



Student booklet

Street photography

#1

THE DEFINITION

To be an authentic street picture, it must correspond to this definition:

Street photography is an artistic genre, practiced in public places, which seeks to capture a human presence with a spontaneous (not posed) attitude.

Street Photography is a genre with precise characteristics, which should not be confused with urban landscape photography (focusing on urbanization as a whole, and not necessarily on humans), and of street portraits (posed photography).



#2

SETTINGS

Photographing the street, and its characters, requires a great reactivity of shooting; it is therefore necessary to adapt the settings, and the modes of the camera, in order to be able to perform this dynamic work.

Shooting mode: the speed priority mode (S/Tv) will be preferred, as it will often be necessary to adapt your speed to the subject's movement. Manual mode is to be avoided; the loss of time caused by adjusting both aperture and speed at the same time does not ensure a lively and spontaneous picture.

Note: the manual mode can still be used when you want to take a series of images of the same scene with a particular exposure.

ISO: In order to get rid of the sensitivity adjustment, and therefore save time, one solution may be to set an automatic ISO range.

Shutter speed: keep in mind some references; the one necessary to capture a still person (>1/60s), the one for a walker (>1/320s) or a runner (>1/640s), etc. Also be aware of the appropriate speeds to create a panning, or an aesthetic movement blur.



Auto focus: The AF-C (Servo) mode combined with a collimator (or group) is recommended. This combination will allow a precise follow-up of the subject.

Manual focus: It can be smart to lock the focus at a certain distance, and determine the depth of field area; this in order to take images “blindly”, without looking through the viewfinder, but by evaluating the distance from the subject.

Light measurement: the fastest method will be to use an Evaluative measurement (matrix metering at Nikon), coupled with the use of the exposure corrector (if exposure is problematic, or if a chiaroscuro effect is desired).

Note: the Spot measurement requires targeting the point to be exposed correctly and will therefore be less rapid and could lead to exposure errors.

#3

APPROACHES

Two main approach techniques can be distinguished when it comes to photographing the street character.

The “picker” photographer

In this approach, the aim will be to identify in advance a place with architecture, layout, interesting light, and then wait for the right character to arrive in the frame.

In the “picker” posture, composition will very often be the central element of the image, and it will be more complicated to obtain a humanly strong image.

Nevertheless, this approach makes it possible to control many factors: composition, light, technique, and decisive moment.



The hunter-photographer

In this method, the aim will be to approach / contact the subject. The character will therefore have a central role in the image, and will have to be worthy of interest; otherwise, the risk would be to create an image that would not be relevant to either the human aspect or the composition.

Compared to the “picker”, the “hunter” will have to adopt a more frank and relaxed posture in relation to his subject.



#4

TIPS

“Use reflections”

Photograph a subject that is being reflected in a window, on the surface of the water, through a mirror, etc. This trick will avoid a direct confrontation with the character, and will give a singular aesthetic to your image.



“Play another game”

Approach a subject by pretending to photograph something above him, or next to him.... Then, take a quick picture of it, or pretend to look at your picture, when in reality you are photographing it in “screen view” (LiveView).

“Use a wide angle lens”

By using a wide angle, your subject (who is supposed not to know much about photography) will not be aware that he or she may appear in your viewfinder. This will allow you to photograph him/her without being suspected.

“Close the image”

Make sure that your subject appears through an “opening”. This trick can be realized thanks to an element placed in the foreground, and very close to the objective (a gap between leaves of trees, the gap between curtains). This tip will allow you to highlight your subject, and hide from it.



“Deploy your tripod.”

Working on a tripod makes you more “professional” (you could be an architectural photographer doing a commission), and therefore more legitimate in your activity in the eyes of many people. You will seem to be taking full responsibility for your shot, and therefore will not be suspected of “stealing images”.

“Look natural”

If after shooting, the subject observes you with an interrogating look (or accusing), do not try to escape his gaze, but instead smile at him and look at him with kindness. In this way, by looking at one another, you will reassure the person about your intentions.



#5

THE GREAT STREET PHOTOGRAPHERS

Eugène Atget (1857-1927): Towards the end of the 19th century, this French photographer began to document, through photography, the streets of Paris, using a street photography approach; he tried to capture his subjects “on the sly”, without them posing (sometimes impossible, because of the long exposure time and the very bulky equipment).

Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908-2004): He is the first true street photographer, in the pure sense of the word. All his work is based on the aesthetics of the encounter, of the random surprise of the streets, the “marvellous daily life”, as he called it. Bresson privileges composition according to the golden ratio, harmonious and precise.

Garry Winogrand (1928-1984): One of the most famous American street photographers. He was also one of the first to break with the illustrious Henri Cartier-Bresson and his precepts of composition; Winogrand’s shots were constructed in a more anarchic, and dynamic way.

