



DEVELOPING a "SEEING" EYE

By Robyn Forryan APSNZ

Most photography is not about documenting exactly what can be seen by our eyes - it is about presenting parts of our environment both real and imagined so that we can be moved in some way by the resulting image.

Our reaction may be to be surprised, entertained, informed, angered, soothed, delighted, pacified or dozens of other feelings but we need to be moved to be able to see value in an image.

For this reason, making pictures is what we must set out to achieve not just taking them. Our mind must be involved in selecting and enhancing the image before the shot is actually taken.

The best description I have ever heard to describe this is the "seeing" eye – developing your photographic awareness so that you either capture the picture just as you want it or capture the essence to work on in your darkroom or computer to make the final picture.

To enhance your "seeing" eye I believe you need patience firstly. Making pictures generally needs to be well thought out. Whatever your subject, take your time - think about the possibilities. If you are concerned the subject may go or the light may change then certainly take a quick shot or two but then concentrate and you will make better pictures.

Think about what really attracts you to this subject. Is it the colour, shape, texture, ambiguity, light, balance or whatever? Think about how you can best represent that in the image. You may want to emphasise the colour by making it prominent in the image or emphasise the shape by including other subjects, which reflect this same shape, or make the texture pin sharp by using your tripod and getting in close. You might show ambiguity by choosing an unusual camera angle or including foreground or background. You may emphasise the light by under or over exposing and the balance or design may be improved by simplifying or concentrating on just one part of the subject and maybe using an unusual viewpoint.

There are literally hundreds of different ways to make a picture tell the story that you want using filters, lenses, angles, exposures, software programmes etc but all of them start with you concentrating on what you want the picture to be and experimenting with ideas to make your pictures move people.

Pictures rarely just occur and come together without a conscious effort on your part. Those landscapes you admire in overseas photographic magazines are not the result of living somewhere else where they just have better landscapes to choose. Every successful picture has been created because the photographer spent time thinking about what they wanted to achieve, practised regularly and committed the effort to make the picture happen.

So how do you learn to create pictures in your mind so you can do more than record what is obviously in front of you? I find books an invaluable tool. I own some photography books but I have viewed hundreds more by utilizing my local library, by sharing with other club members and using the Internet to check out all the images being shared by every other like-minded person who has included them on a web page.

I also commit some time every week to actually making pictures. I use my tripod, a range of lenses, and my local environment to do every kind of photography I can. I go back to the same place many times over to see it in different light, different conditions, with different people etc. I also usually go with a friend and we talk about what we are seeing, how we are making our pictures and what we like or don't like about the subject in front of us.

Finally, I discuss my work with and show it to other photographers on Club nights, in special groups and just one on one. I comment on their work and discuss work that we have seen by others. I enter competitions and attend salons, conventions and exhibitions.

I utilize every opportunity I can to think about making pictures so that when I am out there with my camera my brain is used to being involved in the process. I also find that my best pictures are made when I involve my whole brain - when I am emotionally involved as well as rationally - and often I stop clicking and just experience the moment so that I can focus on what is moving me and what I am trying to show others. By doing all these things, I am gradually developing my "seeing" eye and improving my photography. If you would like to do the same why not give it a go!

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