

CREATIVE52



WEEKLY PROJECTS TO INVIGORATE
YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY PORTFOLIO

LINDSAY ADLER

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PEACHPIT PRESS

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Lindsay Adler

PEACHPIT PRESS

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DEDICATION

To everyone that knows the only way to live is for your passion. And for all our friends and family who support us in our pursuits.

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First and foremost, thank you to the lovely women who made this book possible: Valerie Witte and Scout Festa. I know that at times my words were jumbled and I was sometimes lax with deadlines, but I truly feel that the book was worth it and that we produced something beautiful together!

I never get to thank you two enough, Mom and Dad. You have always been my safety net in case I should ever fail in my pursuits and grand schemes. And even now, you help me secure my success and grow in it. You help me grow, even though I'm already grown. Thank you for being the most stable and supportive forces in my life.

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Thank you to my creative team. My work has grown exponentially since I've been able to team up with such incredibly talented individuals. Much of the work in this book would not exist if you had not inspired me, guided me, or aided me in making images that aren't just photos—they are art. In particular, Griselle and LSC, you women are incredible role models—talented and driven and able to conquer any barriers that come your way. Thanks for being a great team!

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INTRODUCTION

MY STORY: GETTING STARTED

I was lucky enough to find my passion in life at an early age. I discovered photography around age 12, and I've been hooked ever since. Photography is not just a hobby or job to me. Photography has always been an integral part of who I am.

When I was young, my mother instilled in me a very important lesson she had learned. She explained that you never want to spend every day of your life working simply to earn money to afford to do what you love. Instead, do what you love in life every day. If you are passionate about something and lucky enough to find that passion, make it your life and job. If you are passionate enough and work hard enough, you can make a life out of that passion. My mother had not found this passion early in life, and her greatest wish for me was that I have the fulfillment of doing something I love.

With my parents' support, I devoured education in my teens by attending conferences and seminars and taking workshops. I started my portrait and wedding business when I was 15, and it grew into a real studio. Very quickly, however, I fell into a routine. I knew what my clients wanted and expected, so many shoots were formulaic. Everybody got the same poses and the same light, and I began to get too comfortable. I was only shooting paid work, and my portfolio remained stagnant. I found what was safe and stuck with it.

In college I discovered a more creative realm of photography: fashion. I fell in love with the elegance and creative freedom I saw in the works of masters like Irving Penn, Albert Watson, Herb Ritts, Helmut Newton, and dozens of others. It was the first time I had ever really exposed myself to the work of other photographers, let alone photographers considered masters of their craft. Their work inspired me endlessly—their poses,

their light, their styling, the emotion they conveyed, and the timeless beauty they shared in their images. I began spending hours in the studio each week just experimenting and trying to re-create their light or emulate their style. These trials and errors were the greatest lessons I could have offered myself.

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

After college I moved to London to pursue a career in fashion photography. While working at a studio, I built a portfolio of beautiful women wearing beautiful clothing in beautiful locations. The shots were technically strong, well composed, and well executed by most standards. I remembered all that I had learned in photography classes, books, PPA meetings, and established professionals.

I'd been living there less than a year when I got a meeting with an editor of a magazine I'd admired for some time. I excitedly gathered my print portfolio and traveled across London that winter day, eager for an opportunity to work with this publication. To me, this had to mean my big break, the real start of my career and success.

I remember sitting in his office as he quietly flipped through the pages of the portfolio I had poured my heart and soul into. When he finished, he quietly shut the book, turned it over, and pushed it across the table toward me.

"I would start again," he said with a blank look on his face. I stared at him, searching for meaning in his words. He wanted to look at the portfolio again? He wanted to start the meeting again? Then it hit me: I should start my portfolio again. Start from scratch. My love and passion in life wasn't good enough.

“When I look your portfolio, I see a lot of beautiful images,” he said. “Everything is ‘correct.’ Good posing, good lighting, nice retouching. Yet nothing is exciting or original.” I looked at him and blinked a few times, nothing profound to add, just deep confusion and emptiness.

“I look at dozens of portfolios a week,” he continued. “None of your images are memorable. If you leave this office, I’ll soon forget your images. They don’t have impact. Focus your efforts on stopping me in my tracks. Create images that are exciting, memorable, and different.”

