Photography and Public Policy

On an 1861 trip to the Yosemite Valley, photographer Carleton Watkins took photographs which established him as a leading photographer. They also convinced Abraham Lincoln to deed Yosemite as park land to the state of California, paving the way for a system of national parks.

Like painters of the era, photographers were influenced by the ideas of Manifest Destiny →
and Transcendentalism.

They depicted nature as a spiritual place, where humanity could achieve union with God.

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Another photographer who similarly influenced government decisions was William Henry Jackson. He was the official photographer for Ferdinand Hayden's geological expedition in the 1870s.

Jackson used a complicated and difficult photographic process known as the collodion process, which required a "wet plate" process of coating, sensitizing, exposing and developing the photographic material within a span of about 15 minutes. This made a portable darkroom neccessary.

Jackson's photo of Old Faithful was particularly central to the decision to make Yellowstone a national park.
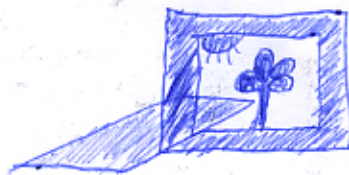
With help from Senator Samuel Clarke of Kansas, Jackson's photos were influential in President Ulysses S. Grant's designation of Yellowstone as America's 1st National Park in 1872.

THE FRAME

A common technique in photography is to minize intrest in the background when the photographer wishes to to draw the viewer's attention to a particular focal point. My photo of this dandelion lacks a particularly eye-catching background, causing the dandelion to be the main focus. This photo of a smoking match, courtesy of David Peterson, similarly uses a bland background to make the match the dramatic focal point.

Shutter speed: 1/
Aperture: F2.8

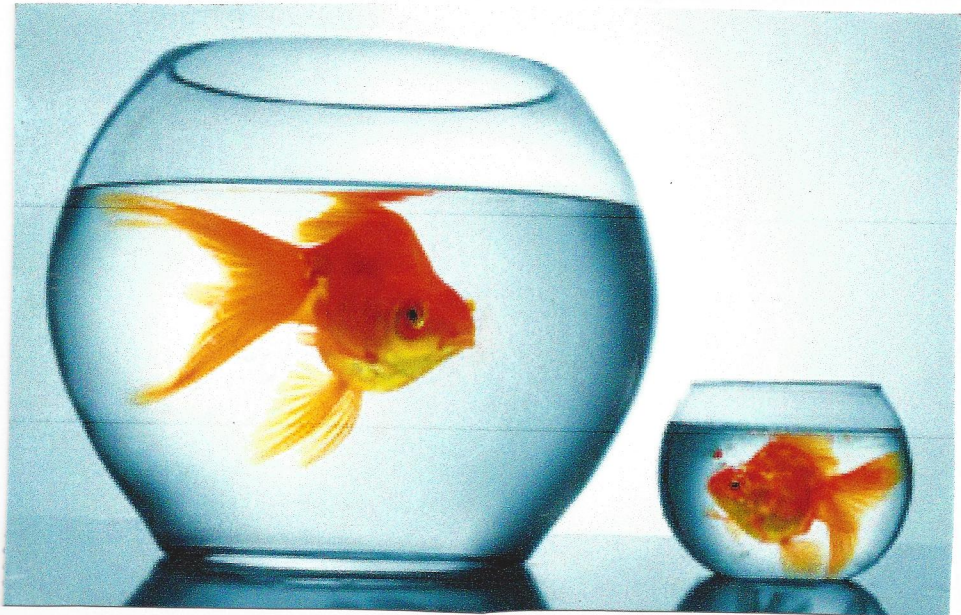# Degas

The impressionist artist Degas was influenced by the use of the frame in photography. One of the striking features of this work is absence of a clearly defined background. The figures in the back, unlike those in front, lack detail and appear blurred Degas does this to enhance focus on the dancers making up the foreground. The painting also has a relatively small scope, only allowing us a view of the two girls without providing information on their greater context. Like photographers who make use of a restricted frame, Degas purposefully limits what can be seen, forcing the audience to use their imagination of what's going on around them. A third notable aspect is the texture, which appears much more realistic than the more artificially polished features of other human subjects in art.

