

# Expressions

Conversations in landscape photography



JOURNAL 7

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Conversations in landscape photography



This journal is published by [aspect2i.co.uk](http://aspect2i.co.uk)

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We have now left 2024 behind where we were probably surrounded by family and possibly overindulging during the Christmas celebrations! For some, it's good to enjoy some rest and relaxation, and for others, to begin thinking of their photographic travels during 2025 and what they would like to explore.

Challenging yourself with your photography is not often something we consider doing as the pursuit itself is there to be enjoyed, frequently surrounded by inspiring landscapes that ignite our creative vision. It is true to say that we only get better at something if we are willing to take some considered risks in the knowledge that we may encounter failure.

One of the most talked about challenges we hear photographers deliberating is whether or not to pursue a distinction with the Royal Photographic Society. As many of you will know, Michael Pilkington made that very decision in 2023 and last year he was awarded his Fellowship of the Royal Photographic Society. In this issue of 'Expressions' Michael shares his full story from committing to embarking on that journey, choosing the subject matter, right down to his experience on the day of assessment.

With probably the coldest winter months still ahead of us there is still the lion's share of winter landscape photography to be explored. For Paul Gallagher this is a very significant part of his photographic calendar and one of the countries he has been visiting for over a decade every year is Norway. Here he shares with us some of the stories of his first travels and experiences in one of the most beautiful Arctic countries.

We see images everywhere these days and some can make you stop and engage. This is how we found the wonderful coastal photography of Simon Berry and invited him to be our Featured Photographer. He shares with us how his professional photographic career was launched, why he loves being at the coast and where his inspirations will take his photography.

Changing direction and experimenting with new ways of making images is important us all. Paul Gallagher has done this throughout his career, but always returns to his roots in black and white landscape photography, although this time, a certain piece of equipment made a personal project all the more fascinating. In this issue he talks about his discovery of the Lensbaby Velvet 56 and how it became such a useful tool.

As always, Expressions is free to everyone, so if you know a budding photographer or a visual artist you would think would enjoy what we are offering here, then please share this link with them [\*\*aspect2i.co.uk/journal\*\*](https://aspect2i.co.uk/journal).





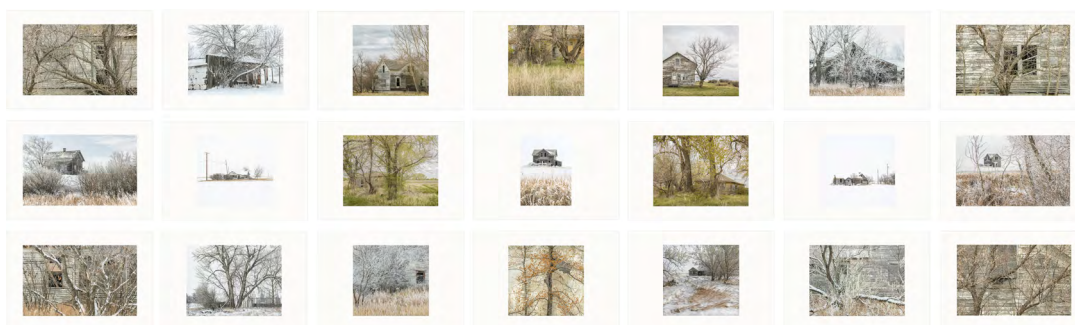
# My journey to FRPS

*by Michael Pilkington*

# My journey to FRPS

by Michael Pilkington

Whilst I had toyed with the idea of a formal RPS qualification for the whole time I had been pursuing photography, I had never really brought it to fruition. Decades ago, I had considered seeking the LRPS Award and subsequently many years on, I considered my skills had sufficiently developed to attain an ARPS Award. Whilst I had even prepared some candidate images for an ARPS submission, time and work commitments always seemed to push this venture down my list of priorities.



© Michael Pilkington

In 2022, my business partner and friend, Paul Gallagher was awarded an honorary FRPS. For me, this projected a huge disparity in presenting our skills and experience to the world and, importantly, our clients. If you are familiar with the expression, it was a case of the monkey and the organ grinder. Internally, I felt a lot of pressure to pursue my FRPS. An important factor was that I did not need to have gained an ARPS to do this meaning I could apply directly for the FRPS.

It took the best part of a year for me to decide on what exactly what body of work I would submit. I consulted the RPS website for the criteria, of which the need to create a distinctive body of work stuck in my mind. I am a landscape photographer, and within that genre, woodland and infrared photography are passions of mine, and often the two come together. However, how was it possible to produce twenty-one images, a veritable body of work, in these areas? Twenty-one images that are distinctive and not repetitive. This latter point is fundamental.

I had watched a couple of assessments and one of the key things, if not the most pertinent consideration, was not to have any sense of repetition within the panel. The question for me, therefore, was how to avoid this characteristic if the panel was made up of images of trees. Indeed, this did prove to be challenging and worrisome when creating my panel.

As I have said, I reflected on what was going to be the subject of my panel. This was a long process and I went around in circles. Speaking to others is probably the most difficult aspect of the whole

experience. I think what this comes down to is the struggle to make a decision. You can find yourself fraught with trepidation. Often, it is best to just commit and make that bold move. Create a couple of panels of the subjects you have considered and see what transpires.



© Michael Pilkington

The subject of my panel came about by pure accident. In 2022, I visited the Great Plains of Montana and North Dakota in the USA. The main purpose of this trip was to photograph the abandoned homesteads that were left behind as people migrated away from these areas, as weather and economic pressures made survival an impossible task and occurred around the time of the Great Depression. It was a fascinating trip, made richer by talking to locals and hearing stories of their ancestors and the communities that existed there during those immensely difficult times.

Typically, I do not photograph buildings in the landscape, nor people for that matter. I am a purist! However, something happened on this trip. The tales I heard brought a new dimension to what I was seeing, a reality and a context. The knowledge I had gained from the people I had spoken with transformed the abandoned farmhouses and churches into places in which people raised children and communities gathered.

I started to have an emotional connection with what I was photographing. These started to evolve into

excitement as I looked at the images on the back of my camera.

The weather, hot summers and bitterly cold winters, have taken their toll on the buildings, creating beautiful textures arising from the decay of the wood and paint. What I also observed was that nature was slowly but surely taking back its original domain. The land that had been re-purposed by man into dwellings, schools, churches and other structures that made up the communities that had once lived here, was now giving way to trees and shrubs as they were encroaching on the buildings, and at times, growing within their boundaries and through the walls and roofs.



© Michael Pilkington

At the time of this trip, I did not know that the work I had produced was going to be the subject of my panel. It was a couple of months later, when compiling a presentation that I realised I had more than enough images for a panel and that this was a subject that I could communicate with and feel passionate about. Gradually the concept that this could be my submission for the FRPS took shape in my mind.