I don’t believe I said very much the rest of that meeting. I took my portfolio and left the office to enter the brisk London air. A thick fog clung in the air, and each breath stung just a bit as the cold air hit me. As I made my way down the cobblestone streets in the fog, I felt as if I were in a movie. I held my portfolio tightly to my chest. Tears were streaming down my face, and I knew that this would be a turning point. Would I listen to this editor and change my work? Would I give up on photography? Would I ignore him and continue work as before? I found myself beside a garbage can, holding my portfolio away from me and contemplating whether I should give up and move on. Maybe I wasn’t good enough. Maybe I could never have the dreams I wanted. Maybe what I had to offer just wasn’t sufficient.

Eventually I shook off those doubts. I could still have doubts, but they wouldn’t control my life or my passion. I decided to take what I wanted from that meeting. I would step up my game—get more creative and stand out from the crowd—but still follow my passion. That cold London day, I made a pact with myself: I would create a completely new and exciting portfolio in just one year. I wanted to replace every single image in my book with something new, something eye-catching, something that would make me memorable.

To achieve this goal, I scheduled a personal shoot for myself every Sunday. At least one day a week, I could guarantee that I would shoot something not

for a client but for me and my portfolio. This could be a creative portrait shoot, a fashion editorial, a beauty image, a fine art nude—it didn’t matter what the shoot was as long as it was something that pushed my creativity. The other six days of the week I could shoot for clients, organize shoots, and find ways to pay my bills. But one day a week was all mine.

I began looking more closely at the work of the photographers and artists I admired. What exactly was it about their work that drew me in? Was it their lighting? Their composition? Their storytelling? As I began to determine what elements drew me to the work of other artists, I gave myself assignments to incorporate these elements into my work. I sought not to exactly re-create something that had been done before but instead to borrow elements and ideas that had inspired me. I took elements that inspired me and left those that didn’t fit my style or vision.

I also began collecting images. I gathered thousands of images from the Internet, magazines, and books to use as reference points for inspiration. Every week I made my way to the fashion magazine shop, where I could absorb the pages of those stunning magazines I longed to be in. I took inspiration from dozens of photos and combined them into shoots that reflected my own take on an idea.

Within a year, I had more than completely replaced my portfolio. I had become an entirely different, and better, photographer. By experimenting and pushing my comfort level, I had learned new techniques and even changed the way I envisioned an image. By shooting to challenge myself, I had created images that differentiated me and fulfilled me as an artist.

My career as a photographer really began after this year of reinvention. I now live and work in New York City as a fashion photographer and director. Had I not pushed myself to step out of my comfort zone and explore different approaches to my photography, I would have stayed safe, but in staying safe I would have stayed mundane. That year of shooting changed my life.

So I have created this book for you. If you want to push yourself to think and see in a new way, this book is for you. If you want to learn new techniques and create images that make you memorable, this book is for you. If you want to reinvigorate your passion for photography, this book is for you. I'm sharing some of the ways I challenged myself to grow, and I hope I can help you do the same.

HOW THIS BOOK WORKS

This book is your remedy for the average portfolio. It's your guide to stepping it up a notch and pushing yourself out of your comfort zone.

How-to books often use bland imagery to prove a technical point, and many fine art books are filled with beautiful imagery but contain minimal educational insights to help working photographers, but this book blends both: inspiration *and* knowledge that you can take to the bank to create images that attract potential clients. This book is about the confluence of ideas, inspiration, equipment, technique, and style.

SHOOT THE TYPE OF WORK YOU'D LIKE TO BE HIRED FOR

If you'd love to do shoots of children for a living, then shoot that type of work! If your portfolio is filled with images of food and sports, then no one is going to ask you to photograph their children. Take a moment to envision the image you've always wished you'd be paid to shoot. What does it look like? What is the subject matter? Then, be sure to use these criteria when photographing the challenges in this book. The shoots don't have to be for a client; simply use them to express your abilities as a photographer. In fashion photography, we do this all the time. We shoot editorials and spec shoots to demonstrate our vision and ability, even if it's not a paid shoot or for a client. These shoots allow you to express your creativity and attract clients, or you can simply use the pieces for marketing. You'd be surprised—sometimes the shoots that make you the most money never actually made you any money at all!

Creative 52 is divided into three sections—Concepts, Techniques, and Post-Production—to address three major ways to challenge yourself, your knowledge, and your creativity.

The Concepts challenges urge you to go beyond the snapshot and push your creativity. They help you approach your imagery with a concept. Then you'll focus your inspiration, creativity, and technical knowledge on expressing that concept. These challenges push you beyond shooting what is safe or comfortable. It's about capturing an idea and creating memorable imagery.

