Advanced Composition

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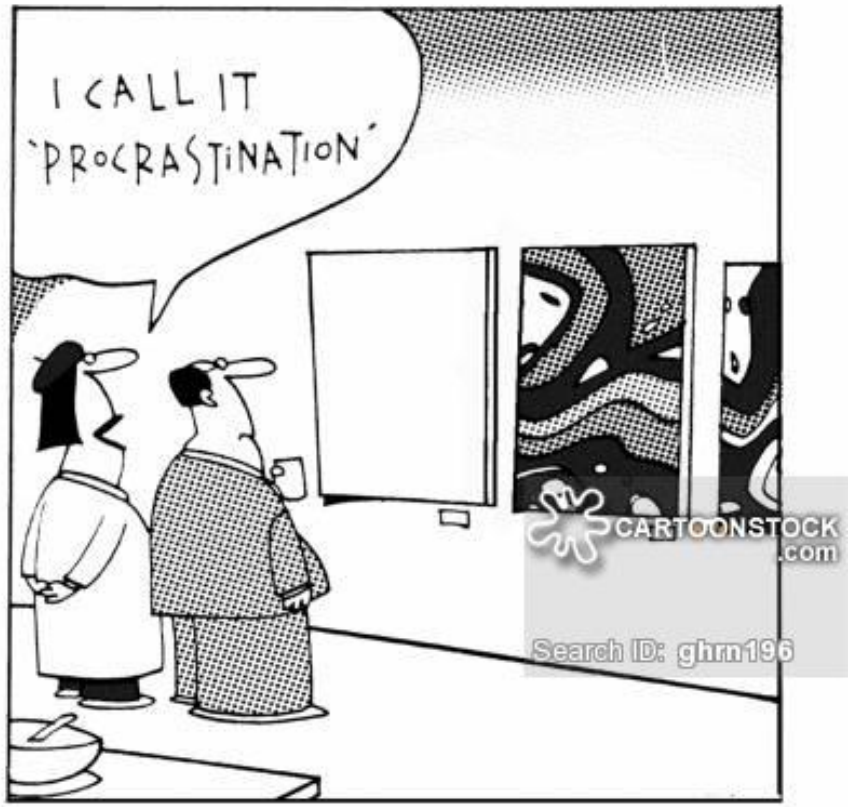
Image Composition and Pre-Visualization

- Humans have perception, cameras do not
  - Perception is the interpretive mental process that organizes and stores electromagnetic sensory data in a way that ‘makes sense’ according to ones own memories and awareness.
  - Cameras capture electromagnetic data including spatial and light relationships, but cameras do not interpret that data.
  - Images seldom reflect the impactful memories of the visual experience.
  - Pre-visualization arranges the components of an image to reflect the impact on the photographer.
  - This arrangement tells a coherent story of what the photographer wishes to share.

Practice: Compose Before Shooting

- Train your eye to see what the camera sees.
- This takes persistent practice OR many years of occasional practice.



A Great Pre-visualization Tool

- Most DSLR cameras have a default aspect ration of 2:3, while many snapshot cameras have an aspect ratio of 3:4.
- Check your camera for your aspect ratio. See manual. Some cameras allow you to change the aspect ratio, as needed.
- Cut a 2” X 3” hole from the middle of a cardboard. Make a 3”X 4” hole if that is your camera’s aspect ratio.
- Carry the card around with you. Hold a 2” X 3” cutout 6” from your face and look at your surroundings. Hold it 12” away for 3” X 4”.
- Identify a subject and note its surroundings and light, through the hole. Move around and compose using principles of composition.
- Squint your eyes at the image, to identify shapes and light/dark areas only.

Identify Your Subject AND Story

- Walk around a scene that attracts you.
- Identify what it is that attracts you. It may not be just an object, but perhaps the light or environment that impacts an object, or an action.
- Identify the ‘story’ you wish to tell with your photograph. Let your photo tell what impacts you most about the scene.
- “Work” the scene, photographing from different angles, and apply the guidelines for composition until you get the shot that tells the story best.
- The story is best when components that are extraneous to the story are eliminated or de-emphasized (preferably in the shot, but also in post-processing.)


Not enough of dog’s face;
Distracting background;
White corner focal point, doesn’t support story.


White corner distracting;
Eye’s unbalanced.


Distracting background;
Face unexpressive.


Extraneous objects in background diminished in size and muted;
Foreground visual weight / focal point supports story;
Story expresses sleepy dog peeping at viewer.
****

Story as Subject
What is the story? What is the subject?

What is the subject now?

With post-processing, what is the subject/story now?

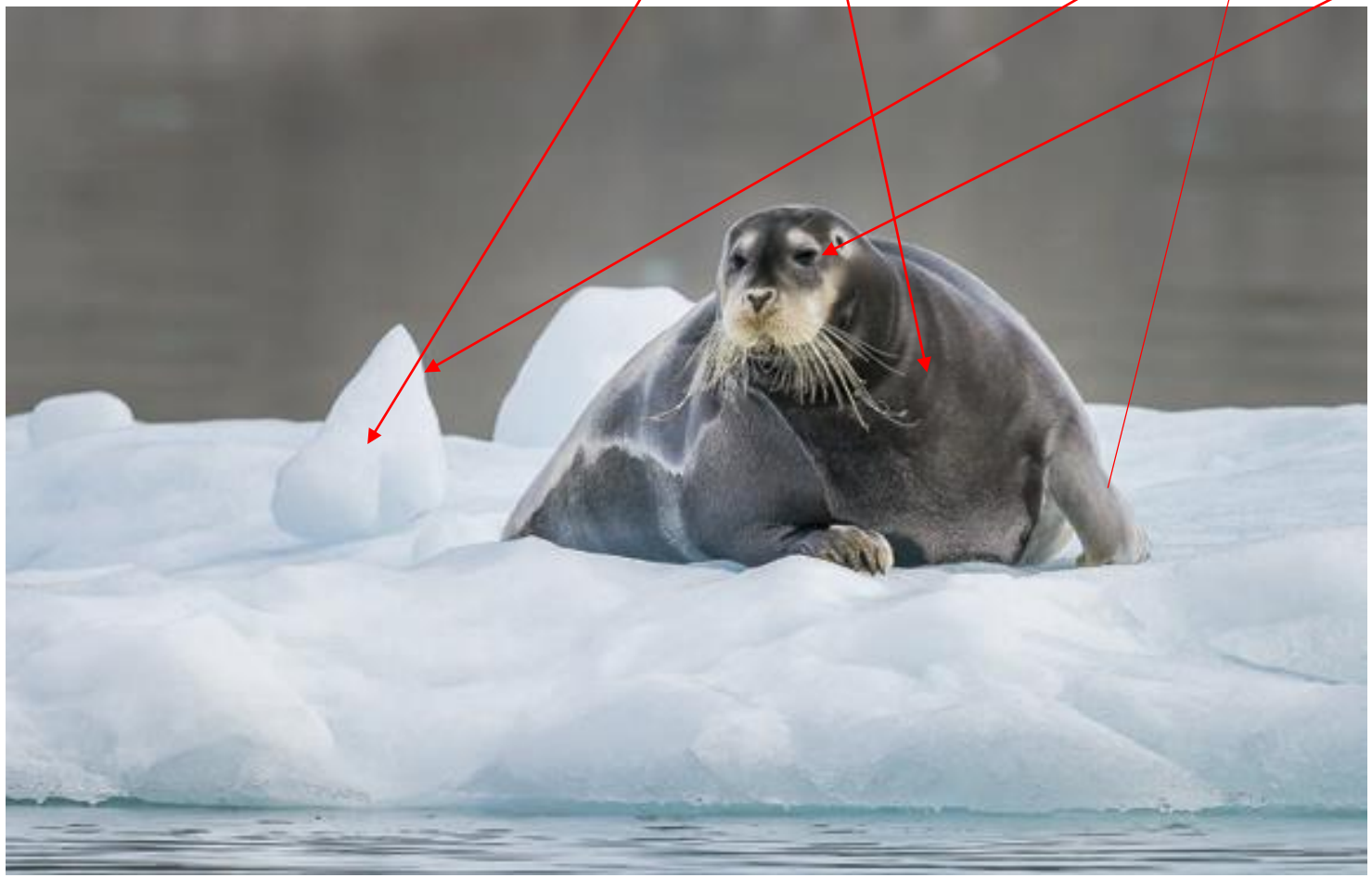
Focal Points

- A focal point is a predominant eye attracter. It stops the eyes and causes your eye to linger on it.
- It can be due to something living, size, color, shape, focus, contrast, etc. It is often NOT the subject. There can be many focal points in an image.
- Squint your eyes and slowly open them. What attracts you first?
- Does a focal point support your subject or is it your subject? Good!
- If not, it detracts from the subject.

Focal point defined by contrast

PSA Journal 7/2018: *Adelle Penguin* by Craig Parker photographer

Focal points: Shape, size, contrast, life



What is the subject?

Hint: Cup your hands around the entire image, then narrow the hole around the seal. Does the story change?

