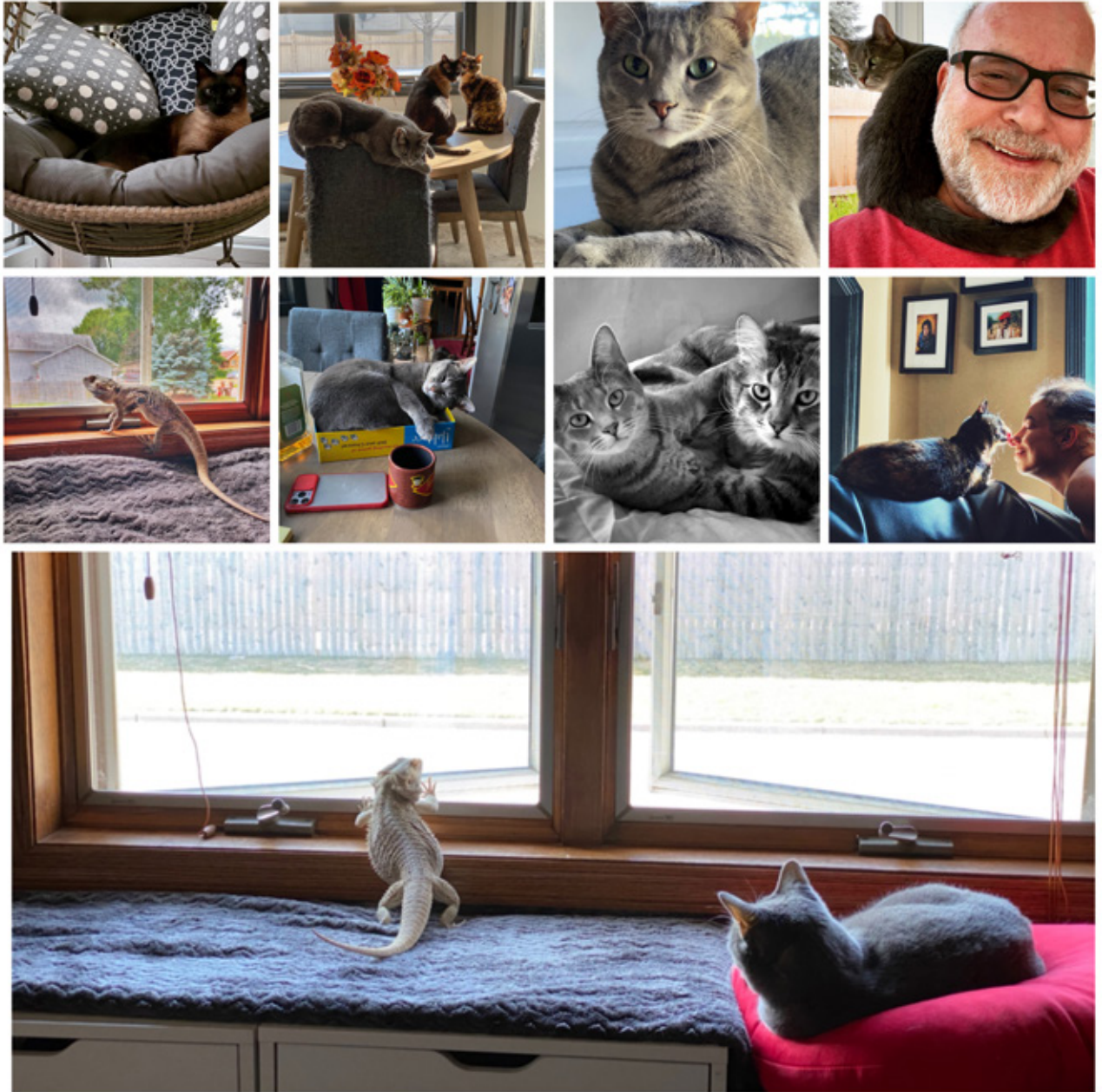


EMOTIONAL INTERACTION

By Kent DuFault



All Photographs by Kent DuFault

I thought I would begin this Creativity Prompt with a montage of photos of some of my pets. At this point in my career, pet photography is one of the primary subjects for my cameras.

I love taking pictures of pets.

Creatures of all types and sizes are amazing in their ability to understand us, and I use my camera to help me understand them.

So, how do you get from merely taking pictures of pets to creating memorable photos and artwork?



