

BECOME AN EXPLORER OF SHAPES, LINES, AND BLOCKS OF COLOR.

By Kent DuFault

The beauty of smartphone photography is that the camera is always with us. We aren't tempted to leave it in the car because we don't feel like carrying it around.

This aspect of smartphone photography is a perfect tool for mastering your creative eye!

Everywhere you go, there is picture potential, as long as you're looking at it with a creative mindset.

This activity is where becoming an explorer of shapes, lines, and blocks of color are so much fun that you'll never stop doing it once you begin practicing it.

Image 001 indicates the level of 'seeing' that we smartphone photographers have versus non-photographers. We look for interesting stories and designs virtually everywhere we go.



Image 001 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

I walked into my local shopping mall at Christmas time. Because I am an explorer of shapes, lines, and blocks of color, I couldn't help but notice how the Christmas tree appeared to be an arrow hitting a bullseye. This image was taken on an iPhone 6 Plus and processed in Snapseed.



Image 002 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

We were shopping at a local Target store when I spotted this interesting composition of circular shapes. This image was taken on an iPhone 6 Plus and processed in Snapseed.

Sometimes, you can enhance your message of shapes and lines by converting to black and white. The scene in Image 002 was devoid of any exciting color, so converting it to monochrome made total sense. It improved the visual impact by forcing attention to the various shapes.



Assignment:

Visit a shopping mall and search for exciting shapes, lines, and blocks of color. Trust me, they are there. Now, hone your skills so that you find them!