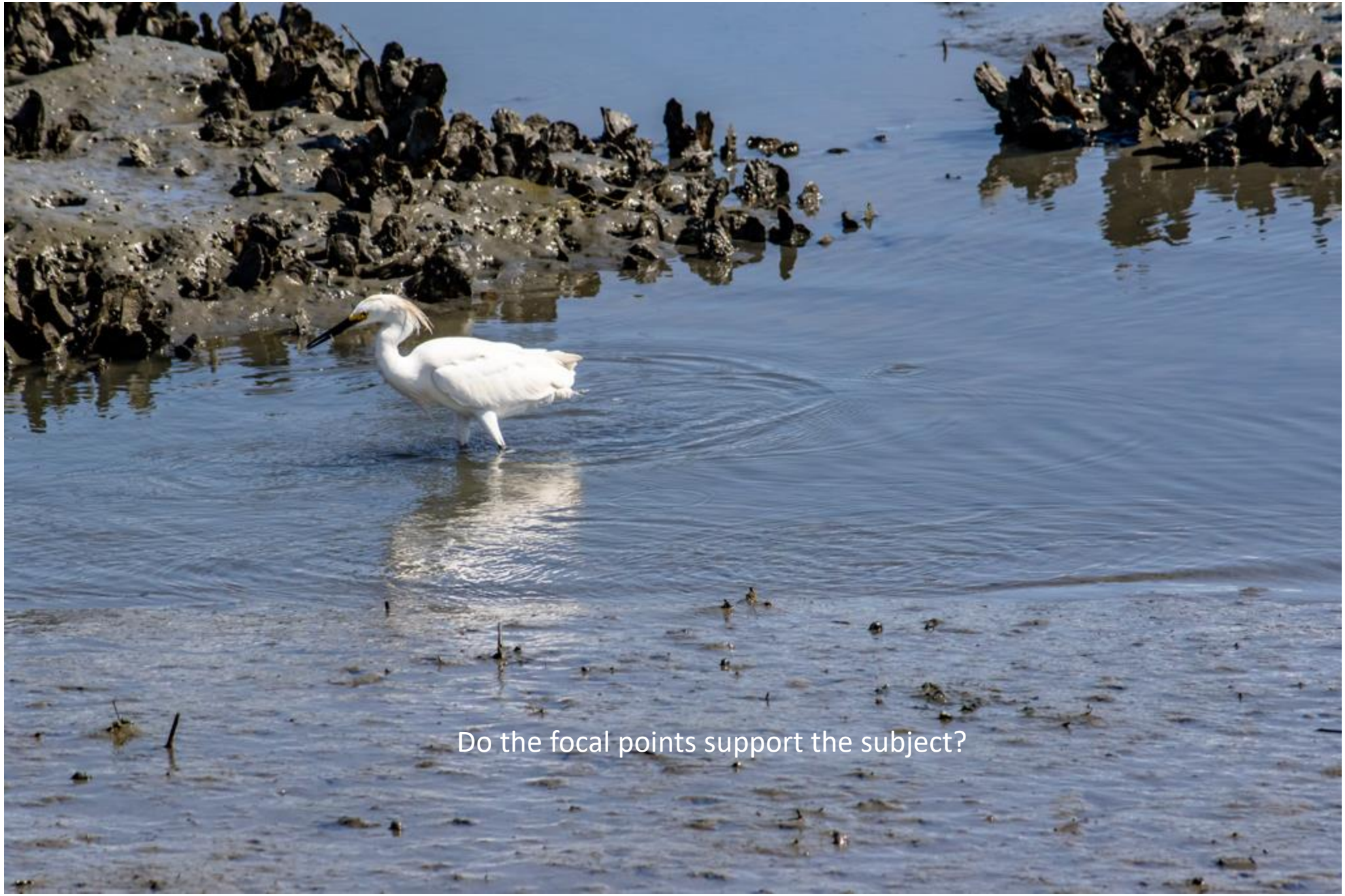
PSA Journal 7/2018: Bearded Seal by Craig Parker photographer

Where are the focal points?
What is the subject?

(from Photographic Society of America (PSA) Journal, July 2018: Duck Dodge by Robert Higgins)

Find Subject and Focal Points

- Use your cardboard cutout
- Locate the subject, which may be the story.
- When viewing images or when pre-visualizing before taking a picture, cup your hands and view sections of the image through the hole between your hands. Find the most predominant attractor in the image. Is it the subject?
- Widen your hand hole around the subject. Does the story change?
- Narrow your viewing hole and move it around the subject. As you block out focal points, does the story change?
- Don’t change the story by eliminating focal points that support the subject/story when pre-visualizing.
- Eliminate focal points that do not add to the subject/story when pre-visualizing.
- Development brings second thoughts! If you didn’t crop in camera, crop or otherwise post-process your image to eliminate or diminish unsupportive focal points and enhance the focus on the subject.


Do the focal points support the subject?

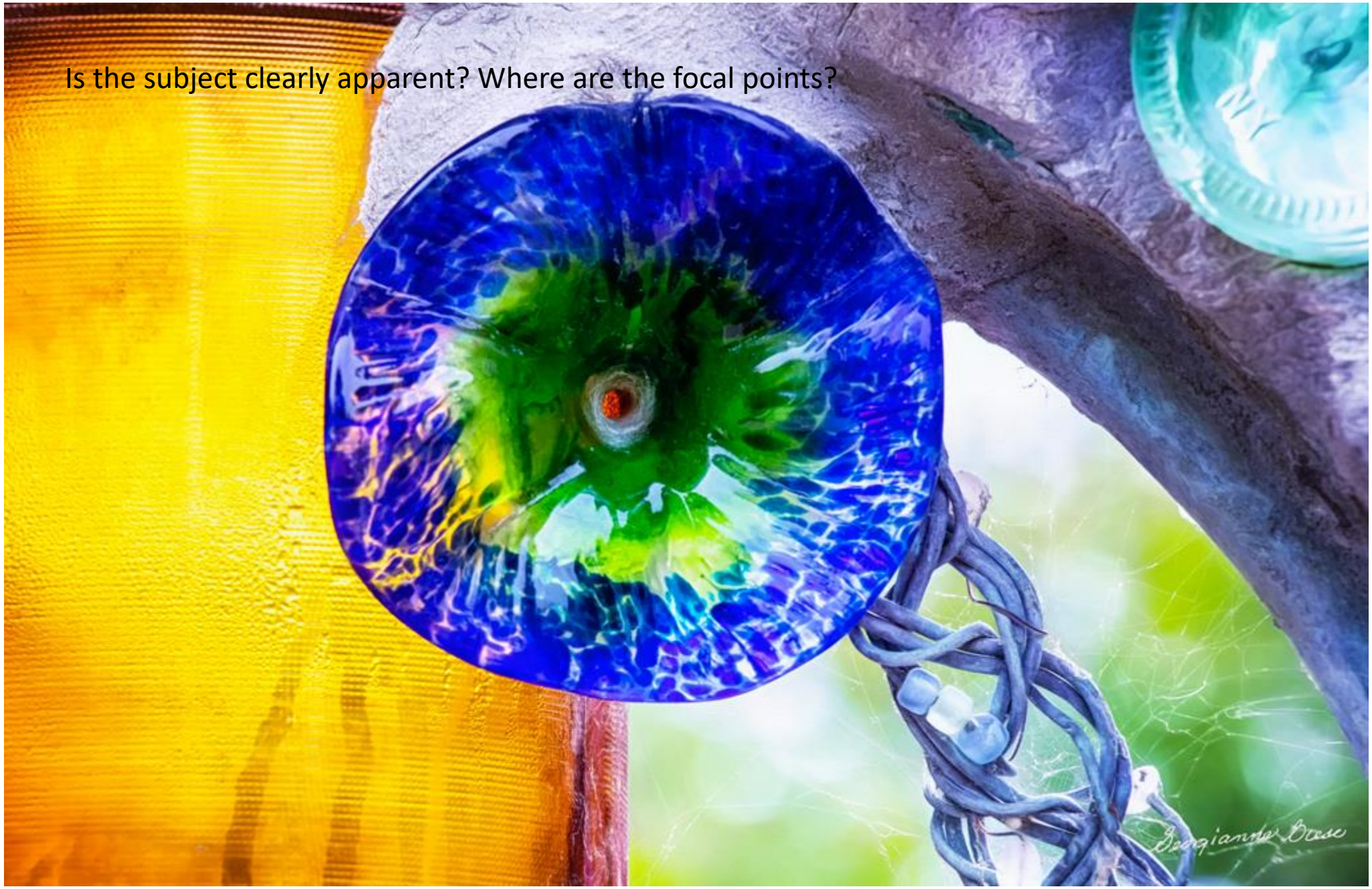

Does the focal point support the subject/story?

Where is the Subject? Where are the focal points?

Is the subject clearly apparent? Where are the focal points?


Subject? Focal points?

Is the subject clearly apparent? Where are the focal points?


Is the subject clearly apparent? Where are the focal points?