In March 2023, I applied for my assessment which would be for October that year. I had seven months to bring this together, which I thought was ample time, even with all the travelling I do with my job. Let's look at the criteria for the qualification:

- A submission that demonstrates a distinctive body of work.
- A Statement of Intent that defines the purpose of the work, identifying its aims and objectives.
- A cohesive body of work that depicts and communicates an individual's vision and understanding.
- The highest level of technical ability using techniques and photographic practices appropriate to the subject.
- An appropriate and high level of understanding of the craft and artistic presentation.



The first thing I had to do at this stage was to write the Statement of Intent. It is limited to 150 words. What I had learned from others was that every word counts. Do not waste words. Every word used must relate to the images and every image must relate to the words. They are intrinsically linked. The other key piece of advice from Paul at the time was that a Fellowship panel is not a collection of your most fantastic images. No one image can be stronger, or indeed, weaker, than any other. All images in the panel must 'sing' at the same volume. No star performers, just perfect harmony! So, this is not about showcasing your superstar photos.



© Michael Pilkington

With the Statement of Intent written, I set about selecting candidate images. I was very clear in my mind about the sorts of images that I wanted. Indeed, I was feeling very confident. This confidence stemmed somewhat from discussions with Paul who seemed convinced that my achieving a fellowship was not a problem, a proverbial walk in the park! I was somewhat arrogant or stupid enough to believe him.

After having assembled my panel, I sought out some independent advice from one of the Landscape Category Assessment Panel judges. I have to say that the feedback I was given was very balanced, positive and helpful. What caused my confidence level to drop through the floor was the phrase 'the images are somewhat repetitive!' I was extremely disappointed as I had gone to great lengths to avoid this. I chose different aspect ratios for the images and used different perspectives, colours and compositions. But this, it transpired, was not enough. I was offered some suggestions on how I could introduce more variation.



## FRPS Statement of Intent

*My intent with this panel of photographs taken on the Great Plains of the USA is to present the captivating narrative of how the landscape is reclaimed by nature after buildings are abandoned by man. The transformative power of nature, chaotically and gracefully, takes back the structures that were once created by human hands. The photographs capture the serene beauty of nature's reclamation, the slow encroachment of trees and shrubs seeded by the wind, birds and animals. Battered by the seasons, especially harsh winters, the fabric of these buildings face an additional persistent onslaught. These photographs will serve as a poignant reminder of the enduring presence of nature and its ability to restore balance and reclaim what was once its own. By presenting this panel, I want to evoke a sense of awe and appreciation for the intricate relationship between humanity and the ever-resilient forces of the natural world.*



© Michael Pilkington

The thing with a panel is, that if you change one image, you must change two or four or even more, as the overall layout of the panel is a coherent body of work and each image or pair of images reflects each other. So, in practice, you don't just need twenty-one images for the panel, you need vastly more to choose from as changes and substitutions will be an integral part of arriving at a balanced submission.



© Michael Pilkington

I was fortunate enough to have another trip to Montana planned in a month. So, I would have an opportunity to augment my collection of images and think carefully about how I could diversify the panel. The difficulty I faced was that all the images I had previously taken were in the depths of winter and in deep snow. Going back in May, the weather conditions would be entirely different, as would be the colour palette of the images. I would have to deal with that in due course. At that moment, I needed more images to select from, or at least different images.

I had finally curated my Fellowship panel, managing to edit the spring images to reflect more muted colours, which fitted well with the winter images. I believed I had finally overcome the dreaded problem of repetition. I had a last consultation with my Landscape Panel Member and, bar a few minor comments, I felt it was good to go.

You have the option of presenting your panel as either a digital projection or in print. As a strong



advocate of printing and a teacher in the subject, it was incumbent upon me to submit prints. Moreover, I believe that prints transform images and have a certain presence that surpasses that of digital projection. They are the final and ultimate step in the photographic journey. I was not going to present my Fellowship Submission as digital images they would be finished prints. So, for me, that was the only way to go.



© Michael Pilkington

I have printed a lot of images in my time. Printing incorporates editing and the actual mechanical act of getting the image printed on paper. However, I felt a certain trepidation. I don't think I have had my prints scrutinised before, and certainly not examined so closely by a panel of experts, all of whose work I admire. Anxiety started to set in. Would my images be good enough? Would the prints excel and stand out from the rest? Was my panel engaging or interesting enough?

I decided to print my images on Epson Bright Cotton Smooth Bright, which is a fine art paper and one I am very familiar with. That is important. You need to fully understand how a paper will present your image and what adjustments may need to be made so that it perfectly matches the image you have edited on your monitor. I must have printed the whole panel three times. Firstly, to see the panel as finished prints, not just images on a screen. I wanted to understand how the prints would sit together and whether the colours and overall compositions sat well with each other.

At this point, I found that one print just didn't work. I couldn't get it to match the subtlety of the other images. Therefore, I had to change two prints. This can pose a dilemma as, at this stage, you have committed to the final panel. One of the images doesn't work, but the other, which inevitably you will have to swap out, does. It is the sacrifice of this image that makes this somewhat complicated. To



use an analogy, it is like a game of Jenga. You have to remove and replace one piece and prevent the whole tower from collapsing.



© Michael Pilkington

The next iteration of the process was to print all the images full after some final adjustments and then examine each print to ensure that colour and sharpness were appropriate.

In parallel, I was deliberating the mounts and mounting techniques. Whilst viewing another panel being judged earlier in the year, I witnessed a candidate fail because the quality of the prints which had been printed on a gloss paper and had cockles. They had been sent from overseas and had been exposed to a myriad of environments, in particular moisture, which can cause this problem. I was, therefore, obsessed with not having any environmental factors affect my prints. Against modern



archival convention, I engaged a professional framing company to dry-mount the prints and cut the mounts. I chose a very thick mount that, in colour, matched the paper I was printing on.



