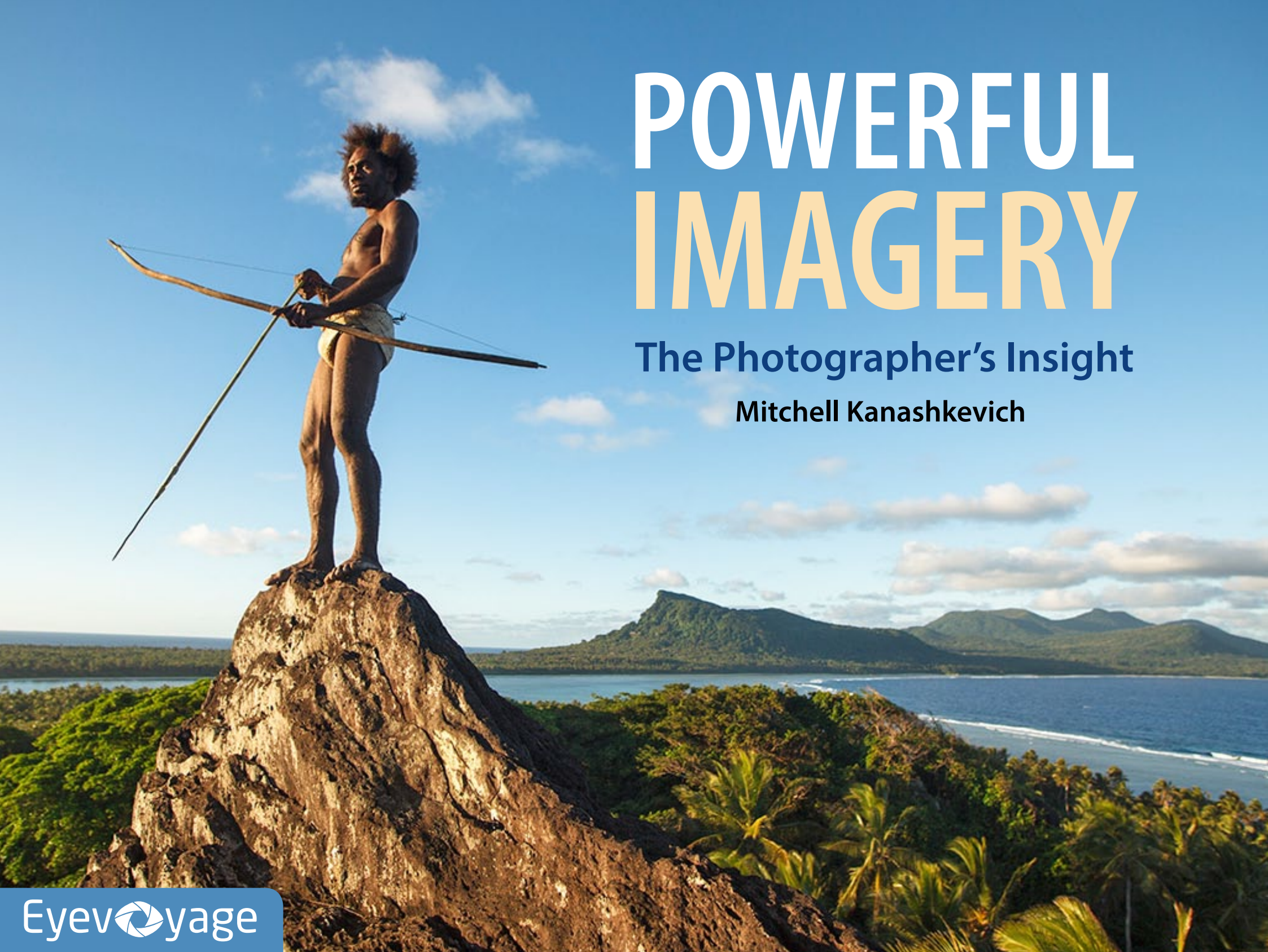


A photograph of a man standing on a large, dark, jagged rock formation. He is shirtless, wearing a light-colored loincloth, and holding a long bow and arrow. He is looking towards the left. The background shows a tropical landscape with lush green vegetation, a blue body of water, and distant mountains under a blue sky with scattered clouds.

POWERFUL IMAGERY

The Photographer's Insight

Mitchell Kanashkevich

Table of Contents

Foreword | 3

Introduction | 4

Some notes from the photographer | 5



Closer to the Gods | 6



Wrestlers | 10



The Climb | 14



Holy Man | 18



Chopping Pumpkins | 22



Sulfur Miner | 26



Make-up Session | 30



Darkness Over the Mountains | 34



Fire Walker | 38



An Ethiopian Welcome | 42



Spear Fisherman | 46



Pilgrim's Devotion | 50



Bidi Smoke | 54



The Chess Match | 58



Morning Catch | 62

What makes an image powerful?

The question may seem straightforward enough, but the answer isn't always as simple. As you'll see in the following pages, each situation has its own set of opportunities to bring forth its own entirely unique impact.

Generally speaking, it is safe to say that they all share the act of moving the viewer on some level. It can be a sense of story or of a particular place, an emotion or mood. The most powerful images blend all of these qualities together seamlessly so that the viewer can connect and react.

In this ebook, I have included a collection of 15 of my favorite images made over the past decade of my travels that I feel embody the essential attributes of powerful imagery.

Learning from examples

I strongly believe that one of the best ways to learn photography is by deconstructing photos that exemplify what it is you want to learn.

When I started out in photography, I used to look at the work of my favorite photographers to search for hints and insights: what lens they used, what settings, what additional equipment, how a particular subject was approached or how they arrived at the final image—anything that shed light on their creative processes.

In *Powerful Imagery*, I have taken this idea even further by deconstructing each image in clear and explicit detail. As a result, there are several different lessons within each photographic example.

Begin close to home

Since I'm a travel photographer, my images come from all over the world. However, this doesn't mean that the lessons in this ebook are solely catered towards exotic locations and world travel.

While many of the tips will inform you how to go about photographing abroad, many are universally applicable, so you can start using the knowledge at home.

Also, remember that "traveling" does not strictly translate to going to faraway places. A weekend getaway is a great occasion to advance your photography, too.

About the author

Mitchell Kanashkevich is a travel, documentary photographer and a best-selling ebook writer. He constantly travels the world in search of images of unique cultures and stunning places.

His work has appeared in some of the world's top travel and photography magazines (*National Geographic Traveler*, *Vanity Fair*, *Lonely Planet Traveler*, *Geographical UK*) on book covers, in ad campaigns and has made its way into private photo collections around the world.



How the eBook is structured?

Each photograph is a case study divided into sections so that you can easily access the precise information you need and understand how the photographer arrived at the final image. The sections for each photograph are categorized into the following titles:

The photo page

Every photograph is presented at full-screen and is accompanied by the image's title, location, equipment used, and camera settings. You're encouraged to keep coming back to this page to use as a reference point as you read the information that explains it.

The story

This section puts the image into context by providing background information on the location and situation in which the photo was created.

Objectives

Every image was created with specific objectives in mind. This section discusses the different approaches to achieve those objectives.

Light

Light is integral to photography. In this section, you'll find crucial information on how to use different types of lighting scenarios to their fullest effects.

Overcoming challenges

Every photographic opportunity is accompanied by its own set of unique challenges, both technical and practical. Some are easily resolved, others require more effort. This section troubleshoots those challenges and offer solutions.

Creative decisions in the field

This section gives you an in-depth look into the photographer's creative process. Key images from the shoot accompanied by explanations and corresponding camera settings show how the image was crafted, from ideation to final decision.

Post-processing

Just as there are objectives for every photo during the shoot, getting the image doesn't stop there. This section looks at the goals of post-processing and reveals the photographer's key steps on achieving them.

On camera settings

I am often asked about my choice of camera settings for particular situations. For the most part, I try to find a balance between fulfilling my creative goals and dealing with technical limitations. However, I often find that there simply isn't enough time to change all the dials to the optimal settings for a particular scene. Sometimes the settings I use depend on what was dialed in previously.

Concerning *White Balance*, I usually have it set at 5,000K. I find this to be a good general setting, and since I shoot in *RAW* format, it's easy to change the *White Balance* in post-processing when necessary.

On the images in “Creative decisions in the field”

The images in this section are not the entire set from each shoot. In most cases, I make considerably more exposures than just six. The photographs I included are those that I consider to be the key images that led to the final photograph.

As you'll notice, I often keep shooting even beyond the point of getting the image I'm after. Sometimes I'm aware that I got the image, but want to continue shooting in case I can capture an even more powerful moment. Other times, I'm not sure what I got until I have a chance to look at the photographs on a computer to analyze them in detail. For this reason, I keep shooting to make sure I get the the best possible photograph.

On post-processing

I post-processed all of the images in the ebook using Adobe Lightroom 4. I have not used any plug-ins for any of the photographs you see.

I didn't apply the same approach to every single image—partly to show you how things can be done differently, and partly because it felt more natural at the time to tweak certain sliders ahead of others. There are different ways of post-processing and no one is more correct than another.

On dedicating yourself to photography

I have breathed and lived photography over the past decade. These images represent an accumulation of my journeys and experiences, and what I took from them. I do not want to mislead the reader by implying that the same caliber of images is possible for someone who has just begun photographing. Growing as a photographer takes time.

If you want to develop as a photographer, you must make a commitment. This doesn't mean quitting your day job. But it does mean dedicating time exclusively to photography, even if it's a few mornings during your family vacation, or over the weekend.

Following through fully with your efforts will always result in more accomplishment than any half-hearted attempts. Once you dedicate yourself seriously, there is no doubt in my mind that your level of photography will reach new heights.

Equipment used

Camera Bodies: Canon EOS 350D, Canon 5D MK I and Canon 5D MK II.

Lenses: Canon 50mm f/1.8, Canon 16-35 f/2.8, Canon 24-70mm f/2.8, Canon 70-200 f/2.8, Sigma 20mm f/1.8

Photoflex 5-in-1 Reflector

Photoflex LiteDome XS Softbox with its adjustable shoe mount

Canon 580 EX II Flash + ST-E2 (Infrared transmitter)



CLOSER TO GODS, RAH ISLAND, VANUATU

Equipment: Canon 5D MKII, Sigma 20 mm f1.8 Settings: ISO 200, 20 mm, f/5, 1/640s

The Story

The image was taken on Rah, a tiny, remote coral island in Vanuatu. It was part of a mini, improvisational tourism campaign that I decided to do with the locals to help them attract more visitors to their island.

I saw the project as a great creative opportunity. I was able to combine my documentary approach along with a more set-up and controlled environment to create photographs that were reflective of the place and the culture. At the same time, they were more beautiful and dramatic than if I were to simply photograph things as they were without any set-ups.

Prior to the shoot, I had spent two weeks on the island and befriended many of the locals including Bob—the man in the image. He was a medicine man, a keen volunteer model, and a photogenic character. The idea to have him with the bow and arrow came from the stories of Bob and his peers hunting flying foxes as teenagers around the area where the photograph was taken.

Objectives

I was struck by what an unspoiled, remote, and untamed paradise the island of Rah was. I wanted to make an iconic image that communicated all of those ideas, as well as a sense of luminosity, positivity, and inspiration.

The location of the shoot, the Rock of Rah, was the definitive feature of the island and also its highest viewpoint. From there, one could see all around the island – the verdant foliage, the surrounding hills, the azure sky, and the clear waters – elements that made the island of Rah the paradise that it was.

