

Photo Essay

A photographic essay is a set or series of photographs that are intended to tell a story or evoke a series of emotions in the viewer.

It allows to tell more than what is possible with a single image

Essays range from purely photographic projects to photographs with captions, small texts or full text essays

PHOTO ESSAY

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graph LR; A[PHOTO ESSAY] --> B[THEMATIC]; A --> C[NARRATIVE];
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THEMATIC

Addresses a topic or issue

NARRATIVE

Tells a story, usually in a
chronological sequence

THEME

How to choose your theme

- Ask yourself what issues you find important.
- Consider ideas that are relevant. Check what is in the news today. Find out what topics are important to your community.
- Are you affiliated with a nonprofit organization that you could use as a resource? See if you can collaborate with them on a project.

- Look at photography publications to familiarize yourself with what other photographers are publishing.
- Consider what type of photography you enjoy. What type of subjects do you enjoy working with?
- Who do you know? Do you have any contacts that would allow you to get some powerful and candid shots?

STRUCTURE

Unless your essay is part of a journalistic piece, it should be able to stand alone, without a written article, and make logical sense to the viewer

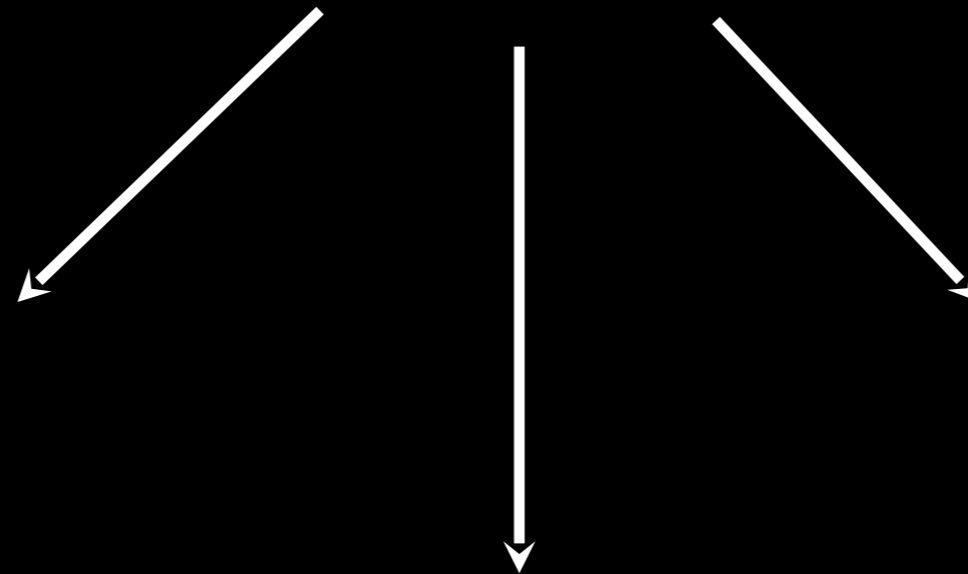
It is important that the order of your photos effectively tell a story, in an interesting and logical sequence.

Structure

Range of Photos

Order of Photos

Information vs emotion shots



**NARRATIVE
SHOTS**

The Lead Photo / The Hook



Your lead photo should effectively draw in your audience. This is usually the most difficult photo to choose and should follow the theme of your essay. It could be an emotional portrait or an action shot, but ultimately it should provoke the curiosity of the viewer.

Stablising shots



Escene or stablising shots are pictures that set the stage and describe the scene of your story.

Detail Photos



Detail photos focus in on one element, be it a building, a face, or a relevant object. These photos are your best opportunity to capture specific objects. Close-up photos provide an opportunity to focus in on specific objects. These photos are tightly cropped, simple shots that present a specific element of your story.

The Clincher Photo



The final photo, the clincher, should evoke the emotion you want the viewer to walk away with, be it a feeling of hope, inspiration, or sadness.

