

# Reflections

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE STONY BROOK CAMERA CLUB



© Hali Sowle

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# UP CLOSE WITH THE PRESIDENT

## Cynde Cusack



The halfway point of the Boston Marathon! What joy and excitement this event brings. It was a cool, rainy day this past April when I went to photograph and cheer on the runners. Every year I've enjoyed photographing this grueling, exciting, athletic event. And the halfway point is a special place to be. After running over 13 miles, runners arrive in Wellesley. The crowds line the roadway waving signs, screaming out words of encouragement and ringing cow bells. The sound can be almost deafening! By the time runners pass Wellesley College and arrive at the halfway point amongst the shops and booming crowds you see many of the

runners beaming with joy. They made it halfway on their journey. Many of the cheering spectators don't know any of the runners, but are there to support and encourage them. Others, like the couple I happened to be standing next to, were there to hopefully catch a glimpse of someone they know. When this runner and the couple next to me saw each other, they were ecstatic. I just clicked away hoping I could get an image or two for them. And to me, the runner looked like all the hard work he had endured to get to that halfway part melted away when he saw his friends cheering him on. He left with a sprint and off to the finish line with a smile on his face.

While I was working on our family's 2023 photo book, I came across these images from the Marathon. And I thought, in a small way, it was symbolic – we are now halfway through our Stony Brook Camera Club's year. And what a first half it's been! As I reminisce about the first half of our club year, I'm filled with gratitude for all the collective efforts that have brought us here together. So many have played a vital role in shaping our club's success.

We started off our year with a fun opening night in person, reconnecting after our summertime hiatus. But the real start began during the summer weeks before the new year kicked off. During that time, our VP Amy Letourneau and the Programming Committee created our awesome programming for the entire year; Ellen Kawadler and Don Steele with the Workshop Committee crafted educational workshops with our talented members; Tony Mistretta and the Competition Committee set the competition schedule and

# UP CLOSE WITH THE PRESIDENT

## Cynde Cusack



lined up all our judges; David Marshak and the Technology Committee prepared for our in person and Zoom meetings; and Billi Manning our Secretary, Ed Gooltz our treasurer, and Charlene Gaboriault our webmaster all prepared for the upcoming year. As I began this year as your President, I was excited to get the journey going. This is not a journey done alone. There are many members who share their knowledge, skills and time to make our club what it is today and I thank them all!

And what meeting was the halfway point of this year – Cabin Fever. Cabin Fever was a wonderful meeting that echoed that of the runner in the marathon. We all worked hard to get there and enjoyed the journey, seeing and learning new things, inspired by each other, felt encouragement from others and got to celebrate by being together doing the thing that brought us all together – photography.

As we embark on the next half of our club's year, let's all capture moments of beauty, preserve memories, and enjoy our Stony Brook Camera Club friendships that enrich our lives. I'm so looking forward to all the great upcoming meetings, workshops, meetups, and events we have planned!

Thanks for all your enthusiasm, dedication, and commitments to our club. Here's to our second half of our journey – may it be filled with great adventures and achievements!

Looking forward to part two,

**Cynde**

# Art: What is it Good For?

By Donna Parker and Tom Amsterburg

Recently, we attended a thought-provoking lecture exploring the value of art. Among the various responses to the question being posed by the title of this article, we were struck by a quote attributed to Hippocrates: 'Art is long, life is short.'

This phrase encapsulates the notion that mastering an art form takes considerable time and dedication, while life itself is fleeting. It underscores the enduring nature of artistic or creative pursuits against the backdrop of our transient existence.

An extension of this idea is that while we cannot live longer, engaging with art in its myriad forms enriches and amplifies our experience of life. By appreciating the works of other artists and creating our own, we deepen our connection to the world around us. In this way our lives are fuller and richer.

Photography, in particular, possesses a unique power to help us to live more fully, to be more aware, and to be present in the current moment. When we pick up our cameras, we are not merely capturing images – we are capturing life itself, in all its beauty, complexity, and imperfection. We become keen observers of the world around us, attuned to the nuances of light and shadow, form and texture, emotion, and

expression. Photography trains us to notice details we might otherwise overlook.

