

Composition Case Study #05

ADVANCED COMPOSITION

For this case study, we are going to look at an aspect of Advanced Composition that I believe is often overlooked: **photographer intent**.

At its base level, photography is simply a method of communication.

All of the rules and tools of artistic composition were created because, while we humans are similar, at the same time we all think quite differently.

Composition helps to give us a means of reaching a broader swathe of our fellow human beings in our attempt to have them understand our communicative **intent** with our photographs.

I believe **intent** eclipses composition rules (to an extent).

We are going to use the image below as a case study for composition versus photographer intent.

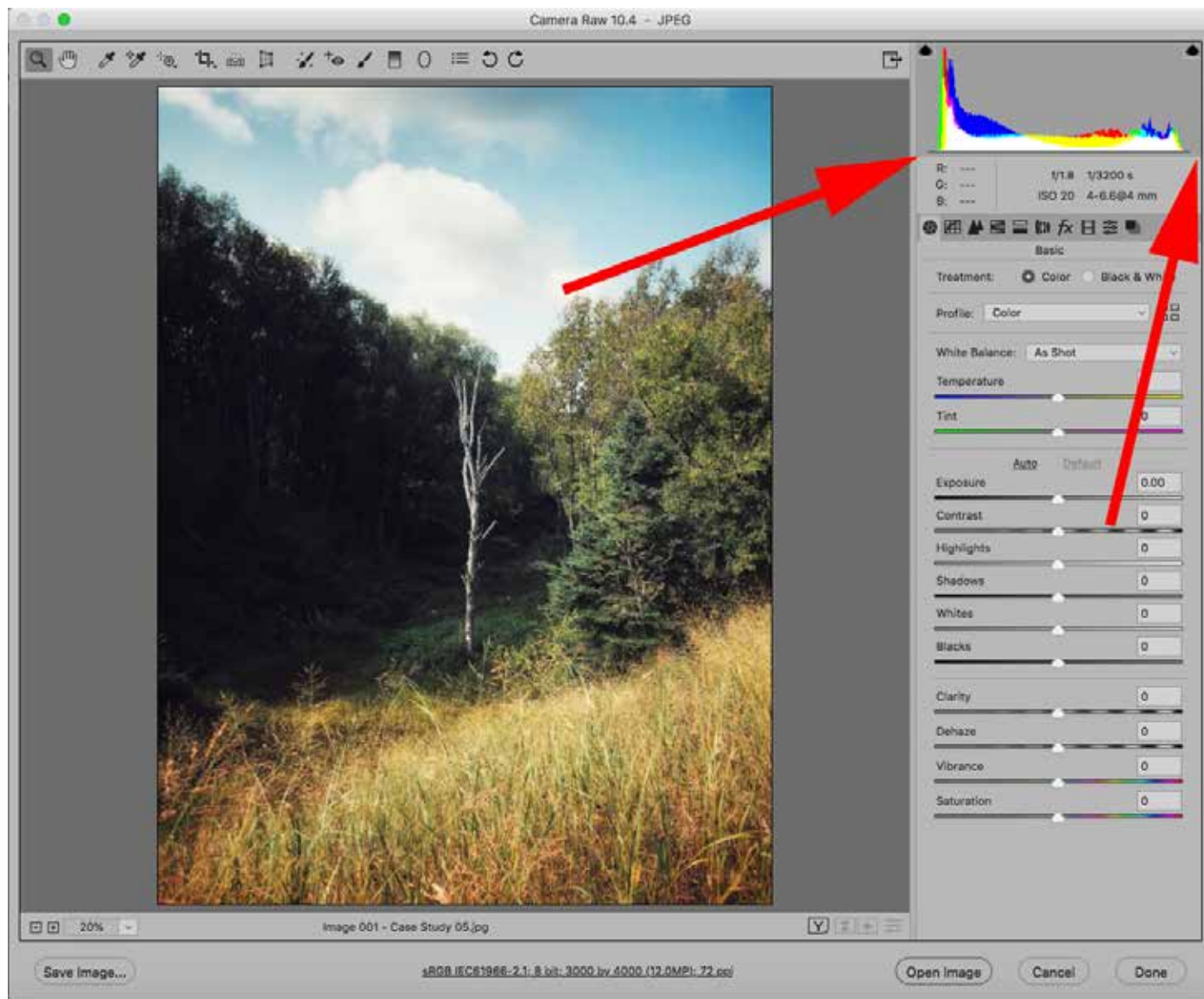
Before I begin, why don't you take a moment to study the photograph and then write down a couple of notes?