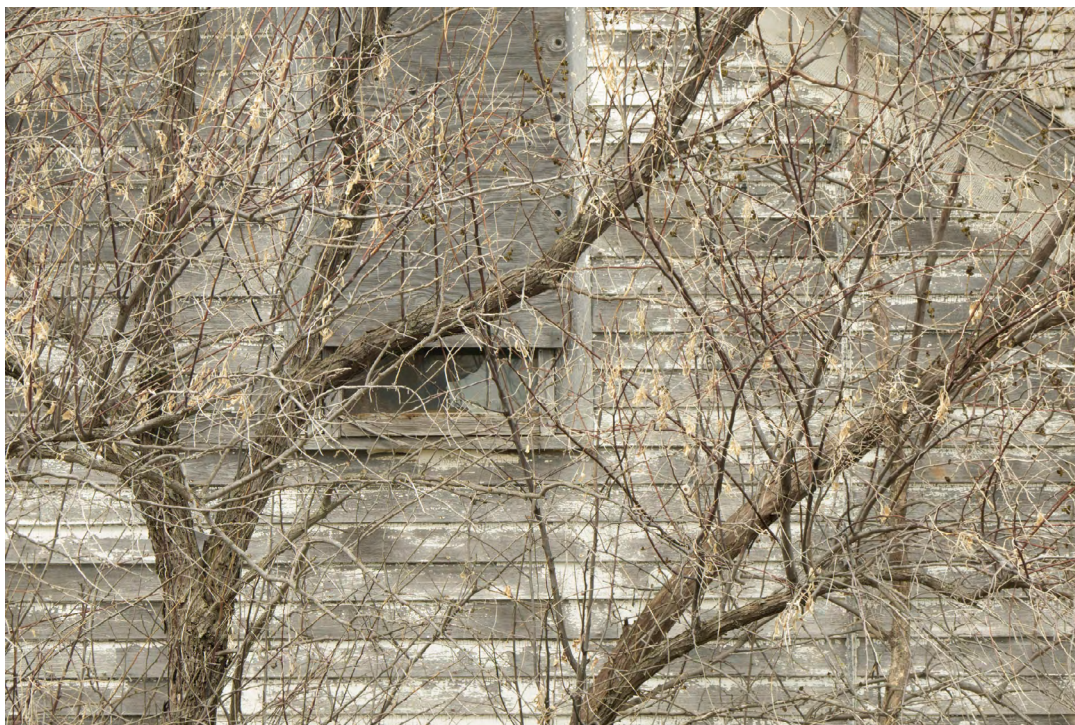
© Michael Pilkington

I was now running against the clock. It surprised me that seven months had passed so quickly. I had to negotiate with the framer to give priority to my project which he kindly did. I collected the finished work and, back at home, set out all the prints – again! I have to say I was very pleased with it. A little more confidence seeped back in, but that is not to say I was optimistic.

I had a week left to get the finished and printed panel to RPS House in Bristol. Again, anxiety set in. How was I going to transport the mounted prints to Bath without them getting damaged and not exposed to extremes in the environment? Perhaps I was over-obsessing. I purchased a couple of robust portfolio boxes and packed them out so the individually mounted prints would not move and damage each other. Still, I had to decide how to get them to Bristol. A courier service, perhaps? What if they lost them? What if they damaged them? What if they left the package out in the rain? My anxiety levels were starting to rocket again. I found this all very interesting as I don't normally suffer from anxiety, well, at least not to the levels I was experiencing. I finally decided to drive them down personally. It would be a seven-hour round trip, but at least I would be certain that they would arrive in the best possible condition.



The assessment itself was not for another three weeks. All I could do was wait. I decided not to attend in person but watch via Zoom. I did not want to experience the humiliation of failing in person. I had, to keep myself motivated and accountable, told many people, family, friends, and clients that I was going for my FRPS. So, failure was going to be embarrassing. I was already considering what I would do if I didn't succeed.



© Michael Pilkington

On the day of the assessment, my submission was to be the first to be assessed. There were ten FRPS assessments that day. I did consider that being the first, the judges would be fresh, keen and more critical, and perhaps less so than on the last panel to be assessed. I am sure they are professional enough for this not to be the case, but I am fretting now.

The judges hear the Statement of Intent read out and observe the panel from a distance, and then they all walk up to examine the prints close up and in detail. They pick up the odd print, holding it to the light, looking for imperfections and faults. My anxiety levels are now going through the roof. After this examination, they all sit down, and the Chair asks them to give comments. I was pleased that the first one was very complimentary, using words like 'this is clearly of the standard of an FRPS'. Some other comments the panel received pointed out other minor (at least to my mind) observations. One judge said that the images in each corner of the panel were somewhat similar – ie. repetition! My heart sank.

After comments have been received, the judges are asked to vote. You do not see how each one votes; this is kept from you and the audience that has attended in person. Finally, the Chair announces the verdict. I did not know that they only give out the name of the candidate if they pass. The next words



I heard were, 'I am pleased to announce that Michael Pilkington has been awarded the qualification of FRPS'. My reaction was not to jump out of my chair shouting and hollering. I felt no excitement, only a truly profound sense of relief. Of course, I was pleased, but I felt no joy at that time. For the record, only two out of the ten passed that day.

It was a few months later that I started to feel a sense of pride in what I had achieved. Now, more than a year later, I do feel very proud of the achievement. I feel a sense of satisfaction being able to put those esteemed letters after my name – FRPS – Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society.

In conclusion, would I recommend anyone pursuing this? My initial motivation was, quite frankly, commercial. I did it for my professional persona. However, I do believe that having six expert and professional photographers, ostensibly at the top of their game, assess my work and say it is worthy of a Fellowship Award is tremendously satisfying. Having been a photographer since I was sixteen and having learnt so much, especially during the last decade and a half as a professional photographer, it is good to know that I have reached such levels. The exercise was also a test of not just my abilities as a photographer but also made me look at my work critically. It forced me to be humble and think about the process I was going through. Creating a portfolio of work keenly tied to a Statement of Intent is challenging and at the same time fulfilling. You don't have to go for any qualifications, but it is good to know where you stand and pit yourself against your virtual peers. The process gives you a purpose and focus to your photography and that is essential if you are to keep evolving as a visual artists.

So, been there, done that. What now?







# Winter at 68°

*by Paul Gallagher*



## Travelogue - A truthful account of an individual's experiences to or within a particular place

Often, simply seeing images of a country is sufficient to instigate a desire to visit it. Norway was one such country. It always appeared wild, largely uninhabited and very remote. The next attraction was the winter. As with many landscape photographers the winter has a certain quintessence about it, and in far greater volume in Norway. The next progression in this attraction to the country was to set a date and go. It was 2013 and my first experience of being a dedicated winter traveller to Norway was the flights I had to take to get there. There were three in total. Manchester to Oslo, Oslo to Bodo and the final leg was Bodo to Leknes.



© Paul Gallagher

As with all travel to expansive countries with a limited window of time, you have to commit to a specific region and Lofoten was placed firmly at the top of the list. On this particular trip I was accompanied by my good friend and fellow photographer; Michael Pilkington. The final flight from Bodo to Leknes was to become something of a fascination for me as it was my first taste of flying in a smaller twin propeller plane. It was dawn and as the plane gained altitude, I saw the Lofoten Islands in their full glory below me veiled in fresh snow from the night before and surrounded by pristine turquoise seas.



