



PSNZ Help Sheet No 12

November 2000 Edition

**Developing A "Seeing" Eye
By: Robyn Forryan APSNZ**

Produced for the Affiliated Camera Clubs of the Photographic Society of New Zealand Inc. by PSNZ

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 film is exposed or the pixels rearranged.

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're concerned the subject may go or the light may change then certainly take a quick frame 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 saturate the colour by using a particular film or filter (eg polariser) 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 or using film or filters to show contrast 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 films, filters, lenses, angles, exposures, chemicals, papers, software 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 from. 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 now the Internet is offering me a chance to "read" all the images being shared by every other like-minded person who has a web page.

I also commit some time every week to actually making pictures. I use my tripod, a range of lenses, filters and films 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!

This PSNZ Help Sheet Was Written By:

Robyn Forryan APSNZ
31 Halberg Street
Glenfield
Auckland

Statements made or opinions expressed are those of the Author and do not necessarily reflect the views of PSNZ.

The right of the Author to be identified as the author of this work in terms of section 96 of the Copyright Act 1994 is hereby asserted.

This Help Sheet and others in the series are available from the Director of PSNZ Help Sheets

Refer under Director of Publications and Services in the Directory or download from the web site at www.photography.org.nz

Also available from PSNZ: The Recorded Lecture Services see our website
www.photography.org.nz