This photo, also by David Peterson, makes use of an uninteresting background to make the focal points be the fish.

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A technique called the rule of thirds is sometimes used to create dynamic tension by placing the focal point of the photo closer to the photo's edge

with the left side having darker features.

This photo by Ansel Adams of a Japanese intern during WWII places the subject closer to the right edge of the photo, creating a sense of imbalance, especially
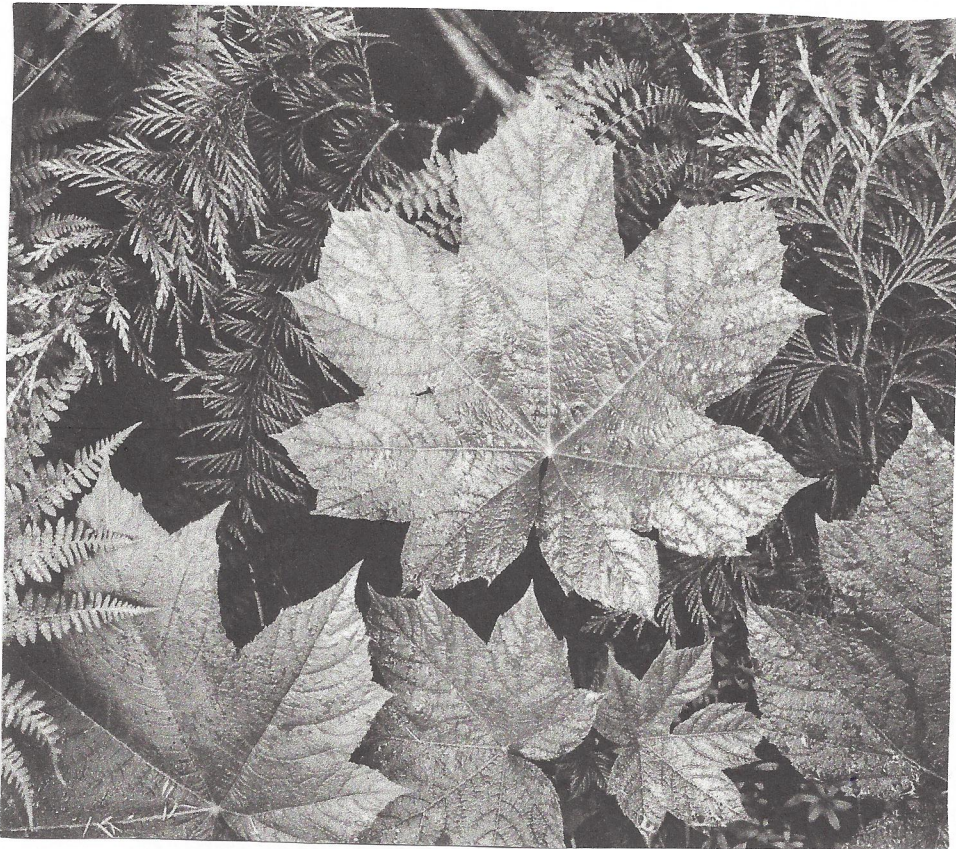
This photo I took in Cabo San Lucas also demonstrates the use of the rule of thirds, with the rock with pelicans positioned at the western edge of the photograph, forcing the eye to explore the rest of the photo.
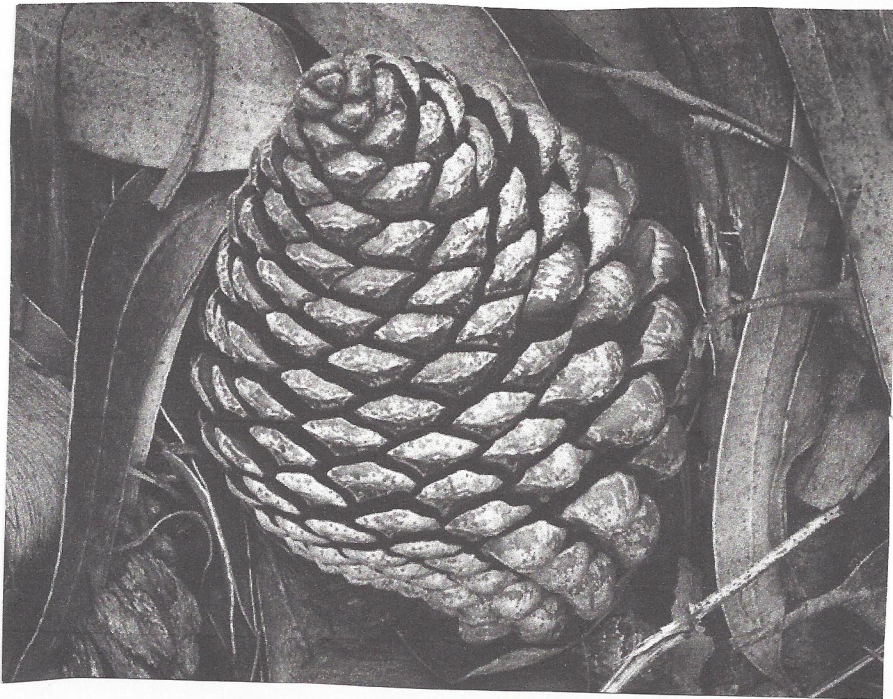
Shutter speed: 1/120
Aperture: F22