The Techniques challenges push your creativity by teaching you new tools and techniques for creating images. If you add these techniques to your creative arsenal, they'll always be available for your next photographic assignment. In these challenges, you'll learn creative solutions that will help you stand out from the competition. Wow your viewers.

The Post-Production challenges help you explore Photoshop as the next realm of creativity, allowing you to make the impossible possible. When you know what's possible in post-processing, it changes the way you see and photograph the world. These challenges teach you a variety of Photoshop tools and concepts that will allow you to better express your vision and continue your creativity far beyond clicking the shutter.

Each challenge contains a description of the project, along with potential inspiration and other artists you can draw inspiration from. Then I tell how I conquered the challenge, including where the idea originated, the image's metadata, and technical information that will help you understand the process I took to create the photograph. I pushed myself to get creative in these challenges, and I invite you to do the same.

Each challenge was crafted to help you explore new concepts, approaches, or techniques in image-making.

HOW I GET INSPIRED

Although I've been a photographer for more than half my life, for years I never considered myself creative. Perhaps I was a craftsman, someone who executed their craft well. But I certainly didn't consider myself a true creative artist. In high school I took technology classes, not art classes, because I saw them as much more practical and utilitarian.

But as I began to shoot and create more striking images, I realized that creativity is a process. You can find a way to cultivate things that inspire and challenge you in order to practice and improve your creativity. Creativity is not a bolt of lightning or unexplainable luck. Most successful artists have a process that they return to so they can produce striking work. I just needed to find and explore my own process.

I have spent a lot of time reflecting on my process, and I'd love to share it with you here. Know, however, that your own process and source of inspiration could be very different from mine. We all seek inspiration in a different way—from without ourselves, from different artists, from movies, from music—yet most important is to discern what inspires you so you can keep coming back for more. An artist without a process is stuck with their fingers crossed, hoping that luck and inspiration strikes them. Take control of your creativity. I suggest you make a list right now. Make a list of the elements that draw you to other photographers' work. What are the things that attract you most? Keep that list beside you as you go through these 52 challenges, and consider how you might integrate them into your solution for each challenge.

LOOKING AT OTHERS' WORK

I usually begin by looking at a lot of other people's work—photographers, artists, sculptors, directors, or any other visuals that pass my way. When seeing work that I love, I used to just drool and think that I could never be that talented. I put my heroes of art

on a pedestal, out of reach. But why? Nothing makes one artist better than another; they just have different strengths and styles. Now, I approach looking at others' work in a different way: I dissect.

What inspires me about a particular image or photographer? What strikes me about their work? Is it their lighting, their set, their model, their styling, their composition? When you know what you love, give yourself the assignment of shooting and incorporating those elements. Or maybe you save the images in a category based on what you love, and come back to it for inspiration in the future.

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

Anything you encounter can inspire you. I frequently take snapshots of photos in magazines, or out the window of a taxi, or even of a frame in a movie. I save them and refer back to them. It's good, however, to have certain places you can return to for fresh images and inspiration. Here are some of the sites that I use as continued sources of inspiration.

- fashiontography.net
- fashiongonerogue.com
- pinterest.com
- vi.sualize.us
- 500px.com
- deviantart.com

In each challenge in this book, the “Artists to Check Out” section lists some of the artists I've used for inspiration. To see the complete list, with links to portfolios, visit blog.lindsayadlerphotography.com/creative52.

Surround yourself with the work of other artists. Go to the movies. Watch advertisements on YouTube. See an installation. Browse art books. The more you look at, the more you have to draw from. Keep a notebook on you, or even just your phone. Snap images of what inspires you, or jot down a note. You never know when an idea will come, and you never know when it will go.

MY CREATIVE PROCESS

Every shoot is made up of a variety of elements. The shoot can have one of these elements as its central focus, or it can use any combination of them. For every shoot I do, I pick one element as the starting point upon which to build:

- Location
- Hair
- Makeup
- Wardrobe
- Model
- Photoshop
- Lighting
- Concept or theme
- Composition

For example, I may start with a location that I have in mind. Or perhaps with the lighting in a photograph I love. Or perhaps a Photoshop technique I learned recently. Or maybe a dress that my wardrobe stylist has shown me.