© Paul Gallagher

This flight was also to deliver my first experience of being aboard an aircraft that lands on a frozen runway. At first this was a little unnerving, but the Norwegian people are experts at surviving the winter season, so a slippery runway was not at all considered challenging.

At the time of arranging this trip, with there only being two occupants of the vehicle we were intending to use, there seemed little point in hiring anything other than a small car. On first sight, we had second



thoughts about this decision. At the car desk in the airport arrivals area, and yes it was just one tall wooden desk, we could see out of the window to the car park outside. The car hire company employee handed us the keys, and when we enquired where the car was, he pointed to a little Nissan Note which he had very considerably de-iced and warmed up for us. For those of you unfamiliar with this model of Japanese engineering, it's the type of car your grandmother would purchase to collect her weekly shop. It was at this juncture I learned that in Norway it is a legal requirement to fit studded tyres to your vehicle during the winter months as they make no effort at all to maintain the ice-free roads, they simply remove snow drifts enabling to make your way driving on compacted ice. A far cry, I hear you say, from the autumnal leaf litter that can render the west coast main line redundant for a day!



© Paul Gallagher

A few miles down the road, and with our street-cred in tatters, Michael and I began our adventure into the landscapes of Lofoten, and the little Nissan Note got us everywhere we wanted to go with ease.

The roads of Lofoten mostly skirt the edge of the fjords and coastline at the base of the mountains. The landscape is a graphic interweave of deep fjords, rocky coastlines looking out over the Norwegian Sea and secluded beaches, all of which are never far away from the towering granite mountains that jut out from sea level. Having been fortunate to travel through many of the beautiful landscapes of the world, this part of Norway far exceeded my expectations. During this first visit, and many more since, I have been fortunate to witness the snowstorms of the winter. One moment you can be standing in the landscape enjoying the very low warm sunlight expected this far north at 68°, and the next the skies begin to darken through a deep purple-blue to a foreboding grey and the snows arrive. Visibility can reduce to a few meters at times, but as the blizzard breaks, the mountains surrounding you gently reappear, and you once again grasp the scale of your surroundings and the raw power of nature



© Paul Gallagher

The locations I had listed to visit were as beautiful as I had hoped, yet exploring other small gravel roads led me to places at the edge of the coast that left me speechless with the sights of the distant jagged peninsulas. I recall vividly observing the mountains of Flakstad for the first time as I took the E10 and headed south towards Ramberg. As the road descends, before you are a line of mighty serrated mountain spires that have been the subject matter of a lot of my work in Lofoten. On this first visit I was desperate to photograph the incredible light on the peaks so took the little road that leads to Vikten Beach and found a rock plateau reaching out into the fjord that I have spent many a happy hour working on during the many return visits.

In 2020 my exploration of Norway continued further north to a latitude of 69° North. I had been looking at images of Norway's largest island for several years and it was enough to beckon me to take another winter trip of exploration. Once again accompanied by Michael, we arrived on the island of Senja in the darkness of a winter evening in early February. This time we still elected to hire a small car but not quite as small as the Nissan Note and splashed out on a Volkswagen Golf which retained some of our re-established street-cred!

The following morning in daylight it became immediately apparent that Senja was quite different to Lofoten due to two main characteristics; the presence of trees, which Lofoten is largely bereft of, and mountain passes that creep over the high mountain ranges servicing the small fishing towns scattered around its shores.



© Paul Gallagher

The elevated viewpoints from the higher ground transformed my experience of Arctic Norway enabling me to witness the expanse of the fjords from above and the interlocking landscape. As with Lofoten, the landscape is as dramatic as you would expect a Norwegian winter landscape to be, and to use the word in its correct context, it is awesome! Although both Senja and Lofoten are a long way from cities and large urban sprawls, Senja being further north felt a little more remote and rugged. Places that I expected to take my breath away did just that such as Tungeneset, also known as The Devils Teeth, that appears before you as you slowly take the coast road from Skaland to Ersfjord. As you stand on the wave polished rock platforms next to the open sea, the almost vertical monolith of rock reaches towards the sky and was thankfully capped in snow and ice during this first visit. As well as exploring the mountain passes and the plentiful rocky foreshores, the beaches on Senja are quite extensive and can occupy a landscape photographer for many hours, and as the sun is constantly moving very low in the sky, the light during the winter months can only be described as exquisite.



The trees of Senja present themselves along the roads that lead to and from the mountains. Being mainly silver birch and certainly contorted by the harsh conditions, they have a gnarled character about them and are often twisted and bent. Being bare of leaves in the winter their shapes are all the more apparent set against pristine snow, and it is very difficult to drive past them without temptation overwhelming you.



© Paul Gallagher

Winter in the UK is not what it used to be, and the expectation of snow seems to be diluted as each year passes. As a landscape photographer, being immersed in a landscape that is truly transformed by winter conditions seems a rite of passage, and without my annual dose, I feel somewhat robbed of the season. Of all of the seasons I experience, winter remains the one that instils an element of child-like excitement and inspiration to be out there, and for that reason, Norway continues to play an important part of my photographic year. Yes, there are days when the snowstorms can be relentless

and your hands and feet remain numb with the cold, but like any pursuit, the rewards still far outweigh the hardship, filling your mind with unforgettable memories and photographs that made you thankful you were there.



© Paul Gallagher









# Featured photographer: Simon Berry

## Simon Berry

Since the beginning of Expressions and the idea of having a featured photographer in each issue, we naturally had a list of people that we were very keen to share with you. Although this list is far from being exhausted, occasionally we like to approach someone who is less well known, but whose work stood out as exemplary.

In this issue of Expressions we have been very pleased to have spoken with one such photographer that caught our attention: Simon Berry. There are not many landscape photographers that do not relish standing on a beach, experiencing the elements and changing light. Simon's photographs express these moments beautifully and we are so pleased he agreed to be featured here in the knowledge that you will appreciate his photographs as much as we do.



© Simon Berry





**From what I can see of you work and your website, you are a professional photographer who splits his time between wedding photography and landscape photography. When did you turn professional and how did you get started in photography?**

I started my professional photography in 2012; a friend knew I was a photographer and asked me to cover his wedding day. Surprisingly, it went really well and I very much enjoyed the day and so my journey into paid photography began there.

I was shooting wildlife as much as I could and initially thought this was for me but I soon realised how difficult it was to capture great images that were saleable and plentiful. So, weddings it was and the occasional trip out to take landscapes.



© Simon Berry



**You clearly have a love for photographing the coast. What draws you to the coast and what elements of this environment do you look for?**

My passion with coastal photography is all to the ever-changing conditions and love of water movement. I often like to go out around when a storm is due or before and after if possible. The Isle of Harris is a favourite destination of mine which offers so many opportunities no matter how the weather is performing. There are numerous locations to explore so you can always be sure to bring home an image.