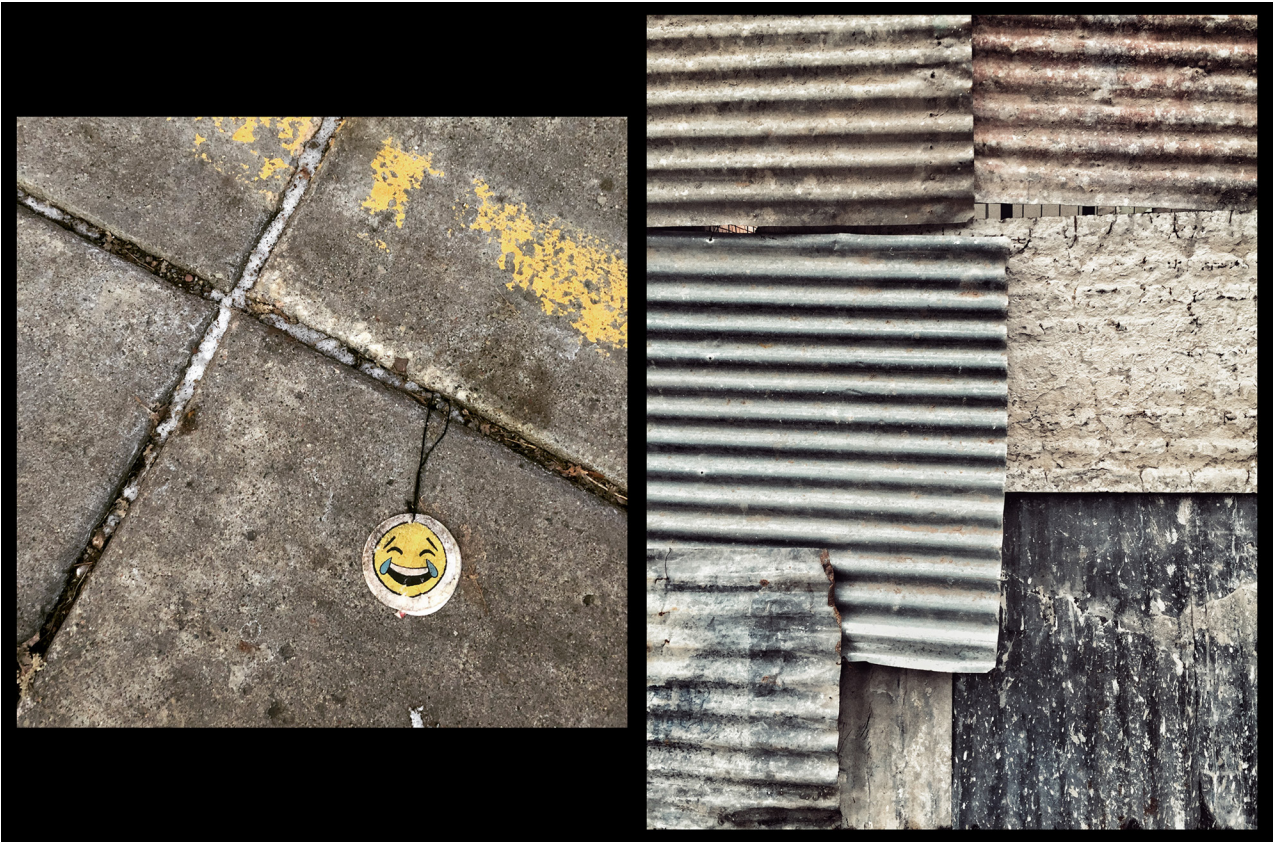


Image 003 – Photographs (l) and (r) by Kent DuFault

On the left side of Image 003, I spotted a smiley face on the sidewalk. There are some clearly defined shapes, lines, and blocks of color, all in one smartphone shot! Plus, it creates an engaging story. On the right of Image 003, I found this interesting study of shapes, lines, and blocks of color as I walked past a construction site. Left photo: iPhone 6 plus and processed in Snapseed. Right photo: iPhone 3Gs and processed in Hipstamatic.

Critical Thought: There is no better way to engage in this creativity prompt than to simply take a walk. I call them 'photo walks' or 'photo safaris.' These walks bring me exercise, and I find a multitude of cool and engaging photos. I'm walking, but I'm mostly looking.



Assignment:

Try taking at least six photo walks where your primary purpose is to observe and find interesting scenes that meet the objective of shape, line, and blocks of color. For each walk, go to a different location. I would suggest doing one or two of your photo safaris in an area you're familiar with, but looking with a new eye toward design. I would then suggest that the remaining photo walks occur in unfamiliar territory. Go to a different part of town or a completely different town.

Now, you're combining a new critical and creative eye along with the new territory.

Try to come away with at least five shots from each photo walk that are wholly based upon shape, lines, or blocks of color to create viewer interest and a bit of a story.

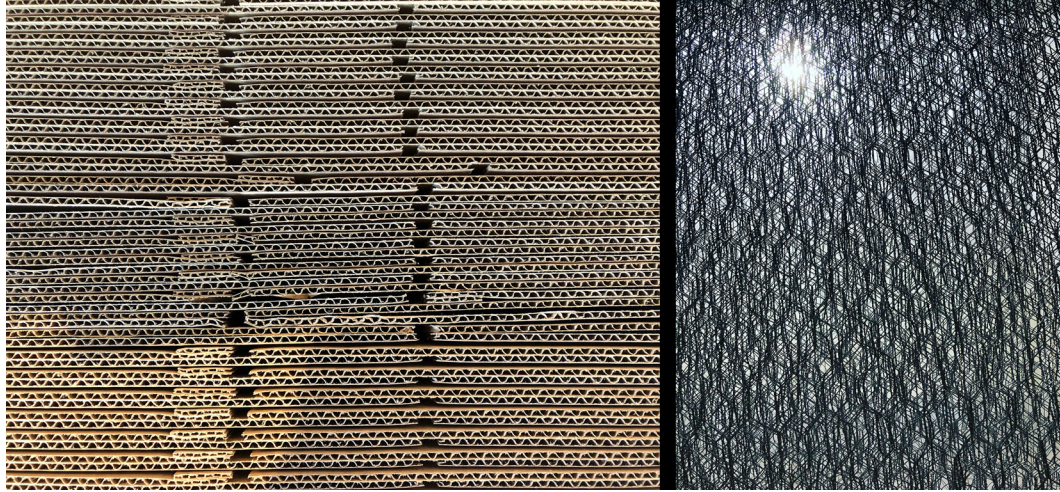


Image 004 – Photographs (l) and (r) by Kent DuFault

There is nothing more fun and fascinating than finding an exciting smartphone picture in the most unlikely of places. On the left of Image 004, I photographed stacked cardboard, and on the right, I shot a sunrise through hanging chicken wire. Left photo: iPhone 6 Plus and processed in Snapseed. Right photo: iPhone 11 Pro and processed in Snapseed and Instaflash Pro.

You can take this creativity prompt to an even higher and more satisfying level by getting down on your hands and knees. I'm saying that metaphorically, of course. You don't have to do that physically. I encourage you to look at the world more deeply and get beyond the apparent picture opportunities.

Key Thought: The world that we live in has been photographed over and over again. Finding a unique shot that stands out from the rest is getting complicated. One way to combat that, as a smartphone photographer, is to look for interesting details that everyone else might have missed.

I took the photo on the left of Image 004 in the lobby of a U-Haul Rental center as I waited to rent a moving truck.

The photo on the right was taken while visiting a friend that lives on a farm.

Both of these photos have a modern abstract appeal that transcends their locations.



Assignment:

Use your smartphone to capture details that everyone else has missed. Don't forget that the concept here is shapes, lines, and blocks of color. Use your intelligence and personality to say something with these pictures beyond a simple recording of the moment.