When I do a photo shoot, I create something called a mood board, a collection of images that express the direction of, and inspiration for, a shoot. Mood boards often contain images showing a shoot's desired hair, makeup, wardrobe, and even lighting. A mood board helps express the photographer's vision to the entire team, and it summarizes the look and feel they are trying to achieve. Consider creating a mood board so you can be sure you've considered all the elements that need to come together to make a shoot successful.

When I've selected my single element, I make a list of everything that comes to mind. Why am I inspired by this element? What are its most striking aspects? What does it remind me of? What colors are involved? What movies does it remind me of?

This is all kind of abstract unless I give you a concrete example, so here is one from a fashion editorial I shot: My wardrobe stylist sent me a photograph of a model walking down a runway in a beautiful dress. At the end of the runway, the model had flipped up the dress, revealing its beautiful and rich texture. I wrote down all the things that inspired me about the dress:

- Purplish blue
- Movement
- Looks like a flower
- Elegant but modern

As I looked at these few key elements, I asked myself some questions. Based on these elements, what would the ideal makeup look like? I felt that the makeup should play off the color palette. Also, since there was already so much detail in the dress, I should probably keep the hair off the shoulders so it would be clean and not compete. What about location? Based on the elements I wrote down, what would the ideal location be? As I studied the list, I kept thinking of blue and purple flowers—lavender! I did some research and discovered a lavender field in the Hamptons, and I decided to plan my entire shoot and concept on this location.

Here is the resulting image. I shot it while standing on a ladder, and I didn't use reflectors, diffusers, or flash. I asked the model to stand with her back to the late afternoon sun that was streaming through the trees and illuminating the dress. I didn't need to light her face because when I had her raise her head to the sky, her eyes were able to catch the open shade. I was able to go back to my creative process to help me formulate an approach for creating this image.



CANON 5D MARK II

SIGMA 24-70MM
2.8 LENS AT 58MM

ISO 640

1/2000 OF A SEC.

F/2.8

Let's take a look at one more example. I spent my childhood on a farm in upstate New York. It was fantastic to have hundreds of acres to explore and enjoy: ponds, hay fields, creeks, forests, and more. My environment always inspired me, and when I began photography, I photographed our land—from birds to mushrooms to sunsets behind the cornfields. When I was older, I decided that my old home would be a great environment for a fashion shoot that would draw on my early explorations.

One area in particular inspired me. My grandfather had planted a small forest of Christmas trees but had never harvested them. All the trees were lined up in long rows, matching one another perfectly. I used this location as my starting point for inspiration. I wrote down what drew me to it:

- Repetition
- Leading lines
- Symmetry
- Nature
- Graphic

I noticed that many of the things that drew me to the scene were based on composition. To play up what I liked best, I would emphasize symmetry and repetition. I centered the model in a row of trees and then used a symmetrical pose and clothing to emphasize this element. When I looked at the scene in camera, however, it really wasn't as perfect and symmetrical as I wanted. So I mirrored the background so that the scene on the right was the same as the scene on the left. That was what it took to make my vision a reality to my viewers.

To summarize, figure out what one thing you will be basing your shoot on. Maybe it's a single word, or maybe it's a style of makeup. Write down everything that comes to mind when you study this starting point—what strikes you about this element—and build from there. As you write your words, look them up on Pinterest or in a search engine. Piece together multiple images. Take the strengths from multiple images, and thread them together using your style and vision.

You may be surprised to learn that none of my shoots cost me any money. That's right! My shoots cost almost nothing because I focus on barter and trade. The hair and makeup stylists work in exchange for images. The designers work in exchange for photos of their clothing. The models work to build their portfolios. Get creative, and remember that your photographs have value. People need images to promote themselves or their businesses, or simply to showcase their specialty. Remember that you can trade your services in exchange for theirs, and take your work up a notch through creative collaboration!



CANON 5D
SIGMA 85MM
1.4 LENS
ISO 500
1/30 OF A SEC.
F/1.8

INSPIRATION VS. IMITATION VS. COPYING

As the saying goes, “It’s not where you take it from, but where you take it to.” Nothing is completely original, nor does it need to be. You will take inspiration from everything from advertisements to songs to nursery rhymes. In fact, you’ll never quite know where all your inspiration comes from. But you’ll take an idea and filter it through your mind, and it will come out the other end your own.