Balance and Visual Weight

- Visual weight, like focal points, is what attracts the eye first, e.g., objects that are bulky, dark, very bright, contrasting; Weight also includes the order in which an object draws the eye compared to other elements in the image.
- Balance the weights in the image to draw the eye toward the subject and not away from the subject.
- The subject should carry the primary visual weight.
- Avoid a preponderance of visual weight on one side of the image.
- Remember the power of triangular placement of visually weighty objects.

Unbalanced Image

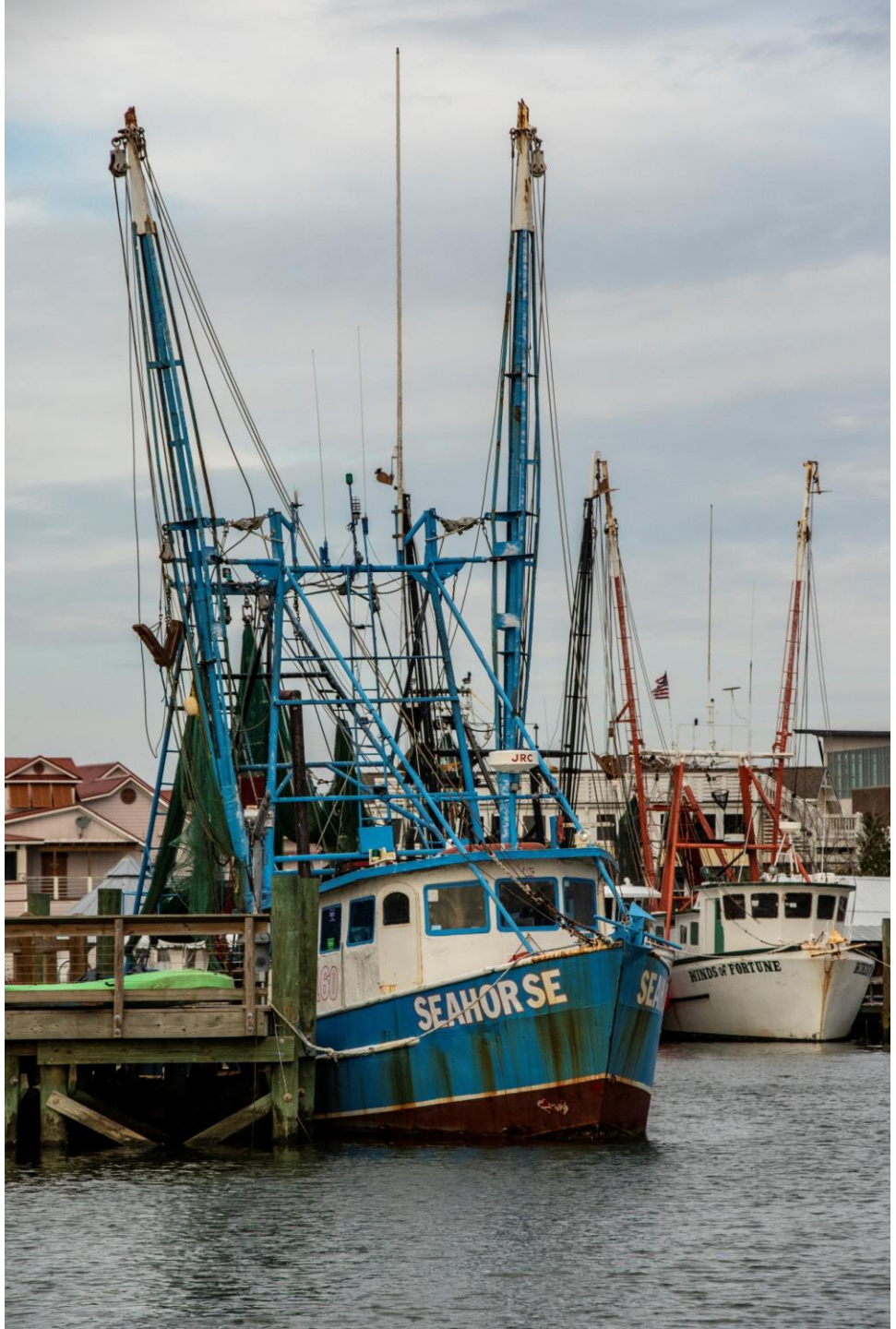
Cropped to Reduce Visual Weight of Tree

NIK Applied Vignette to Move Max Weight to Subject

Visual weight

PSA Journal 7/2018: Bearded Seal by Craig Parker photographer

Original Image



Post-processing to minimize distracting visual weight

Subject (body of boat) carries the most visual weight

Front weighted; subject is the curve

Cropped and subject highlighted with NIK Darken/Lighten Center preset

What is the subject? Where does eye travel?

Eliminate Extraneous Weight to Focus Subject

Balanced Weight

Eliminate Weight that Competes with Subject's Weight

Positive and Negative Space

- Allow enough space around the subject to tell the story.
- If the subject does not fill most of your image, allow enough space around it to have it entering the image or facing into the image.
- Don’t have objects that lead the viewer’s eye off the edge of the image.
- Positive space includes all the objects that are directly related to the image.
- Negative space is everything else.

Good Use of Negative Space

Poor Use of Negative Space

Positive Space Emphasizes Subject/Story

Positive Space Contains Unnecessary Focal Points

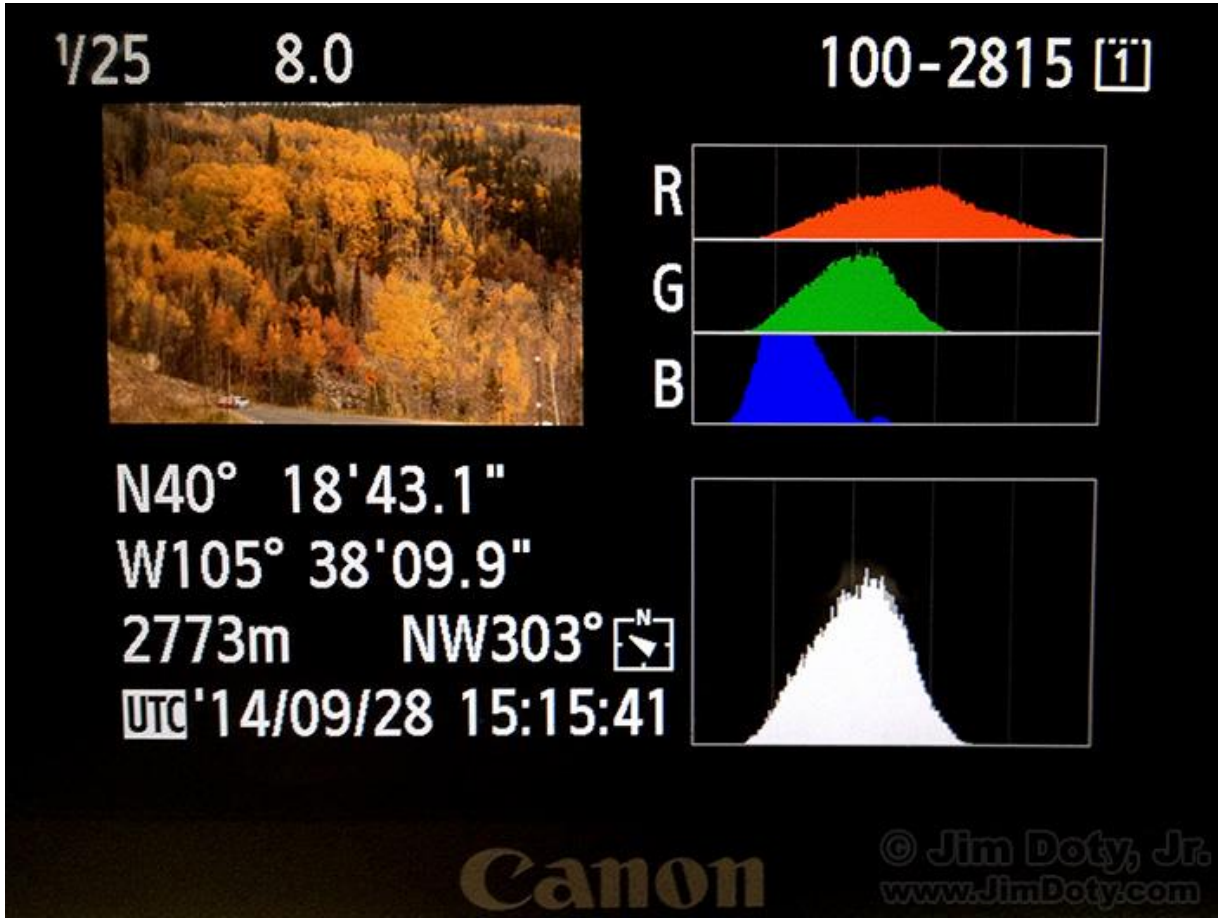
Removed distractions with texture and repositioned subject to power point