Bob was the perfect subject to put a human face to the island. Having him with a bow and arrow was representative of these self-reliant people whose roots were still firmly based in their ancestry.

The combination of Bob, the dramatic view from the rock of Rah, and the lighting scenario effectively communicated the exotic notions of the land and its people as well as that sense of positivity and inspiration.

Light

I knew that I wanted to take advantage of the light during the golden hour—sunrise and sunset—to achieve my objectives. Because this light makes all the colors very vivid and vibrant, it is perfect for creating an image with a positive, dramatic, and inspirational ambience.

I also wanted to sculpt with the light to make Bob's physique and all of the textures of the environment as dramatic and distinct as possible. Because of the sun's proximity to the horizon, the golden hour is the best time to achieve this sculpting effect by directing the light within the image. In this case, it was perpendicular to Bob's face.

I knew that our window of opportunity to take advantage of this lighting scenario was limited. To prepare for this, I had to previously scout the site. I even took sketch photos of one of Bob's friends before Bob, himself, was available.

Overcoming challenges

"The white man has a watch, the black man has time." This Vanuatu phrase was a direct reflection of the locals' mentality. I fully appreciate its meaning, but for someone like me who has been conditioned by the Western ideology of "Time is money," adapting to it was a big challenge.

In a practical sense, this meant that any planning was to be approached without too many expectations. When we initially scheduled the shoot for sunrise, Bob didn't turn up. Not because he didn't care; he simply wasn't aware of the importance of punctuality. He slept in and didn't think much of it.

Because of my friendships with the men on the island, such challenges were resolved by themselves. In the case of Bob not turning up, he was scolded by our now common friends. When he understood how much I wanted him to be there early, he made sure to arrive on time in the afternoon.

While I didn't make friends with anyone with the specific purpose to take their photograph, it is important to note just how vital good rapport is when photographing people. Our friendship was Bob's only motivation.

Creative Decisions in the Field

1. I know that I want to photograph Bob on the Rock of Rah, but I don't yet have my mind set on the exact location. In large part, this will depend on the direction of the light. This image is a test shot to see how things translate through the viewfinder.

2. I start to work on the perspective and Bob's pose. The elements that I want to show are here, but the image does not feel iconic enough. I feel that I need to distance myself.

3. I get on a higher point of the rock so I can show a larger part of the island. I like the shot, but feel that it is too green. Also, a shadow covers a large part the area—not something I want.

4. I decide on an angle where everything takes on a more iconic feel. I ask Bob to appear ready to use the bow and arrow, and look up. His face is turned too far away from the sun and, as a result, too much of it is lost in the shadow.

5. Bob looks out into the expanse of nature around him. The shot works on many levels, but I want something a little less static.

6. Again, Bob is ready to shoot, only this time he looks into the distance. Not necessarily a believable documentary photograph, but it does convey everything that I wanted in just the right light. The clouds that float in above Bob's head are a great bonus. They give the sky a bit more balance.



ISO 200, 24-70mm@25mm, f/2.8, 1/4000s



ISO 200, 24-70mm@24mm, f/4.5, 1/1250s



ISO 200, 24-70mm@32mm, f/4.5, 1/1250s



ISO 200, 20mm, f/5, 1/640s



ISO 200, 20mm, f/5, 1/800s



ISO 200, 20mm, f/5, 1/640s

Goals and Key Steps

Add a sense of overall luminance

- Under *Tone Curve*, I moved the *Highlights* and *Lights* sliders about half-way to the right.

Bring out detail in the bright clouds

- I moved the global *Highlights* slider around half-way to the left.

Bring out detail in the dark areas

- I moved the the global *Shadows* slider half-way to the right.

Make the sky a slightly deeper blue color

- Under *Luminance*, I moved the *Blue* slider slightly to the left.

Make outlines of his facial features and hair more prominent

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Clarity* value to paint around these areas.



AFTER



BEFORE



WRESTLERS, KOLHAPUR, INDIA

Equipment: Canon 5D MKI, Canon 24-70 mm f2.8 Settings: ISO 1000, 62 mm, f/2.8, 1/160s

The Story

At a camel fair in India, I came across a scene of two men wrestling in a sand pit in front of excited, screaming fans. I stopped and watched. The whole thing was strangely fascinating and picturesque. I later found out that what I had witnessed was *Kushti*, a popular ancient form of Indian wrestling.

After some research online and inspiration from the images of other photographers, I decided to make a photo story on the subject. I headed for Kolhapur, a South Indian city which was the capital of *Kushti*. A few days of wandering around and photographing in various schools led me to one place which was particularly photogenic during its afternoon training sessions. I visited a few times, got to know some of the wrestlers, and received permission from the head trainer to get into the pit and photograph the action from up-close.

Objectives

I wanted to create a close-up look at one of the training sessions in this particular wrestling school. The ideal spot to photograph this was from inside the pit at the same eye level as the wrestlers. I needed to obtain permission from the head trainer to do this. It was simply a matter of asking politely, but asking was important. Had I not asked permission and proceeded without invitation, I would have greatly offended the trainer and risked being banned from the pit.

When photographing action, it is always great to get the image in the middle of that action. That is exactly what I wanted to do here. I didn't know specifically which moment would prove to be most dramatic, so I kept shooting intermittently, waiting for something to reach out to me visually.

Of course, the thing that made the whole scene special and very atmospheric was the light. One of the objectives was to capture those distinct light beams coming through the window into the wrestling pit.

Light

Light was a big reason behind why I chose to photograph the training sessions at this particular wrestling school. Every afternoon, the interaction of the direct light from the setting sun with the particles of sand in the air created very powerful looking light beams. Whatever took place in the pit gained a surreal and very dynamic feel because of that lighting scenario.

The light beams that I was after were not distinct from just any spot within the pit. I had to find the optimal balance—a point from which they were visible enough, and from which I could still have an intimate feel of the action taking place. Once I found that point, I stayed there for a few minutes and waited with the hope that a strong moment would take place.

Overcoming challenges

A very obvious and practical challenge was getting into the action and not getting hurt. Some of the wrestlers were giants and having one of them bodyslammed on top of me was not something I wanted.

Over my time photographing the wrestlers, I had to develop an instinct of when to come in and when to pull back. A few times, one of the wrestlers would pull me back if a body unexpectedly came crashing to the ground in front of me. But for the most part, I managed just fine on my own.

The most frustrating challenge was getting the combination of light, moment, and interesting characters in action. While it would make no sense not to take advantage of the light, not all of the action was happening by the window where the light beams were most distinct. Nor were the more interesting characters always in that location. I needed to spend hours shooting around the same spot over a few different training sessions to come up with just a few powerful photographs.

Creative Decisions in the Field

1. I find the spot where the light beams are most distinct and start photographing different wrestlers who enter the frame. I wait for something visually dramatic to happen. There is nothing very special about this moment. I keep waiting, and make exposures intermittently.

2. The action during training sessions is not always visually exciting. I sit in the corner of the pit for minutes at a time without moving and wait. There's some action here, but I feel it lacks dramatic impact.

3. Another pair of wrestlers enter the frame. The moment is a little more dramatic, but I have to slightly adjust the framing to capture it. Also, the light beams are not as distinct.

4. There's action between a new pair of wrestlers. As one pushes the other, I press the shutter button, keeping it pressed in anticipation of something. I like this moment, but the next one has more drama to it.

5. With my finger on the shutter button, I capture a few frames of a wrestler falling down. In the editing process, I choose this as the most powerful image. There's a strong element of story through their body language. The distinct light beams make everything even more dramatic.

6. The light beams and the sand in the air are ideal ingredients for an image full of impact. I make this photo shortly after the previous, but the moment is not as strong.



ISO 1000, 24-70mm@46mm, f/2.8, 1/160s



ISO 1250, 24-70mm@30mm, f/2.8, 1/160s



ISO 1000, 24-70mm@43mm, f/2.8, 1/160s



ISO 1000, 24-70mm@46mm, f/2.8, 1/160s



ISO 1000, 24-70mm@62mm, f/2.8, 1/160s



ISO 1000, 24-70mm@64mm, f/2.8, 1/160s

Goals and Key Steps

Add visual drama and punch

- Under *Tone Curve*, I moved the *Lights* slider half-way to the right and the *Darks* slider three-quarters of the way to the left.

Bring out detail in darker areas of the sand and the shoulder of the wrestler on the right

- I moved global *Shadows* slider about half-way right.
- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Shadows* value to paint over the areas mentioned.

Accentuate the light beams

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Clarity* value to paint over the outlines of this element.
- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Exposure* value to paint inside this element.

Make the wrestlers pop in the image

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Clarity* value to paint over the subjects.



AFTER



BEFORE



THE CLIMB, RAH ISLAND, VANUATU

Equipment: Canon 5D MKII, Sigma 20 mm f1.8 Settings: ISO 1000, 20 mm, f/2.8, 1/250s

The Story

This photograph is another from the mini, improvisational tourism campaign on the Island of Rah in Vanuatu. In this case, I wasn't going for an iconic kind of image like I was with Bob. I wanted to show something from the lives of the locals that was commonplace for them, but unusual for most people who might visit the island.

I heard that teenagers go hunting for birds and flying foxes with slingshots and climb trees to do so. The actual hunt would not be very appropriate for a tourism campaign, but I felt that the climb up a tree would work well and would be visually appealing.

This shot was set up. David, the boy in the image, re-enacted the way he went about the hunt. There was no way for me to capture him in action during the real thing because I had to climb up the tree before him to take the photograph and would have scared away all of his prey.

Objectives

The main objective was to create a dynamic photograph of the boy in action. I had to communicate the sense of him climbing up the tree. The choice of perspective was crucial. We climbed up a few trees and I maneuvered to shoot from various angles in order to get this image.

The choice of lens was important, too. A wide-angle was absolutely necessary. I had to be relatively close to David, but I wanted to fit his entire body into the shot. It was also vital to include enough details to make it clear what context he was in—that he was actually above ground, climbing up a tree.

Another objective was to show David's environment—the jungle, trees, vines, thick growth of greenery. Choosing to shoot at the actual location where the hunting took place partly took care of those things. The other part was, again, the choice of the wide-angle lens. I could quite simply include more of the boy's environment into the frame.

Light

For the most part, the light in the scene was diffused by the tree canopy. As a result, it was soft and fairly flat. However, there were brighter pockets of light where the sun rays did penetrate the canopy. In practical terms, this meant that I had to take care not to have a crucial detail under that direct light or it would be overexposed and potentially lost.

I also needed to expose with post-processing in mind. I had to underexpose the darker parts of the scene in order to not overexpose the brighter parts too much. This way, I could still save some of the detail in post-processing. As you can see from the before and after images, I did manage to bring back most of the detail in the brighter areas of the image. Nothing is totally blown out.

Overcoming challenges

The first challenge was finding the most appropriate perspective. An image like this would only work if I could communicate that David was above the ground, climbing up the tree. As I mentioned, we climbed up a few trees before I found the angle from which I felt I could create the image that I wanted. The climbing was at times fairly tiring, but because it was not during an actual hunt, we could both take a break after every few attempts.

The next challenge was capturing the activity of the climb to communicate the intense physical exertion. I had to be close enough for his facial expression to be easily seen and read, yet far enough away for sufficient details to be included into the frame so that the whole scene could be understood.

Again, the fact that I had some control over the shoot helped. I was able to get a few takes of David climbing to make sure that I got the precise moment and angle.

