

Class booklet

The portrait

#1

WHAT IS A GOOD PORTRAIT?

The success of a portrait will depend on two factors, both of which must be respected in the same image, namely a sense of aesthetics and a strong emotional reference from the subject.



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Illustration: a few portraits of the same person with a similar aesthetic. One of these portraits carries the strongest emotional reference.

#2

THE CRUCIAL SETTINGS FOR SUCCESSFUL PORTRAITS

Depth of field, which must be minimal, if the willingness is to highlight the subject on a blurred background.

The shutter speed must be fast enough to freeze the subject's face; to avoid blurring, a shutter speed of one 60th of a second (depending on the focal length used) is a minimum.

The focal length used should not be excessive. At too short a focal length (< 50 mm) and close to the subject, distortion is a real problem for faces.

The focus must be on the subject's eye. As the main source of emotion, it must be legible.

The light measurement must be done on the subject, in order to expose the face correctly.

#3

AESTHETICIZE YOUR PORTRAITS

The light should be used to highlight or beautify the subject:

- *A reflective light on the subject* can be used (thanks to a reflector, or another flecking surface such as a white wall).
- *A filtered light source* can be of the most beautiful effect (sun through branches, a window).
- *A “light-dark” (chiaroscuro) atmosphere* can be created to dramatize the scene.





Illustration: portrait with reflector (or chiaroscuro)

Distinguish between two placements of the subject in your frame:

- ***The position at the third of the image***, which will give less importance to the subject and create an image centred on the aesthetic composition.

- ***The central position of the subject***, which will give a prominent importance to the subject; it will be a simple composition, but at the service of the portrait.



Illustration: two portraits of the same person (same light, same aesthetics). One centered, the other is composed of thirds.

Distinguish between the different shots: close-up, medium close-up, American shot, Italian shot, and medium shot. Each of these shots will require more or less **work with the body gestures**.



Illustration: two portraits of the same person (same light, same aesthetic). One in medium close-up, the other in wide shot (from head to feet).

The importance of background and decor, which should not interfere with the readability of the portrait. Generally speaking, the eye should not be focused on anything other than the human subject. For this purpose, a background with a plain and neutral texture will help to distinguish the subject.