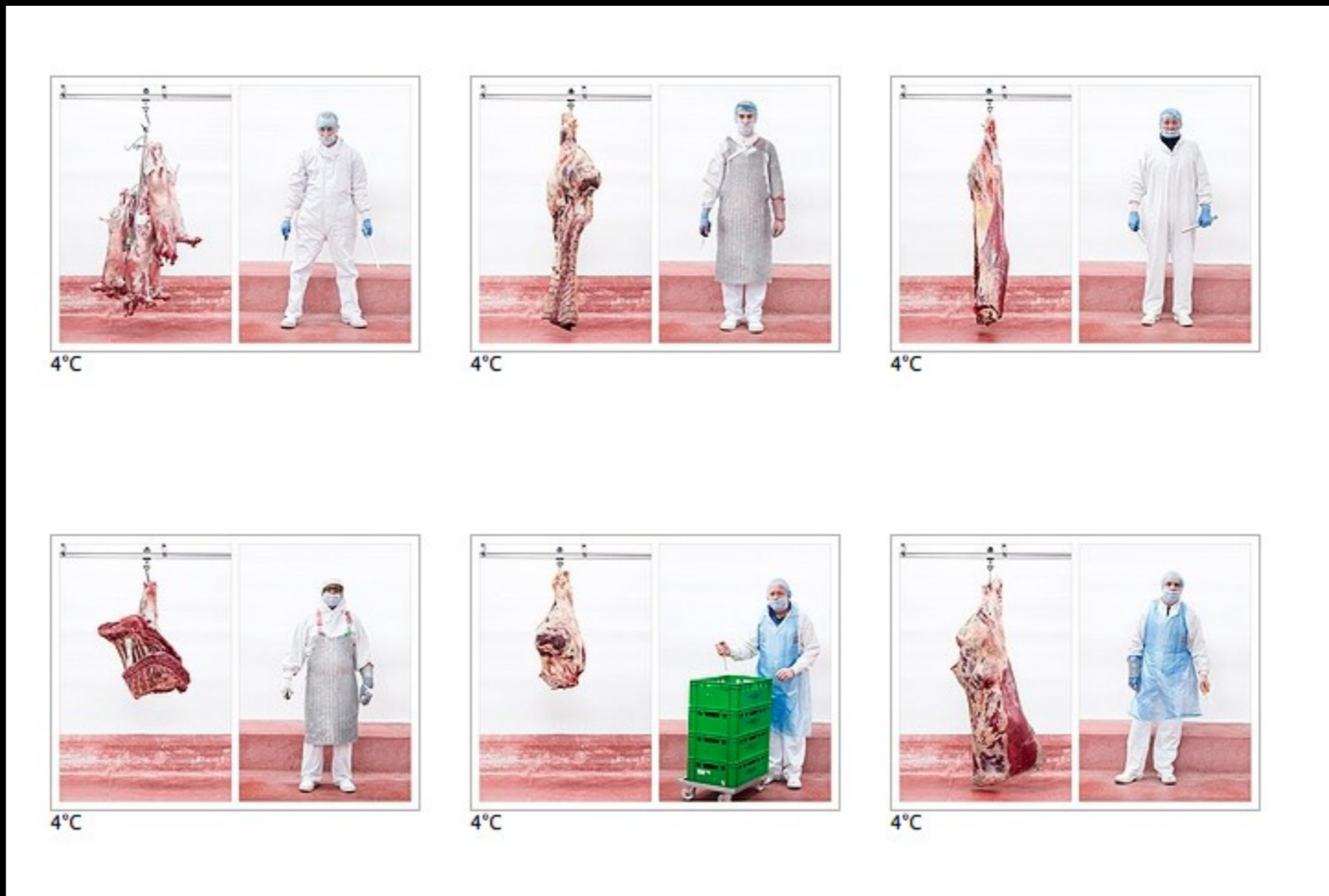
Other shots

Portrait: Often a tight portrait or head shot, but can also be tight environmental portrait. This shot gives a face to your characters. It make the story personal to someone. Even if your character is not a human, a portrait can be important.