Creative Decisions in the Field

1. David begins the climb and I start shooting. I don't know exactly which moment I am looking for, so I explore different ways of photographing the action.

2. I continue making exposures. This one is good as far as David's expression, but I don't get the sense of the climb nor that he is fairly high above the ground.

3. We change trees. I decide that I want to capture David further up in his climb. I want to include his legs into the frame to show how he is holding on. This image works on some level, but I feel that I can still get more of a sense of height and climb from a different perspective.

4. I get further up the tree and photograph David from above. I am happy with this perspective, but I don't feel as involved or close to the action because David's body is turned sideways.

5. This is the shot. It has the expression, the right perspective, and enough of a sense of climb and height. I don't know that this exact image is the one I'll be happy with at the time, but I do realize that a shot from this perspective will work.

6. Just in case, I try taking another image from a different angle. I do this to give myself some more images to choose from so I don't have to come back and re-do the shoot again in case I feel I missed something.



ISO 1000, 20mm, f/2.8, 1/80s



ISO 1000, 20mm, f/2.8, 1/80s



ISO 1000, 20mm, f/2.8, 1/200s



ISO 200, 20mm, 3.3, 1/50s



ISO 1000, 20mm, f/2.8, 1/250s



ISO 1000, 20mm, f/2.8, 1/250s

Goals and Key Steps

Bring out more detail in the darker areas

- I moved the global *Shadows* slider almost half-way to the right.

Increase overall luminance to the image to make it look punchier

- Under the *Tone Curve*, I moved the *Lights* slider half-way to the right. These global adjustments to the bright areas made the overexposed area of the tree even brighter, but I dealt with this in the next step.

Fix the overexposed area of the tree

- I moved the global *Highlights* slider one-quarter of the way to the left.
- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a decreased *Exposure* value to various degrees to paint the areas which were too bright.

Add a sense of volume and enliven his face, the tree below his chin, and the green leaves

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with an increased *Exposure* value to various degrees to paint over these areas and make them look brighter.

Make his eyes, nose, and mouth, and the textures of the leaves and tree more prominent

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Clarity* value to paint over these elements.



AFTER



BEFORE



HOLY MAN, MAHESHWAR, INDIA

Equipment: Canon 5D MKI, Canon 24-70 mm f2.8 Settings: ISO 100, 70 mm, f/4, 1/160s

The Story

For the Hindus in India, rivers are sacred. They are believed to have cleansing powers, not only physically, but spiritually. Narmada is one of the most sacred and holy rivers of all. The photograph was taken on the banks of the Narmada in a small pilgrimage town called Maheshwar.

One of the rituals around the rivers is to bathe in them and sip their waters. Usually, this is done by the more devout Hindus. To me, this act became a strong visual representation of the relationship that people have with the rivers in India.

I spotted the man in the photograph from some distance. He looked like the kind of mythical holyman that one only hears about, so I watched him closely. Slowly, I approached and prepared my camera. I made eye contact with him and asked with a nod whether it was ok to make a photo. He looked at me calmly and just continued with his ritual. I knew this reaction from before. It was a reaction of a deeply spiritual person who really didn't care about trivial things such as photography. It made no difference to him whether or not I took the photo. I stayed around and made a few exposures.

Objectives

On one level, I wanted to capture the act of the man sipping water from the river, cupping it in his hand. I already knew what to expect as far as body language, so I waited, anticipated the moment, and pressed the shutter button when it came. Coming up as close as possible and zooming in to 70mm on my 24-70mm lens was important to show the action from a close enough distance.

On another level, I wanted to create an image that was serene and timeless while at the same time, visually dramatic. The way I framed the scene was crucial. I had to isolate the man and the part of the river from anything that was indicative of time and place. The bluish tones of the water and the light of the setting sun naturally gave a serene feel to the photograph. Some post-processing work was done to ensure that the image had the right amount of punch and drama.

Light

At the time I photographed this scene, the sun was setting. When the sun sets, the light is closer to the horizon and hence more directional. I could have potentially manipulated the angle at which the light came from in the image by repositioning myself in relation to the subject. However, my choice was ultimately influenced by my desire to photograph the man from the front to show his facial features and what he was doing.

The sun was behind him, but because it was still not in the final stages of descent it did not render his figure into a silhouette. Rather, it illuminated everything from an angle creating an outline around his hair and back, and made the water in the river and in his hand shine.

This light was a vital factor in achieving the objective of creating a timeless and serene photograph. I cannot take credit for doing anything special with it. I simply recognized the potential of the situation and took advantage of it.

Overcoming challenges

The biggest challenge here was making decisions within a very limited amount of time in addition to the physical boundaries and being sensitive towards the subject.

While I recognized the great potential in the scene, I was initially too far away to make a decent photograph. I knew that the man would not be there for a very long time, but I couldn't run towards him. That would have been inappropriate and would kill his serene, spiritual moment.

Once I did get close enough, it was all about finding the best angle to tell the story from. A step in one direction or another made a big difference, so I experimented and shot from different angles. Because my time was limited, it really helped having previous experience photographing similar scenes. I anticipated what came next and calculated where I needed to be after a few exposures.

Creative Decisions in the Field

1. I see the man taking a ritual bath from a distance and approach him. I don't want to alarm him by running to get close enough. I don't know how long I have to make the photo and I don't want to lose it. I stop to take the image from where I am at a distance.

2. The man continues bathing. I take a few steps forward. I shoot whatever he is doing, but I feel that I need to be closer.

3. The man cups the water in his hand to sip. This is exactly the moment I want to capture. The idea of creating a serene, timeless image enters my head and I decide that I don't want any other elements in the scene except for the man and the water.

4. The man cups the water and sips again. There is nothing around him but water. The image has the elements of simplicity, serenity, and timelessness that I want. I know that I got the image I wanted, but I continue to watch, prepared to make more photos.

5. The man starts dipping himself in the water. He does this a few times and I try to capture the action of the drops of water splashing off of him. I miss the action with this exposure.

6. A couple more shutter clicks later, I capture the moment with the splashes of water. Though this image works, it is not what I was ultimately after because it's not as symbolic of the relationship between man and water in India.



ISO 100, 24-70mm@66mm, f/4, 1/400s



ISO 100, 24-70mm@70mm, f/4, 1/250s



ISO 100, 24-70mm@70mm, f/4, 1/160s



ISO 100, 24-70mm@70mm, f/4, 1/160s



ISO 100, 24-70mm@70mm, f/4, 1/200s



ISO 100, 24-70mm@70mm, f/4, 1/200s

Goals and Key Steps

Make the water in the image look a cool blue

- I moved the global *Temperature* slider to the left until all the colors in the image gained a significantly bluish tint. This meant that the man started looking a bit too blue. I dealt with this issue in the next step.

Bring back warmth to the man's colors

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a significantly increased *Temperature* value, and carefully painted over the man.

Make all the colors look richer and punchier

- Under the *Tone Curve*, I moved the *Highlights* and *Lights* sliders significantly to the right.
- Under the *Tone Curve*, I moved the *Darks* and *Shadows* sliders significantly to the left.

Bring back detail in the shadow areas

- I lost detail in the shadow areas due to the previous step, so I moved the global *Shadows* slider almost the entire way to the left to bring it back.

Make the man's facial features and hair more prominent

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Clarity* value to paint over the areas which needed to look more prominent.

Enhance the sense of depth and volume in the man's face, body, beard, and hair

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Exposure* value to paint these elements in order to brighten them.



AFTER



BEFORE



CHOPPING PUMPKINS, MARAMURES, ROMANIA

Equipment: Canon 5D MKII, Sigma 20 mm f1.8 Settings: ISO 800, 20 mm, f/3.2, 1/50s

The Story

The image was taken during a trip through Romania with a couple of local photographer friends. We journeyed in search of the country's remaining traditions and ended up in Maramures—a region home to a few small villages that modernity still hadn't transformed.

During a walk around one of the villages, I saw this beautiful, almost painterly scene. The bright colors of the pumpkins and the woman's sweater stood out from afar. As we approached, with cameras around our necks, the woman noticed. She understood that we were photographers and adjusted her clothing, just in case she would be photographed.

My friend initiated the conversation. The woman told us she was chopping the pumpkins and storing the seeds for the winter. Like many rural people in this part of Romania, she still relied on her land and its harvest for survival.

Objectives

The vibrant colors in the scene jumped out at me immediately. It was important to communicate the lively ambience that they created. As you'll read later, the lighting helped a lot with this.

The action of the woman chopping pumpkins was visually powerful. I wanted to emphasize it. I'd love to take the credit for the blurring of the axe and the hand, which communicates movement more powerfully, but it happened by chance due to my choice of a lower shutter speed in relatively low light.

I wanted the photograph to feel intimate, to make the viewer feel like they're right there. The choice of a wide-angle, 20mm lens was important, as was finding the ideal perspective. Shooting from above created a sense of distance, so I actually got on the floor to be at eye-level with the action.

The woman was very conscious of our presence, but I wanted the shot to feel as if we weren't there. I wasn't after a posed photograph. The fact that the woman was already working helped a lot. We simply asked her to keep going and not to pay any attention to us.

Light

The sky was covered with clouds on the day of the shoot. The light in this photograph comes from the doorway on the left side of the frame. It is not strong, but the fact that it comes from the side and from a single direction creates a progression of light to dark tones.

This particular lighting scenario evokes a sense of volume; it sculpts the pumpkins and enhances the textures in the scene. The contrast between the lighter and darker parts of the scene was an important factor in achieving this. Due to the darker parts of the scene, the bright and vivid colors looked even more intense and rich.

Overcoming challenges

The first basic challenge in almost any village in Romania is being accepted. Most places we visited were very welcoming, but having a friend or guide who speaks the language definitely helps. If I were alone, I would have certainly drawn at least a bit of suspicion and this wouldn't be great for gaining access to photograph scenes like this one.

One specific challenge was to get the chopping motion at just the right moment. As I said, the blur wasn't intentional, but I did want to get the hand and the axe to be where you see them. It took me a few attempts to get it right.

The next challenge was not to shock and overwhelm the woman. There were two of us taking photographs at the same time. For someone who isn't a model, all the shutter clicking and commotion of two grown men moving around, crouching, and lying on the ground to get the shot can easily be overwhelming. My friend was chatting to the woman throughout the shoot. I kept smiling and used the few basic words in Romanian I knew—this also helped to ease the situation.

Creative Decisions in the Field

1. I begin photographing from the doorway of the shed. I notice the chopping motion. It is something I keep in mind to shoot later from a different angle.

2. I step into the shed. The woman's natural reaction is to smile at me and for the camera. This is not the kind of shot I am looking for.

3. I ask my friend to ask the woman not to pay attention to me. She is more comfortable and looks away, plucking seeds out of the pumpkins. I get down on the ground to get a different angle.

4. I make my way further into the shed. My friend is photographing, too, and we switch places with one another. I crouch again and see an opportunity to make the photograph of the woman chopping the pumpkins. I check the image and I'm not happy with the position of the axe. I want it on its descent.

5. The axe is on its descent exactly how I wanted. I am happy with this shot, but feel that I can still make other strong images.

6. The woman returns to plucking the pumpkin seeds. I continue to shoot and feel that I end up with another strong shot. I like it, too, but prefer the one with the chopping motion for its movement.



