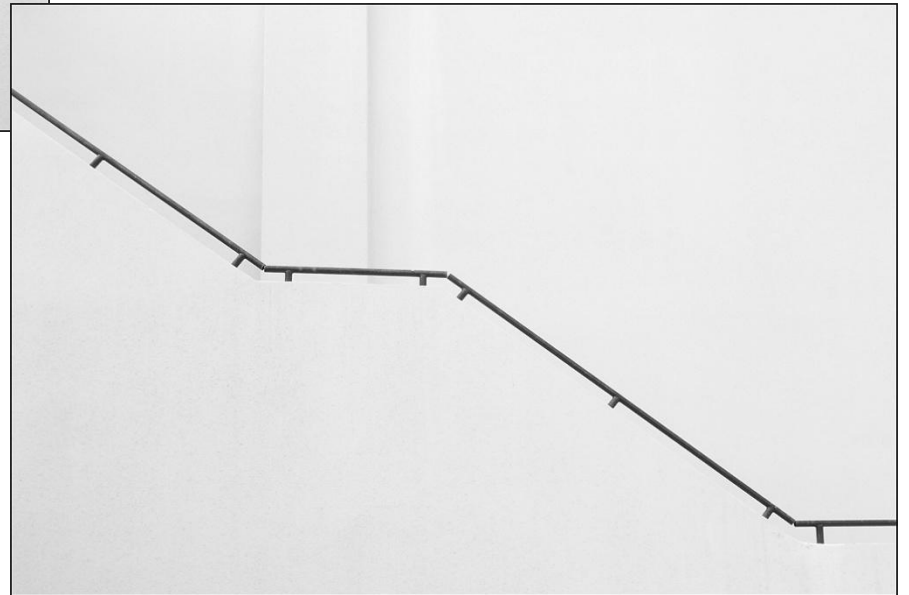
Lines - Diagonal



Lines – Diagonal Orientation

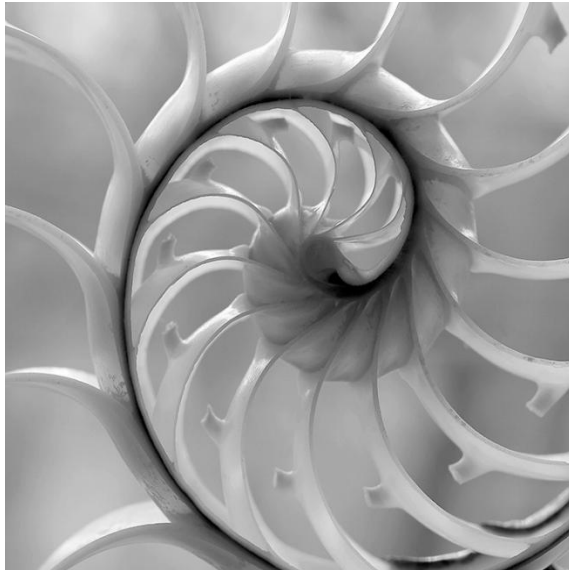


Upward - harmonious



Downward - compulsive

Curves



Lines - Curves



Perspective – Vanishing Point



Perspective – Vanishing Point



And There Is More

Even Numbers



Even numbers are
symmetric and formal

Regularity typically not