Can you go too far in inspiration so that it becomes imitation or, in fact, copying? In my opinion, yes. If you are trying to exactly replicate an image, you should do so only for educational purposes. Perhaps you want to test yourself and see if you can exactly duplicate an image—the model’s look, the hair, the makeup, the pose, the lighting, the Photoshop effects, everything. It may be a great learning exercise to deconstruct and re-construct an image, but to call it your own work, you should bring your own style or approach to the table, at least for the sake of this book. These challenges are meant to help you push yourself and draw inspiration. Even if you take a concept or

technique from another artist, the way you present it to the world should be your own. So draw inspiration from wherever you need; take the pieces of an artist’s work that attract you, and repurpose them—they will become your own.

GET CREATING

This book will take patience. There will be times when you don’t love what you created, and that’s just fine. Not every image should go into your portfolio. Careful editing of your portfolio shows the world the best you have to offer. Be OK with “failure.” When you fail you learn, and when you learn you grow, and when you grow you move closer to success. Explore, mess up, and try things you’re uncomfortable with. Perhaps you’ll stumble across a style that becomes uniquely your own. Or perhaps you’ll learn what you *don’t* like to do, which can be just as important.

Take a year or take two years or however long you need to complete these challenges. Just know that you should always be growing, always trying something new, and always photographing—because it’s what you are meant to do.

PART I

CONCEPTS

MORE THAN JUST A PHOTO

GO BEYOND A SNAPSHOT, AND PUSH YOUR CREATIVITY. THESE CHALLENGES WILL HELP YOU APPROACH YOUR IMAGERY WITH A CONCEPT, AND THEN YOU'LL FOCUS YOUR INSPIRATION, CREATIVITY, AND TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE ON EXPRESSING THAT CONCEPT. THESE CHALLENGES WILL PUSH YOU BEYOND SHOOTING WHAT IS SAFE OR COMFORTABLE. IT'S ABOUT CAPTURING AN IDEA AND CREATING MEMORABLE IMAGERY.



SIGMA SD1
SIGMA 50MM-150MM
LENS AT 70MM
ISO 100
1/125 OF A SEC.
F/13

CREATE AN IMAGE BASED ON A SINGLE COLOR

DESCRIPTION

Photographers have many tools of communication in their visual tool kits—composition and exposure often come to mind. Color, however, is one of the most powerful and underutilized tools of portrait photographers.

For this challenge, your images should *scream* a specific color. Use one dominant color in the frame. Don't forget that you can use other colors to enhance this main tone.

By properly utilizing color, you can immediately engage your audience and stop them in their tracks. You can also use color to communicate a certain mood or emotion—keeping in mind that different colors evoke different feelings in a viewer. Your color palette instantly communicates a great deal about your intention in creating an image, or it can be used to direct the eye. Saturated colors attract the eye, whereas more subtle tones recede. Similarly, warmer tones tend to advance in the frame, while cooler tones fall toward the background. When you use color, use it for purpose and impact.

In order to successfully complete this challenge, brush up on your color theory. Try to achieve color harmony—you can do this in a variety of ways. Maybe you utilize colors that are adjacent on the color wheel, like yellows and greens. Or, choose a color scheme of complementary colors, like purples and yellows. Or, make your job easier by letting a single color pervade the entire scene.

Ultimately, your final image should grab the viewer's attention, which will help you land potential clients and draw the admiration of those appreciating art.

INSPIRATION

Many photographers and artists have used color as an important tool for communicating their visual message. My favorite contemporary example is David LaChapelle. Color is an essential element in his fashion and celebrity portrait work. In every single frame, the color is purposeful and is used for impact or to direct the eye. The color theory in his work is stunning and worth studying.

Fashion and beauty photographer Jamie Nelson carefully uses color to direct the eye and create energy in her images. She utilizes the bold colors of hair, makeup, and lighting to create tension and harmony, resulting in eye-catching imagery. Her images jump off the page, and a great deal of this power is due to her successful use of color.

If you are interested in creating your own color combinations, kuler.adobe.com is an interesting resource that allows you to generate color palettes for inspiration. Also check out *Smashing Magazine* (smashingmagazine.com) for several articles that explain the power and science behind color selection in photography and graphic design.

ARTISTS TO CHECK OUT

David LaChapelle lchapellestudio.com

Iain Crawford iaincrawford.com

Jamie Nelson jamiemelson.com

Solve Sundsbo solvesundsbo.info

MY SOLUTION

Strong, bold color is one of the most important elements of my work. My favorite color is red, and this very aggressive color is pervasive throughout my work. For this challenge, I decided to use my signature red as the central color in the image.