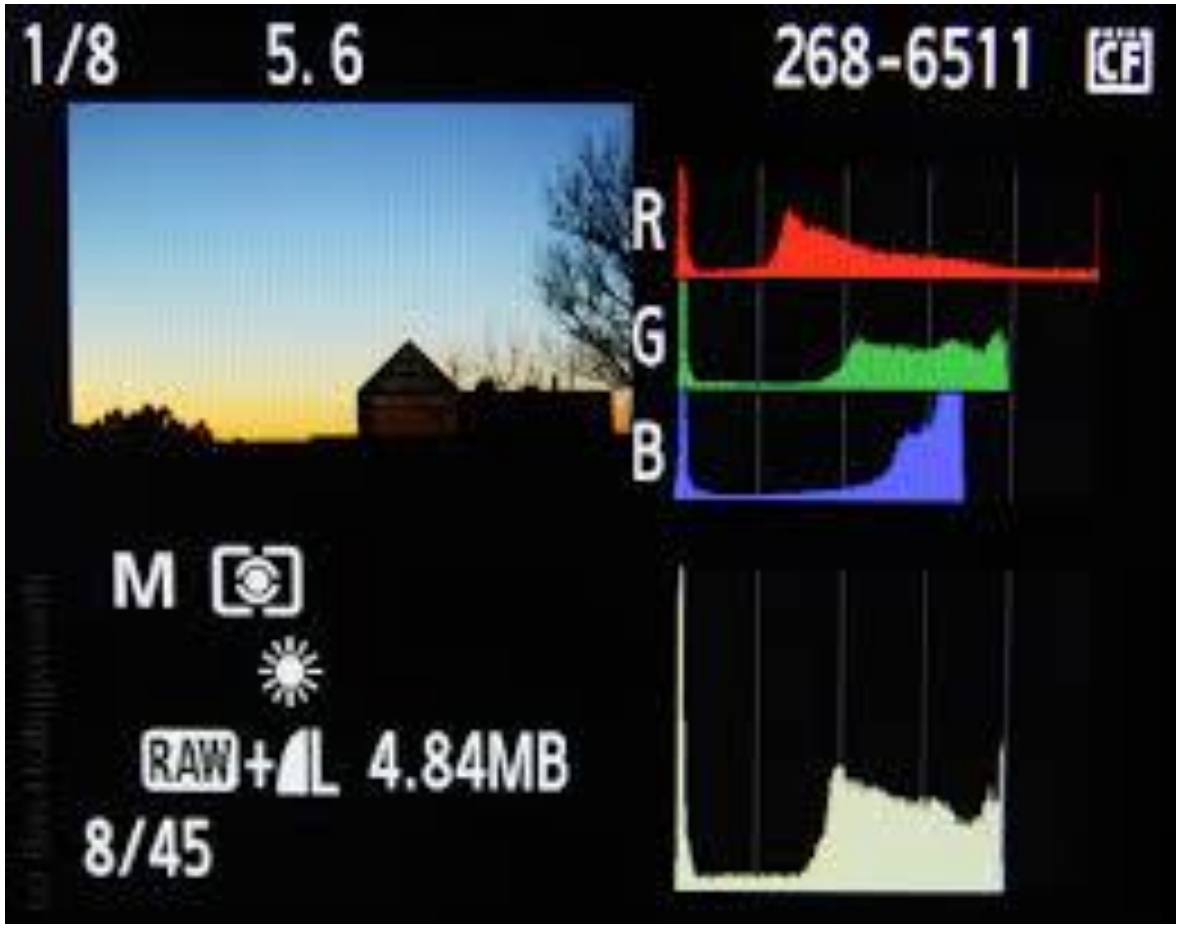
Filled small negative space with supporting focal point.

Light

- Make test shots. Check the histogram. Normally, the graph should stay between the right (light) and left (dark) sides and not climb up either side.
- Avoid shooting into the sun or other bright light, unless it is part of the story. It will ruin other images and possibly damage your lens.
- Learn how and when to use fill flash outdoors.
- Learn how to use multiple light sources.
- Learn how to adjust the intensity of your light sources and your exposure.
- If there are drastic differences in light intensity, use High Dynamic Range (HDR).

Camera Histogram





Shooting Angles

- Backlighting and shooting through another semi-opaque object or screen, with stronger light behind the object, is often very effective for flowers and leaves.
- Silhouettes result from placing a subject in front of a stronger light source and exposing for that light source.
- Shadows are best shot from an angle to the light source.
- A shot taken at a 90 degree angle to the light source can be quite effective for many types of images, but especially landscapes. Fill flash (flash set at a very low power) might be necessary for portraits.
- In shade, you can get an excellent image, though you might have to use a fill light.

Shooting into Sun for Effect (Panorama, most likely stitched from photos shot at different angles in Aperture Priority)