Ansel Adams' photos of this leaf and Pine cone seemingly defy the rule of thirds. The reason for this is that both photos are very balanced and there is no clear grid for dividing the photo into thirds.

Impressionism in Art and Photography

Traditional Japanese woodblock prints such as this one captured great interest in Europe, the use of intense colors, simple lines and flat areas of pure color appealed to artists such as Monet and Van Goh. These Japanese prints thus had a great impact on the impressionist movement, a style of art which attempted to capture the image of an object as someone would see it if the just caught a glimpse of it. Notice how the building and tree are abruptly cut off from the frame, leaving the viewers to use their imagination to decide what lies outside the painting's boundaries
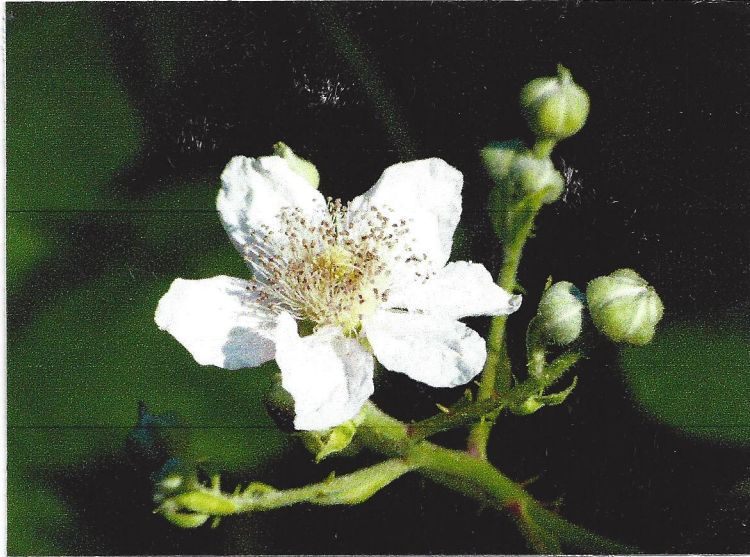
As evidenced by the below paintings by Japanese artist Hiroshige (left) and French impressionist artist Henri Rivière (right), Japanese art had a clear influence on European art.

The same technique of 'filling the frame' used in art is also applied to photography. Because the photographer must decide what to include and leave out of a particular scene, every inch of the frame space must be useful in creating a great image

This photo of a flower's close up fills the frame for the most part, but the empty space surrounding the flower detracts somewhat from the image's interest factor

Aperture: F/4
Shutter speed: 1/60
ISO: 900

I increased saturation to bring out the white of the petals and dialed up contrast as well.

Much more reminiscent of Japanese block art, this photo I took of a tree's underside completely fills the frame and provides an expansive feel to the photo.

Shutter speed: 1/60
ISO: 200
Aperture: F/16

The pattern of light and branches makes for an eye-catching mosaic of contrasting colors.