© Simon Berry



**Landscape photographers often take inspiration from other's work. Are there any photographers that have influenced you over the years and what was it about their work that captivated you?**

I have been influenced by Michael Kenna and Joe Cornish. Different in so many ways but so inspiring. Julien Calverley is another amazing and dramatic photographer and shoots in a way I love. When I look at his images I feel as though I could be standing there.



© Simon Berry





**In comparison to the open landscapes of the coast do you explore landscapes inland such as valleys, woodlands and mountain regions?**

Most of my work is coastal but I am planning to do more inland images and push myself to see these scenes in a way that I have struggled with to date. I intend to explore the mountains and valleys of Scotland this coming winter.



© Simon Berry

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**Are there any countries or locations that you would consider to be on your 'bucket list' and what is it about these places that makes you want to visit?**

Visiting Hokkaido in Japan is very high on my list of places to visit and photograph. The work of Michael Kenna with its simplicity and beauty are just epic. Argentina, Torres del Paine and Yosemite are also places that inspire me and I have a strong desire to visit and photograph.

There is so much more of Scotland and the Hebrides that need to be seen too and hopefully I'll visit there again in early 2025.



© Simon Berry







# Seeing differently

*by Paul Gallagher*

## Seeing differently

*by Paul Gallagher*

I always like to have a project to delve into which makes me consider what I am doing in my work. To this end, I have often taken a malleable approach allowing myself to explore different ways of making photographs with varying subjects. If I ever feel I have arrived in a creative desert, that is when I initiate this, which allows me to suspend the stalemate and take up the freedoms of something else with no trepidation of what will go wrong, nor any intention of sharing the work.



© Paul Gallagher

Two years ago, I needed some of this imaginative exploration and found it when looking at some of the many photography books I have on my shelf. I have always advocated looking at the work of others, wherever it may be found, and as you discover images that make you stop and engage, ask yourself why it happened. What was it about the image that invoked the change from glance to look? It is not always easy to offer an explanation as it may not be the composition or landscape; it may simply be the way the photograph makes you feel, the character and quality it possesses.

Whilst perusing my books I happened upon photographs that were created using old large format cameras fitted with very old hand-ground, vintage lenses. The results were as far as possible from the images we see today from high quality large pixel-count digital cameras capturing light with critically sharp modern-day lenses. The images that arrested me showed an entirely different character with blurred edges, vignetting, and the only portion of the frame that was sharp was the image centre.





I was captivated by the beauty of the images and the dissimilarity to digitally created images I am presented with every day. Given the flaws of the lenses used and the lack of resolving power, the subject was rendered in a way that was not trying to impress or grasp attention. The photographs did not need to try any harder as they had achieved beauty in their own way without the need for modern intervention and technology.



© Paul Gallagher

I began exploring local woodlands to try to create the same visual outcome using long lenses with a wide aperture and mostly dedicating my work to black and white as this genre remains the foundation of my work. I was using modern digital lenses with a Nikon DSLR so when the image editing was embarked upon, further work was needed. After some exploration using various filters in Photoshop to enhance the vignette effect and blur at the image edge, the results became enjoyable to me and I had developed a work-flow through which to work.

Last year the project continued in the background when I assigned myself the time to explore this personal direction, when one day a client on one of our aspect2i workshops showed me a lens that would intensify both my passion and pursuit of this body of work. The lens was a Lensbaby Velvet 56. It has a maximum aperture of f1.6 so can produce an incredibly shallow depth of field. But more appealing to me, it has been built so that when used wide open between f1.6 and f2.8 the velvet effect takes place with the edges of the image circle becoming blurred with soft focus, akin to the vintage lenses used to make the images that stopped me in my tracks whilst looking at my books.

The lens is fully manual so it is all down to the photographer whilst making the exposures. Focussing



can be challenging at times as the combination of aperture and velvet effect is visible as you are creating your composition so there is a lot of the image area that does not appear sharp. In some ways it resembles the days I was using large format cameras, when a foolish mistake could render your images useless.



© Paul Gallagher

I have not been the owner of this lens for very long, but the results so far have been exactly what I was seeking. Photography is a representation of reality captured by the photographer and presented as an image. Black and white is a further step away from reality with the absence of colour, and using the Lensbaby 56 Velvet, a step further. Working this way forces you to see your surrounding differently as not all in your frame will be clearly visible when the process is concluded. What you elect to remain sharp makes the eye keener when you are out there, and the ordinary is given attention and often becomes beautiful.



© Paul Gallagher





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# Right time, right place

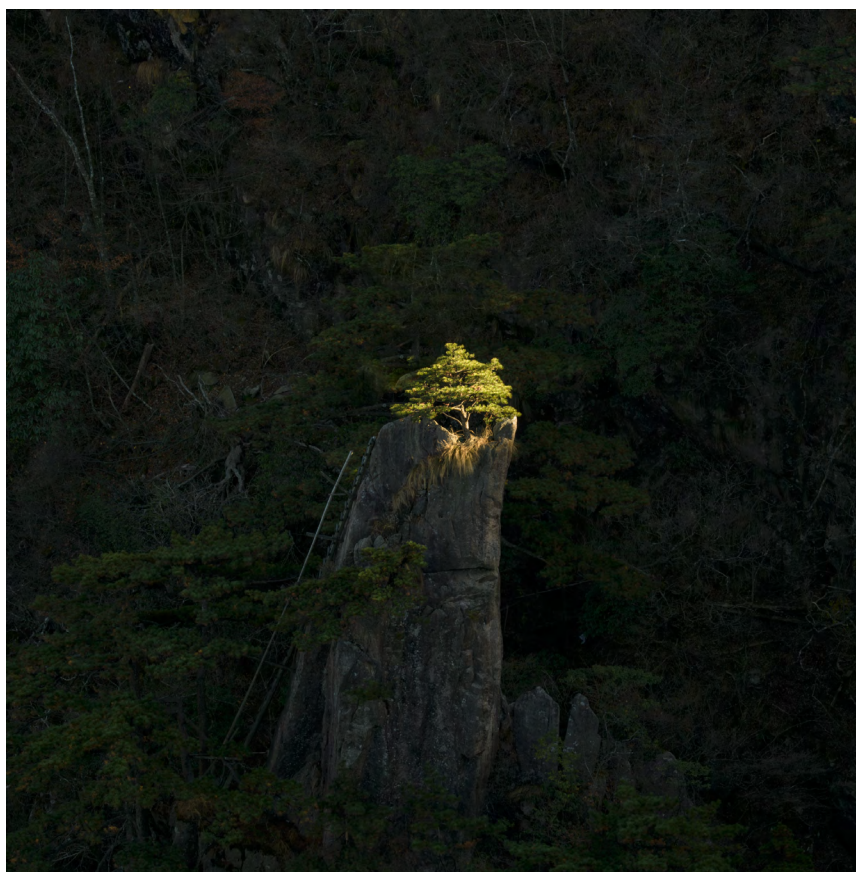
*by Michael Pilkington*

## Right time, right place

*by Michael Pilkington*

It happens sometimes. You are at the right place at the right time, and this is what happened here. This is an image of Brush Tail Hill in the Yellow Mountains of China and it sits within a deep valley that only receives direct sunlight occasionally. For just thirty minutes a day, give or take, a shaft of sunlight hits the tree perched on top of a rock and illuminates it. For this brief moment in time, the tree glows against the rock faces behind it that are cast into relative darkness.