Sand dunes Death Valley National Park by Fikret Onal

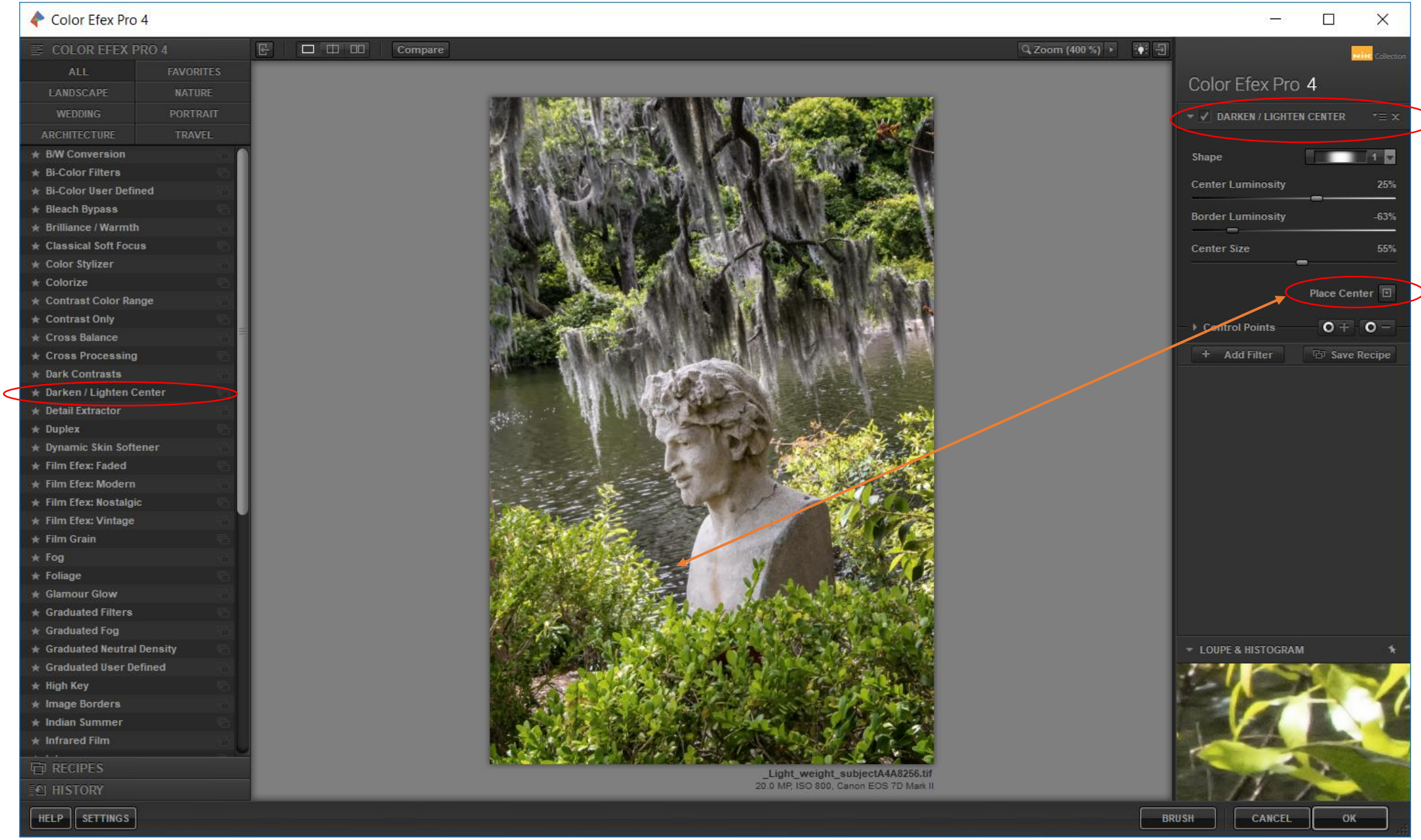
Backlit Tulips


Georgianna Diaz

Adjustment of light in post processing

Fairly even light,
taken in early afternoon

Visual weight of tree competes
With similarly weighted statue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COLOR EFEX PRO 4
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FAVORITES
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ARCHITECTURE
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B/W Conversion
Bi-Color Filters
Bi-Color User Defined
Bleach Bypass
Brilliance / Warmth
Classical Soft Focus
Color Stylizer
Colorize
Contrast Color Range
Contrast Only
Cross Balance
Cross Processing
Dark Contrasts
Darken / Lighten Center
Detail Extractor
Duplex
Dynamic Skin Softener
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Film Efex: Modern
Film Efex: Nostalgic
Film Efex: Vintage
Film Grain
Fog
Foliage
Glamour Glow
Graduated Filters
Graduated Fog
Graduated Neutral Density
Graduated User Defined
High Key
Image Borders
Indian Summer
Infrared Film
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DARKEN / LIGHTEN CENTER
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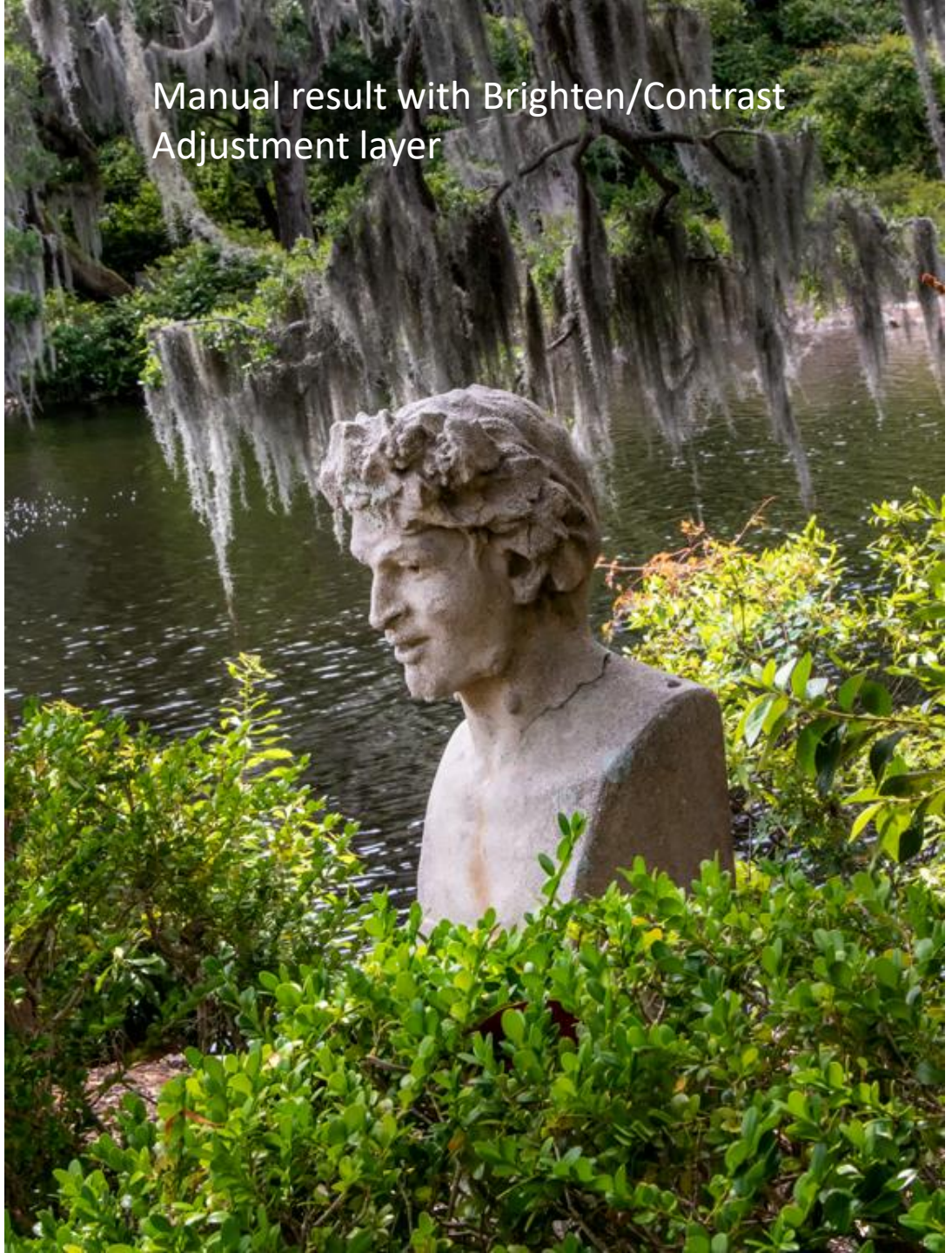
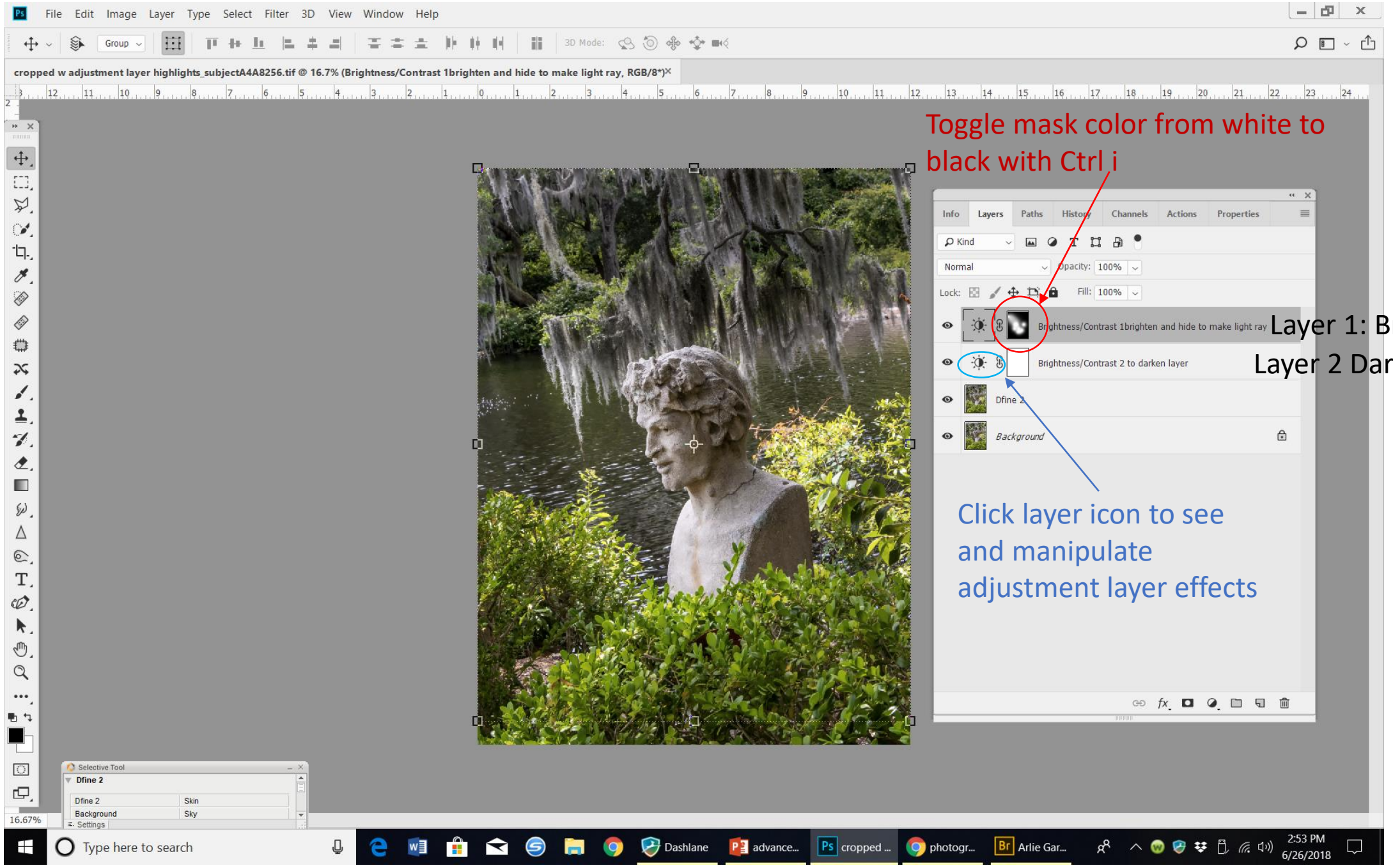
Center Luminosity
25%
Border Luminosity
-63%
Center Size
55%
Place Center
Control Points
Add Filter
Save Recipe
LOUPE & HISTOGRAM
HELP
SETTINGS
BRUSH
CANCEL
OK