I had to greatly reduce exposure in the center due to the light's intensity (the sun was in the middle of the photo)
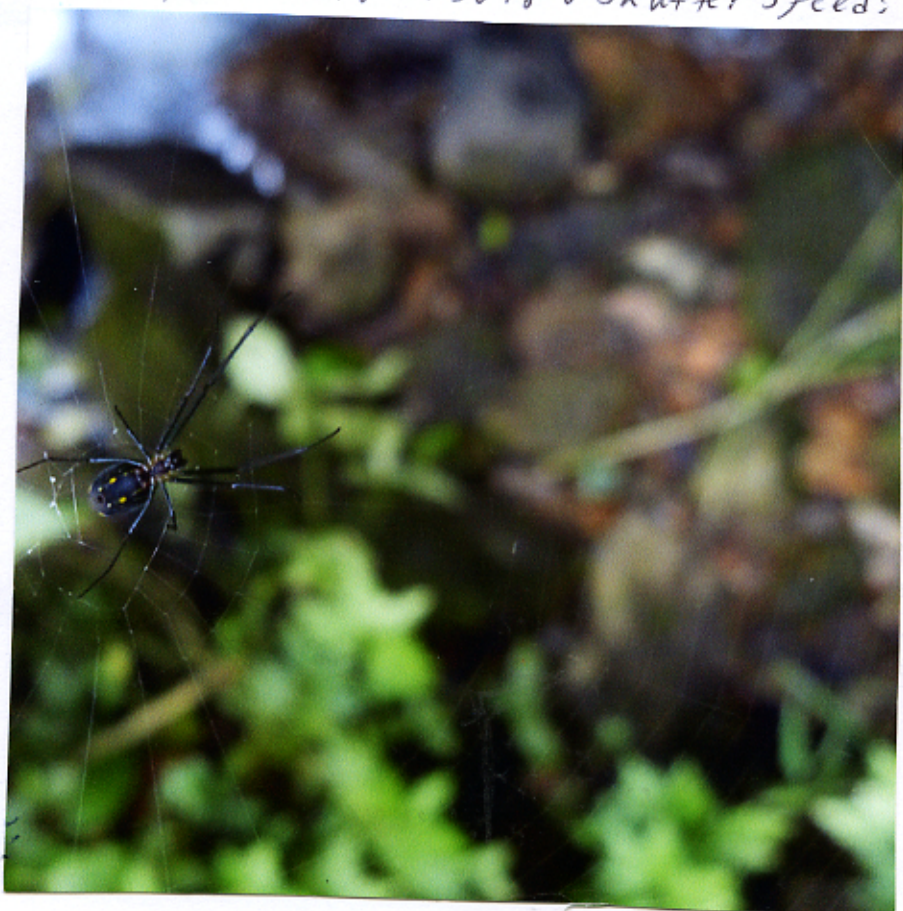
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Aperture: F/16   Shutter speed: 1/125   Iso: 400

It took a while to get a decent photo of a plane at St. Maarten's famous airport located right behind a popular beach. When I finally got one without blur (it required a tripod and high shutter speed) I increased the blue hue of the sky, resulting in a shocking contrast between sky and plane. I also used photoshop's clone stamp tool to erase distracting decals from the plane.
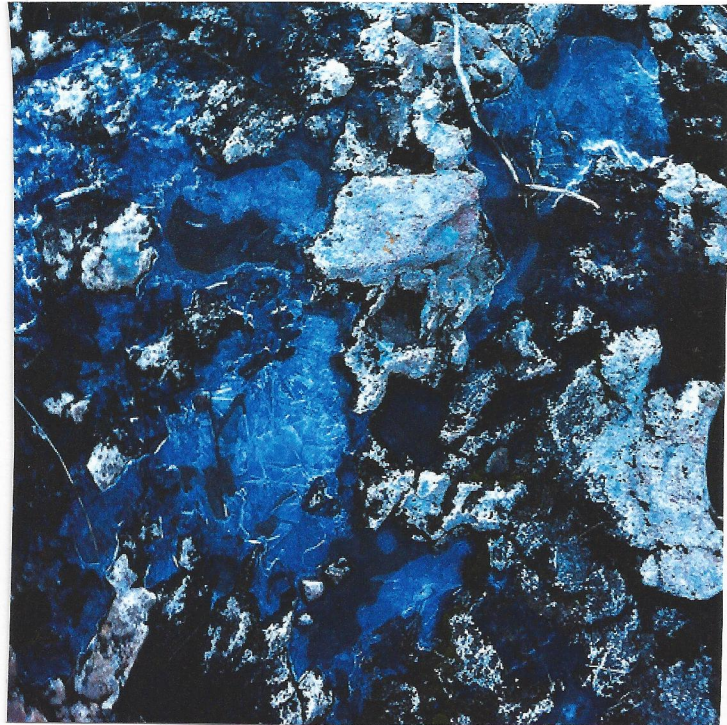
I used the rule of thirds to lead the viewers eyes toward the spider, making the image more interesting to look at. I also blurred out the background to ensure that the focus remains on the spider. The juxtaposition between spider and background gives a greater depth to the photo.