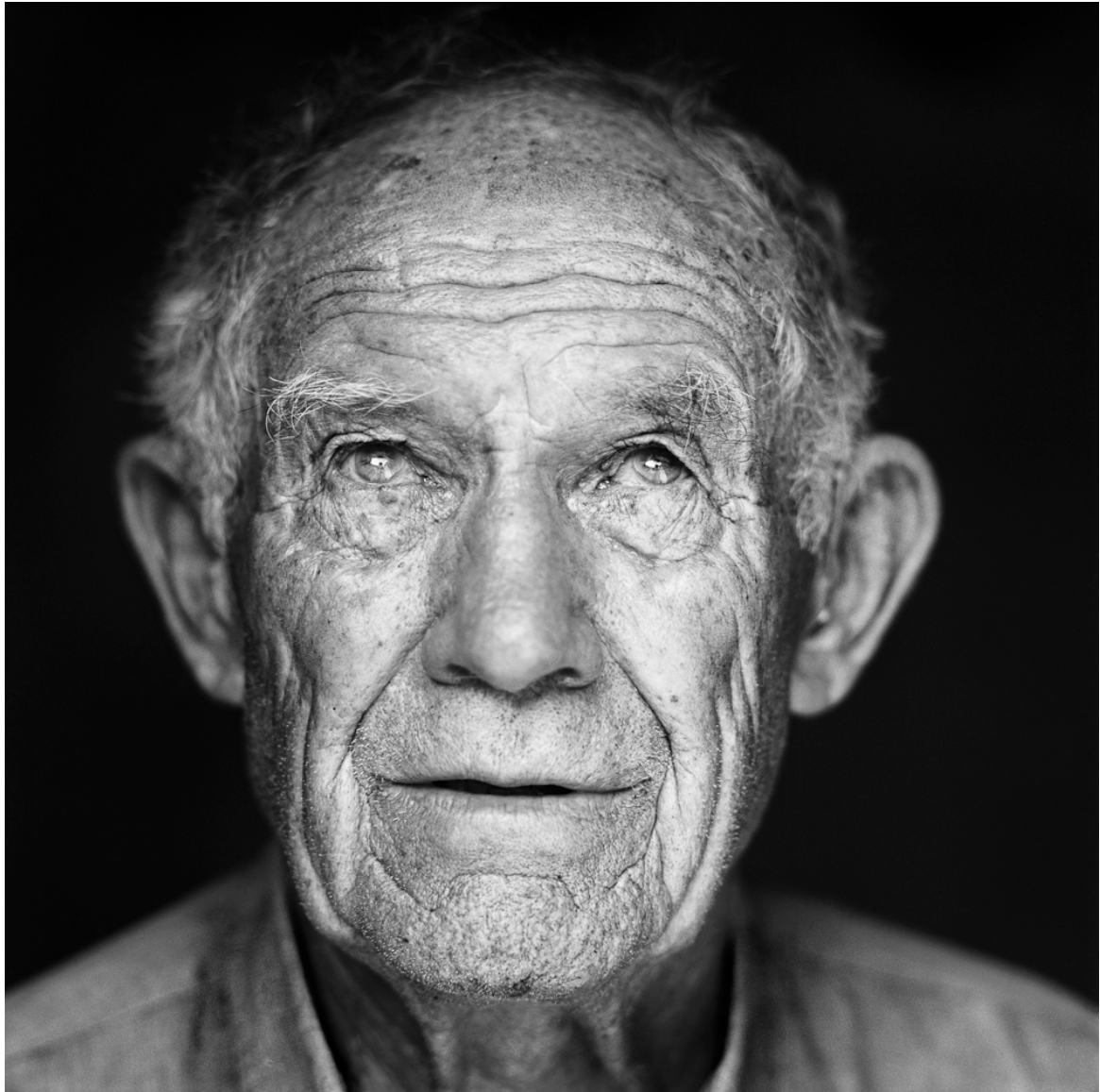


Illustration: A portrait on a plain background.

#4

DIRECT YOUR MODEL, STEP BY STEP

Give the basic indications to the model: first, position it in the desired set-up and under the right light.

Make your test images (light, depth of field, focal length, composition,...): ask the model to adopt a different position for each image, or to move. In this way, the warm-up will also be that of the model which will avoid stiffening and staring.



Illustration: Image of a portrait sequence (one sees the photographer and the model).

Then comes the time to shoot! **Any non-professional model will tend to inhibit herself/himself from the start, and will put on a “mask”,** a kind of fixed attitude that she/he is used to take in front of a lens. **The challenge will be to bring down this attitude in order to get back to a more natural look.** Here is a non-exhaustive list of tips:

- ***Energize the model by asking them to adopt a series of very specific positions.*** In this way, the model will concentrate on their role and forget about the lens pointed at her/him, which will also allow you to repeat the most interesting postures.

- ***Bring attention to the point at which her/his eyes should focus.*** A slightly distanced look in relation to the lens will give a more distanced and deeper attitude compared to a stand-up look.

- ***Don't stick your eyes to the viewfinder,*** the subject may feel scanned. Be careful to maintain a simpler and more human relationship with the model, in this way the subject's attitude will be more natural.

- ***Ask the model to perform certain mental gestures or operations that require concentration.*** Thanks to this technique, the model will forget for a moment that they have been photographed, and more natural gestures will reappear.

- ***Ask the model to close their eyes.*** When their eyes are closed, move slightly. Then ask them to open their eyes, and then take the picture. In this way, you capture the subject in a brief moment of perdition.

#5

SOME REMARKABLE AUTHORS

Nadar (1820-1910): He is the photographer of the great artists of his time. He used wet collodion, a negative process.

Auguste Sander (1876-1964): From 1911 onwards, he started his huge project called “The Men of the 20th Century”, which brought together portraits of Germans from all social categories, and he categorized them into 7 groups (peasants, artists, women,...).

Lisette Model (1901-1983): She “caricatured” her subjects; in her photographs, she details the appearances, the faces, the curves of the bodies. Her photography is clearly expressionist.

Richard Avedon (1923): For his series “In the American West”, he travelled through the USA and photographed American low society (workers, vagrants, servers, minors,...). For each of his images, he used a white background, set-up outdoors.

Philip-Lorca diCorcia (1951): He practises an image called “documentary-fiction”, two contradictory terms. Practically, the situations that he photographs seem to be taken on the spot, but in reality everything is set up (subject, light, extras, decor).