NIK Darken/Lighten Center result


Manual result with Brighten/Contrast
Adjustment layer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Brightness/Contrast 2 to darken layer
Dfine 2
Background
Layer 1: Brighten
Layer 2 Darken
Click layer icon to see and manipulate adjustment layer effects
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Dfine 2
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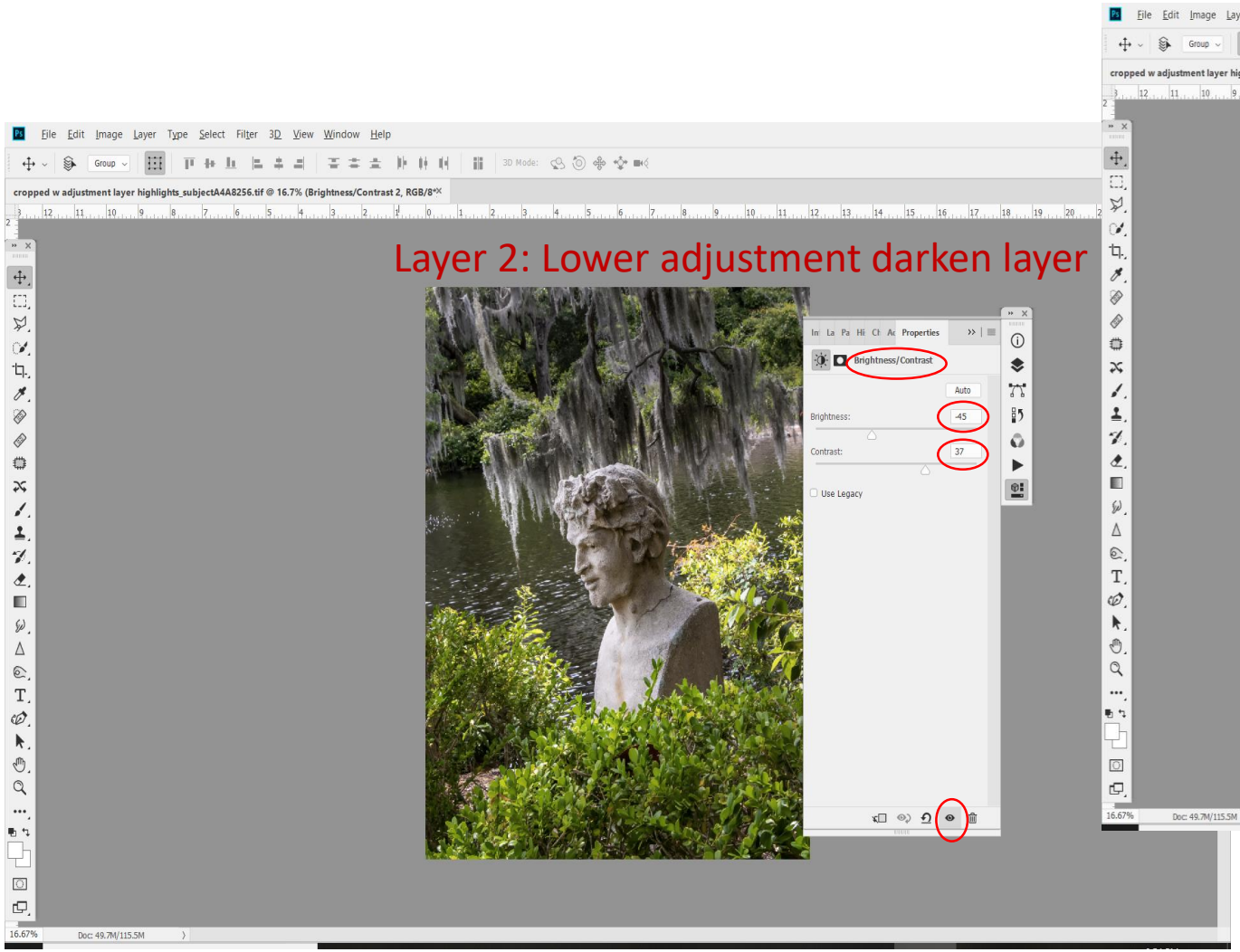
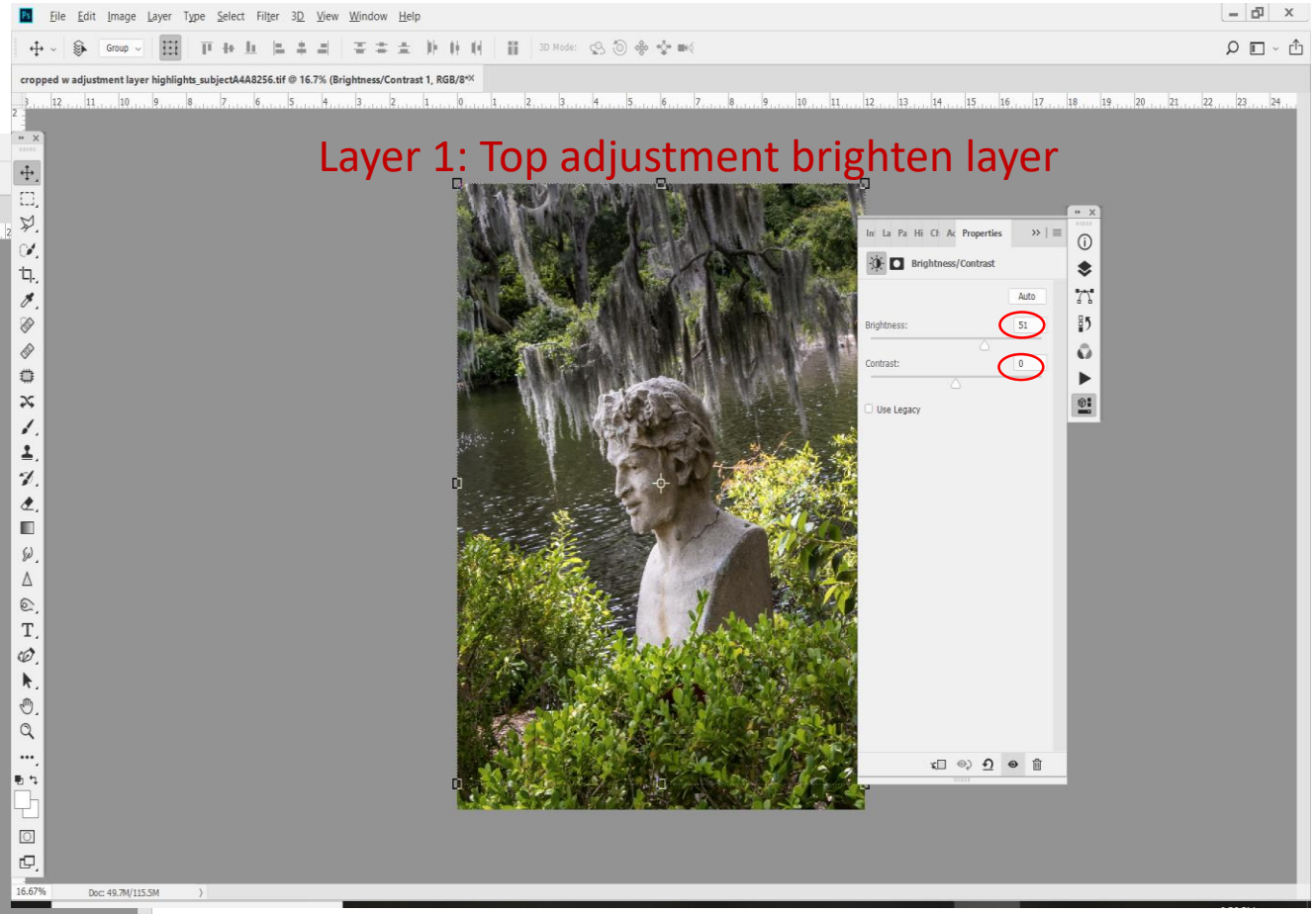
Adjustment Layer Effects, Layer 2, Layer 1