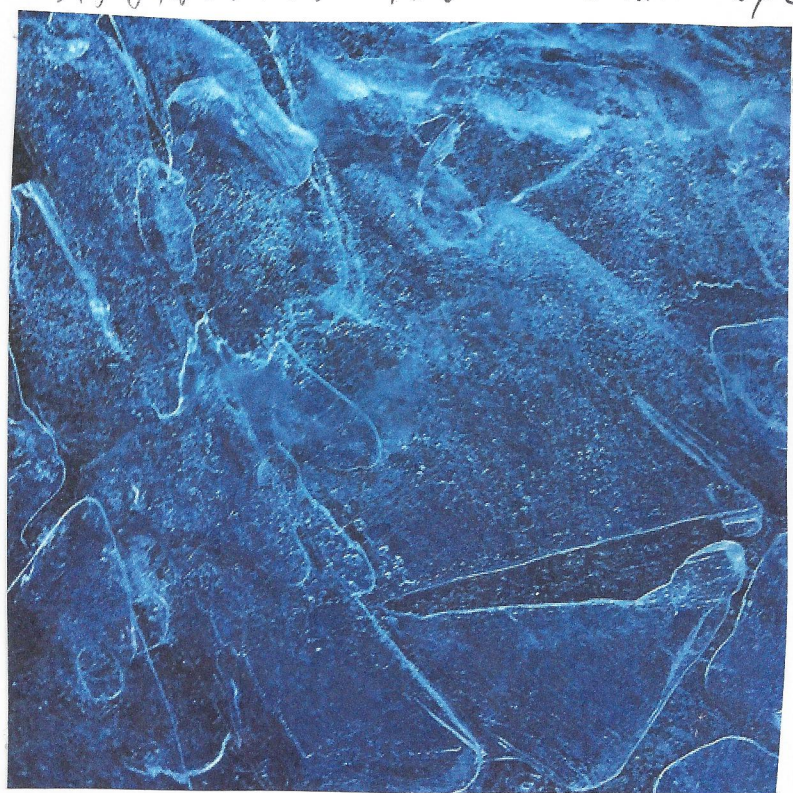Aperture: F/2   Iso: 800   Shutter speed: 1/60

Aperture: F/8   ISO: 800 Shutter speed: 1/15

This ground shot of ice on top of a local mountain finds its value in the sharp detail of rocks and rich, dark blue hues of ice. Brightness increases courtesy of photoshop increase the visual appeal

Aperture: F/8   ISO: 800 Shutter speed: 1/15

Another picture of ice on the same morning, this time without the rocks. The cracks in the ice are nice natural lines.