My mind went through a variety of options for this challenge: bright red hair with white skin? Red clothing on a red background? Red makeup? There are a million different options, many of which I have already explored in my images.

I decided for this challenge that I wanted to paint the subject's face red—but instead of using paint, I would cover the subject in red powder. This would add an extra dimension of texture. Add some dramatic light, and I felt I had the makings of an exciting photograph!

Years ago I had seen photojournalistic images from India's Holi Festival of Color—it's a beautiful celebration of bold colors and energy. You have likely seen the images: thousands of people throwing colored powder in the air, covering one another. I recalled the images from this festival and knew that the bright-colored powder would do the trick for my idea. After a few minutes of searching on the Internet, I found the powder on Amazon.com and ordered it from India for less than \$20 a box.

For the shoot, I covered the man in powder, set up a black background, and used three studio strobes. The main strobe was a 22-inch white beauty dish that illuminated his face. I kept it to the right of the scene and at a high angle so that the light would cut across the powder and enhance its texture. I used barn doors on the second strobe and set it at a 45-degree angle to the left of the frame; this helped separate the subject from the background and put a slight highlight on his neck and head. The third light (also with barn doors) was used to add a slight suggestion of separation between the subject's head and shoulder on the right side of the frame. If you study the image carefully, you can see that the two back rim lights are casting slight highlights on the subject's shoulder and the side of his face, and that the beauty dish helps carve out his features.

If you decide to try this technique at home, be aware that the powder will stain. I love making a mess, but maybe you shouldn't try this in your living room. I've seen several great fashion and even engagement sessions done with this powder—it just invites people to make a glorious mess!

While my subject didn't exactly love being covered in red powder and posing for 20 minutes, he did love the images! ●

CREATE A PORTRAIT OF SOMEONE WITHOUT SHOWING THE FACE

CHALLENGE

2

DESCRIPTION

When you hear the word “portrait,” you probably envision a photograph of someone’s face. The image in your mind likely includes a subject who is posed and gazing back at the camera. But what if you can’t see their face at all? What if the person isn’t even in the frame? Perhaps that individual’s defining element isn’t their face.

In this challenge, you must communicate the essence of one or more individuals without the ease of allowing their faces or expressions to tell the story for you.

Can you capture that individual’s essence by showing only a part of them? Or, create their portrait using items that are near and dear to them? You could even get creative by eliminating the person’s face in a humorous way. The solution to this creative problem is up to you!

INSPIRATION

Albert Watson, one of my favorite photographers, took a very famous portrait of the back of Mike Tyson’s head. You cannot see his face, yet the thickness of his neck and his overall stature communicate his identity. Can you imagine having a celebrity come to your studio and photographing the back of his head? It is bold creativity like this that allows truly unique images to be made. Your attempts could fail, but you could also create an iconic image.

Photographer Brooke Shaden often creates fantasy-inspired images—you are not meant to connect with the subject but with the emotions that the images evoke. Her images are extremely mysterious and often dark. The lack of identity allows you to put yourself in the place of the subject and imagine their emotions and experiences. An obscured face may also compel you to look more closely in order to discern the subject’s identity or to discover why it is hidden.

For decades, portrait photographers and photo-journalists have created portraits by photographing items that are important to the subject—perhaps an elderly farmer’s worn hands or a carpenter’s tools. This challenge pushes you to think more deeply about your subject and to tell a story that cannot be told simply with a face.

ARTISTS TO CHECK OUT

Albert Watson albertwatson.net

Brooke Shaden brookeshaden.com

Michael Vincent Manalo theflickerees.wix.com/michaelvmanalo

Elizabeth Messina elizabethmessina.com

MY SOLUTION

For this challenge, I wanted to create a powerful portrait about a relationship without showing faces. Relationships are intangible, so how do you photograph one? By shooting the smiles and laughter between two people, or maybe an embrace or the holding of hands? In wedding photography, I have seen beautiful images of a couple holding hands, as well as images of the rings that symbolize their relationship. But what if I am not capturing a romantic relationship?

I chose to photograph two sisters for this challenge. Though they are nearly ten years apart in age, they have a very close relationship and have supported each other through good times and bad. To show that they are sisters without showing their faces, I dressed them in the same outfit (which came from an Etsy seller, Glamastik, who had beautiful corsets and feather pieces). To me, the cream color represents the purity of childhood and their relationship. Had I gone with a richly colored or black piece, I would have communicated a very different message.