Special Techniques

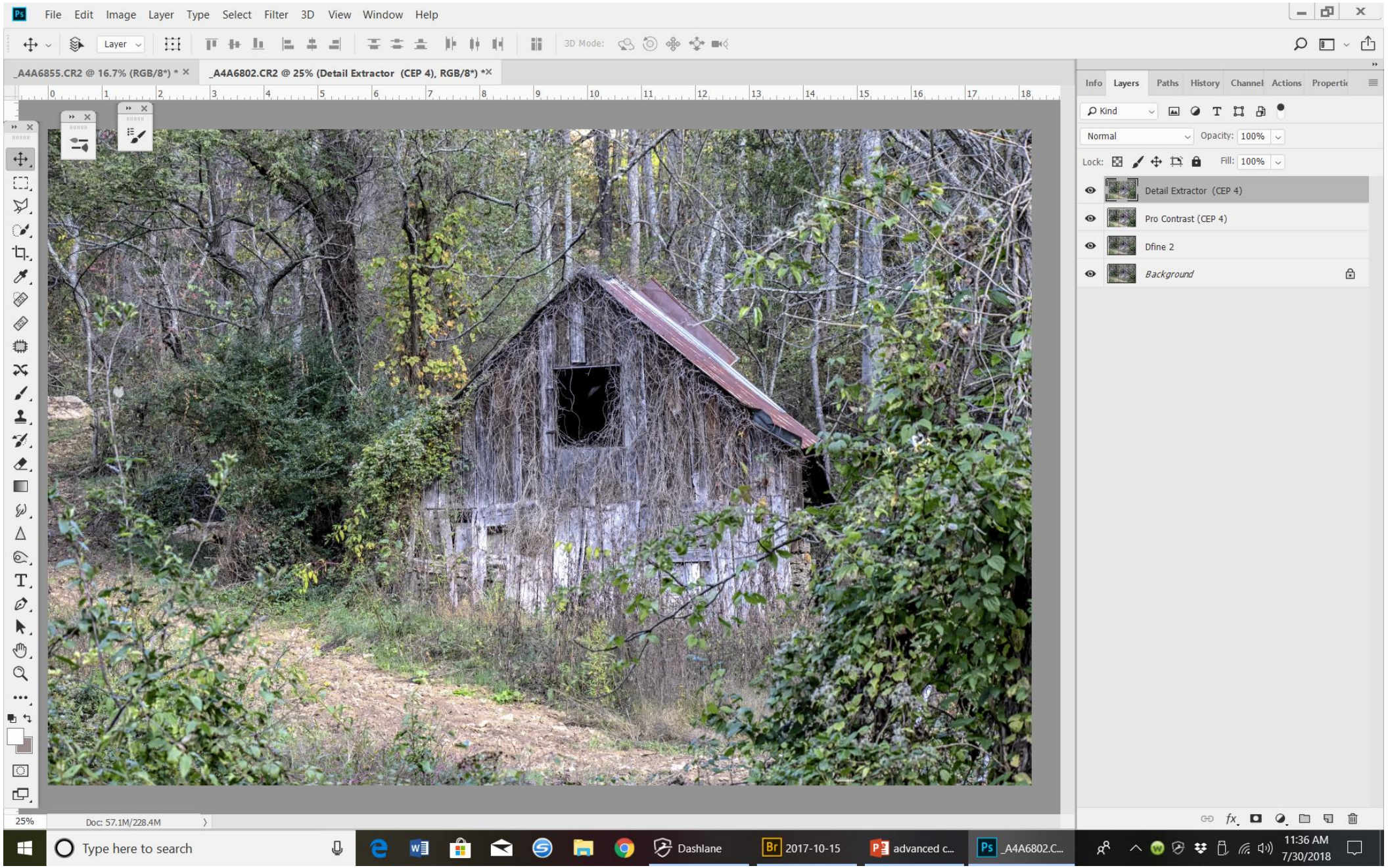
- Shooting Through

“Shooting Through”

Hold a semi-opaque object such as netting, other flowers, etc., close to lens while shooting another object further away.

Special Techniques

Add 3-D dimensionality with
light in post-processing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Opacity: 100%
Lock:
Fill: 100%
Detail Extractor (CEP 4)
Pro Contrast (CEP 4)
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Background
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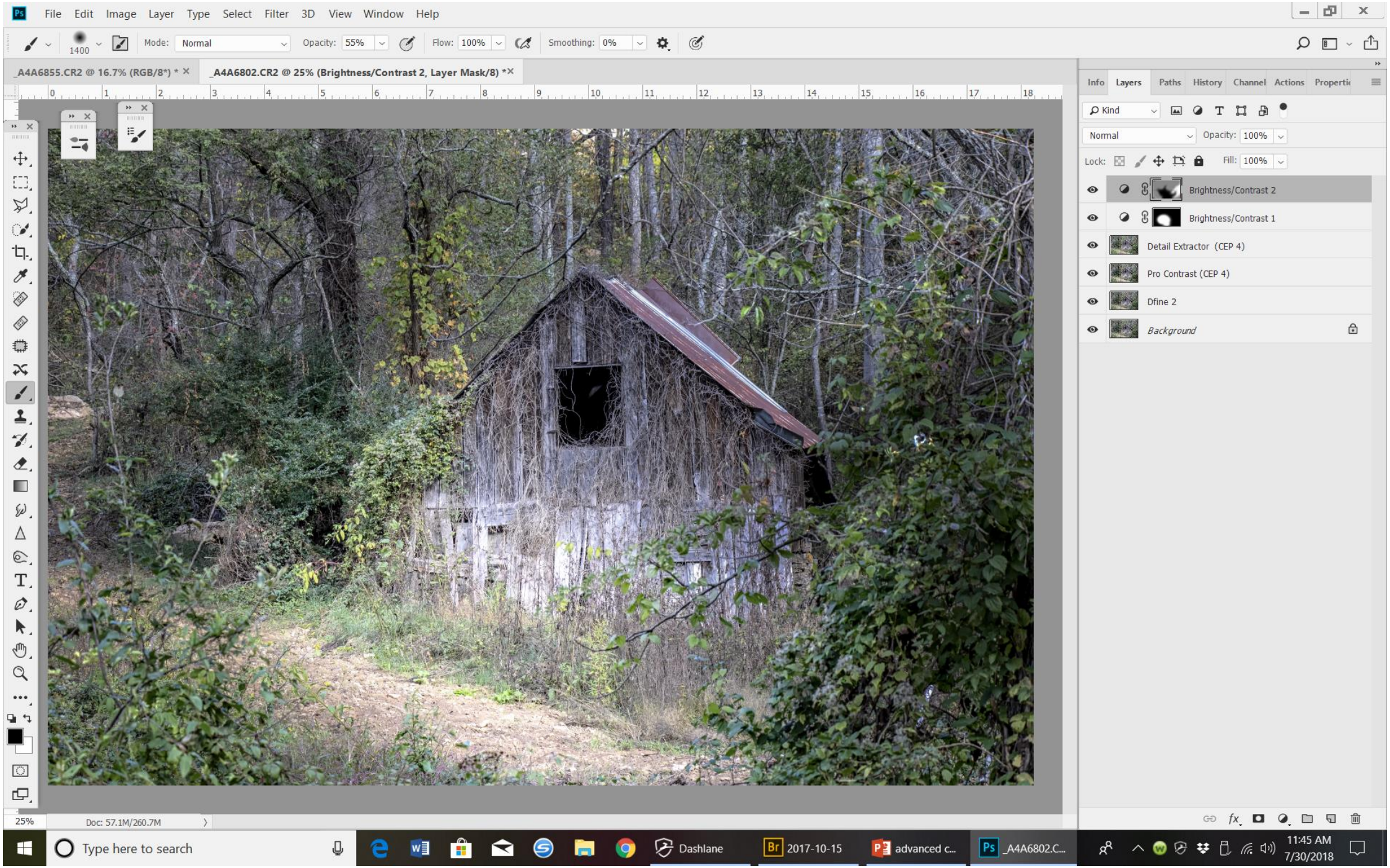
7/30/2018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Detail Extractor (CEP 4)
Pro Contrast (CEP 4)
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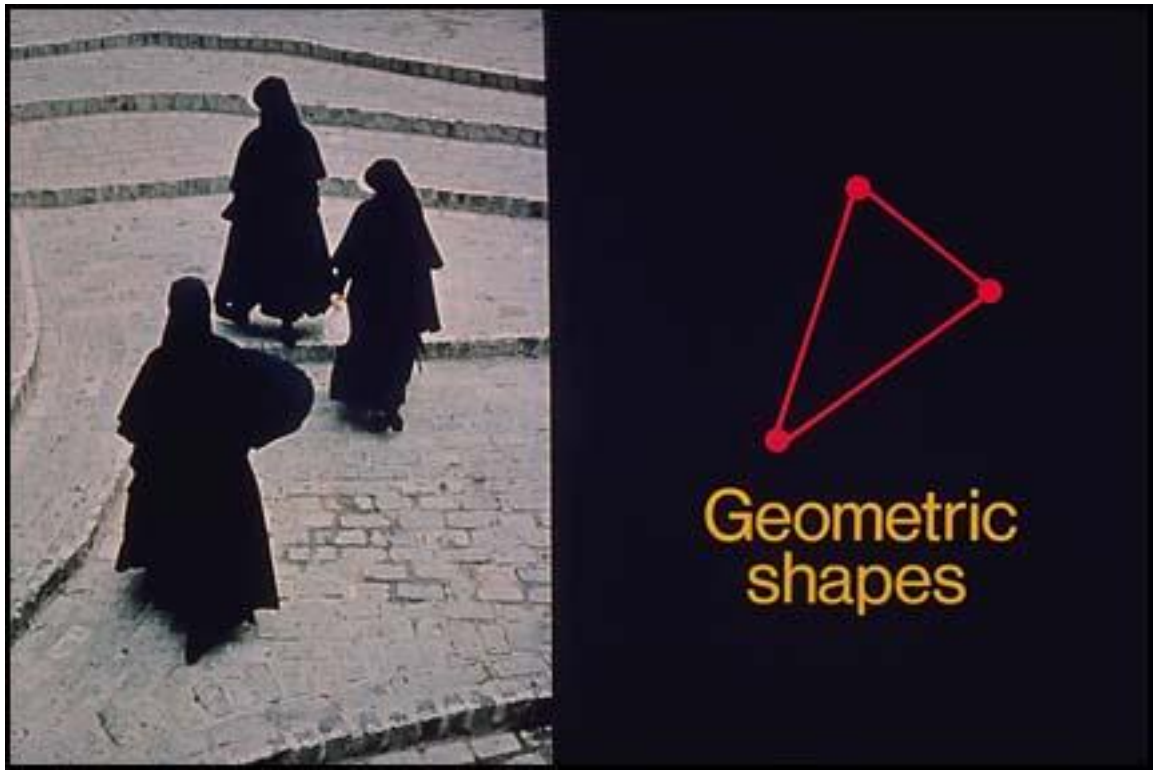
Look for graphical shapes, repetition, and eye leading spatial relationships