Medium Shot: The medium shot serves to inform the viewer who are the characters and what they are doing. The shot should include both the subject and it's surrounding.

Action/Gesture: Action shots show your subject doing something, ideally the thing you are reporting on.

UNITY

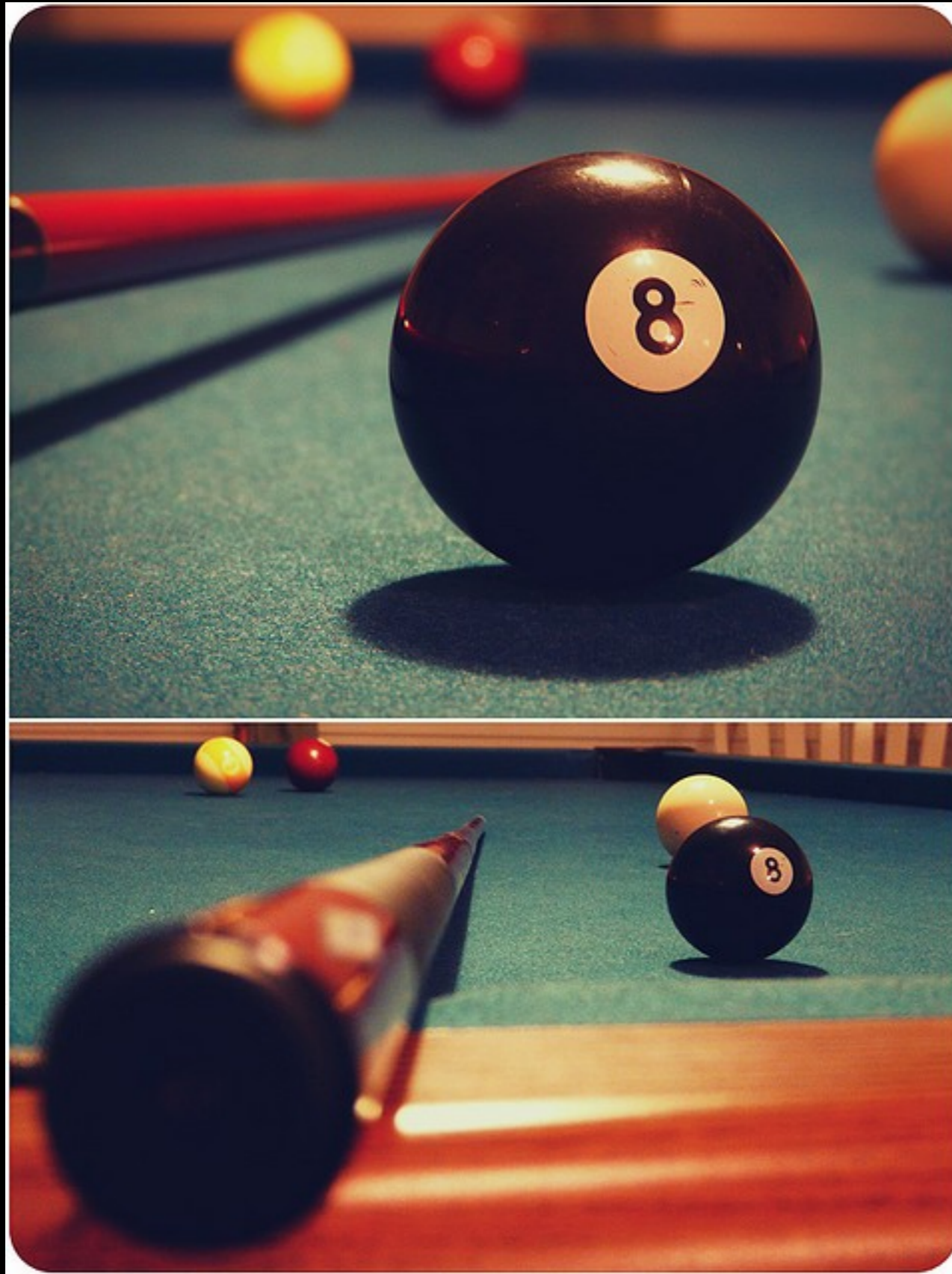


Creating visual coherence in your photo essay is very important. This will allow all the pictures to tie together and be perceived as a *whole*, rather than individual images thrown together. There are several ways to accomplish this, including the theme itself, the structure and specific elements such as color, composition, use of light, etc.