In this edition of our newsletter, we are thrilled to showcase a diverse array of articles exploring different dimensions of our beloved art form. Pamela Ruby Russell shares her firsthand experiences from the original Woodstock event, delving into the intersection of music and photography. Joe Kennedy takes us on a captivating journey through the history of Scotty's Castle in Death Valley National Park, accompanied by wonderful imagery. Hali Sowle, whose work graces our cover, recounts her adventures in Costa Rica and shares some of her fabulous nature images with us. Lastly, Jim Borrebach discusses Gestalt principles and their profound impact on composition, offering invaluable insights and tips for enhancing your visual storytelling.

As always, we eagerly await your feedback on this issue of Reflections. Please share your thoughts on what resonates with you, what you'd like to see more of, and how we can continue to enrich your experience as part of our photography community.

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# Ginny Castro

## New Member Questionnaire

### 1. WHAT OR WHO BROUGHT YOU TO THE CLUB

I met two SBCC members through a night photography meetup and have enjoyed getting to know and shooting with them both. They mentioned the club and suggested that I check it out and I'm so glad I did!

I love the enthusiasm and energy of the club members and everyone's willingness to share their knowledge. I find the variety and quality of everyone's images inspirational and the fact that there are a lot of opportunities to shoot with fellow club members enriches the club experience.



### 2. WHAT KIND OF PHOTOGRAPHY DO YOU LIKE TO DO?

My photographic interests are varied and include night photography, long exposure photography, ICM, landscapes, and architecture. When I first tried night photography, I was intrigued by my camera's ability to capture things I couldn't see and to record things in motion. I have been doing night photography for many years and I am still captivated by night scenes.

I am starting to experiment with ND filters and daytime long exposure photography including moving water (the ocean and waterfalls). My ND filters have also expanded my ICM practice - capturing or introducing motion during the day.

### 3. WHERE IS YOUR FAVORITE PLACE TO PHOTOGRAPH?

My favorite place to photograph is Boston; I am drawn to the city and find myself returning time and again. The city is dynamic and full of energy; there is always something new to see and to photograph in the city. I can do architectural and macro photography in the same trip to the city, or any other combination of genres.

# Ginny Castro

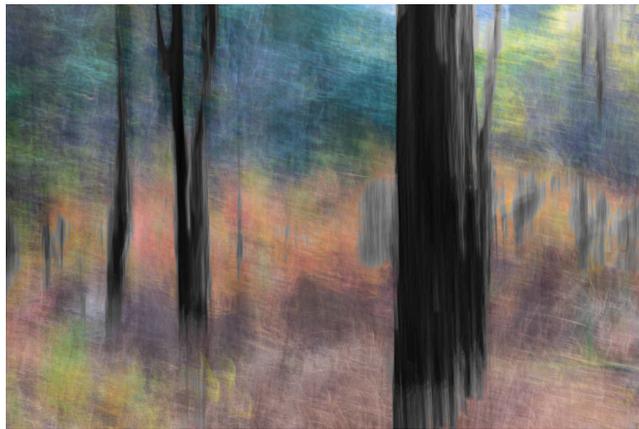
## 4. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO LEARN FROM THE CLUB AND ITS MEMBERS?

I look forward to joining in and organizing group shoots for the club. I have thoroughly enjoyed the club activities I've attended so far and have loved making new "photo friends".

I am always looking for opportunities to try or learn something new and to share the knowledge I have.

## 5. WHAT ELSE DO YOU WANT US TO KNOW ABOUT YOU?

I love to travel and I'm always up for an adventure. I have a number of "go to" photo locations, but I'm always looking for new places and things to shoot.



© Ginny Castro



MEET THE NEW MEMBER

# The Natural Beauty of Costa Rica

## By Hali Sowle



In June of 2023 my husband Mike and I went to Costa Rica for a workshop with Greg Basco. For those of you who saw Greg's presentation to the club last year you may remember his amazing images. Greg is one of the foremost nature photographers in Costa Rica, and he is an amazing teacher and workshop leader. He also has a wicked dry sense of humor which makes all of the trips extra fun. This was our third trip with Greg and like the first two it didn't disappoint. Costa Rica is an amazing place, not only for birds and wildlife but as a country, they use no fossil fuels to power their electric grid and are leaders

in conservation maintaining the integrity of their Cloud Forests to protect the water supply for the lowlands.