ISO 800, 20mm, f/2.8, 1/60s



ISO 800, 20mm, f/3.2, 1/50s



ISO 800, 20mm, f/3.2, 1/50s



ISO 800, 20mm, f/3.2, 1/50s



ISO 800, 20mm, f/3.2, 1/50s



ISO 800, 20mm, f/3.2, 1/50s

Goals and Key Steps

Make the overall scene punchier, livelier, and more vibrant—most specifically, the orange pumpkins and purple sweater

- Under the *Tone Curve*, I moved the *Darks* slider slightly to the left and the *Shadows* slider almost half-way in the same direction. This made the darker tones richer, resulting in a significantly punchier looking image.

Accentuate the textures of the pumpkins

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Clarity* value to paint over the pumpkins and enhance their textures and prominence.

Show and keep the detail in the highlights and shadows of the pumpkins

- I moved the global *Shadows* slider almost half-way to the right. This brightened some of the darker parts and showed more detail without taking away from the richness and depth of these tones.
- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a moderately decreased *Exposure* value to paint the brighter parts of the pumpkins that looked overexposed.

Create a sense of depth between the woman and the wall behind

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Exposure* value to paint part of the wall behind the woman. Making this area brighter helped me separate the two elements and gave the photo a greater sense of depth.
- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly decreased *Exposure* value to paint around the corners of the image, darkening them in order to draw more attention to the brighter middle of the image. This also added to the sense of depth.



AFTER



BEFORE



SULFUR MINER, IJEN CRATER, INDONESIA

Equipment: Canon 5D MKI, Canon 24-70 mm f2.8 Settings: ISO 200, 24 mm, f/2.8, 1/800s

The Story

Kawah Ijen, or Ijen Crater, is one the toughest working places on earth. Here, by the volcano vent, hundreds of men mine sulfur using nothing more than metal rods and their bare hands.

I photographed at Ijen Crater over a few days for a personal project. Tohari, the man in the photo, was one of the first miners I had communicated with while there. He was also a technician and had been at the crater overnight to make sure that the constantly burning volcanic flame would not break out and consume all of the sulfur.

Tohari was now packing his load of sulfur into two bamboo baskets joined by a stick. This is the typical mode of transporting the sulfur to the collection base. He and other miners carried loads, weighing up to 100 kilograms, on their shoulders for approximately three miles over some of the roughest terrain in the world several times per day.

Objectives

I was after a sort of illustrative, journalistic shot of Tohari placing sulfur into the bamboo baskets. I wanted the viewer to feel right there next to the action. To achieve this, I got up close with a wide-angle lens—20mm—and crouched to get around the same level with Tohari's hands placing a slab of sulfur into the basket.

To capture the exact moment of the action that I wanted, I had to stay around for a while. I anticipated the moment that Tohari would place the slabs of sulfur into the baskets and fired off a few exposures. It took a few images from different angles and at different moments to get the shot.

My other objective was to communicate what kind of a place Tohari and the other miners were working in. The wide-angle lens helped with that, too. Quite simply, I could include a lot into the frame. I positioned myself in a way that I could clearly see all the dramatic fumes which were being spat out of the vent. There is also another man in the background working. Framing him into the shot helped me communicate that Tohari wasn't the only one working in these tough conditions.

Light

The area by the vent where the mining was taking place was either in the shade, during the sunrise and sunset hours, or was lit by very rough light during most of the day.

There was no particular reason related to light to take the photograph at this time. I followed some of the workers as they made their way down to the vent during early morning in order to escape the harsh, midday sun.

Because the action did take place in the shade, the light here is flat and doesn't add any drama to the image. There is, however, a lot of visual impact due to the clouds of fumes. For this reason, the image is still powerful even without dramatic lighting.

The flat, even light did work well in showing all of the details that made up the scene. In this sense, it helped tell the story in a clear and straight forward manner.

Overcoming challenges

The main challenge of photographing at Ijen Crater was the actual walk up to the crater rim and down to the vent. I was quite fatigued every time I got down there. I needed to relax and catch my breath every few hundred meters.

Of course the actual challenge of the environment was very tough, too. When the wind blew in my direction, the sulfuric fumes became virtually intolerable. They made me feel like coughing, crying, and vomiting, all at the same time. Not having any special equipment, I did as the locals. I put a wet cloth over my face and breathed through it with my mouth.

The final challenge was getting Tohari comfortable with me photographing him for an extended period of time. He and other miners have hundreds of tourists photographing them every day. They usually have a very superficial relationship and the shoot only takes a few seconds. However, my purpose was different. Intermittent chatting in my limited Bahasa Indonesia was necessary to get the access I needed to make the kind of image that I was after.

Creative Decisions in the Field

1. I notice Tohari placing slabs of sulfur into the baskets. I take a photograph right away just to get started.

2. I try a different angle of Tohari placing the sulfur into the baskets. I am not in time to compose the image properly, and unintentionally crop off the bottom of the baskets.

3. I pause when Tohari goes off to get another piece of sulfur. I now have a better idea of how to compose the shot and want to photograph the way he approaches the sulfur baskets with a new slab. This isn't the main shot I am going for, but it helps to further explore the subject matter.

4. Tohari goes to chisel off the next piece of sulfur with a metal rod. I shift my perspective to capture this.

5. Another worker comes into the scene and begins chiseling the hardened sulfur. Tohari is ready to put another slab into the basket. At this stage, I know exactly how I want to compose the shot and the moment I want to capture. I want the precise moment of the sulfur being put into the basket.

6. I am fairly convinced that I got my shot, but I continue shooting because the intention of this project is a photo story and important moments can come at any time.



ISO 200, 24-70mm@24mm, f/2.8, 1/800s



ISO 200, 24-70mm@24mm, f/2.8, 1/640s



ISO 200, 24-70mm@24mm, f/2.8, 1/800s



ISO 200, 24-70mm@24mm, f/2.8, 1/800s



ISO 200, 24-70mm@24mm, f/2.8, 1/800s



ISO 200, 24-70mm@24mm, f/2.8, 1/800s

Goals and Key Steps

Enhance the sense of drama

- I slightly brought down the global *Exposure* slider. The darkening of the image alone contributed to adding a sense of drama.
- I tweaked the *Tone Curve*. As a result, the *Highlights* and *Lights* sliders below the *Tone Curve* ended up around one-quarter of the way to the right. The *Darks* and *Shadows* sliders moved almost half-way to the left. This step created more contrast, making the dark parts look richer and the bright parts livelier.

Accentuate the textures of the sulfur slabs, baskets, ground, and sulfuric fumes

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Clarity* value to paint over the mentioned areas.

Make his hands, eyes, and mouth more distinct

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Clarity* value to paint over these features.

Bring out the details in the darker areas of the miner's suit

- I moved the global *Shadows* slider around half-way to the right.
- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Shadows* value to paint over the collar in the suit because it was still dark after the global adjustment.



AFTER



BEFORE



MAKE-UP SESSION, KERALA, INDIA Equipment: Canon 5D MKI, Canon 24-70 mm f2.8, Photoflex Softbox, 580 EXII Flash Settings: ISO 1600, 65 mm, f/2.8, 1/40s

The Story

In Kerala, South India, there is a colorful, ancient ritual called *Theyyam*. The ritual takes on many forms. Sometimes it is a spectacular athletic dance. Other times, the *Theyyam* performer simply circles the local temple. In more dramatic displays, he tears off the head of a chicken with his bare teeth as a sacrifice to the divine. One thing that the performances have in common is the belief that the *Theyyam* performer enters a trance and becomes a living god in a human body.

This image was taken during the pre-performance makeup stages. Makeup is an important part of *Theyyam*. Every performer is also a makeup artist and must remember how to apply hundreds of different designs to himself or to his peers, each representing a different god.

I am always interested in what happens behind the scenes because I can create images with the kind of intimacy which is not possible during the performance. The makeup process provided me the opportunity to do just that.

Objectives

This photograph is all about an intimate look at the makeup process, which in turn is all about the intricate patterns and vivid colors. I wanted to emphasize these. Because the available light from a halogen lamp made the scene flat and dull, I had to use an off-camera flash to help me with my aim.

Of course, it was also important to get up close enough to the performer's face to capture all those elaborate details so they would be distinct enough within the image. I would have to virtually lie on top of the performer if I were using a wide-angle lens. It helped having a 24-70mm zoom which I used at 65mm while standing over the performer's face.

I framed the scene close enough to keep all the intricate detail of the actual makeup design, but wide enough to show the context of its application and the casual relationship between the artist and performer. For example, the artist's bare foot so near to the performer's relaxed and trusting expression is telling of their relationship to one another in a culture that considers feet as something unclean.

Light

As mentioned before, the available light at the scene was a halogen lamp. It didn't do much to enhance the scene, so I used an off-camera flash. More specifically, it was an off-camera flash in a soft box with an orange tinted gel (thin piece of transparent film).

The flash set-up helped me to really bring life to the scene. Having it pointed slightly from an angle allowed me to sculpt the facial features of the performer and bring out the intricacy of the patterns. The orange tint was perfect for emphasizing the red and the yellow colors that were predominant in the scene.

Overcoming challenges

The biggest challenge in shooting *Theyyam* performances was actually finding them. While *Theyyam* is a tourist attraction in this part of Kerala, there was only one place where performances were held for tourists and it wasn't incredibly interesting.

The more fascinating performances took place in small, remote villages and the tourist information center had no idea about most of them. I looked for help at a local museum of culture and, thankfully, was briefed by an enthusiastic professor who, seeing my passion and interest, shared with me as much information as he had available. He gave me the names of villages and people. I went out to look for them on my motorcycle. Sometimes I ended up in the wrong place and frustrated. But when I did find the performances, I met more people and got more leads to future performances.

Not having a translator with me was also a challenge. My communication was very rudimentary, but I was not aiming to set up specific shots and that made things much easier. Gestures and a few basic words in English, which some of the performers understood, were enough to explain that I simply wanted to observe what they were doing and to document them without interruption.

Creative Decisions in the Field

1. I begin photographing with the idea of capturing the son learning how to draw the various patterns from his father. I make this first exposure as a warm up of sorts.

2. The boy moves. I change my perspective and get down on the floor to get a more intimate look at what is happening. The frame is very busy—but I am still just sketching with the camera and observing.

3. I get closer and use an off-camera flash to the right of the frame. It produces a warmer looking image than the fluorescent light above. I am still not happy with the perspective and reconsider the framing.

4. I move back a little in order to include all the paints that the artist is using into the frame. They add to the story, but I feel that for the image to work I need to be closer.

5. I get closer again to a point where I have cropped out the boy's head and only barely see the head of the artist. I get a better look at the performer's painted face and realize that I should focus on that.

6. I change angle and get even closer to the performer. Kneeling above him, I make a few exposures, this being the strongest. Though this image isn't about the father and son anymore, it feels stronger. I can see the make-up designs and the performer's expression, and how it's all accentuated by the off-camera flash.



ISO 1600, 20mm, f/2, 1/50s



ISO 1600, 20mm, f/2, 1/40s



ISO 1250, 24-70mm@34mm, f/2.8, 1/40s



ISO 1600, 24-70mm@28mm, f/2.8, 1/40s



ISO 1600, 24-70mm@65mm, f/2.8, 1/40s



ISO 1600, 24-70mm@65mm, f/2.8, 1/40s

Goals and Key Steps

Add punch

- Under *Tone Curve*, I moved the *Lights* slider half-way to the right and the *Darks* slider three-quarters of the way to the left.