For an image like this, the goal is to eliminate as much as possible any details in the background as these will only serve to distract the viewer from the main subject, this being the tree. So, in these circumstances, we would want to under-expose the image to cast as much of the background into shadow. We will effectively be shooting to the left (normally, we would shoot a little to the right to slightly over-expose and avoid the manifestation of noise in the image, particularly the shadows).



© Michael Pilkington

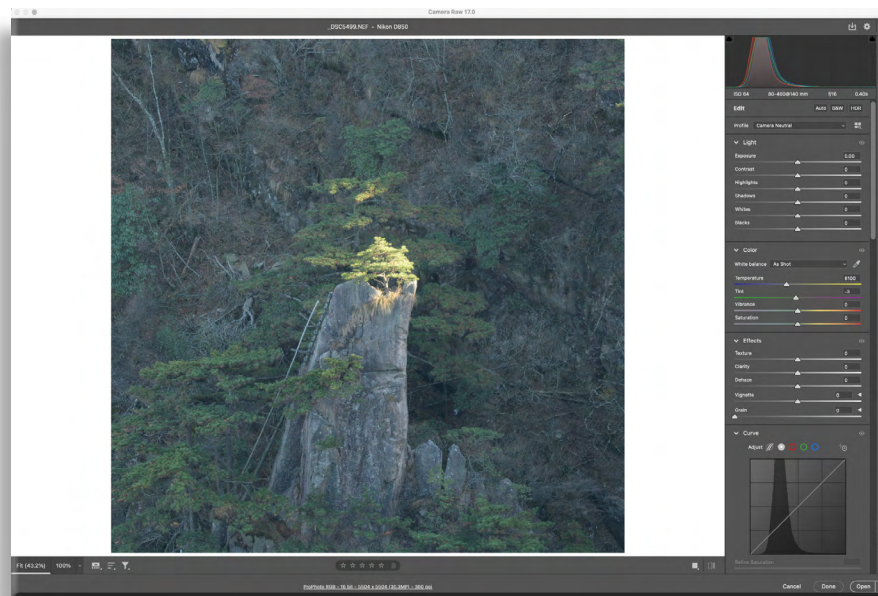
It was also necessary to under-expose the image because the dynamic range was quite large; dark shadows and bright highlights where the sun was hitting the tree. In effect, I was achieving two goals with one action.



## How I got the shot

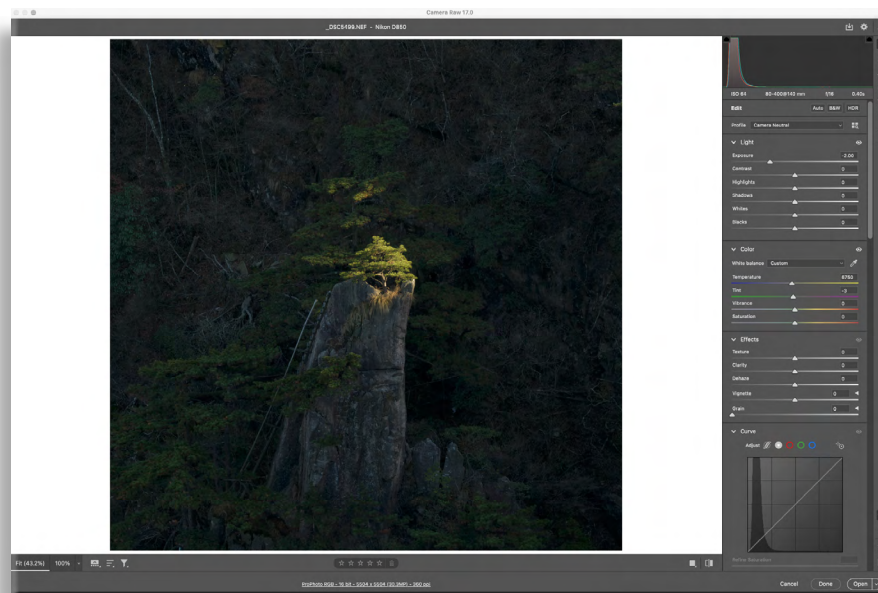


Despite under-exposing the frame, as can be seen from the histogram, there is still a lot of detail in the background.



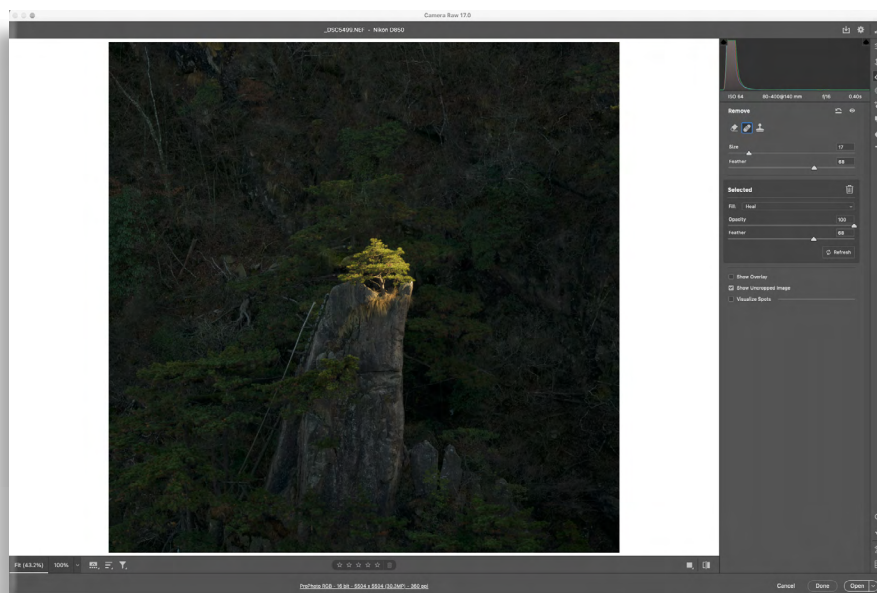
Raw file and starting position

The first thing to do, keeping in mind our objective, is to reduce the exposure significantly. This removes a lot of the detail in the background and also increases the saturation of the yellows and greens in the tree. Remember, increasing luminance or exposure reduces saturation and decreasing



Step 1 - bring down the exposure

exposure will increase saturation. We want to retain some detail in the background. It is important to retain a sense of context and visual interest so we don't want to reduce exposure to the extent that the background is entirely black. What we can see now, is that there are some branches or foliage on the cliff face behind the main subject of our tree, that are also catching some of the sunlight. So my next step will be to use the healing brush tool and remove them as they will only act as a distraction and compete with the sunlit tree.