William Klein (1928): like Winogrand, Klein's photography is very spontaneous, as evidenced by the chaotic aesthetic of his images (blurred, grainy, decadent,...). He is also the instigator of the Close-up Photography movement, a genre that advocates taking pictures as close as possible to the subject.

Lee Friedlander (1934): Lee Friedlander's images are of great compositional richness. In the 1960s, this great name in American photography went against the rules of composition brought by Bresson; Friedlander experimented extensively, and adopted blurred images, decentered framings, his own person, reflections, etc. into his images. His images are very often filled with elements, and therefore very complex to read.

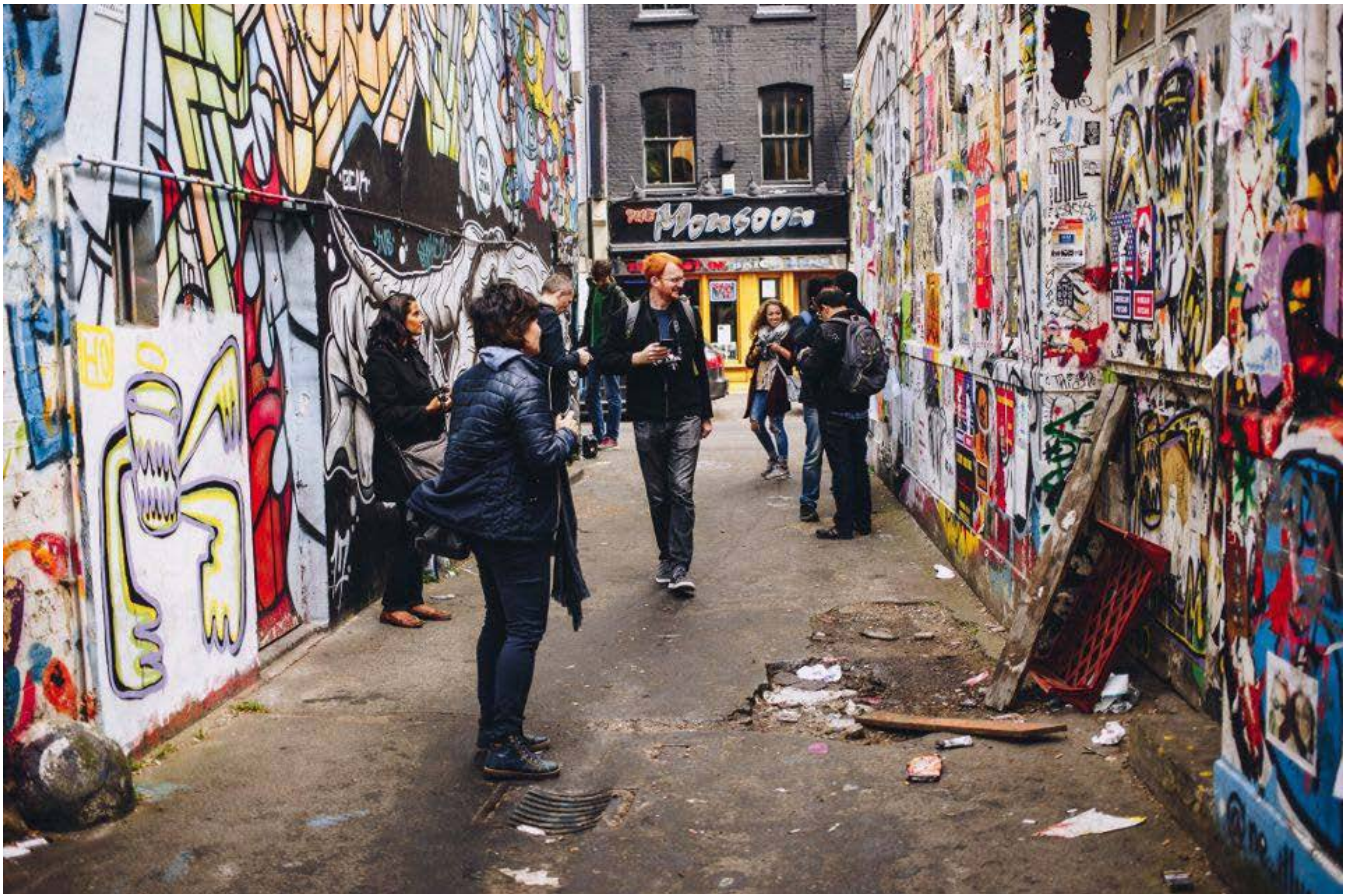
Bruce Gilden (1946): this American photographer is now the main representative of Close-Up Photography; he always photographs his subjects within a metre of each other, with flash and without warning.

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