DIY ON A BUDGET

Remember that your photography has value. I often borrow items from artists on Etsy, DeviantArt, and eBay. In exchange, I provide them with photographs that they can use for promotion or on their websites. My work showcases their talent and, ideally, brings them additional business. I have used this money-saving technique to borrow everything from clothing, glasses, and candelabras to vintage cars!

My final image shows the two girls walking barefoot in the forest. You can tell by their bodies and clothing that they are sisters. The path in the woods represents the journey of life. By holding hands, they represent their relationship and their support of one another. By being barefoot, they communicate the idea of youth and innocence.

I toned these images in Adobe Photoshop Lightroom by using a custom preset I created for myself called Young Glow. I frequently create my own Lightroom presets, which I offer on my website. Other presets, actions, and plugins to check out are Nik Color Efex Pro, Nik Silver Efex Pro, onOne Perfect Effects, Perfect B&W, Kubota Image Actions, Vaco Film, Paint the Mood, Totally Rad, Red Leaf Film Emulsion, and Rock My Edits.

I shot with an extremely wide aperture (f/1.4) so that the path was a mere suggestion rather than a distracting element. Furthermore, the narrow depth of field gives a dreamlike quality to the image. I used the AI Servo focusing mode to track their slow footsteps, and I added a vignette to the image to direct the viewer's eye and enhance the feeling of walking down a path.

Even though their faces are not shown, this is a portrait of the relationship between sisters.

In another version of this assignment, I photographed the two sisters holding a bouquet of flowers. The girls were on the edge of the forest and heavily backlit. I exposed for the flowers, so the overexposed light in the background wrapped around the subjects in a heavenly glow. Although the image was beautiful and elegant, it communicated less about the girls' relationship and didn't tell much of a story. ●



CANON 5D MARK III
SIGMA 50MM 1.4 LENS
ISO 1600
1/800 OF A SEC.
F/1.4



CANON 5D MARK II
SIGMA 85MM 1.4 LENS
AT 85MM
ISO 640
1/8000 OF A SEC.
F/4.0

TELL A STORY

CHALLENGE

3

DESCRIPTION

A powerful image doesn't have to be simply eye candy. In fact, many of the most powerful and memorable images are much more; they tell a story and evoke emotion through that story. A single frame may convey someone's past, an intense emotion, or a relationship between people.

For this challenge, you are invited to tell a story with a single image. There are many ways to tell a story. Perhaps the viewer empathizes with your subjects and puts themselves in their shoes. Perhaps the viewer's interest is piqued, encouraging them to imagine the past, present, and future of the subject. Perhaps the image tells a story about a moment of tension or intense emotion. Or, maybe your subject's expression says it all, and we can envision endless stories simply by looking in her eyes.

Your story doesn't need to have a beginning, middle, and end. Instead, it can be a piece of a story that arrests your attention and leaves you wanting more. Keep in mind that your story could be real or a fantastical fairy tale. The story can be purely documentary, or it can be surreal, based on a story from your dreams.

This challenge is essential to your growth as a visual artist. Telling stories engages your viewers. They will interact with your images on an emotional level, which will make your images more memorable and have a longer-lasting impact. Learning to develop ideas and tell stories will serve you well throughout the rest of the challenges in this book.

INSPIRATION

Gregory Crewdson's elaborately staged and lit images are the definition of storytelling. Without words and without knowing the backstory, you can read endlessly into his cinema-inspired imagery. Many of his images convey loneliness and sterility, with ample use of negative space in the frame and a pervasive distance between the subjects. Perhaps it's the man standing beside his car, door open, in the pouring rain. I can feel the loss and tragedy in his life as he simply stands there focusing on nothing more than the rain beating on his skin. In another photo, a couple looks like two dejected strangers, and you can feel their loneliness and emptiness.

Ellen von Unwerth has created many iconic storytelling images for advertising campaigns, including the vintage-themed Guess ads that have such a sexy playfulness to them. A study of her work shows a great deal of feminine mischief and storytelling.

Commercial and portrait photographer Vincent Dixon infuses storytelling into all of his advertising frames. He makes compelling images for clients by drawing and keeping the attention of the target audience. He frequently uses humor and surprising juxtapositions to tell his stories, such as Darth Vader in McDonald's or a herd of sheep groomed like poodles. His work will inspire you to tell quirky and unexpected stories.