Diptychs and triptychs are a brilliant tool for photographic storytelling. They present two or three images which can be from the same session or they can be polar opposites to show opposition or contrasting ideas.



When two images are placed together, their individual narrative is altered as they enter a dialogue





EXAMPLES

What the World Eats

Peter Menzel



















A world around Disney
Christoph Sillem

Wandering through Christoph Sillem's photographic series *A World Around Disney* is like wandering through a Disney cartoon. However, Sillem's photographs are not representing any kind of stage set. Sillem has discovered the community of Val d'Europe.

This surreal housing complex is the one that surrounds Disneyland, Paris, a large scale neighborhood erected to accommodate the employees of the nearby destination. Disneyland, whether it is in Anaheim, California or Paris, France, is an environment entrenched in fantasy and non-reality, truly an escape to the land of Disney. What Sillem has discovered here is where that non-reality spills out of the park. The neighborhood is designed after Baron Haussman's architecture, the man who designed much of Paris in the 1860s. However, this neighborhood does not resemble the thriving metropolis of Paris. Rather, it seems much more like a plastic ghost town, and through Sillem's lens, it is difficult to perceive where fantasy ends and reality begins

















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YA KALA BEN (Crossed look)

Namsa Leuba

An African-European photographer, born in Switzerland. This project was accomplished on a trip to Guinea Conakry. She was interested in the construction and deconstruction of the body as well as the depiction of the invisible.

She had previously studied ritual artifacts common to the cosmology of Guineans; statuettes that are part of a ceremonial structure. Modesty, luck, fecundity or a channel for exorcism, those statuettes hold a cultural value through what they represent or symbolise. With her Leuba transforms these objects, cosmological symbols of a community, who traditionally have a signification when used as part of rituals.

In recontextualizing these sacred objects through the lens, she brings them in a framework meant for Western aesthetic choices and taste.

Throughout her fieldwork, she had to deal with sometimes violent reactions from Guineans who viewed her procedures/practices as a form of sacrilege.















Echoism

Julian Wolkenstein

There is a myth, some say a science, suggesting people who have more symmetrical faces are considered more “attractive”.

If you are made symmetrical, do you consider yourself more beautiful, less so, or is it just weird? Or is it you at all? Do you have a best side? What is to be said of left and right brain dominance?

This is a series of photographic portraits completed in 2010. The subjects were specifically cast for their individual facial features. They were photographed front to camera and in the same position. They were asked not to express emotions or character. The process consisted of a face-to-camera portrait, then the image is split into a left and a right section, and one side is horizontally flipped. These images are recombined to create two separate and symmetrical identities of the subject.

This initial study focusing on facial symmetry, is part of a larger piece revolving around facial features, facial proportions and facial symmetry. The term Echoism relates to facial symmetry in its physiognomic sense. An accompanying website and continuing project entitled "Echoism" is at www.echoism.org













Behind the Scenes with Obama

Callie Shell





















Final thoughts and resources

Some questions to ask yourself about your essay

Context: Make sure to portray the context, setting & situation

Character(s): As yourself, Who are the characters of my story?

What makes them interesting & compelling?

Conflict: Is there a conflict?

Plot: Is there a sequence of events?

Theme: What is the Essay about ?

Image Characteristics: How will you use the composition, color, & light to create unity for your story?

Progression/order: Does the chosen order of the images help you tell the story? Why was it chosen?

Juxtaposition: How does juxtaposition affect the meaning and power of the images.

Narration: Is there narration? Is it effective? Necessary?

Be careful with:

Misplaced focus

Under/over exposure

Presentation

Variety of shots

Visual Unity

The odd one out



QUESTIONS?