

Basic Aesthetics in Photography

When we talk about aesthetics, we mean that some things are generally more pleasing to the eye—whether it be in a photograph, painting, or sculpture.

One thing that often happens when discussing the quality of pictures is that people are self-conscious about their own photographic abilities, and therefore think they can't judge a picture. In my opinion, anyone can evaluate a picture and express whether they like it or not; you don't need to be an expert to convey your own views.

The difference between a photographer and anybody else is not their ability to notice beauty, it is that the photographer should also be able *explain* why some elements are pleasing while others are not. The understanding of aesthetics is ingrained in everybody. Anyone can see them, but only few can actually analyse a picture and are able to explain the compositional techniques to create a beautiful picture.

These techniques were not “invented” by some expert painters, they were discovered in many different disciplines. For example, the golden ratio is not only of importance in photography or paintings, but also in architecture, mathematics, and even in the arrangement of flowers. This means we can apply some of these universal rules to create pictures that, visually speaking, most human beings will find harmonic.

Compositional Elements

Leading Lines

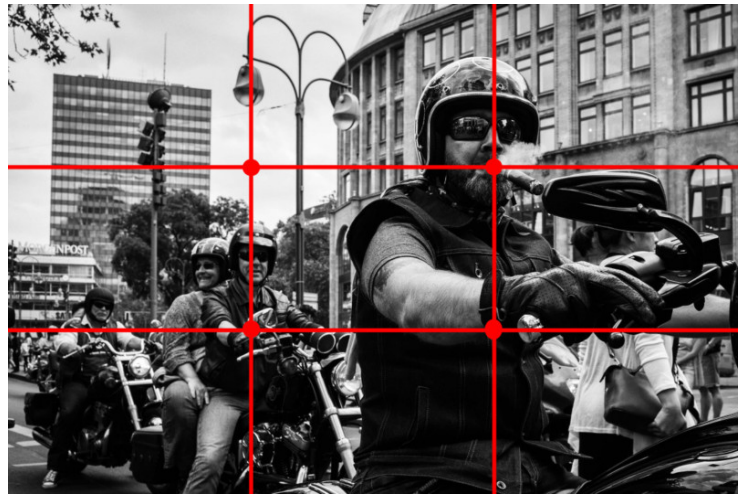


The viewer's eye is automatically led by lines and other geometrical figures. Leading lines help to put an emphasis on the subject, making them the centre of attention. If the natural eye movement can follow these lines and ends up on the subject, it gives a very harmonic impression. Conversely, fighting against this flow can be very stressful.

Rule of Thirds

Slightly different than the golden ratio, the rule of thirds is an approximation and divides the image in three areas. It is often more pleasing to place the subject slightly off-centre. This is not only meant in a horizontal aspect, meaning from left to right, but also in the vertical gradient from bottom to top.

This leaves us with four intersections (top left, top right, bottom left, bottom right) where we want to place subject “ideally.” In Street Photography, using the top coordinates allows us to show more from the subject, making them the most preferable points to focus our attention.



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Triangles

Geometrical symbols help to control the flow of the picture. They build a basic framework for the viewer to follow and create some dynamic movement because symbols like triangles or circles aren't a dead end.

Rule of Odds

The picture above already shows an example of three subjects that form a triangle. But it's not only three subjects that are pleasant for a viewer—5 or even 7 points of interest can increase the aesthetic value of the image tremendously. The psychology behind this odd rule is that even subjects are easy to organize, easy to pair (2,4,6 etc.), and this is an uninteresting task for our brain.



Breaking Symmetry



Having a symmetrical picture is a nice achievement, but a picture that is 100% symmetrical is too easy to comprehend. In order to make it more interestingly, you can simply use a subject very slightly off the sectional plane.

Create Depth

A sense of depth will make your shots look realistic and dynamic. Although photography is a two-dimensional art form, conveying depth can be done by utilizing perspective and finding the right angle.



Be conscious of how your foreground, mid-ground, and background elements work together — having them contrast each other will make the depth effect more pronounced.

Frame Within A Frame



This technique is a straightforward way to lock the viewer's focus on a specific point in the photo. Look for objects or structures around you that can act as a frame for your subject. Architectural elements such as hallways or arches and even trees can help narrow the viewer's attention.

Use Shapes and Textures

Look out for structures that form eye-catching shapes in contrast to its surroundings. You can often get nice geometric shots from architecture – walk around your city and take note of the buildings and spaces around. Punctuate unique shapes by including negative space in the frame, or by getting in close to the details.