What do you think my intent was as the photographer? Try to be as specific as possible.

What do you think I had in mind for the composition? Try to list some rules and tools as discussed in the Advanced Composition premium guide.



Photograph by Kent DuFault



Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Look at the histogram displayed in the ACR window of this image. Take notice that my shot has no absolute black or absolute white. This indicates lower contrast.

I wanted to show you the histogram for this image because it's important to understand that contrast, along with the black point and the white point, can have a huge impact on the communication aspect of a photograph.

Why is that?

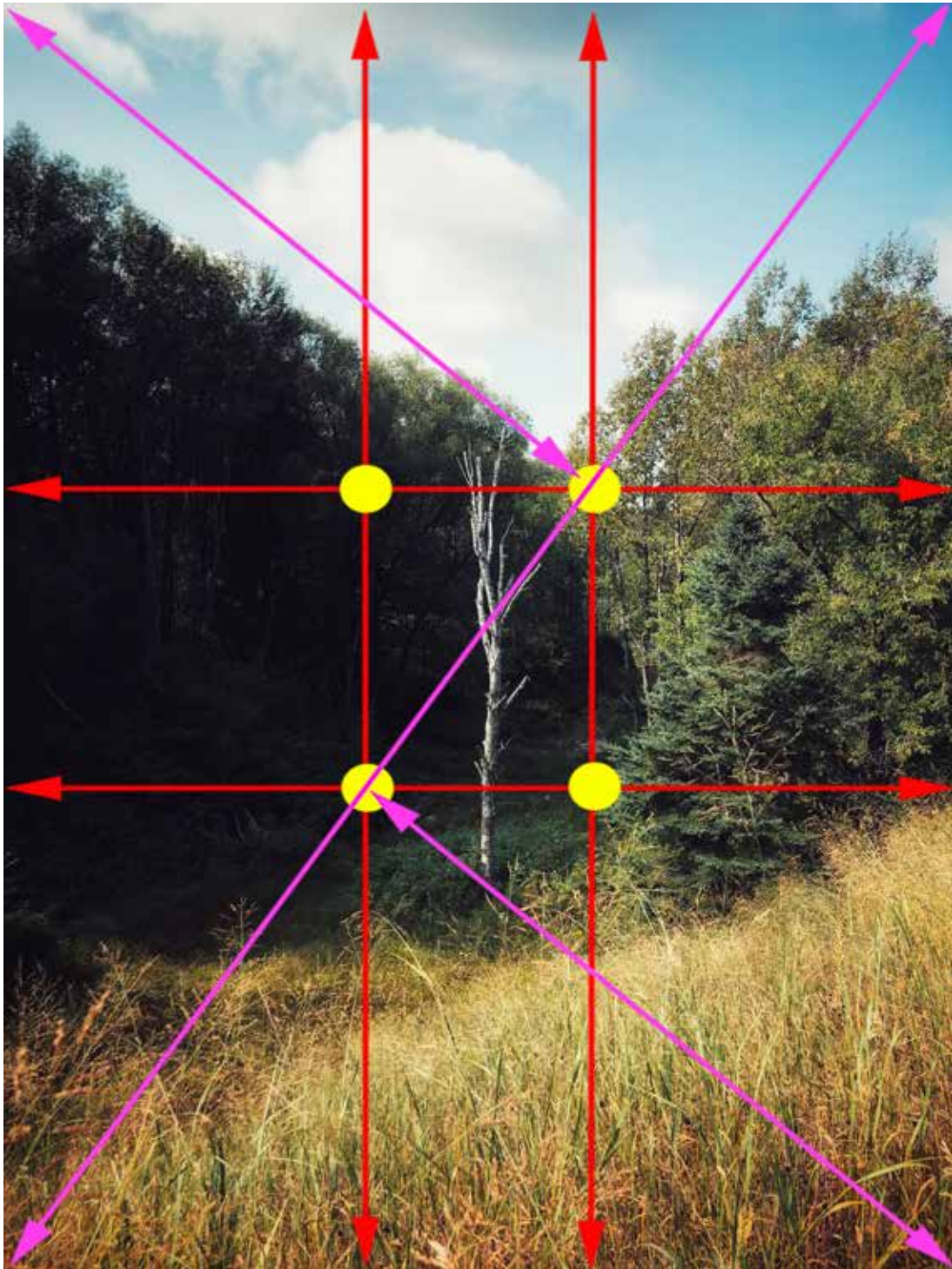
The reason is that they are key triggers to the human mind.

