How Visual Perception Affects Picture Taking

Perspective – We cannot get that important BINOCULAR view of a scene in a photograph, we also miss out on clues due to movement (as we, or the objects move, they have a different relationship to each other) so we need other clues such as converging lines, distant mist, haze etc. When using anything but a "standard" lens we exaggerate perspective (wide angle) or compress (telephoto) it; these lenses need careful use, especially when using a rangefinder camera because the perspective in the viewfinder does not change. With a wideangle have some part of your picture close to the lens, otherwise you end up with loads of empty space and very very distant mountains!

Horizons – We are strongly conditioned, by living in our "carpentered" environment to judging verticals and horizontals – get them a bit out in some circumstances and you spoil the picture. If you are way out though, you may get away with it. Often, you will notice, television cameramen will deliberately tilt the camera when shooting, say, the pages of a book

Distractions (1) – Red things we notice readily – use black and white!!! Bright things out of the composition area are going to distract because our peripheral vision (with the fuzzy but sensitive rods) is designed to pick up light colours or movement.

Distractions (2) – We can easily miss "blemishes" in our pictures before we press the shutter because the brain is concentrating so much on the subject at the time of taking. The fresh look at the scene when we see the image later and we kick ourselves! Why didn't we notice that? Just bear this in mind and try to look all round the image in the viewfinder before taking the shot.

Keep It Simple – the brain is constantly scanning a moving image and is rarely encountering something completely new. The photograph is a still image and we approach it with only a title to prepare our minds in some cases. What was clear to you when you took the picture may not be to the viewer. Keep compositions simple and clear.

Shade – Our Visual system is designed to figure out the lightness of surfaces and we must beware of overestimating the films ability to "see" into the shadows in the same way we can.

Colours - An associated factor is the film "seeing" the same colours we do. The familiar example is the Bluebell which Patrick Walley illustrated to us last week. This is not so much an illusion but simply because the pattern of response to colours is different in our visual system and in the film. In full sunlight the film picks up a lot of the redder end of the reflected light than our eyes do. In diffuse light the blue is truer to what we see. Our brains will also assume constancy of colour in objects seen in different light and we have to be aware of this in taking pictures.

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