Increase overall luminance

- I moved the global *Exposure* slider very slightly to the left.

Make the design patterns pop

- I used *Adjustment Brush* with a moderately increased *Clarity* value to paint precisely over the various elements of the design.

Make the performer's nose, lips, and eye outlines, and the hand with the brush and the foot more prominent

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a moderately increased *Clarity* value to paint over these elements.



AFTER



BEFORE



DARKNESS OVER THE MOUNTAINS, SPITI VALLEY, INDIA

Equipment: Canon 5D MKII, Canon 70-200 mm f2.8 Settings: ISO 500, 85 mm, f/8, 37s

The Story

Dhankar in Spiti Valley, India is a small mountain village with a devout Buddhist community. The village is accentuated visually by a temple complex that sits on a group of hills above it. The complex is very striking as you enter by road and it keeps grabbing your attention from virtually everywhere.

The combination of the temple complex, the dramatic cliffs, and a backdrop of snowy peaks made for one of the most spectacular sites I had seen during my journeys around India. I was absolutely compelled to capture it.

Objectives

I made various photographs of the temple complex from different angles during my hikes through the neighboring mountains, but wanted to explore this subject matter in more depth. My main aim was to create a photograph that was a less obvious representation than most I had seen before.

I decided to make the image after sundown. I felt that the starry sky, the lit-up buildings, and the predominantly dark blue and purple color palette would not only make for an image which was different, but would add a sense of mystery and magic.

I had already photographed from various spots before during daylight hours. This was important. I had a good understanding from where I wanted to take the photograph. If I didn't, it would be quite time consuming to experiment, as every photograph had to be taken on long exposure.

Once the sun set, my friend and I got on a motorcycle and rode directly towards the spots I had in mind. I wanted to photograph from a few different approaches to give myself some choices later on.

Light

Most of the scene was enveloped by the darkness of the night. Only the temple complex and a few houses had light. I needed to make a long exposure to capture any detail in the areas which weren't near the artificial light. I placed the camera on a tripod, set the exposure for 19 seconds, and used a remote to set off the shutter.

There were two reasons for using the remote. One was to avoid camera shake which was very possible when I'd press the shutter button. The other was the flexibility that a remote can offer. Most Canon cameras—which is the camera I used—have a limit of 30 seconds as the longest fixed shutter speed duration. If you want the shutter to stay open for longer, you have to set the camera to *BULB*, and sit there watching the seconds pile up before deciding, yourself, when to close the shutter. Certain remotes allow you to set a custom shutter speed duration and automate the process.

Overcoming challenges

By far the biggest challenge when shooting in the dark is focusing. In this particular case, I was lucky to have the subject I actually wanted to focus on lit up. I simply pointed the red focus dot at the building and the important elements of the scene were in focus.

I do want to touch upon the subject of focusing when there isn't an illuminated element in the scene. Things become considerably more difficult in such cases. Auto-focus is rendered useless if your subject is far away—as mine was here—and manual focus in the dark can be extremely frustrating.

One way to battle the problem is to use a long-range flashlight. It can be an extremely effective focus-assist light. A friend shines the flashlight at the target area, you focus on it, lock the focus, turn off the flashlight, and press the shutter.

Photographing under a full moon does provide a chance to focus on an element manually. If you don't have a full moon and you can't reach your subject with a flashlight, you're pretty much at the mercy of chance. The most frustrating thing of all is the wait to see what you've ended up with. It can take from a few seconds to a few minutes for every exposure.

Creative Decisions in the Field

1. On a morning walk I take a series of photographs of the temple complex, the village below it, and the mountains. I am happy with the results, but they strike me as too typical and too straight forward.

2. I photograph during one of my hikes from a different perspective, at a different time, and in different, harsh midday light. I feel that the light accentuates the rough textures of the rocky mountains. This image works, but the scene loses its magic. It becomes a purely documentary shot.

3. I decide to photograph later in the day and make this exposure from the window of my guest house shortly after sunset. I see the potential and I like the image, but feel that I can explore the idea further.

4. I get on a motorcycle and ride to a spot from where I feel the scene will look most dramatic. Using a 70-200mm lens, I zoom all the way to 200mm to capture what I consider to be the key part of the landscape. The shot works on some level, but I feel that I've cropped too much out.

5. I ride to a different spot to capture more of the landscape. I am almost satisfied with this shot, but the snow peaks—an element that I consider very important—do not look very prominent here. I only realize this after I look at the image on the computer screen back in my room.

6. I make this exposure the next night. The perspective is just right and, although I preferred a starry sky over a cloudy one, this image works best overall.



ISO 100, 24-70mm@32mm, f/2.8, 1/1250s



ISO 100, 70-200mm@32mm, f/5, 1/4000s



ISO 800, 24-70mm@40mm, f/6.3, 30s



ISO 500, 70-200mm@200mm, f/7.1, 42s



ISO 500, 70-200mm@102mm, f/7.1, 19s



ISO 500, 70-200mm@85mm, f/8, 37s

Goals and Key Steps

Give the image a cooler tint

- I moved the *Temperature* slider to the left until a bluish tone gained dominance.
- Under *Camera Calibration*, I moved the *Blue Primary Saturation* slider about one-third to the right to further accentuate the cool tint further.

Make the dark tones deeper and richer

- I moved the *Blacks* slider slightly to the right.
- Under *Tone Curve*, I moved the *Shadows* slider slightly to the right.

Make the clouds and rough textures of the rocks in the crevices of the mountains more prominent

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a significantly increased *Clarity* value to paint over these areas.

Accentuate the snow around the peaks

- I moved the global *Whites* slider one-quarter of the way to the right.

Bring back the detail in the overexposed whites on the houses and the mountain

- The previous step caused all the bright colors to be slightly overexposed. I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly decreased *Highlights* value to paint over these areas.

Bring out a little more detail in the shadow areas

- I moved the global *Shadows* slider around one-third of the way to the right.



AFTER



BEFORE



FIRE WALKER, KERALA, INDIA

Equipment: Canon 5D MKI, CANON 24-70 mm f2.8 Settings: ISO 1000, 52 mm, f/2.8, 1/320s

The Story

Still on the trail of *Theyyam*, I learned that some of the more fascinating performances were held as private ceremonies in the houses of wealthy believers. These patrons wanted to receive blessings from the divine by hosting the *Theyyam* performances themselves.

Through a lead from a *Theyyam* performer whom I had befriended, I ended up in one of such houses in the middle of the night. The atmosphere here was more mystical and mysterious than at the public performances.

It was difficult to find the owner of the house amongst over 100 guests. In situations like these, you have to be ready to forfeit the opportunity, but I received permission to make photographs by a family member. If anyone would have objected, I would have found a way to deal with it.

What followed was a surreal display. The artist, after entering a trance, began to run back and forth through the fire across glowing coals. I was stunned by the display, but was able to react in time to get a few exposures.

Objectives

First and foremost, I wanted to capture the act of the *Theyyam* performer walking on fire. The moment was very fleeting, so I made sure to be in the right place at the right time to get the shot.

Having a zoom lens in such a scenario can be the difference between getting the photograph or not. At times, there's simply no way to get close enough physically. So, zooming in was the only way to fill the frame with the action and thereby exclude the unnecessary elements in the scene.

Light

The primary light source here is the fire. It was extremely bright, but didn't illuminate the performer very well. His face was one of the key elements that was getting lost in the darkness. Only those elements which were very close were sufficiently lit to make out any detail.

I exposed this shot with post-processing in mind. I slightly under exposed the face in order to not overexpose the fire too much. I could still bring back the detail in the dark area, but overexposing the bright flame meant that it would look completely blown out. Hence, there would be no way to recover any of the highlights.

Overcoming challenges

The main challenge here was unlike any other I've ever experienced. The whole performance was very unpredictable. The *Theyyam* performer circled the fire, ran through the flames, then circled it some more. I had to be able to run around after him and squeeze through the spectators to get a good perspective to make the photographs I was after. At the same time, I had to keep in mind that I was at somebody's house and no one had invited me. It was important to take extra care not to come across as offensive or disrespectful.

I was very familiar with the Hindu culture by then, and I knew that these were some of the warmest and most hospitable people in the world. As long as none of my mistakes were blatantly careless nor intentionally disrespectful, I would be forgiven. Lots of goofy smiles, countless apologies, *thank you's*, and more smiles smoothed the way for me to photograph.

At the end of the night, being overly cautious probably left me with more shots missed than captured. Ultimately, there was no other way to go about the situation.

As a sign of gratitude, I made sure to get the address of the house and send them a few of the photographs that I had taken during that night's performance.

Creative Decisions in the Field

1. The performer starts circling the fire. I have no idea what to expect, but get into position to photograph. By the time I get there and make this shot, he has already circled the fire a few times.

2. The performer stops gazing into the fire with entranced eyes. Other men involved in the performance add wicker to make the fire burn brighter. I realize that this might not be the moment, but I take the photo in anticipation.

3. The performer approaches the fire. I am still not sure what he is going to do, but I press the shutter button and anticipate his next move.

4. I immediately press the shutter again as the performer enters the flames. The moment is very dramatic and has an eerie feel to it. It only lasts a millisecond, but I instantly feel that I got something.

5. I don't stop shooting as he walks out of the fire. This photograph is also dramatic, but the performer is silhouetted against the fire. It doesn't have the same impact as his face in the previous frame.

6. The performer is getting ready to walk through fire again. I haven't checked my previous shots and don't know if I got what I wanted. I attempt to get a better photograph, but an observer enters the frame and spoils my chances.



ISO 1000, 24-70mm@40mm, f/2.8, 1/320s



ISO 1000, 24-70mm@57mm, f/2.8, 1/320s



ISO 1000, 24-70mm@54mm, f/2.8, 1/320s



ISO ISO 1000, 24-70mm@52mm, f/2.8, 1/320s



ISO 1000, 24-70mm@43mm, f/2.8, 1/320s



ISO 800, 24-70mm@60mm, f/2.8, 1/200s

Goals and Key Steps

Accentuate the sense of darkness

- Under *Tone Curve*, I moved the *Darks* slider about one-third of the way to the left.

Darken the parts of the overexposed highlights in the fire

- I moved the global *Highlights* slider one-third of the way to the left.

Slightly brighten the darker areas of the image where the detail was getting completely lost

- I moved the global *Shadows* slider slightly towards the right.

Slightly brighten the performer's face

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with slightly increased *Exposure* and *Shadows* values to paint the area.

Make the outlines of the performer's eyes, nose, and mouth a little more prominent

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Clarity* value to paint over these facial features.

Make the edges of the flames pop

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a moderately increased *Contrast* value to paint these areas.



AFTER



BEFORE



AN ETHIOPIAN WELCOME, GERALTA, ETHIOPIA

Equipment: Canon 5D MKII, Canon 16-35 mm f2.8 Settings: ISO 2500, 16 mm, f/7.1, 1/40s

The Story

This photograph was made during a coffee ceremony in a kitchen in Geralta, Ethiopia, a remote region steeped in ancient traditions and culture. It is believed that Ethiopia is the actual birthplace of coffee and serving it is a way of showing hospitality that has been around for hundreds of years.

I was invited to share this intimate moment by Kinfe, a young man whom I befriended while photographing in a local church. He was curious and began chatting to me. I was just as curious and excited to make a local friend. I invited Kinfe to join me on a motorcycle ride around his region for the day. He did, and at the end of our little journey he invited me to his home.