Photograph by Dominika Roseclay

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/woman-in-grey-top-hugging-brown-dachshund-1139793/>

In these five Creativity Prompts, I will hopefully get you thinking about why you love pets and how you want to photograph them.

These Prompts are not about forcing a style onto you or creating a bullet point list on 'how to do it.'

But instead, they will point you in a direction and allow you to explore your pets or the pets of others, as you see them.

In this first Prompt, we will be discussing **capturing pet pictures through emotional interaction.**



Photograph by Krista Mangulsone

<https://unsplash.com/photos/9gz3wfHr65U>

Emotional interaction shots of pets can occur between a human and a pet or between two or more pets together.

In this style of photography, capturing the peak emotional moment is critical to success. You also want to make sure that you don't forget your basics on composition, lighting, and background.

In the previous two examples, I think the first photo of the woman and her dog creates a better emotionally charged shot than the second photo of the dog and the cat.

The second shot fails a tiny bit on the basics. It could have been vastly improved if the photographer had gotten lower to the ground, thus changing the angle of view to better see both faces.



Assignment:

Photograph your pets while they interact with family members, friends, or other pets. The critical step is learning to capture peak action. You mustn't be fumbling with camera settings, or you will miss the best shots. This is an excellent time to try out your smartphone camera. I use my iPhone 11 Pro almost exclusively for my pet photography because it's fast, accurate, and produces high quality in nearly any light. If you are using a DSLR or mirrorless camera, now is a good time to use those automated settings. Start with these suggested settings and adjust as necessary.

- Set the ISO to Auto and then set a maximum increase of ISO 1200.
- Use the Aperture Priority mode.
- Use the appropriate focal length lens. This would typically be between 35mm and 150mm, depending on your situation and desired photo.
- Set the f/stop to f/5.6 (indoors) or f/8 (outdoors) and adjust as necessary.
- **Keep your eye on the automatically set shutter speed.** Follow the Reciprocal Rule, which states, "the shutter speed should be equal to or faster than the numerical focal length of the lens being used." For example, if the lens is a 100mm lens, the shutter speed should be 1/100th or faster. If a 35mm lens is used, the shutter speed should be 1/35th or quicker. If your pets are moving, you must take that movement into account when checking your shutter speed. If you need to speed up the shutter speed, you will have to open your aperture (f/stop) or increase the ISO.
- Use all your camera focus points and set the focus mode to Continuous Mode (AF Nikon, AI-Servo Canon, AF-C Sony).
- Concentrate on capturing peak action while also remembering your basics.

Let's get some pet interaction inspiration!



Photograph by Autri Taheri

<https://unsplash.com/photos/l0Gq4BmboYY>

Bath time is always an excellent interaction photo opportunity.

Crucial: Whenever possible, include a meaningful expression, touch, or humorous moment.



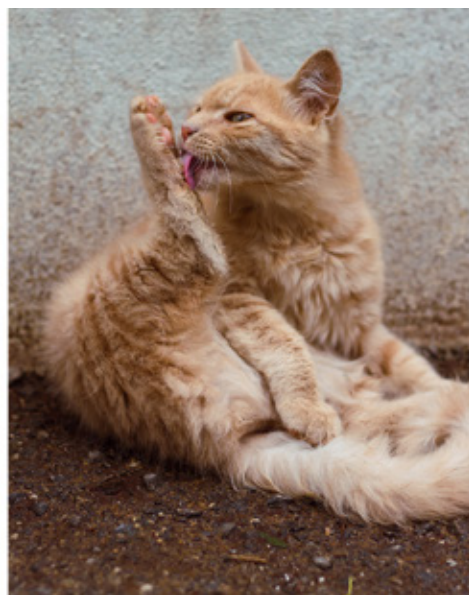
Photograph by Kent DuFault

Bath time images don't need to be limited to dogs or other more stereotypical pets. In these images, I am preparing to give my bearded dragon a bath when he was a baby.



All Photographs by Kent DuFault

My dragon is now four years old, and I have accumulated many exciting and fun interaction bath time pictures of him.