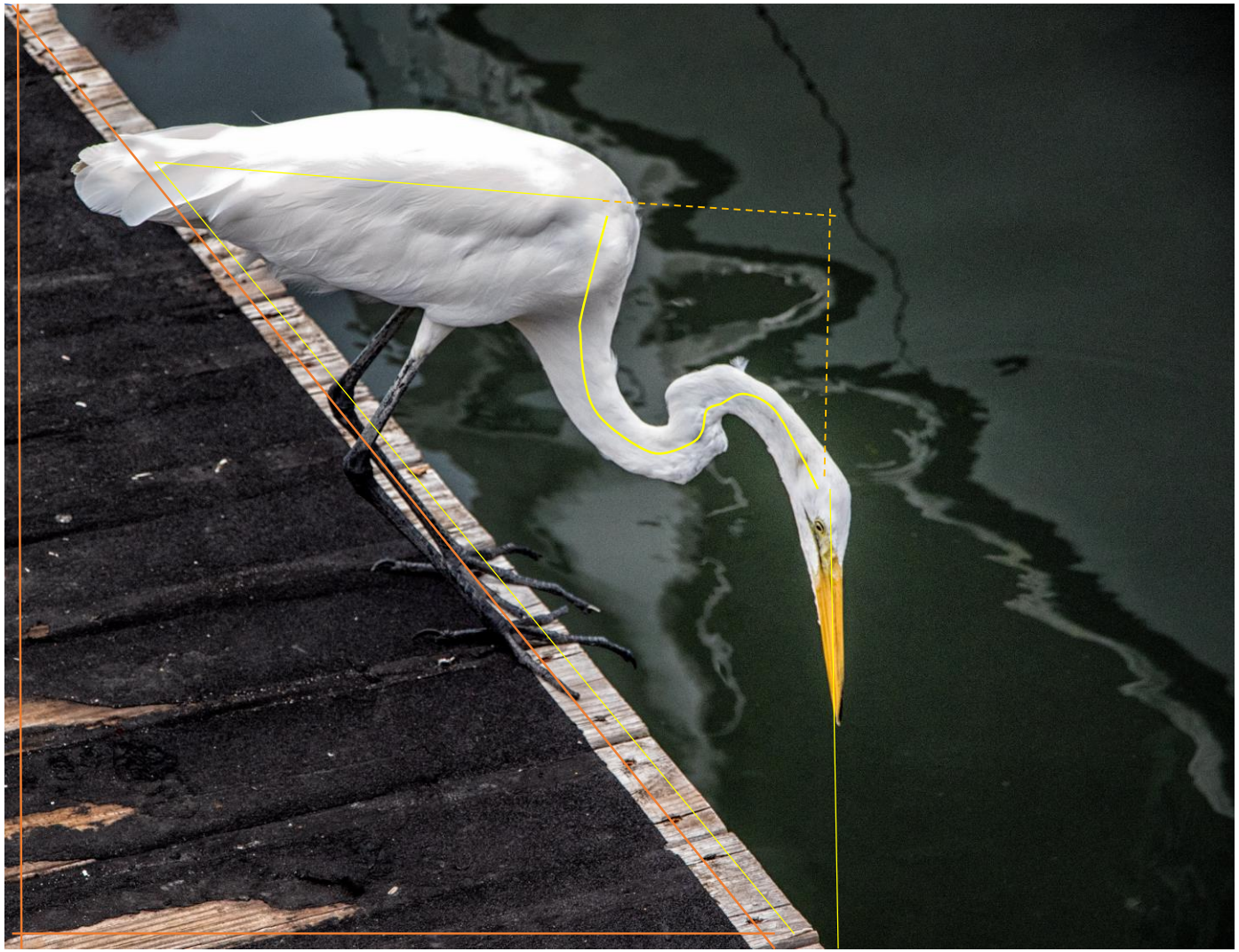
Look for Strong Shapes

Look for graphical elements and repetition

Triangular relationships between focal points are particularly effective

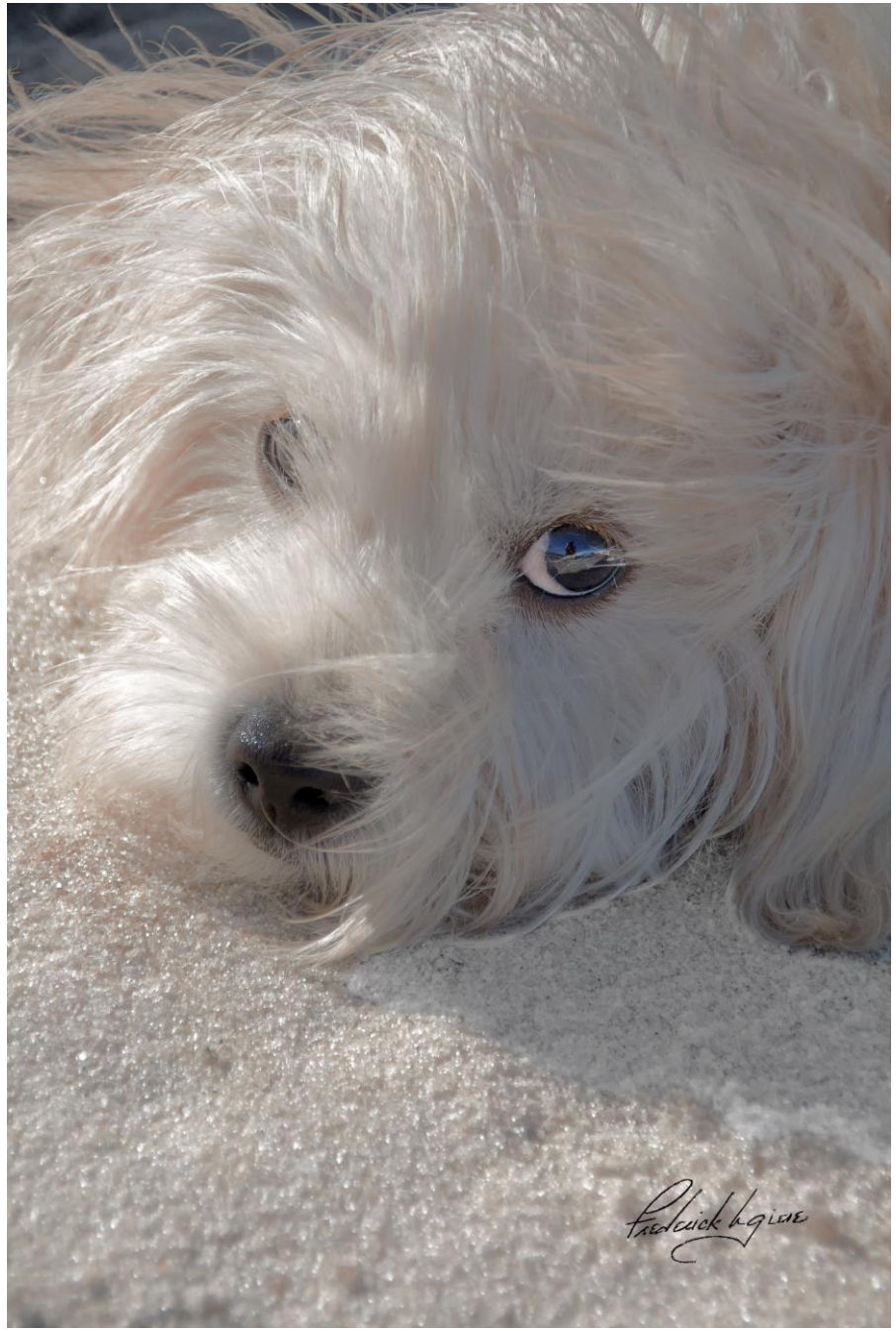


S curve combined with polygon shape



Pre-Visualize a Final Image Format

- Square a possibility for symmetric subjects
- Rectangular or panoramic as appropriate for the story
- Landscape with aspect ratio of 2 high and 3 wide
- Portrait with aspect ration of 3 high and 2 wide
- Circular for classic images
- If you don’t pre-visualize the final result aspect, you might have to crop to a non-standard final size, which is a disadvantage for prints.
- Inspect the edges for components that lead the eye out of the frame. Don’t include them in your image.
- Crop in camera: Frame your image with the guidelines for composition, so you don’t have to crop in post-processing. This requires the selection of a proper lens, among other things. Post-process cropping deletes pixels and reduces the pixel quality of the remaining image.




Frederick Lynch

Enjoy your practice!

Do it with photography friends, not people you would bore to death.

See as the camera sees.

Compose to really communicate your wonderful experience of beauty!

Reference:

Photzy.com
Advanced Composition by Kent DuFault