Alec Soth (1969): American photographer of the Magnum agency, his portraits are imbued with softness and honesty.

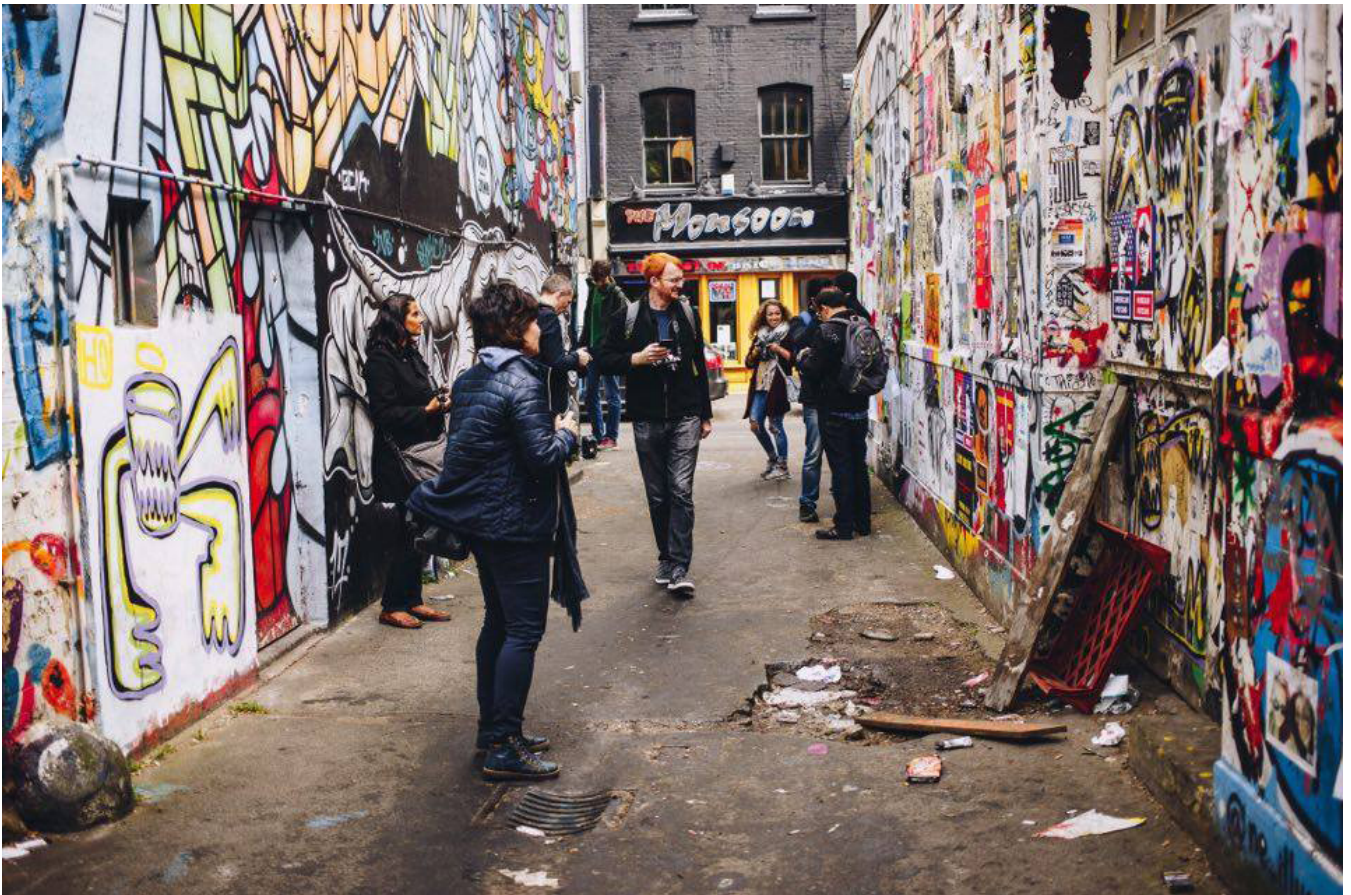
Bruce Gilden (1946): Gilden is not in favour of a photograph that embellishes, on the contrary he seeks to reveal what is most inharmonious in the faces. He uses flash for this purpose to uniformly expose faces, and realizes close-up shots.

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