Photograph (l) by Juan Gomez and (r) by Dhava Eddine Bentaleb

https://unsplash.com/photos/Rwlo7_0s2jc

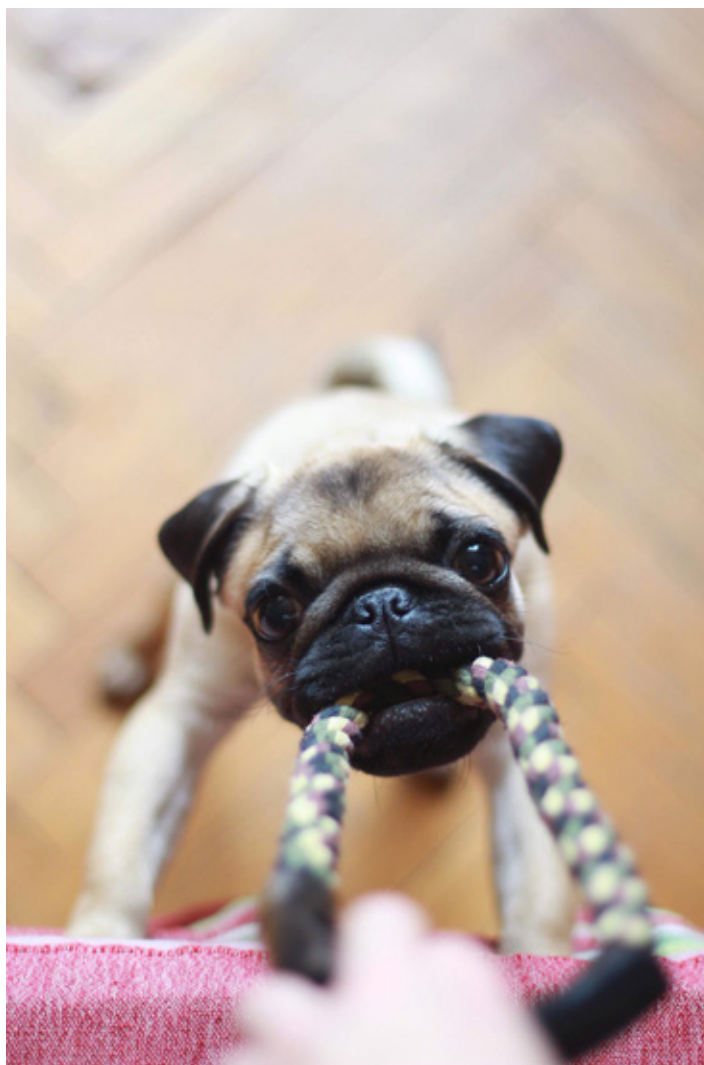
https://unsplash.com/photos/3pWQgEpid_I

Even cats take a bath, and they almost always do interesting interactive things while they're doing it!



Assignment:

Photograph your pets, or the pets of friends, while they are being given a bath or taking a bath. Remember to time your shots for peak action and get the camera in close. Here's an idea! Try taking some volunteer bath time shots at a local animal shelter. Tell them what you're doing. It may open some doors for you if you have a genuine interest in pet photography.



Photograph by Darinka Kievskaya

<https://unsplash.com/photos/ff221Bu56mI>

Playtime is a perfect interactive moment. If you can concentrate on the pet, make sure the eyes are in focus!



Assignment:

Photograph your pets or the pets of friends while they are playing by themselves, with their owners, or with other pets or animals. Practice placing the critical focus on the eyes. If you have multiple animals or people in the frame, compose your shots so that **one pet is always the main subject**. This is another opportunity at local animal shelters; they need fun photos of the animals.

Remember: Think outside the box!



Photograph (l) by Jonas Vincent and Photograph (r) by Turgay Yildiz

<https://unsplash.com/photos/xulIYVlbYIc>

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/unrecognizable-person-holding-dog-paw-on-grassy-meadow-6415655/>

When an animal knowingly shares its paws with you, it is a sign of trust and love.



Assignment:

Photograph pets with their owners and concentrate your lens and storytelling on the following:

- 1 Hand(s) and paw(s)
- 2 Leg(s) and tail(s)
- 3 Noses



Photograph by Kent DuFault



Photograph by Alicia Jones

<https://unsplash.com/photos/13Nt3KvEQ3w>

Before we close, let's touch one more time on this crucial aspect of pet photography. It is a consideration that many photographers miss when photographing and interacting with their pets and pet owners.