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Close up of
my friend.
Again the
application
of 'filling the
frame' is used
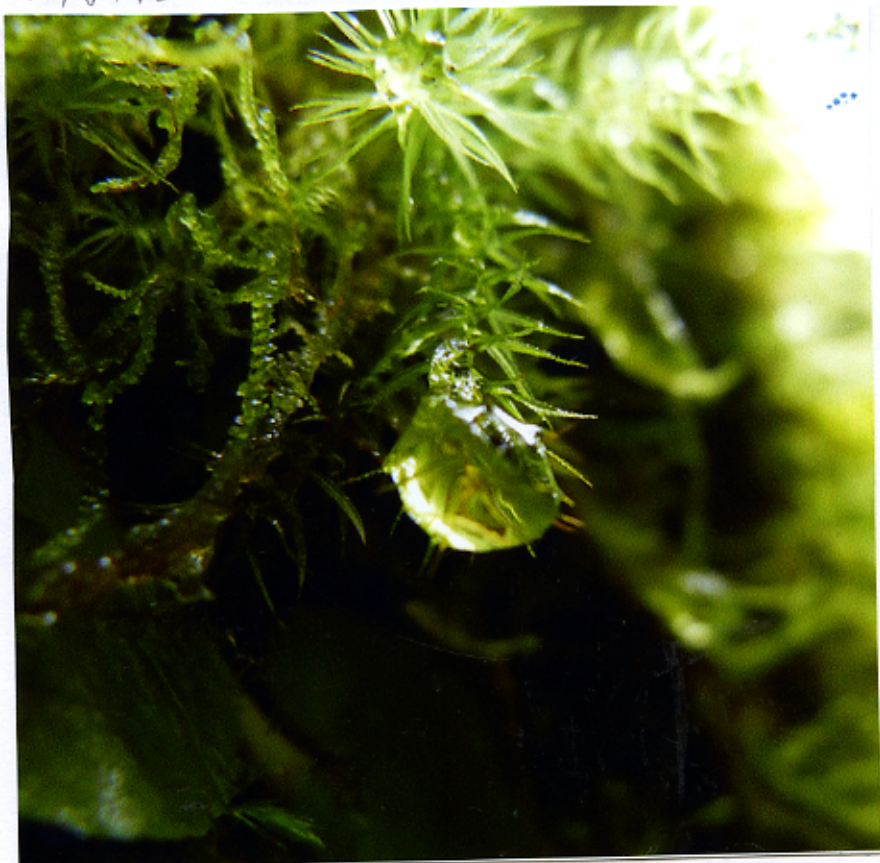to draw the
viewer's attention.

Aperture: F/4 Iso: 400 Shutter Speed: 1/120

Aperture: F/4 Shutter speed: 1/60   Iso: 400

Plant close-ups
such as this
one require
a shallow
depth of field,
so I increased
the aperture to
F/4.
I found the
detail and
balance to be
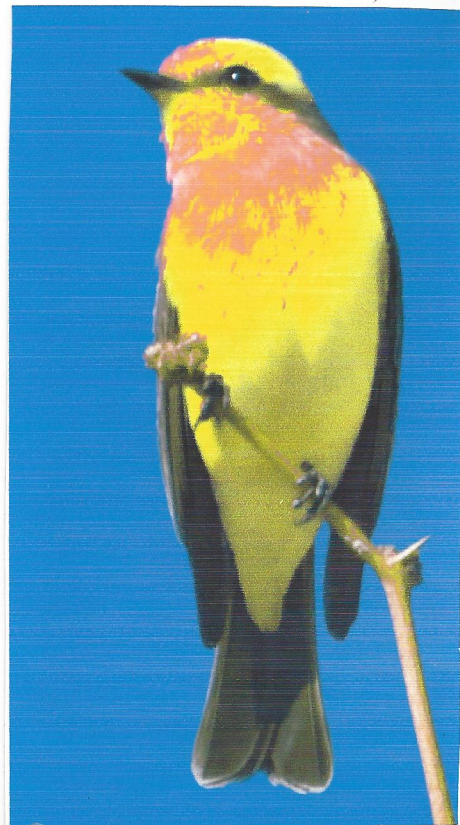ideal, so this
photo was used
raw

Like my spider photograph, Euan Henry makes use of the rule of thirds and a blurred background to create single point of interest that captures one's attention.

Photographer Michael Small demonstrates in the below photos the impact of filling the frame. Whereas on the left the empty space and tree branches distract from the main subject, the photo at right lacks 'noise' and attention is firmly focused on the bird.