High contrast, deep blacks, or extreme whites will almost always suck the visual weight from virtually every other element within a photograph.

Always take these three elements into consideration, no matter what the composition is!

For my **intent** with this photograph, I most certainly did not want any of these three elements to dominate.

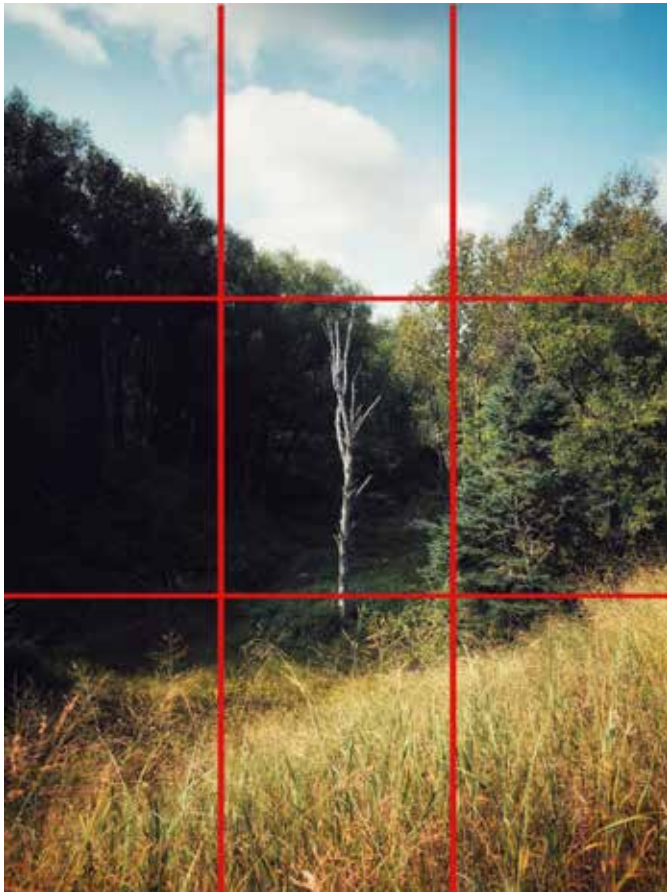
That is why the image displays a lower contrast, with no deep blacks or bright whites.



Photograph by Kent DuFault

When I place the Golden Ratio/Golden Triangle overlay onto the image, you can see that some thought process went toward these rules of composition.

However, you can also see that things didn't line up quite perfectly. My **intent** was a bit different than what this formula provided.



Photograph by Kent DuFault

The Rule of Thirds grid indicates an eye toward symmetry. However, you cannot classify this shot as completely symmetrical. That is quite evident.



Photograph by Kent DuFault

The Golden Spiral also indicates some thought process toward the composition. However as in the previous examples, it doesn't fit the intent exactly.



Photograph by Kent DuFault

If the image is cropped into a better 'fit' for the Golden Spiral, the resulting photograph feels very unbalanced and most definitely does not fit my intent for the photo.



Photograph by Kent DuFault

On the left is the photograph exhibiting my original intent. On the right is the photograph that better fits into the Rule of Thirds and the Golden Spiral. The left image is still the best representation of my intent for the photograph.

What was my intent?

Do you have your notes handy? Let's see how closely you called it.



Photograph by Kent DuFault

The blue oval in this image represents my intended final stopping point for a viewer's eyes.

However, my **intent** was not for the tree to be the subject. The subject is the scene as a whole.