Objectives

My main objective with this photograph was to create a kind of intimate insight into the world which I was experiencing. I wanted to show as many details as possible that would help communicate this: the mud oven, the makeshift fireplace, the reused tin can. These were important elements that said this is a simple, rural household. A very wide lens was virtually a necessity to fit all of those details into the frame. I used a 16-35mm lens at 22mm.

It was important for me to create a photograph which felt close and personal, not a distant outsider's view. It helped a lot that there was a girl right in front of the camera because she was the anchor through which the viewer could connect with the scene. It was key that I was already sitting on the floor around her eye level. I took the photograph from there to allow for that intimate feel which would have been lost if I were to photograph the whole scene from above.

The scene also naturally radiated a warm ambience that I really wanted to communicate. This was achieved due to the kinds of light sources in the kitchen. The fire, in particular, enhanced the themes of warmth and intimacy. I also made sure to exclude any elements from the frame which were not consistent with the predominantly earthy tones.

Light

There are three sources of light in this photograph. The main one is the open door to the left of the frame. The light coming through the door created a gradual progression of light to dark tones which lent a sense of depth in the photograph. This is particularly evident when looking at the face of the girl. The way that the light fades into the background separates her from the rest of the scene.

The second light source is the fire. It isn't very strong, but as mentioned before, it does enhance the sense of intimacy with a warm glow.

The small window in the background is the third light source. Though it is not very strong either, it does illuminate the back of the room. The mother with the baby on her back, who are important to the story, would otherwise fade into darkness.

Overcoming challenges

The main challenge for a travel photographer working with people in modest, rural settings is getting those people to be comfortable with the camera. In this case, I was invited by a family member—Kinfe. The woman making the coffee was Kinfe's mother; the baby, his sister; and the girl, his cousin. His personal invitation definitely put the rest of the family at ease so there was no tension. I asked Kinfe to ask his mother to continue making the coffee as normal and not to pay any attention to me.

However, the children were a different matter. They were extremely curious and wouldn't stop looking into the camera. Usually, I prefer more candid looking shots. But here, I felt that the eye contact actually added a certain kind of connection and a sense of reality. It was as if the mother went about her usual routine, but kids will be kids—always curious.

Another big challenge in this scenario was capturing a moment which was interesting and telling enough of what was happening. I sat in the kitchen for the entire ceremony that consisted of boiling three jars of coffee. As you'll see on the next page, I kept shooting intermittently, looking for a moment where all the elements came together and evoked a stronger sense of story.

Creative Decisions in the Field

1. I like the idea of a photo with the mother working and the child just hanging around in need of the mother's attention and touch. I start to make sketch photographs, partly to get a feel for the scene, partly to get them used to all the shutter clicking.

2. The baby girl is restless and keeps moving around. This is fine with me because I get the chance to create different images from the same spot.

3. The baby sits calmly, the mother looks out the door. I feel that I am in the spot where I need to be, but something is lacking. I still don't know whether it's a particular moment or another compositional element, so I sit and wait to see how things unfold.

4. The mother puts the baby on her back and continues to work. I love this kind of casual intimacy. I am closer to things coming into place for a scene that feels right, but it's not quite there yet.

5. A girl enters the kitchen, sits in front of the camera, and stares into it. I want to ask her to move, but soon realize that she is the compositional element that was missing. I take a couple of photos. Here it is not as clear as in the next frame that the mother is doing something by the fire.

6. This is the frame I am happy with. I have all the compositional elements in place—the mother crouches over the flame clearly doing something, and there's eye contact with both of the children.



ISO 1600, 16-35mm@22mm, f/2.8, 125s



ISO 1600, 16-35mm@22mm, f/2.8, 1/200s



ISO 1600, 16-35mm@22mm, f/2.8, 1/200s



ISO 1600, 16-35mm@22mm, f/2.8, 1/200s



ISO 1600, 16-35mm@22mm, f/2.8, 1/20s



ISO 2500, 16-35mm@22mm, f/2.8, 1/40s

Goals and Key Steps

Make the darker colors deeper and richer

- I moved the *Blacks* slider slightly to the left.

Enhance the sense of volume in the girl's and the toddler's faces

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Exposure* value to paint over the brighter parts of these elements. This accentuated the progression of light to dark tones that is responsible for bringing out volume.

Make the outlines of the girl's eyes, nose, and mouth, and the mother's arm more prominent

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a moderately increased *Clarity* value to paint these areas.

Bring attention to the girl's eyes, the fireplace, and the mother's arm

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with various increases in *Exposure* value to brighten these elements.

Direct attention away from the elements that had a lesser role in the image's story— the plastic basin above the girl's head, the mother's bright dress, and the floor

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with various decreases in *Exposure* value to darken these elements.



AFTER



BEFORE



SPEAR FISHERMAN, PANAY, PHILIPPINES Equipment: Canon 5D MKII, Canon 16-35 mm f2.8, Aquatech Underwater Housing Settings: ISO 1000, 16 mm, f/5, 1/320s

The Story

This is another photograph off the coast of a small fishing village, this time near the island of Panay in the Philippines. As you can see, the story here takes place underwater. The fishermen in this village still go out to sea, dive, and catch fish using a traditional method with homemade spear guns.

The man in the photograph is under a bamboo raft with palm tree branches attached below it. This construction is called *payaw*. This fish aggregating device attracts fish to its branches by acting as shelter from potential predators. The devices are placed a couple of kilometers from the shore. After its initial mooring, it's later established as a habitat where larger boats catch fish with nets. But before then, fishermen on smaller outrigger boats go out to sea, dive, and shoot a few fish for a family meal.

Armed with fins, a snorkel, and underwater housing, I went out a few times into the deep blue to capture this activity.

Objectives

The main aim was to simply document this part of the fishermen's lives. Doing this, however, was not as simple as one might think.

We visited several *payaw* where one of the fishermen dove a couple times under one raft to check for fish. He then got back into the boat and we went to the next location. This intermittent diving and surfacing rendered scuba diving gear fairly useless and cumbersome. To photograph from below, I had to free dive with the fishermen.

The fishing took place out in the open sea. There were vast blue expanses everywhere I looked. The wide-angle lens mounted onto my housed camera allowed me to communicate this quite effectively.

There was a certain grace in the movement of the fisherman, as if he was dancing underwater. Capturing this was no different to how I would do it on shore. I simply made multiple exposures of him in action.

Light

Underwater, light fades and whatever you photograph loses a certain amount of color. The further you get from the subject, the more color you lose.

This is a great shame when photographing colorful corals or other subjects that require their color to tell the story effectively. Here however, preserving the color was unimportant. In fact, the almost duo-tone effect of the light underwater made for a more atmospheric photograph and was actually evocative of the fact that we were in fairly deep water.

The thing to keep in mind when photographing underwater is that the light fades quickly. You actually have less of it to work with. In order to create images that are in sharp focus, you need to crank up the ISO and raise the shutter speed. With the constant movement of the sea, it is absolutely impossible to keep the camera steady at lower shutter speed settings.

Overcoming challenges

The biggest challenge was actually being out at sea, free diving with the fishermen, and twisting my body to get the right perspective for the shot.

I did have quite a bit of prior experience doing some easy dives in snorkeling sites around the world. This proved to be very useful. However, here we were going out into the open sea and the depth to which the fishermen dove was greater than what I'd been to before. I went out with them a few times and basically had to learn on the spot.

The Aquatech camera housing, though great, required some time getting used to. I had to get comfortable enough with all the knobs, dials, and buttons for the process of adjusting my camera settings to be as familiar with it as I was without it.

Another very frustrating challenge came from looking through the viewfinder underwater while being thrown around by currents and waves. It was a great recipe for sea-sickness and I did, indeed, get sick, emptying my stomach during one of our trips. I was glad to provide a laugh for my fisherman friends.

Creative Decisions in the Field

1. I am excited as we jump into the water. The action begins immediately and I start shooting right away. The fisherman is already below me, awaiting his prey. This exposure isn't bad, but it doesn't make me feel like I am deep in the sea nor does it really bring the viewer into the action.

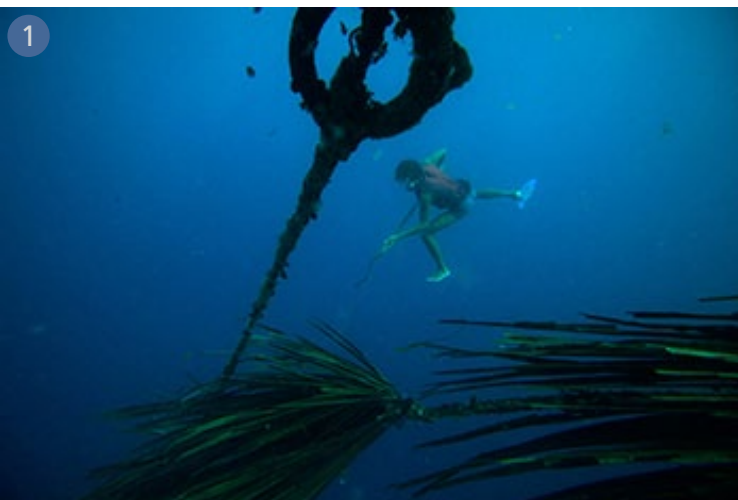
2. I miss-time my dive on this opportunity. So, I resort to photographing the fisherman as he descends and equalizes by pinching his nose.

3. Another dive, another attempt. I time my dive fairly well, but as I maneuver under water, I position myself a little too far from the action. With so much water between us, the resulting image looks murky.

4. The man spears a fish and his friend helps him bring it in. The sea is heaving. I become disoriented and it's difficult to frame the shot well. I end up with the most important element—the fish—out of the frame.

5. I compose myself and dive again. The timing is right and I position myself close enough to the fisherman. One of the few things I particularly want to capture is the dance-like movement, most notably in his legs. I keep the shutter button pressed with the hope of getting it, but the shot is not ideal because his legs are overlapping.

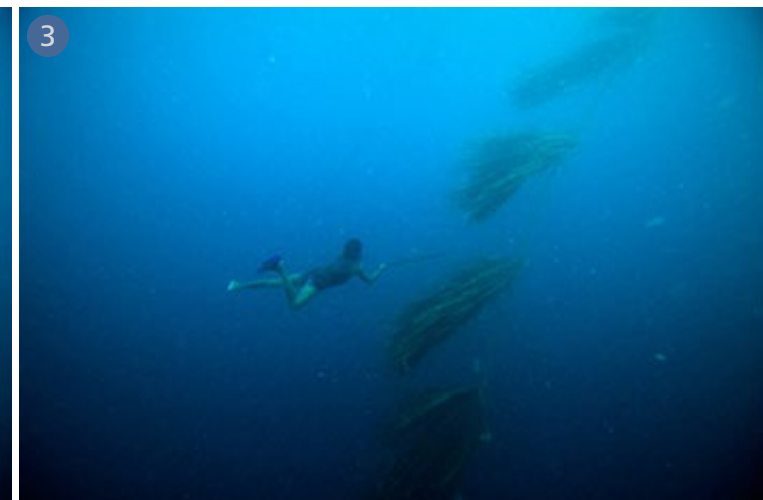
6. The exposures turns out just the way I wanted with one of the fisherman's legs separate from the other in a sort of a dancing motion.