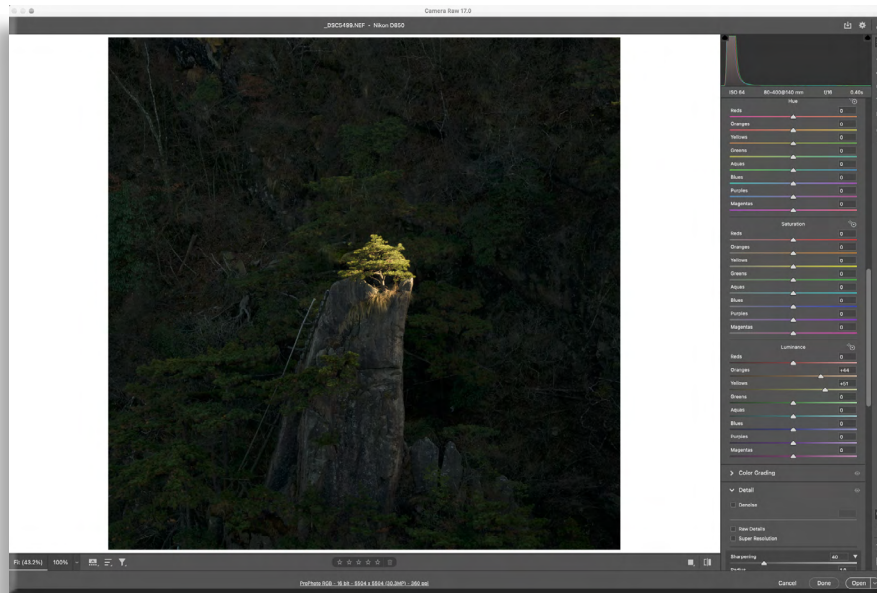


Step 2 - remove distractions from behind the main tree

The actions we have taken so far, reducing exposure, has drastically removed the luminosity of the tree. Normally I would use the white slider to bring out the light in the image, but in this case, that action would reveal details in the background and effectively undo what has so far been achieved.

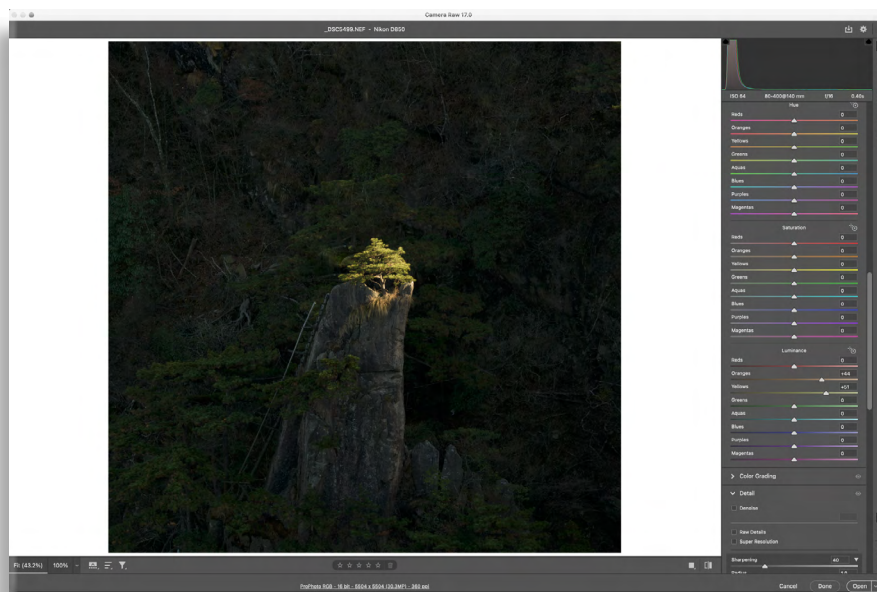
I need to bring out the light in the tree and an effective way of doing this is to turn to the HSL (Hue, Saturation and Luminosity) sliders. As the image has so few colours, and the colour which is there is concentrated on the main tree, I can use these sliders to increase the appearance of light hitting the tree.

So, my next step is to increase the luminosity of the yellow slider which will affect the greens in the tree (most greens that we see are substantially yellow) and also the orange slider as this will affect the dead grasses at the base of the tree which are equally in sunlight.



Step 3 - increasing the luminosity of the greens and oranges

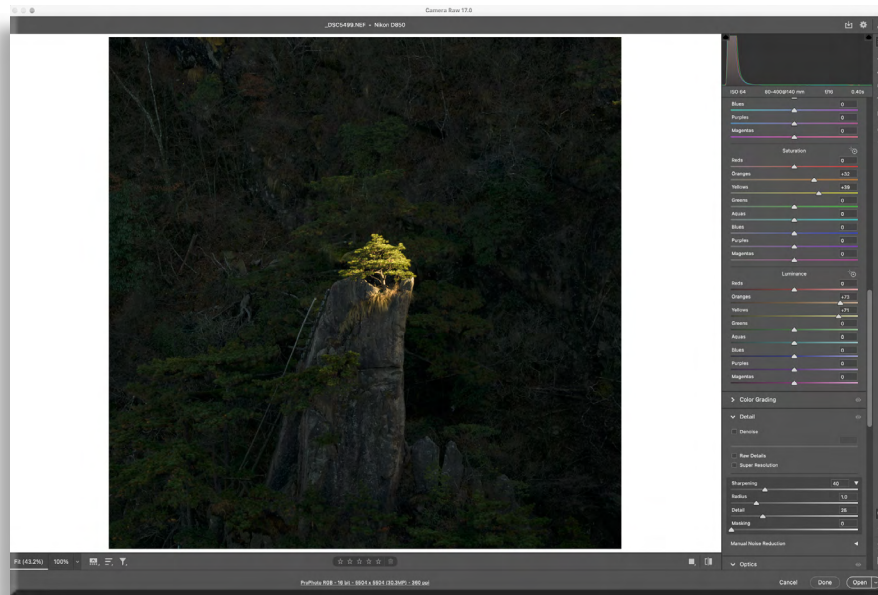
The tree is standing out nicely now, however, I feel that it is glowing and losing some of its definition. To remedy this I am going to use a brush to select the tree and add clarity and texture.