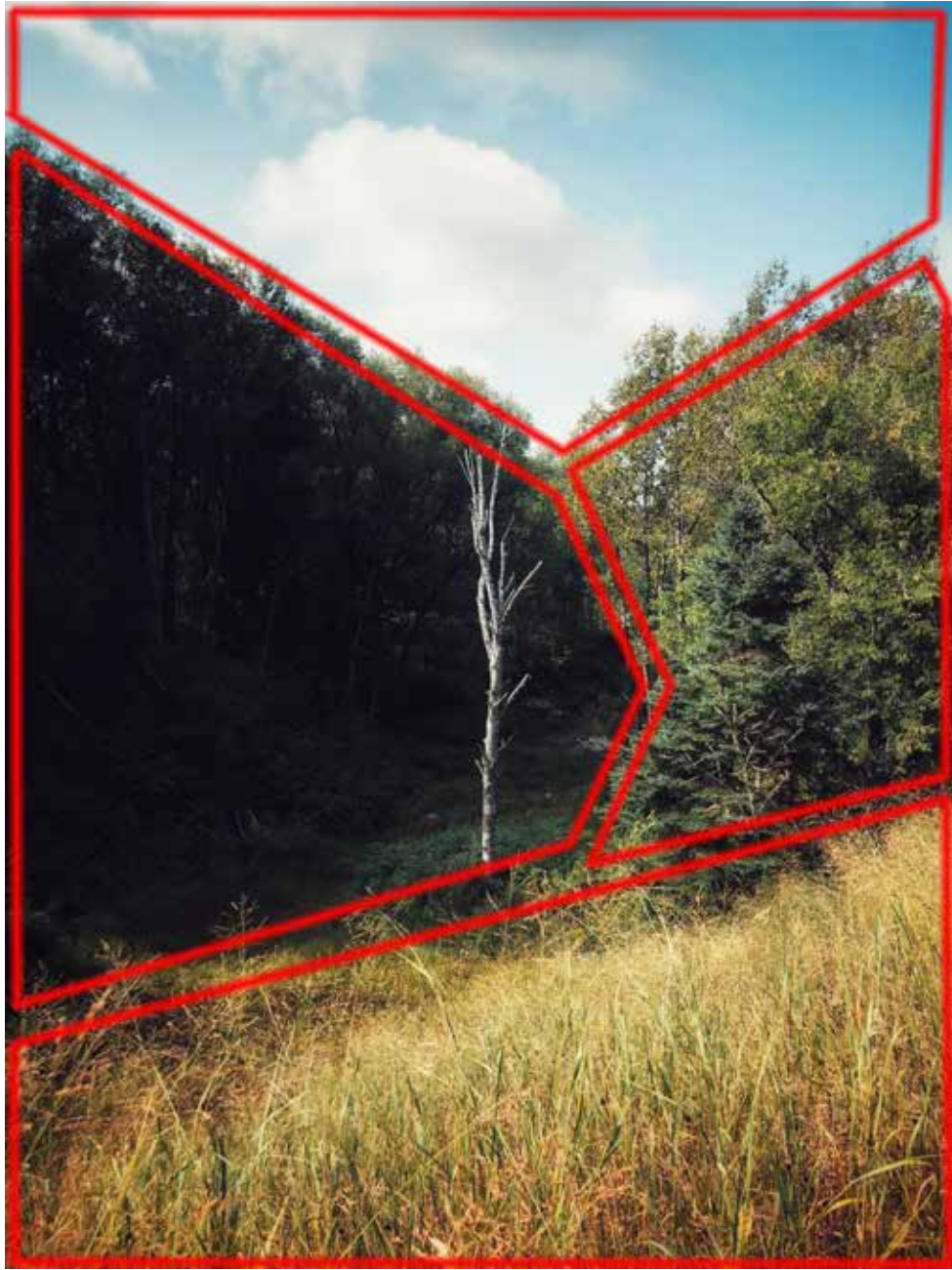
When the entire frame of a photograph is the subject – is positive space – then you are often looking at a shot that is an abstract or a semi-abstract.

That was part of my intent for this image – **to be a semi-abstract.**

Do you remember the discussion on **graphic elements** from the Advanced Composition guide?