ISO 1000, 16-35mm@16mm, f/5.6, 1/320s



ISO 1000, 16-35mm@16mm, f/5.6, 1/320s



ISO 1000, 16-35mm@16mm, f/5.6, 1/320s



ISO 1000, 16-35mm@16mm, f/5.6, 1/320s



ISO 1000, 16-35mm@16mm, f/5, 1/320s



ISO 1000, 16-35mm@16mm, f/5, 1/320s

Goals and Key Steps

Make the image significantly more visually dramatic by making the darker tones deeper and richer

- I moved the *Blacks* slider about half-way to the left.
- Under *Tone Curve*, I moved *Darks* and *Shadows* sliders almost the entire way to the left.

Make the blue tones look more realistic

- The previous step made the darker tones richer, but it also exaggerated the blues. To fix this I, moved the global *Saturation* very slightly to the left.
- Under *Camera Calibration*, I moved the *Blue Primary Hue* and *Blue Primary Saturation* sliders slightly to the left.

Bring back some of the lost detail in the fisherman's shirt

- Making the image look more dramatic also resulted in loss of detail in the darker areas. I moved the global *Shadows* slider almost the entire way to the right.
- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Shadows* value to paint over the area which was still too dark.

Make the fisherman stand out more from the water

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with slightly increased *Contrast*, *Exposure*, and *Clarity* values to paint over the area around the fisherman.



AFTER



BEFORE



PILGRIM'S DEVOTION, LALIBELA, ETHIOPIA

Equipment: Canon 5D MKII, Canon 70-200mm f/2.8 Settings: ISO 640, 200mm, f/8, 1/80s

The Story

The ancient town of Lalibela is often referred to as Ethiopia's Jerusalem. The town is particularly famous for its rock churches and its celebrations during the Ethiopian Orthodox Christmas. During the Christmas period, Lalibela becomes an important place for pilgrimage.

Devotees come from all over the world, but it is the pilgrims from the surrounding areas who drew my attention the most. Most of these pilgrims were extremely poor, but their financial situation was no obstacle for their devotion. They walked, sometimes barefoot, from distances as far as one hundred miles.

A lot of the walking devotees were elderly. Years of moving around without shoes had made their feet look like cracked leather boots. I noticed this time and time again and felt that a photograph of these cracked, wrinkly, leathery feet would be a great way to show their devotion and the suffering that the people were ready to inflict on themselves in order to be closer to the divine.

Objectives

My main goal was to tell the story of the pilgrims' devotion in a powerful and minimalist way. The wear and tear of the older pilgrims' feet from constant toil was a perfect representation of this.

To make the image work, it was vital to get up close. That was the only way to draw attention to all the textures—the cracks, callouses, and wrinkles in the skin. This helped to enhance the emotional impact of the shot.

Most of the focus is on the feet, with peripheral attention to the red rock from the ancient church. These details are minimal, yet they are evocative and tell the story in a powerful manner. A 70-200mm telephoto zoom lens made this shot possible.

Light

The photograph was made during a late morning. My choice to seek this particular image at this time of day was a conscious one because the light was harsh. It was very appropriate to accentuate the textures of the pilgrim's feet. The photograph serves as an example that there is no good or bad light, just light appropriate for a particular situation.

I was familiar with the light at this specific location. I had shot there numerous times before and knew the area where I wanted to capture the pilgrims' feet. The pilgrims came out from under a shadow cast by another church and their feet were illuminated by the harsh, direct light.

Overcoming challenges

Photographing an elderly person's weathered feet was an awkward thing to do. It was too easy for my intentions to be misinterpreted. Avoiding those misunderstandings was, in itself, a challenge.

When I asked a couple pilgrims to pose with their feet for my photograph I didn't get what I wanted and there was only so much that I could ask them to do without making them feel overly awkward. For the kind of image I wanted I needed to find a spot where I would be able to photograph them naturally from the appropriate angle. Having been all around the various churches in Lalibela over the prior seven days, I came to know pretty well what to expect from many of the spots there.

I came to the conclusion that one particular church complex would provide me with the best opportunity to get the image that I wanted. There was a steady flow of pilgrims going up a few steps into one of the entrances. The steps elevated their feet to a level where I could photograph them without having to lie flat on the ground.

I leaned against another set of stairs opposite the church entrance with my 70-200mm lens ready. When this ideal subject approached the steps, I made a few exposures discreetly.

Creative Decisions in the Field

1. With many pilgrims returning from Christmas celebrations, I am reminded of the idea of showing their worn and leathery boot-like feet. I ask one of them to stop and make an exposure from the best angle that I can. It isn't good enough. The light doesn't accentuate the wear and tear and I feel that the perspective could be better.

2. I photograph another pilgrim's feet from another angle. His feet aren't quite as weathered and the light still isn't doing anything to improve the image.

3. I discover a place with many pilgrims coming through at the time of day when the light could really help me accentuate the wrinkles and callouses of some of the pilgrim's feet. I make a reference exposure.

4. I come back to the same place the next morning and wait at the same spot. This time, there aren't as many people passing by. I have to wait longer for someone who fits my criteria, but it's better because I can get a clean shot. I anticipate the woman coming into the doorway. It's not the shot I'm looking for because I frame too wide and her feet are not easy to see.

5. An ideal candidate appears. I start shooting right away, making a few exposures as he prepares to enter.

6. The pilgrim stands still before entering the church. I have the perfect chance for the image I want. The light is harsh, accentuates the cracks and deep wrinkles in the skin, and my perspective is just right to show what I want.



ISO 100, 70-200mm@85mm, f/8, 1/50s



ISO 100, 70-200mm@200mm, f/2.8, 1/320s



ISO 100, 16-35mm@26mm, f/2.8, 1/2500s



ISO 400, 70-200mm@110mm, f/5.6, 1/400s



ISO 640, 70-200mm@185mm, f/8, 1/80s



ISO 640, 70-200mm@200mm, f/8, 1/80s

Goals and Key Steps

Make the image punchier and livelier

- Under the *Tone Curve*, I moved the *Lights* slider three-quarters of the way to the right.
- Under the *Tone Curve*, I moved the *Shadows* slider half-way to the left.

Bring out some detail in shadow area

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a moderately increased *Shadows* value to paint over the area.

Make the wrinkles and cracks in his feet more prominent

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with various increases to its *Clarity* and *Contrast* values to paint over these areas.

Accentuate a sense of depth in the highlighted areas on the feet

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Exposure* value to paint over these areas.



AFTER



BEFORE



BIDI SMOKE, RAJASTHAN, INDIA

Equipment: Canon 350D, Canon 50mm f1.8, Photoflex 5-in-1 Reflector Settings: ISO 400, 50 mm, f/2.8, 1/125s

The Story

Bundi District in Rajasthan, India is full of villages where people still seem to live in a different time. Their dwellings are mud houses, they wear traditional outfits, and go about their lives much as their ancestors did. The colorful kaleidoscope of costumes, faces, and houses is a photographer's dream.

While staying in the Bundi area, I rode around from one village to another over a period of one month. I looked for interesting scenes and wandered around the villages with my friend and translator to seek out photogenic characters.

I met this Indian woman unexpectedly through a friendly local who wanted to show us around his village. The woman turned out to be his aunt. It immediately caught my eye that she was smoking. It was very unusual for women to smoke in India with the only exceptions being those in certain tribes and castes.

The combination of the woman's outfit, her chiseled, wrinkly face, and the swirls of smoke that filled the air made for an irresistible photographic opportunity.

Objectives

The woman was a visually fascinating character. Her facial features, the local *bidi* cigarette in hand, and the scarf over her head were all ingredients for a simple, yet compelling image. That was exactly my objective, to create a powerful portrait of a very photogenic character.

Using a 50mm lens on a cropped sensor camera was enough to have her face fill the frame and make it the main feature of the photograph. The story is in her face. The wrinkles were like words. They were telling of the kind of harsh conditions she lived in. I wanted to emphasize this as much as possible, so I used a reflector to help me achieve this aim (read more under "Light").

A smaller objective was to capture the most dramatic moment of the smoke from the *bidi* and the woman's mouth. I took a few photographs, anticipating and shooting intermittently.

Light

The light indoors was fairly dull and it left the image looking somewhat flat. Because I really wanted those wrinkles to look defined, so I decided to use a reflector. My friend held it for me from outside the house and directed it through a window to the left of the frame.

Having the reflected light come at an angle allowed me to sculpt the woman's face with light the way I wanted. An important thing to note is that the reflector was being held about seven feet away from the subject. This distance assured that the light wasn't harsh.

Another thing to note is that the reflector I used had various sides to it. I used a checkered golden/silver side to give me a light that was warm, but did not have an overwhelmingly orange cast to it.

Overcoming challenges

With a timid, elderly woman, it is always going to be challenging to make her feel comfortable in front of a stranger's camera. It really helped that we were brought into her house by her nephew.

My friend also played an important role before he stepped outside with the reflector. He explained what we were doing and made small talk until she felt at ease enough without being overly self-conscious. Of course, as always, a smile and a few simple words from the photographer, like *hello* and *thank you*, also went a long way.

One technical challenge was getting the desired direction of the reflected light. My friend, who was operating the reflector, had experience doing this before which proved invaluable. Though the reflector is extremely easy to use, a lot of hassle is saved if the person aiming understands how to direct the light. I guided my friend from inside, telling him which direction to move the reflector and, soon enough, we achieved the effect I was aiming for.

Creative Decisions in the Field

1. After a quick conversation, the woman lights up her *bidi*. Sometimes images of people lighting cigarettes work well, so I start to photograph right away.

2. I already know that I am happy with this composition, so I wait for the right moment. I press the shutter as the woman takes a drag of the *bidi*. There isn't enough to make this photograph interesting, so I keep waiting.

3. The woman brings the *bidi* down and looks at me. I like the immediacy and the connection that the look brings. However, there isn't enough smoke and I want to show that she is actually smoking.

4. Within a matter of a seconds, the woman exhales smoke from her mouth and smoke emanates from the *bidi*. I react in time to capture this. This frame is the one that I am after. Again, there is the immediacy from her eye contact. The presence of smoke and the *bidi* in hand make it clear what the woman is doing.

5. I continue to photograph and hope that I can get even more dramatic smoke clouds with the next image. I press the shutter in anticipation, but get an image very similar to the second one.

6. The woman, again, exhales smoke from her mouth, but this time the smoke is not as distinct as the first time around.



ISO 200, 50mm, f/2.8, 1/60s



ISO 200, 50mm, f/2.8, 1/60s



ISO 400, 50mm, f/2.8, 1/125s



ISO 400, 50mm, f/2.8, 1/125s



ISO 400, 50mm, f/2.8, 1/125s



ISO 400, 50mm, f/2.8, 1/125s

Goals and Key Steps

Make the overall feel of the image cooler to slightly offset the effect of the warm light created by the reflector

- I moved the global *Temperature* slider to the left until the tones in the photograph became more neutral rather than warm and yellowish.

Add a strong sense of drama

- I added a significant amount of contrast and made the darker tones deeper and richer. Under the *Tone Curve*, I moved the *Darks* slider significantly to the left.
- I moved the *Shadows* slider in the same direction to a lesser degree.
- Under the *Tone Curve*, I moved the *Highlights* slider slightly to the right.

Make the woman's wrinkles more distinct

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Clarity* value to paint over her wrinkles.

Accentuate the smoke

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Exposure* value to paint over the smoke and brighten it.
- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Clarity* value to further accentuate the smoke.

Brighten the whites of the woman's eyes, her irises, and the catch light in her irises

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Exposure* value to paint over these areas.



