



THE ART OF SEEING

Short Guide

Written by Kent DuFault



What would you like to achieve with your photography?

Achievement can be measured in many ways. For some, it's winning awards. For others, it's selling their artwork. In today's social media environment, it often means getting so many 'likes', or 'followers', or 'shares'.


I have enjoyed the benefit of all of these things. Would it surprise you if I said, "None of them were the ultimate achievement for my photography?"

I'm going to share a very personal story with you...



I consider this photograph to be my ultimate achievement in photography. Why? Let me tell you the story...

Kent DuFault
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/11456208136/in/photolist-ism4xW>



It's never been particularly well received by the world at large. However, it did touch one person.

I took this photograph in February of 2008. At that time, I was living in Florida and working at a Ritz Camera Center. Mainstream digital photography and online photo sharing were in their infancy. In fact, at that time, I had no online presence at all other than a Facebook account, which I rarely looked at.

One day, I shared some of my photographs with a younger co-worker. She told me that I should put them online at photo sharing sites like Flickr, DeviantArt, and Redbubble.

That night, I went home and looked at those websites. I thought it might be fun, and I decided to follow her recommendation.

The photograph of the hose was one of the first images that I uploaded to a site called DeviantArt.

Now... this brings me to the heart of my story. But before I reveal that, I ask you: "What do you think of the image of the hose?"


It's never been particularly well received by the world at large. However, it did touch one person. And it touched them in a way that changed my life forever.

That person is now my wife. At the time that I posted that photograph, my wife lived on the other side of the world in Argentina.

She now tells me that when she saw this photograph, she knew that the person behind it had to be someone special. It touched her. It touched her that I had found beauty in something so mundane as a messy hose.

Her finding the hose photograph online led her to write a note about how much she liked it. I wrote back. We shared pictures and messages and soon became friends. Nine months later I traveled to Argentina, and I ended up living there with her and her family for almost four years. We were married in 2012.

The art of seeing. The art of sharing. The possibility that one of your photographs might touch someone on the other side of the world and change lives.



Each of us sees the world differently.

So... what was my greatest achievement through photography? I found the love of my life (when I had long ago given up on that possibility). Plus, it led me to fulfill a lifelong dream of living in a foreign country.

I like to talk about the 'art of seeing' because truly that is what makes us different: different from other photographers, different from the rest of the population that doesn't care about art, or photography.

Each of us sees the world differently. There are photographers that devote their lives to taking beautiful landscape photographs. And while I can appreciate the art and the effort one goes through to get those images, I don't find them particularly inspiring.

Identifying "how you see" is an important step along your photographic path.

I'm here to tell you that it doesn't come easily. It took somewhere around twenty years of being an active photographer before I discovered my way of seeing.

Once I did discover it, that knowledge truly opened up my career as a professional photographer. I was no longer simply imitating what others did or what I thought would be successful, I was truly putting my own personality into the photographs.

I told Photzy that I wanted to write this guide because, if you spend any amount of time on Flickr, 500px, or similar sites, you will begin to recognize that many photographers haven't developed their own way of seeing.

Everyone is shooting the same subjects. Everyone is following the same trends in processing. Many are trying to mimic what they think is successful.

I'm not here to point fingers. Believe me. I followed that same path for a very long time.

Before I give you some helpful hints on nurturing your own art of seeing, I want to share three photographs with you that I created for paying clients, which depict my way of seeing.



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I see in shape and form.
It's my superpower.

I chose three very different photographs of three very different subjects, used for three very different purposes to illustrate a point.

After studying the three photographs, can you tell what my way of seeing is?

Maybe, maybe not... that's how difficult it can be to identify your own way of seeing. It's not always all that obvious.

I see in shape and form. It's my superpower. Clients hired me because I could see beyond the obvious. If you were to study a body of my work over the last twenty-five years, you would find a consistent use of shape and form.


The first image of the girl jumping was a family portrait session. And, while it depicts the child in a pleasing, memorable, manner, it's the shape of her body that makes the image special.

Image number two, of the man working, was taken for a corporation that gentrifies old buildings. My exact instructions were, 'find something pretty and interesting in this non-pretty atmosphere for our corporate brochure'. Through my use of

shape and form, an interesting work shot was captured.

The final photograph of the cornstalk was for a magazine cover. Again, boring subject, and this photograph is all about shape and form.

I hope this illustrates to you how once you've discovered your way of seeing, you can consciously apply it to any form of photography that you might pursue.




Begin the discovery
process and unearth your
way of seeing.

Here are some suggestions to begin the discovery process and unearth your way of seeing.

1. I want you to go to 500px and bookmark twenty images that caught your attention in less than five seconds. (I don't want to put too many parameters on your own discovery process, but if possible, try to look at photographs that are not typical to what you would shoot. In other words, if you typically shoot landscapes, look at still life photos or portraits.) Once you have chosen your twenty images, study them for consistent elements. Are they typically vertical or horizontal? Are they color or black and white? Do they have a light and airy mood or are they very dark and mysterious? Are there pronounced lines, colors, or patterns. The more specific you can be in identifying common traits, the more successful the exercise will be.
2. I want you to go out on your own social media accounts and identify your top twenty images. These would

be the images that have received the most likes, shares, and comments. Once you've done this, I want you to do two things. First, sort the images into a list from your favorite to your least favorite. Second, look for elements in those photographs that are common to the group you chose in assignment 1.

3. I want you to ignore what everyone else thinks and identify your own top favorite images that you've ever created. Take some time with this exercise. Some of the images may go way back into your history. (Some of my favorite images that I've ever created were photographed twenty to thirty years ago.) Create a list of twenty images that are your very best (in your mind).
4. Now that you have these three groups of images, try and cross reference commonalities between all of them. This will provide the clues as to "your way of seeing".



A big part of becoming
a better photographer
is pleasing your own
objectives.

Discovering your way of seeing may not happen all at once. Like I said, it took me many years. As you begin to have self-discovery through the process, try and apply that knowledge whenever you're creating new photographs.

If you like to shoot landscapes, and your discovery process reveals that you often see in dark, moody, and black and white, then attempt to create landscapes like that even if it's the middle of the day!

(Nobody said it wouldn't be challenging! That's part of the achievement and fun!)

If your efforts reveal that you're attracted to Minimalism, then be Minimalistic in your new photographs as often as you can.

If you discovered that you love bright, garish, eye-popping color: then use that!

I opened this guide with the photograph of the hose. That hose was actually my neighbor's. I came out of the house one day and saw it all tangled up on the side of his house. In my mind, I saw him throwing it there as he was in a hurry going about his business. Because I always practice my

art of seeing, I immediately saw a story, and in the story I saw the beauty of shape and form. I went and got my camera and created a photograph.

That photograph hasn't won any awards. It hasn't received dozens of likes or even any comments.

Yet, I feel that it is one of the best pictures that I've ever taken, and my wife agrees: and that's good enough for me.

I know all of you at Photzy wish to become better photographers. A big part of that process is pleasing your own objectives. And a big part of that is identifying how you 'see'. How you see, and utilizing that vision, is what will make you truly happy as a photographer.

When you create a shot, and in looking at it you feel a glow inside, something in that image is part of your "art of seeing".

Good luck on your path.

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