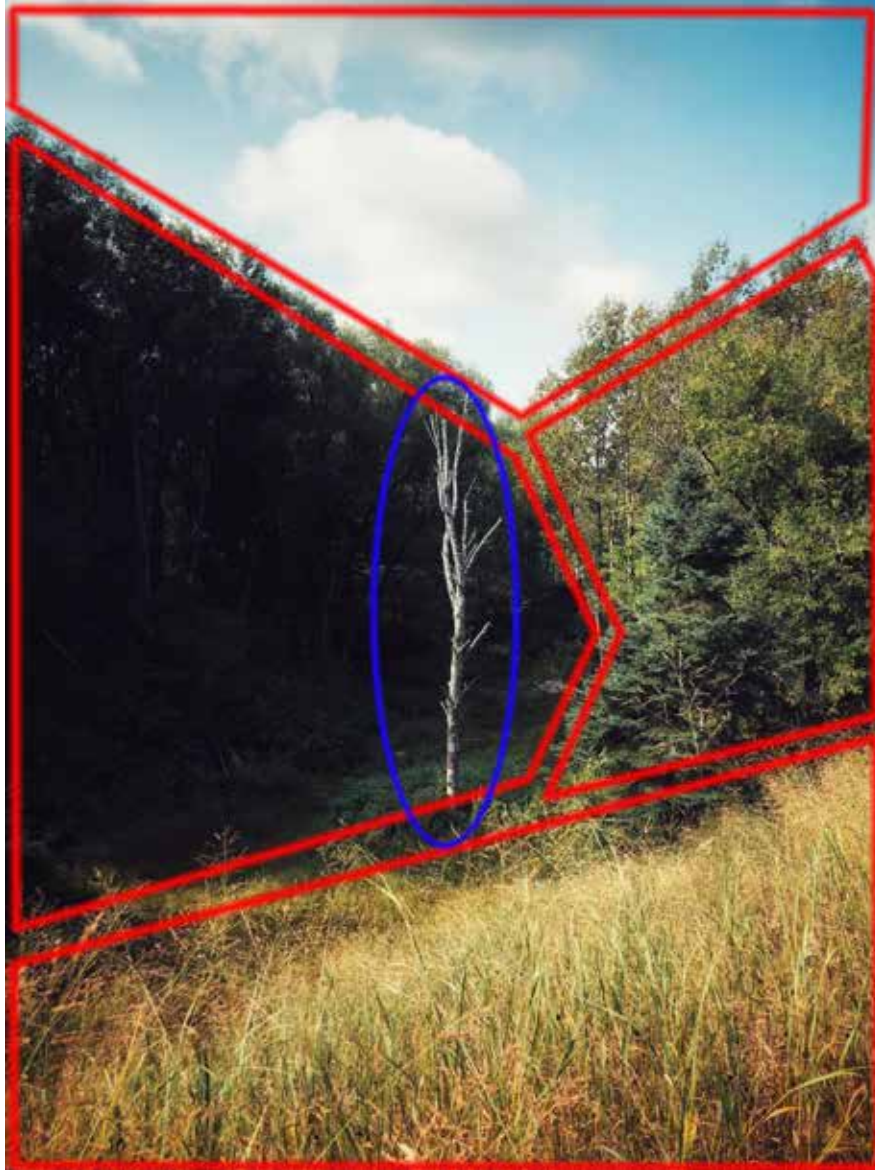
The **intent** of this photograph was to artistically **display graphic elements within nature.**

Let me show you what I mean.



Photograph by Kent DuFault

When I first laid eyes upon this scene, what you see illustrated in this image is exactly what my creative eye spotted. The scene was a jigsaw puzzle of graphic shapes. My intent began to formulate.



Photograph by Kent DuFault

This image 'outlines' my intent for this photograph.

My **intent** was to create a semi-abstract nature photograph that relies on symmetry and graphic shapes for the composition.

At the beginning of this case study, I asked you to notate a couple of thoughts.

Did you spot my intent? If not, where do you think this image failed in its effort to communicate with you?

As discussed earlier, the rules of composition were involved in my thought process while pre-visualizing this photograph.

However, none of them were followed to the letter.

My hope is that you now understand how important it is to interpret your intent for every photograph that you create, and then use the rules to help communicate your intent.

Don't follow the rules blindly.

The tools of composition that I used for this image were as follows:

- Symmetry
- Color contrast
- Graphic elements