AFTER



BEFORE



THE CHESS MATCH, BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

Equipment: Canon 5D MKII, Canon 24-70 mm f2.8 Settings: ISO 1600, 35 mm, f/2.8, 1/50s

The Story

I came across the somewhat surreal photos of people playing chess in the Szechenyi thermal baths before and it was something that stuck in my mind. Then, I traveled through Eastern Europe and ended up in Budapest where the baths were located. I took the opportunity to visit, for the sake of bathing before photography, but, remembering the images I saw, I also took my camera along.

There were, indeed, people playing chess in one of the thermal pools. I passed a few hours enjoying the water and, when I was done, I brought out my camera and dedicated some time to photographing the chess players.

Objectives

I feel that the best travel photographs are made from images of everyday scenes which are normal for the countries we visit, but are unusual and quirky for outside viewers. My first objective was to simply show this scene of the men playing chess in water up to their chests.

My next aim was to find the perspective and framing that would help me communicate the scene of the men absorbed in their match. As always, the choice of lens was important. Having a 24-70mm zoom gave me a lot of flexibility with the framing. To find the ideal perspective, I walked around and took photos from a few different spots.

Three of the men around the chess board had their eyes entirely fixed on the pieces. The man in the middle appears to be in particularly deep thought, with a finger over his chin in contemplation. The man who is slightly outside has an intense, eager expression as he looks at one of the chess players possibly anticipating his next move.

The body language is there—it tells you this is an intense chess game and these men are very much engrossed. I waited for quite some time and took a few frames before I ended up with this photograph.

Light

The baths were lit by artificial lamps that gave the scene an orange tint. To address this, I could have adjusted the white balance while shooting, but because I shot in RAW format, I knew that I could adjust it later and didn't worry about it at the time.

The lamps were located in many spots and illuminated most of the baths fairly evenly. There were a couple of chess games happening at the same time and I chose the one where the participants were slightly better illuminated.

Fog was also an important factor that affected the light's impact on the scene. When there was more fog, the light became diffused and parts of the scene gained a sense of depth.

Overcoming challenges

The main challenge was to get all the elements to come together. The light had to illuminate the scene intensely enough. The perspective had to show as much detail of the game with as many facial expressions as possible. And the moment had to be telling and relatively dramatic. It took quite a bit of walking around, choosing the angle, waiting for the moment, and shooting intermittently to end up with the shot you see.

A pesky challenge from the bathhouse was condensation. The humidity was constantly fogging my lens. In order to make a clear photograph, I needed to keep wiping the lens every few moments. I wasn't very well prepared for this particular challenge and simply used the edge of my shirt to wipe the lens.

Creative Decisions in the Field

1. I begin photographing from a candid angle. I don't want to be right in their faces. I want to take things slow to see how the chess players will react to me before getting closer.
2. I photograph the men from above with the zoom lens at 25mm. I am still sketching the photograph and don't know exactly what I am looking for.
3. I zoom in from the same spot. The men are really into their game and I feel that I am getting closer to something. I decide to focus on their expressions, but I'm not happy with the perspective here.
4. I see that the men aren't distracted by me. I crouch and find the perspective I

want. I wait for a moment when the men's expressions are as telling as possible. I also pay attention to the background as well. I don't want any distractions in the background. As you can see, most of the people in the background are in the fog and not visually distracting.

5. I am still capturing images from exactly the same spot. Sometimes we only know in retrospect which shot is the one.
6. I try a different perspective to get the walls of the building into the frame, but moments as strong as the previous one are gone.



ISO 1600, 24-70mm@54mm, f/2.8, 1/80s



ISO 1600, 24-70mm@25mm, f/2.8, 1/40s



ISO 1600, 24-70mm@46mm, f/2.8, 1/40s



ISO 1600, 24-70mm@35mm, f/2.8, 1/50s



ISO 1600, 24-70mm@35mm, f/2.8, 1/50s



ISO 1600, 24-70mm@24mm, f/2.8, 1/60s

Goals and Key Steps

Fix the White Balance

- I moved the global *Temperature* slider to the left until the tones in the photograph became more neutral rather than a warm, orange tone.

Add a little bit of punch and richness to the darker tones

- Under the *Tone Curve*, I moved the *Darks* and the *Shadows* sliders slightly to the left.

Make the men stand out from the background

- I moved the *Orange* and *Yellow Luminance* sliders almost half-way to the right. This made the men, who were all predominantly yellow and orange, brighter than the background.
- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with slightly increased *Clarity* and *Contrast* values to paint around the men's heads. This also added to their separation from the background.

Accentuate the fog

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Exposure* value to paint over the areas. This made them brighter and more accentuated.

Make the men's faces, hands, and the chess pieces more defined

- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a slightly increased *Clarity* value to paint around these features.



AFTER



BEFORE



MORNING CATCH, MADURA ISLAND, INDONESIA

Equipment: Canon 5D MKI, Canon 24-70 mm f2.8 Settings: ISO 250, 24 mm, f/9, 1/80s

The Story

I have an ongoing photographic fascination with all things fishing related. During my journey around Indonesia, I ended up in a small Muslim fishing village at a photogenic location on the island of Madura.

After a night at sea, the fishermen came to shore with their catch in picturesque woven baskets. The villagers gathered around to buy—some for their families, some to resell at the fish market further inland. The whole scene was full of commotion and photographic opportunities.

Objectives

There were two main objectives during the shoot. I wanted to tell the story of the fishermen bringing their catch ashore. I also wanted to show that this was a Muslim community in a minimalist, yet powerful manner.

There were three factors that allowed me to do this—my choice of subject, the composition, and the light. I waited to photograph a fisherman who wore a *taqiyah*—a type of Muslim cap—and composed the image so the mosque inshore was within the frame. The light took care of the minimalist and the powerful part. With the bright twilight sky behind the subjects, everything was rendered into silhouettes. There were enough strong, distinct details—the *taqiyah*, the domes of the mosque, and the boats—to understand what the scene was about.

My other objective was to communicate the beauty of the location. This came through when nature worked its magic with the orange, yellow, and purple shades in the clouds and sky.

Light

I made a very conscious decision to photograph the scene at twilight, just before sunrise. I had been at the location the morning before and saw how the colors in the sky made the scene beautiful, vivid, and full of energy. This was the time when I would be able to position myself in a way that I could render the mosque domes, the boats, and the fishermen coming ashore into silhouettes.

Overcoming challenges

The first and seemingly simple challenge was being at the location on time. Only it wasn't quite as simple because my accommodation was in a town 13 miles away from the fishing village.

A photograph like this was next to impossible to make at twilight unless I spent the night in the village, or if I had my own transportation. It was useful that I had a motorcycle. Having been to the village half a dozen times prior to the shoot, I had come to know the road well and arrived well before sunrise to catch all the action and the beautiful light.

Finding the ideal angle is always a challenge when photographing silhouettes. In this case, I also had to take care not to have the figure blend in too much with the dark mass of the sea. That would have made it harder to understand what was happening in the scene. There was a good amount of running around, crouching, and standing up to scramble again to other vantage points.

I finally found the spot that enabled me to get as much separation between the figure and the sea. I was thankful that the sea reflected the colorful sky and added more contrast to the man's silhouette. To really make the sea stand out from the figure though, I had to turn to post-processing.

Creative Decisions in the Field

1. I already know that I want to make a photograph of silhouettes on the beach with the mosque dome in the background. I photograph in the very early stages of twilight. There are a few things that I am not happy with in this shot. The motion blur was not what I intended and I prefer to capture the moment of the fisherman coming out from the sea.

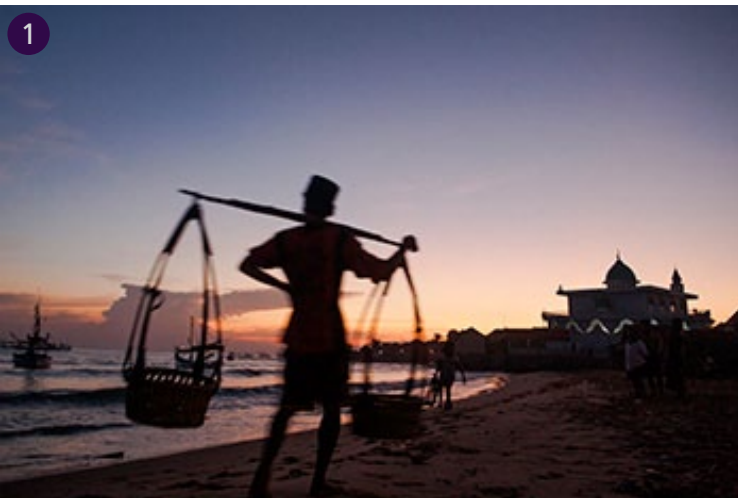
2. I get distracted with other action and aim the camera at a fisherman going into the sea with the baskets. It works well enough as an image, but isn't exactly the image I envisioned.

3. I take, what is in a sense, a practice shot from the perspective that I want, but with the fisherman going into the sea.

4. I find a perfect candidate for the image I want. A man wearing a *taqiyah* hat comes out of the water. I start photographing him as he walks out. The mosque dome isn't visible here because I'm not in the right spot in time.

5. I follow the man with my camera and slightly crouch. I get the exact exposure which I am after. He's just around where I want him compositionally and I have the mosque dome in the background.

6. I am rarely completely satisfied, even when I get an image I am happy with. I take a few more photographs just to see what I can come up with, but I decide on the previous shot.



ISO 640, 24-70mm@25mm, f/4, 1/10s



ISO 500, 24-70mm@48mm, f/6.3, 1/10s



ISO 500, 24-70mm@24mm, f/9, 1/250s



ISO 250, 24-70mm@24mm, f/9, 1/80s



ISO 250, 24-70mm@24mm, f/9, 1/80s



ISO 250, 24-70mm@27mm, f/9, 1/60s

Goals and Key Steps

Create a warm, purplish tint

- I moved the global *Temperature* slider to the left until the image started to look warm.
- I moved the global *Tint* slider to the left until the tones gained a purple tint.

Give the image more overall luminance

- I moved the global *Exposure* slider slightly to the left to make the image brighter overall, but this overexposed the clouds slightly. I dealt with this in the next step.

Bring back detail in the clouds

- Under the *Tone Curve*, I moved the *Highlights* slider half-way to the left.

Add visual punch and drama

- I moved the global *Contrast* slider past half-way to the left.
- I moved the *Blacks* slider slightly to the right.
- Under the *Tone Curve*, I moved the *Shadows* slider about one-third of the way to the left.

Separate the silhouette of the fisherman from the sea

- I moved the global *Shadows* slider to the right to brighten the darker areas of the water.
- I used the *Adjustment Brush* with a moderately increased *Shadows* value to paint the areas of the water that were still dark.



AFTER



BEFORE

Keep Learning!

New images like the ones in this eBook are discussed several times per week on our Facebook page. Learn from some of the world's most talented photographers as they take you behind the scenes of their creative process.



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Final words

It is my hope that you now have a better understanding of what goes into making powerful photographs. Beyond that, you should recognize that great images do not simply present themselves by chance or luck. Through careful planning and a discerning eye, you can start making powerful photographs of your own.

I encourage you to use this eBook as a continuous reference, to keep coming back to the images and lessons as a source of inspiration and ideas for your own photographic adventures whether they're near or far from home. Thank you for joining me on this journey. I wish you all the best on your own visual explorations.

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