Photograph by Valerie Elash

<https://unsplash.com/photos/HNCX1RT1qRk>



Key Point:

Pet interaction photos almost always have the most impact when the facial expressions are close and prominent in the frame. There is nothing wrong with the above image. However, consider this:



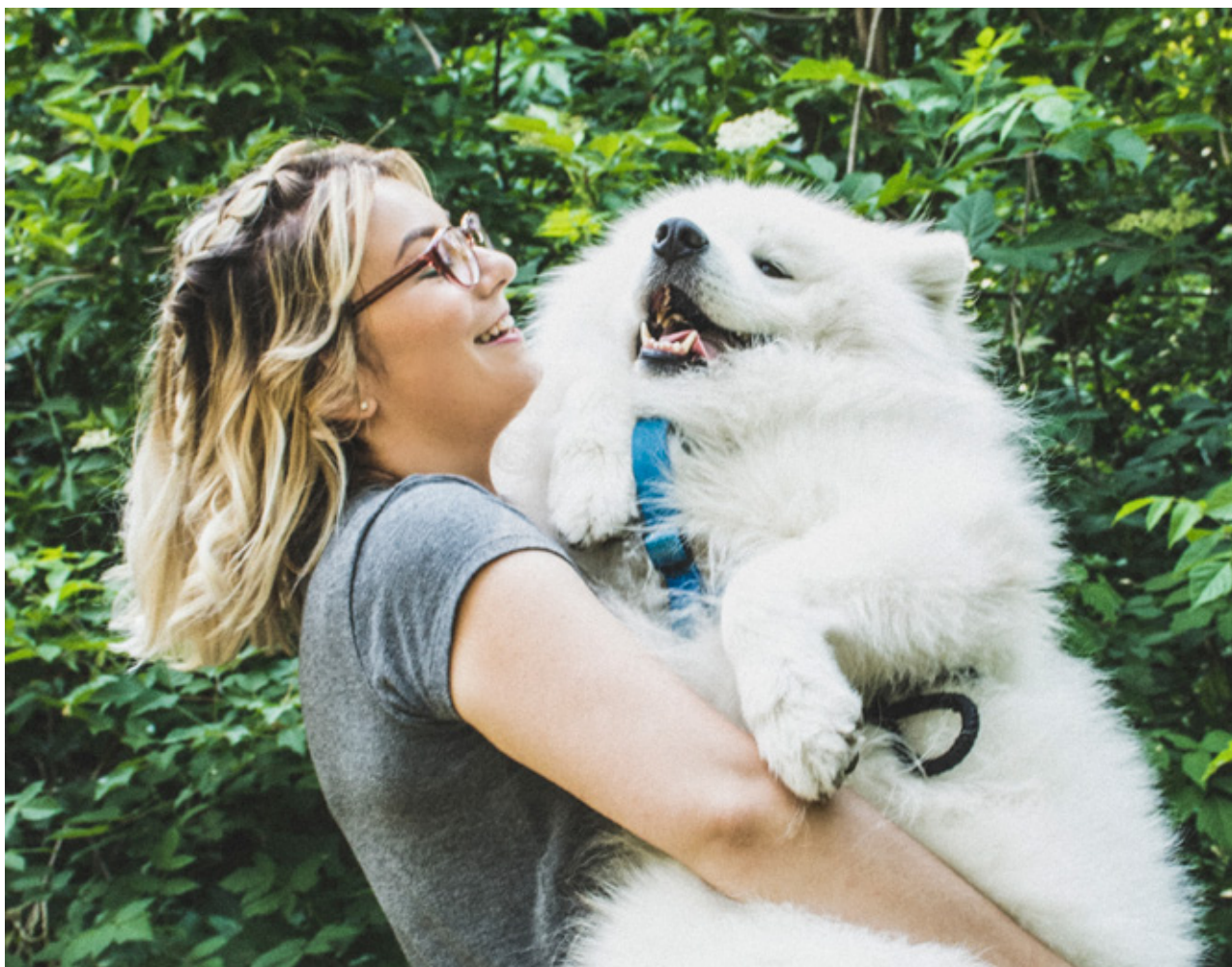
Photograph by Valerie Elash and graphic by Kent DuFault

<https://unsplash.com/photos/HNCX1RT1qRk>



Key Point cont.:

Here is where the emotional interaction lies. Unless the size of the pet is critical to your photo story, think faces!



Photograph by Valerie Elash and cropping by Kent DuFault

<https://unsplash.com/photos/HNCX1RT1qRk>



Assignment:

Create a portfolio of work where you concentrate your camera on the faces of the pets and their owners. However, these are not portraits. Make these shots interactive. Use your creativity to control the action. (Hint: a dab of peanut butter hidden somewhere in the frame is sure to get the attention of most pets.) Practice using your auto settings and try different types of lighting.