Using close up images that completely fill the frame is also effective in reform photography, such as in these photographs by Paul Strand. Born in New York in 1890, Strand took pictures off that demonstrated the plight of the urban poor.
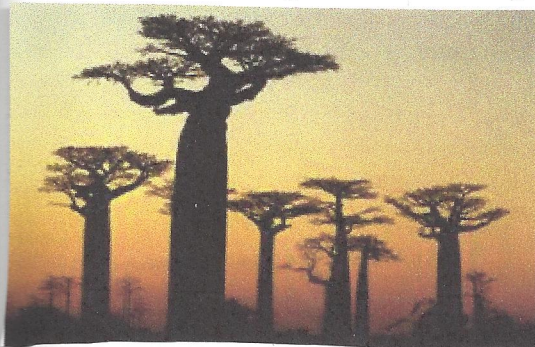
His images often focus on a small area, allowing greater emphasis to be placed on the subject.

Photos such as these have their intensity enhanced due to the focused nature of the images. They evoke pity and anger and discomfort, key ingredients for affecting reform

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Shape: a two-dimensional element basic to picture composition; the 1st means by which a viewer identifies an object within a picture. Shape can be manipulated to be more dominant by placing them against contrasting backgrounds ↓

Form is three-dimensional shape, brought out often using shadows ↓

Color: the colors of an image influence its mood; brighter colors add vibrancy and energy, blues and greens have a soothing effect, and reds and yellows convey an invigorating mood. ↓

Contrast of color excites the eye, making it jump from one color to the next ✓ Repetition of single color induces a harmonious effect on the photo ↗

Shape: Element which gives depth to images. Can be positive (taken up by object such as the subject) or negative ("empty" space)

In close-ups as well, providing a defined background and foreground gives depth to the photo.

Use of space is best illustrated by landscape photography. In this photo, there is a well-defined background and foreground, accentuated by the dock's focal distance with relation to the water and sky.

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9/24/13 Emphasis: The center of interest, the area that first attracts attention in a composition, can be created by contrast of values, colors, and placement
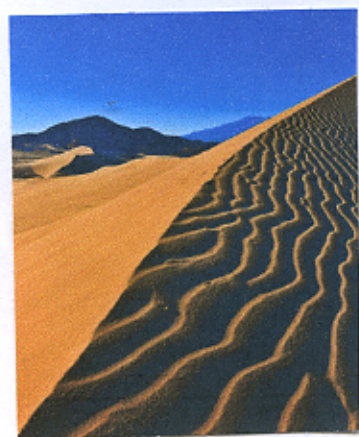
Ribbon surrounded by repetitious grass emphasizes ribbon's bold color.
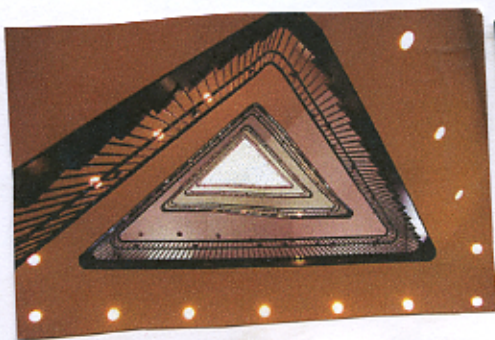

Contrast between wood "foreground" and forest "background" draws emphasis to hole in wood.

Contrast: The arrangement of opposite elements (light vs. dark colors, rough vs. smooth textures, large vs. small shapes) in a piece to create visual interest, excitement and drama.

Rhythm: Refers to the regular repeating occurrence of elements in the scene just as in music. Repetition of similar shapes sets up a rhythm that makes seeing easier and more enjoyable.

Landscape Photography and
Ansel Adams

- Ansel Adams (1902-1984) was an American photographer and environmentalist
- Famous for his black-and-white landscape photography; he disliked using color because he felt that it distracted viewers from the photo's content
- Photo were mainly taken in the American West, especially in Yosemite National Park
- Developed the Zone System, a photographic technique for determining optimal film exposure and development, with his friend Fred Archer
- His photography was used to advocate conservation, and it helped expand the national park system and promote the Sierra Club