For example:

With the picture of the stacked cardboard, I pushed one box over so that the pattern was out of sync with the others. When the photo was published, it carried the message of non-conformity. It has sold several times to illustrate that exact message!

When I took the picture of the chicken wire, I chose a camera position that included the sunrise behind it. That decision adds depth and a sense of story and mystery to a very abstract photo.



Assignment:

Using your smartphone, create a body of work for your portfolio, with close-up imaging of known objects. Use shapes, lines, and blocks of color as essential elements within your composition. Also, incorporate a story to accompany each shot. You can manipulate the scene to create the story (the stacked cardboard) or use a change of camera position to add storytelling elements (the chicken wire).



Image 005 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Even within scenes that are quite busy and filled with objects, a carefully placed shape, line, or block of color will attract immediate attention! This image was taken on an iPhone 6 Plus and processed in Snapseed, TouchRetouch, and Mextures.

For image 005, I asked the model to sit on the stump, lean forward, and let her arms drop. I added to the drama and the sense of despair using grunge post-processing techniques. This photograph was part of an assignment to illustrate a mental health issue.

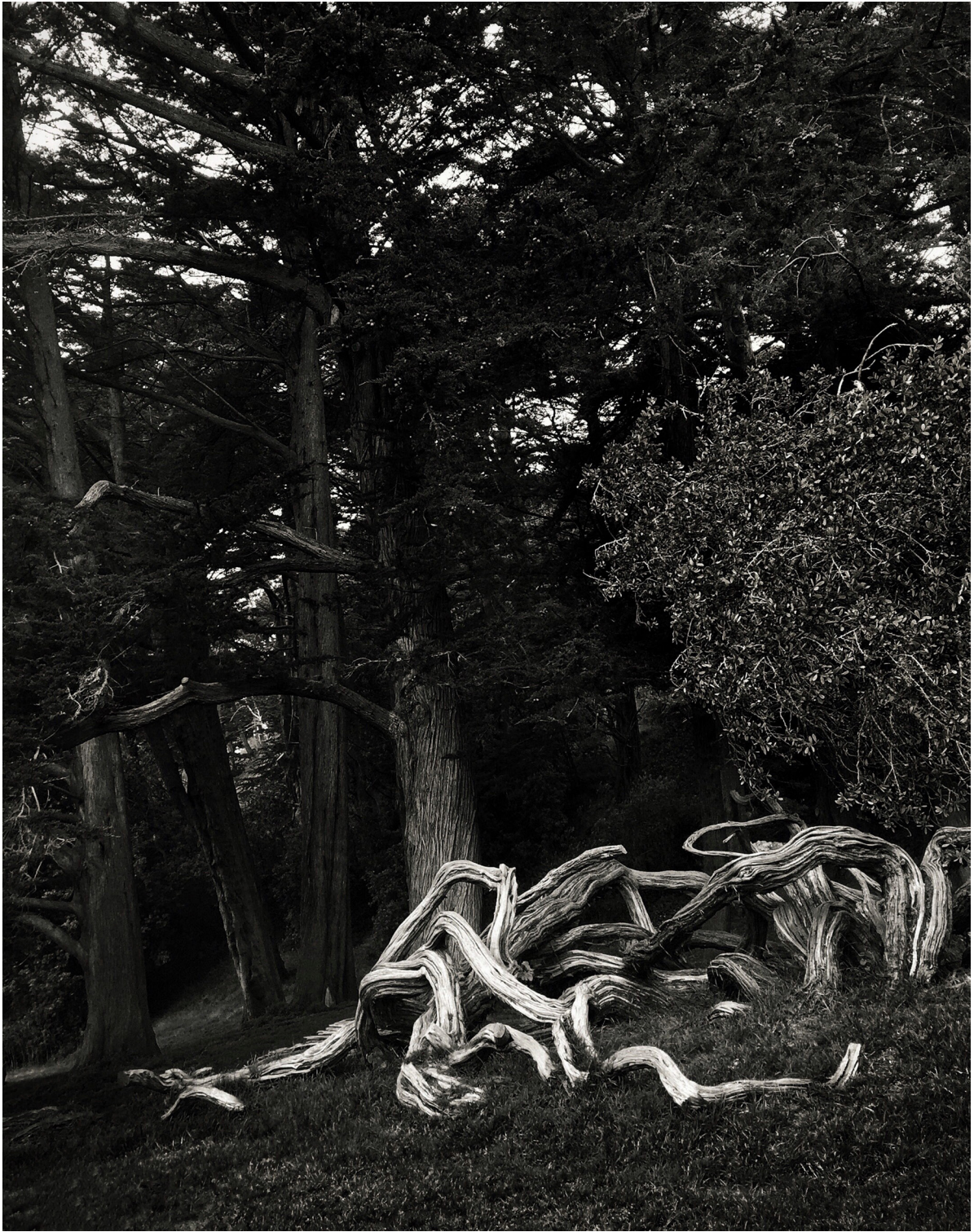


Image 006 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

I noticed the lines of this tree trunk in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. The reality was that it didn't stand out enough from the surrounding background. So, I continued my vision in post-production by darkening the surrounding forest and slightly dodging the white tree (the subject) that was growing on the ground.