found in nature

Odd Numbers

Nature tends to be irregular

Adds interest

One surrounded by others is comforting



Odd Numbers



Repetition

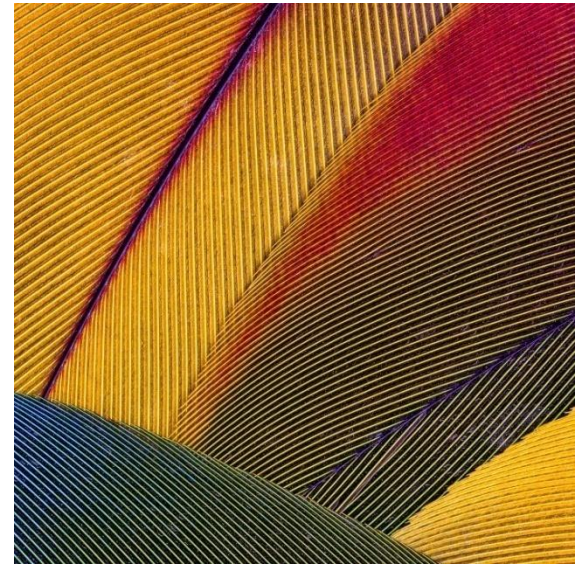


Objects



Forms

Textures and Patterns



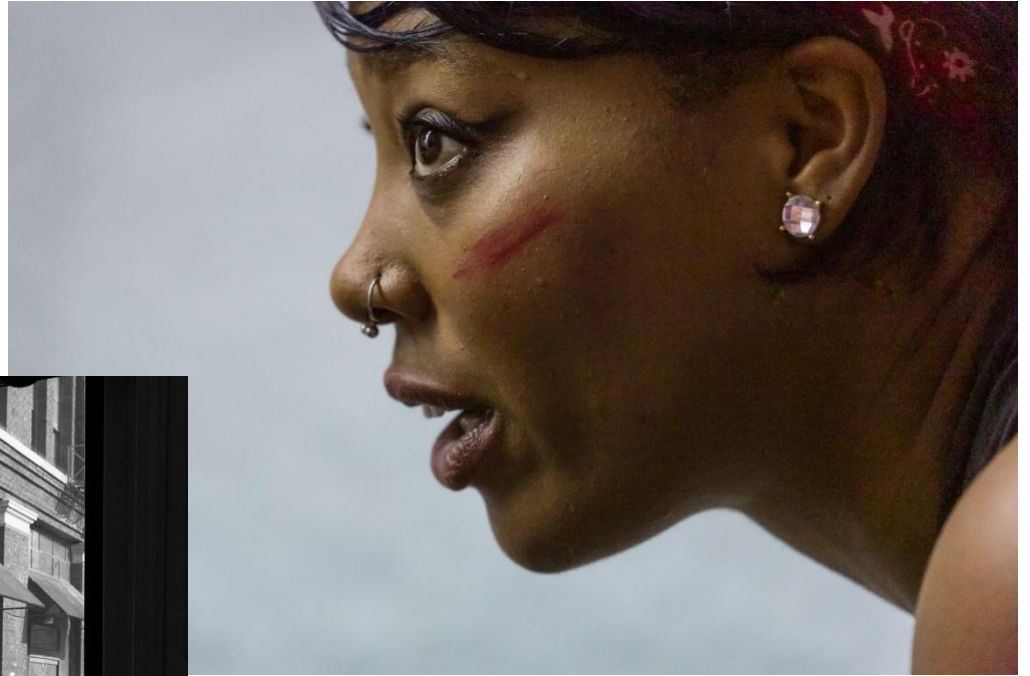
Frame Within a Frame



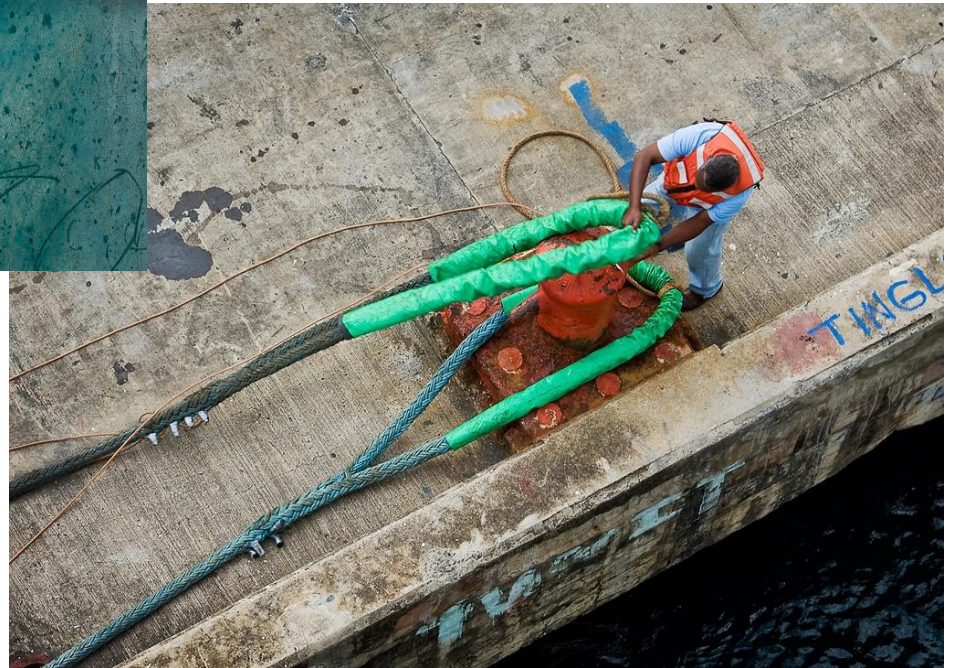
Space to Move Into



Space to Look Into



