

IN THE FRAME

DISPATCH ON CREATIVITY FROM DON GIANNATTI

I was asked if there was some sort of list of things I look at or think about before I click the shutter?

There is. I used to have a checklist that included “was the film loaded correctly” and “are the dark slides clean” and such.

We don't do that anymore, but there is still a long list of things that I think about as I am making a photograph. And like anything we all do again and again we become much faster at processing these questions. Some of these happen so fast I don't really 'think' about them. Others are non-hierarchical – which means there is no order to how they are thought through. And some are dependent on choices made before or after.

But there they are in a list... one that is not meant to be hierarchical. I am sure I could add many more, but this list is pretty basic to what I do.

> OVERALL

Correct horizon. It can either be straight or obviously tilted. A tiny tilt just looks wrong.

Best placement of horizon.

Tangents.

Are there empty places in the shot (not to get rid of them, but only to approve them and NOT be surprised by them)

Crop room (super important in commercial)

Background. (What is it doing for the image?)

Foreground. (What is it doing for the image?)

Do I need that much background?

Do I need that much foreground?

Do I need that much surface?

Should my background serving any purpose and if it is, is that purpose being met?

Is there anything in the background that should not be there or will be a problem?

Same for the foreground.

Is the lighting on the background interesting, or is it static and one-dimensional (not better or worse, just need to know so it can be appropriate for what I am trying to do)

> **LIGHTING**

Are speculars placed where I want them?

How are the speculars transitioning to true values?

Does the light interfere with any part of the image and make it important or lost?

There is no right answer, but I need to know exactly what that light is going to do.

Do I see shape? And is it clear?

Do I see dimension? And does it read?

Do I see the texture? And is it important?

Are the shadows deep or shallow? Is that important?

Do the shadows have sharp transitions or soft transitions?

Whichever transition is showing, is that what I want for the overall look of the image?

Does the surface of the subject show itself with the lighting I am using?

> **COMPOSITION**

Is it static?

Does everything have its own place?

Does the space between them create a 'hero' on purpose or mistake?

Is it dynamic?

Are things overlapping?

Is anything not overlapping, and is there a reason for that space?

Do I have leading lines?

Do I have serpentine interest lines?

What relationship does each item have to each other?

Is anything being hidden by something that shouldn't be?

Are all labels straight?

Are the things that line up – lined up? Perfectly?

If not, does that add interest to the image?

Things that need to be straight, need to be straight.

> **POV**

Is the angle working from a framing standpoint?

Do tall things look tall or do they look squatty?

> **DoF**

Is it too shallow or too deep?

How does it affect the main subject?

Is focus an issue?

How could a different focus point alter the photo?

> **The Shot Surprises**

Elements: Are they straight, clean, lit, and generally looking great?

Are there elements that are making visuals we did not intend? (Like a 'face', or a horse?)

Then check all four corners with a very discerning eye. If things fall apart in an otherwise great image, it is often in one of those damned corners.

NOTE: I did not get into color correction, or various other things that may or may not be useful for every shot. You can add any additional items you wish.

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