This image was taken on an iPhone 6 Plus and processed in Snapseed and Instaflash Pro.

You'll notice that I often use post-production techniques to enhance the shape, line, or block of color that was my original inspiration to create a photo. There's nothing wrong with doing that!



Image 007 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

I wanted to share this photo because it clearly illustrates how even the most mundane objects can take on new meaning and excitement when a design element is included. This statement is especially true when photographed with shapes, lines, and blocks of color. This image was taken on an iPhone 8 Plus and processed in Snapseed.



Assignment:

Create a body of work for your smartphone photography portfolio that begins with inspiration from shapes, lines, or blocks of color. But then take those images into the editing software of your choice and manipulate the resulting photos to further enhance your initial idea.



Image 008 – Photographs (l) and (r) by Kent DuFault

*Two attributes primarily contribute to the illusion of shape and depth perception in photography. Those attributes are light and shadow.
Left photo: iPhone 6 Plus and processed in Snapseed. Right photo: iPhone 8 Plus and processed in Snapseed and Instaflash Pro.*

For the left photo of Image 008, I was sitting on the same side as the woman when I noticed her demeanor and body language. I was also captivated by the light reflecting off of the metal bars. It almost appeared as if she were being held captive.

However, I couldn't see her well enough to create the story that I had in my mind, so I moved to a seat on the other side of the subway car to capture a better angle of her.

I was on a bike ride with my wife (the photo on the right of Image 008) when I noticed the fascinating interplay of light and shadow creating shapes and lines. I stopped my bicycle, and I asked my wife to circle back and ride through it again. This photo has gained a lot of attention and sold many times.



Assignment:

Actively observe shapes, lines, and blocks of color. For these pictures, I want you to improve your shot by either moving the camera (an example is the left shot in Image 008) or by moving the subject of the picture (for example, asking my wife to ride through the tunnel a second time after positioning myself).



Image 009 – Photographs (t) and (b) by Kent DuFault

Top photo: iPhone 6 Plus and processed in Snapseed.

Bottom photo: iPhone 8 Plus and processed in Snapseed, Instaflash Pro, and TouchRetouch.

By placing a rain-soaked window in front of the lens, the top photo in Image 009 becomes an abstract block of color. Notice the careful placement of the buildings in the background. The buildings' unobstructed view brings back a sense of realism to what was an almost entirely abstract photo.

A technique that I often use is to first identify an exciting scene. The bottom photograph of Image 009 was in the financial district of San Francisco. I then decide on what smartphone camera photography technique that I want to use to create a picture. In this case, it was the blocks of yellow color and lines of the trolley car system. Then, it's a matter of waiting for something interesting to happen. I stood on the sidewalk until this businessman came

walking by. I saw that he intended to cross the street, so I did as well from the opposite side. I timed my shot, waiting for him to enter the yellow color block before releasing the shutter. Putting him within the block of color makes him stand out from a bustling scene.



Assignment:

This creativity prompt is a two-part assignment. First of all, I want you to create a body of work where you place something in front of the lens to semi-obscure the scene, thus creating blocks of color. Think of the top half of Image 009. You can do photo safaris and look for objects to put in front of the lens. I often use windows, or you can carry something with you. I usually bring some Saranwrap in my pocket as a mobile device for this purpose. Try different objects that you can take with you. A few that come to mind are sunglasses, thin paper, and various types of plastic.

For the second part of this creativity prompt, I want you to scout locations with blocks of color. In preparation for your photo, decide on a camera angle and your intended storytelling message. Now, wait for something to happen **or** bring a friend along and make something happen.

All photographs in this creativity prompt (created by Kent DuFault) were shot with either an iPhone 3Gs, an iPhone 6 Plus, an iPhone 8 Plus, or an iPhone 11 Pro.

Kent DuFault's post-processing toolbox includes Snapseed, Instaflash Pro, TouchRetouch, Polarr, Focos, Light Distortions, Instagram, Mextures, Hipstamatic, and LensLight.