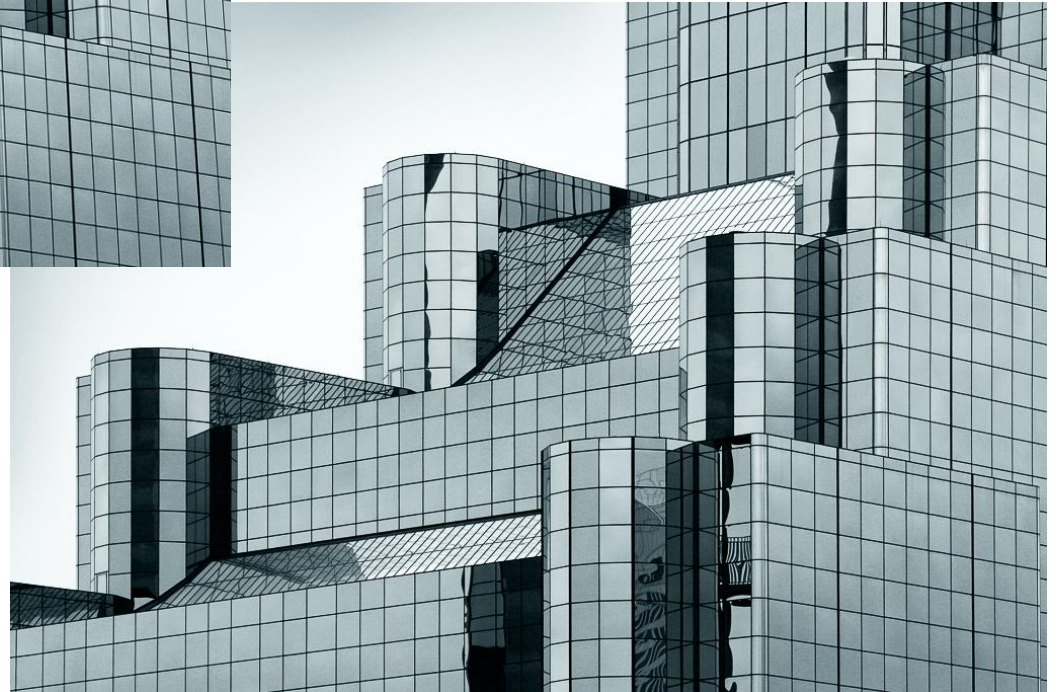
Camera Angle or Vantage Point



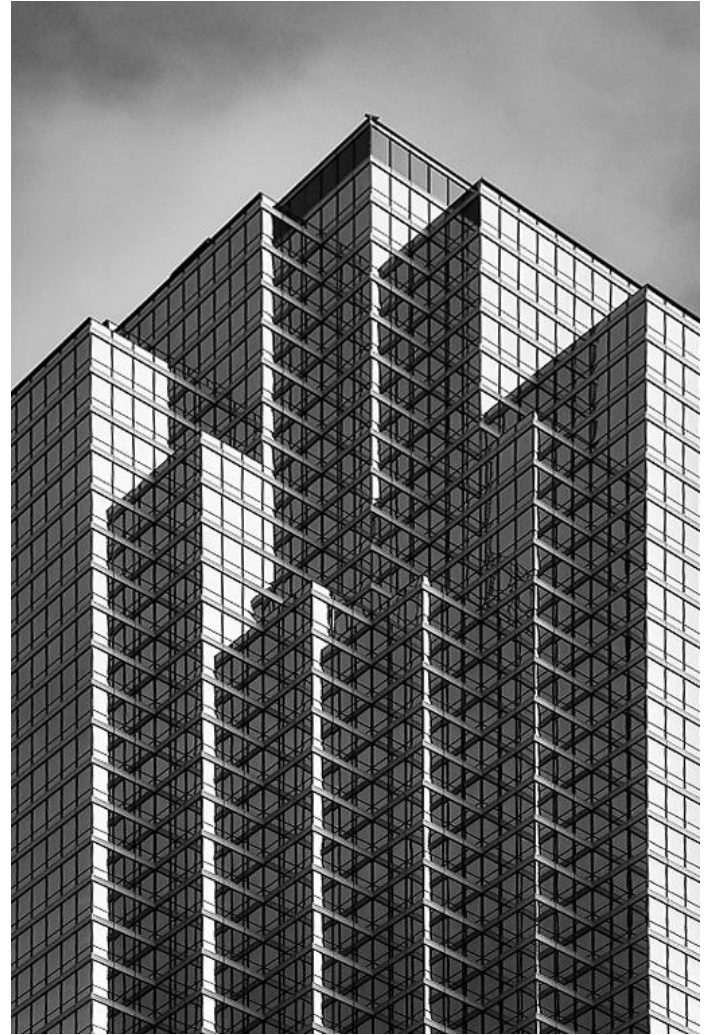
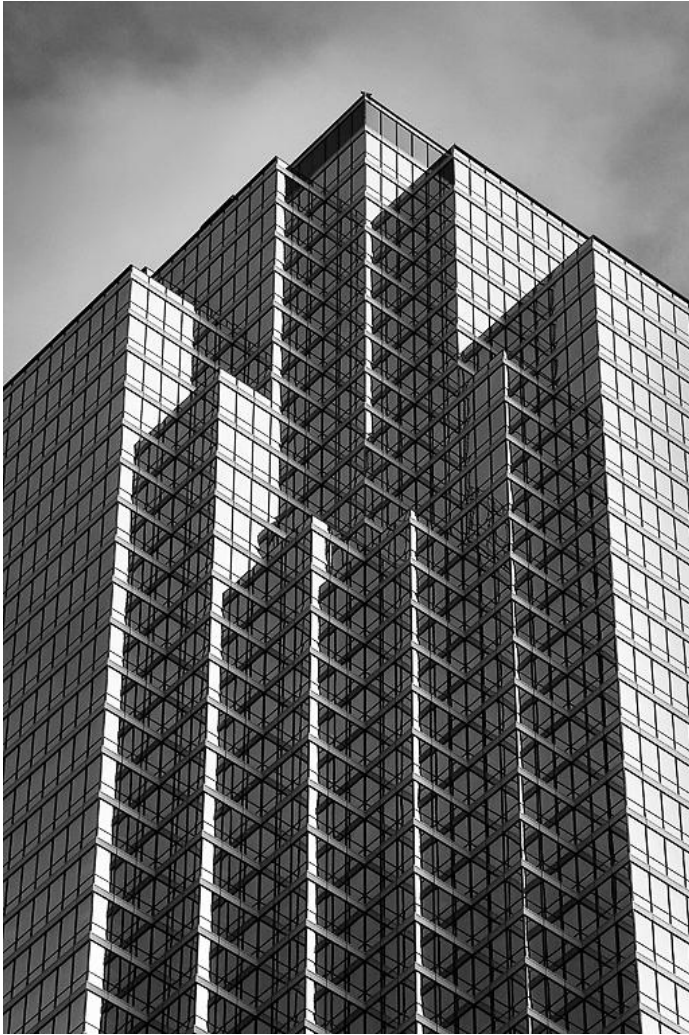
Camera Angle-Height or Vantage Point



Control Perspective Keystoning and Distortion



Control Perspective Keystoning VS Distortion



Negative Space



The area surrounding the main subject. It acts as a background or buffer, helping to highlight the subject and create a sense of balance and visual interest.



Negative Space



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Homework

- Pick 3 of the 5 images
- List the compositional elements you see used in each of these the images
- Send me your list - f-richards@sbcglobal.net

Door



Boat



Waiting



Sweep



Abandoned