Step 4 - increasing clarity and texture of the tree



As mentioned before, increasing luminosity of a colour will effectively desaturate it. The tree has lost some of its vibrancy and so it is now necessary to dial back in some of the yellows and oranges lost during the previous step.



Step 5 - increasing saturation of the yellows and oranges

Editing of the image is now complete. It is a simple process and took no more than five minutes to complete. What is important to remember, is to be clear about what you want to do with an image before you start and understanding what are the tools that you can use to achieve that.

I strongly recommend that you spend just five to ten minutes everyday editing your images. They don't need to be your best photos, nor does the finished image have to be perfect. This exercise is simply to improve your knowledge of the tools and how they work so they become second nature and you can concentrate on the create aspects of editing.



# Change is everywhere

*by Phil Newberry*

## Change is everywhere

by *Phil Newberry*

Early in 2024, my partner and I decided to escape the gloomy winter for a few days and flew to Morocco, staying in a lovely Riad in Marrakech. It is an amazing place, rich in sights, sounds, smells, and a culture that we hadn't experienced before. The temperature was a perfect mid-twenties during the day, with bright blue skies.



© Phil Newberry

This trip was all about relaxation and spending time together and not about photography, so I hadn't packed my main photography gear; all I took was my Infrared converted Canon EOS R and a 50mm RF lens. The 50mm is small, light, and doesn't suffer too badly from the infrared hotspot issue. There are many things I love about shooting infrared images, including the ability to produce images in conditions that would otherwise be too contrasty and harsh, so I figured it could be a good choice of camera to bring.

Before we left the UK, we'd already decided to book an excursion to break up the stay with something outside of the city. We settled on a visit to the Cascades d'Ouzoud (Ouzoud Falls), which is about 2.5 hours Northeast of Marrakech. Ouzoud means 'the act of grinding grain' or 'olive' in the Amazigh language, depending on which article you read. Either definition speaks to the features of the area, including old hydro-powered mills and an abundance of olive trees.

When we arrived at our destination, we met our guide, Mohamed, an Amazigh from that region. He



explained that the water that was used to irrigate the groves was switched daily between groves owned by different families. Earlier in our walk he had explained that temperatures in 2023 hit 50 degrees and that they were definitely noticing the effects of climate change.

It was incredibly liberating to walk around with just a camera and a single lens; no other paraphernalia to worry about. This trip was no exception, and I'm sure I came back with compositions I either wouldn't have noticed, wouldn't have bothered to set up, or just wouldn't have worked as well if shot in those conditions with my main camera.

Eventually we arrived at the Ouzoud falls. They are the tallest in North Africa, at around 330 feet in 3 stages, fed by melting snow from the High Atlas Mountains and, although not yet the peak time of year for water flow, our guide explained that they were considerably reduced from what they would normally expect at that time of the year. You can see the limestone tufa flowstone-like formation to the left of the image. This is formed by the water which flowed over limestone dissolving some of the calcium carbonate in the rock and depositing this as calcite on the rocks behind the waterfall. It would normally be less visible as it would be hidden by cascading water.

If I had brought a tripod with me, I would almost certainly have found a vantage point where I could set up my camera and slowed the shutter speed to achieve a silky look to the cascading water, doubtless capturing a composition similar to many you can see online. At the base of the waterfall is a natural pool that some hardier youngsters were bathing in and, for a few Dirhams, the locals offer small boat or raft rides across the pool. These seat about eight people and are rowed out to the base of the falls. It only takes a few minutes, and I could see that they didn't take people close enough to get completely soaked, so I risked taking my camera. I'm really glad I did because it allowed me to capture an unusual perspective that I hadn't seen elsewhere, with the infrared adding an extra dimension to the captured scene, including highlighting the lush greens of the flora around the falls.

I don't have the steadiest of hands at the best of times, so bobbing around under the falls on a raft was a challenge, especially as the lens isn't image stabilised. I increased the ISO to 200 and hoped for the best. While it's not the sharpest image I've ever taken, I came away feeling that I'd captured something different and perhaps even unique, and within it is a story of the change and struggle that the environment faces and the challenges this brings to the people whose lives and livelihoods are impacted.

Of the fifty or so images I took that day, those taken at the falls sum up the rugged beauty of the scenery, the calm and peace we felt there, and the hospitality and decades of knowledge our guide generously offered us. For me, it is also a poignant indicator of the changing world we're all trying to adapt to, and the impact that we and the climate changes are having on the flora and fauna that we all so enjoy trying to capture.

## End note

***"I crop for the benefit of the pictures. The world just does not fit conveniently into the format of a 35mm camera. W. Eugene Smith"***

W. Eugene Smith

Most of the time we are concerned with what we are including in our frame, and moreover, the position of the elements within it. It is often suggested to help with this that we have wretched rules that we can apply such as the Rule of Thirds or the 80/20 rule. For anyone that has experienced some form of maturation during their photographic journey, these are thankfully cast aside and disregarded.

The next restriction photographers apply to themselves, sometimes without knowing, is common aspect ratios. All too often we hear photographers saying, "I have to photograph this in a 16:9 ratio?", or even worse, "I'll have to leave that out as I am shooting square." The composition should never be dictated by the shape of the frame you are using.

This is very different from learning how to adopt a specific aspect ratio and was something that film users frequently mastered. An obvious example of this was Colin Prior's panoramic work of the Highlands of Scotland. These photographs showed us how to see the glens and mountain ranges of Scotland in a very different way and became seminal work selling many thousands of calendars for decades. The difference here was what was happening before the camera came out of the bag, pre-visualisation and the intent to use the frame as a creative tool.

W. Eugene Smith is saying that very often the frame in which your image is placed is of less importance than the image itself and is advocating the freedom to crop in whatever aspect ratio you choose. It may be the case that simply one side of the image captured contains superfluous information that only serves to dilute the message in the image. If that was the case, why apply the crop to anywhere else?

It is these subtle conventions that slowly creep into our work that we embrace and even gain comfort from that could be restricting our freedom, and indeed, diluting the power of our images. Once again, more rules that become shackles we should shake free from.

If you would like to comment on what you have read, you have something to add, or you have any questions that may help you on your way in your photography, then please get in touch. You may have had an experience you would like to share that you know others would be fascinated to hear, or you may want to contribute as a featured photographer or submit an article. Just follow the email link below and feel free to drop us a line with your thoughts or equally leave a comment on our [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#) pages.

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## Education



## Retreats



## Online



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