Each of our trips started in the capital of San Jose at the Hotel Bougainvillea, we always got there two days early because the grounds of the hotel are beautiful and well worth photographing. They have well tended gardens that attract butterflies and many types of birds as well as being one of the few remaining places that the endangered yellow-eyed leaf frog can be found. On our trip last June, a few of the other attendees showed up early and one knew a man who ran a sloth sanctuary on the outskirts of San Jose. Eight of us went there and spent a great day with the animals.

Our trips followed mostly the same plan: we spent a few days in the lowland rainforest, mostly photographing birds, although we did do some macro work as well. This last trip we had some special experiences with king vultures from a blind one morning and then bats at night. A different trip we went to the Tarcoles river and did boat tours. After a few days in the

# The Natural Beauty of Costa Rica

By Hali Sowle

warm lowlands we moved to the Arenal Volcano, stopping along the way at a Macaw Sanctuary where we had fun photographing both scarlet and the highly endangered green Macaw's.

We did lots of macro and small reptile work up at the volcano. Greg has worked with a local who does reptile rescues and they have an amazing area to do setups in. All the animals we photographed for macro were wild and were returned to their natural habitat. We photographed red-eyed tree frogs, poison-dart frogs, glass frogs, eyelash vipers, katydids, boa constrictors, walking sticks and even a setup that included the extremely venomous fer-de-lance, from a very safe distance away. We worked a lot with flash and making flash look natural, I said before that Greg is an amazing teacher and he was incredibly patient with us explaining the why's and hows of using the flash off camera. On our down time we photographed around the Arenal Observatory lodge which had extensive, beautiful grounds full of hummingbirds and flowers.

Our third stop was the cloud forests and this

was all about the hummingbirds, although we did photograph other birds and some landscapes, especially at the amazing waterfall Catarata del Toro. So many types of hummingbirds: green violet-ears, white-throated mountain gems, green-crowned brilliants and many more.

If you care to see more of Costa Rica and many more of Mike's and my images please visit: <http://www.hali.org/Vacations/> there is a drop down filter for Costa Rica.

Here are a small example of some of the things we saw and photographed:



**Blue-Crowned Motmot**

# The Natural Beauty of Costa Rica

By Hali Sowle



**Red-legged Honeycreeper**



**Keel-Billed Toucan**



**Red-eyed Tree Frog**



**Cataratadeltoro**

# The Natural Beauty of Costa Rica

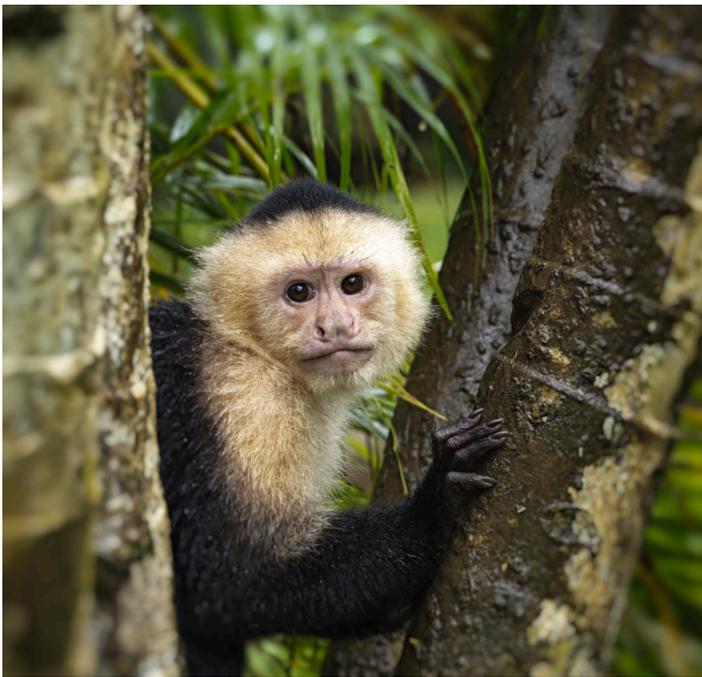
By Hali Sowle



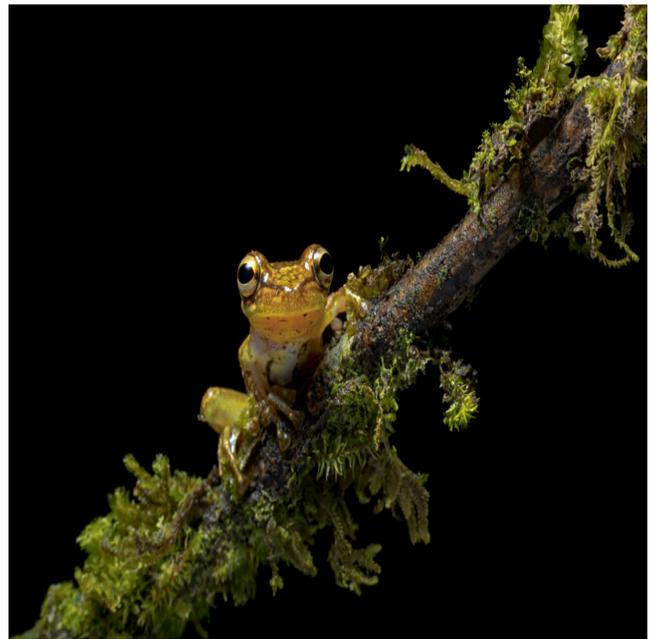
**King Vulture**



**Yellow-Eyed Leaf Frog**



**Capuchin Monkey**



**Glass Frog**

# The Natural Beauty of Costa Rica

## By Hali Sowle



**Fer-de-Lance**



**Blue Jeans Poison Dart Frog**



**Collared Aracari**



**Olive-Backed Euphonia**

# Scotty's Castle: A Death Valley Side Trip

By Joe Kennedy

Believe it or not there is a national park inside of a national park! Scotty's Castle, also known as the Death Valley Ranch lies within the confines of Death Valley N. P.



**Scotty's Castle**

A visit here is like walking back to the Roaring Twenties as witnessed by the design, decorations and artifacts on display throughout the national park. One unique difference at Scotty's Castle is that the park rangers do not wear the traditional uniform of the NPS. Here they are allowed to don garments typical of that era.

**Ranger Holly**



So, who was Scotty and how did he manage to get a castle built in a national park?

It all began with Albert Johnson who had the "house" built as a vacation spot for his wife and himself. The dry desert air was good for Albert's broken back, and after a while he seemed more amused by Scotty's antics than his concern for the money Scotty had swindled. Albert and his wife Bessie spent many winters in Death Valley, and eventually she requested they build a home that would make their visits more comfortable. In 1922 the couple started construction on the castle, where they built space for Scotty to live as well. Significant work on the castle had already been completed when the Johnsons discovered that the castle had accidentally been built on federal land instead of the land Johnson had purchased.

**Death Valley Ranch**



# Scotty's Castle: A Death Valley Side Trip

By Joe Kennedy

So how does Scotty fit into this story?? Well, Scotty was an ex-Buffalo Bill trick rider and learned well from the showman the art of publicity and how to use it to promote himself. And, that he did - as a rich gold miner from the mysterious Death Valley with a fabulous secret gold mine. This cowboy was able to sell the wealthy a bill of lies about his secret mines. His wealthy friends were constantly backing Scotty financially. The lies continued and Scotty enjoyed the life of luxury. The only problem was, Scotty didn't own a single mine and never intended to!



**Prospector Vane**

Albert Johnson, who had poured thousands into Scotty's operation, discovered there was NO gold when he visited Death Valley! Despite being swindled, he struck up a life long

friendship with the cowboy. The desert environment proved beneficial for Johnson's health and Scotty's stories were a pleasant distraction for the wealthy benefactor.



**Two Fer**

Castle unique feature - "A Two-fer" (If the residents expected trouble this interesting device might help. From inside a gun would be positioned on the other side of this metal door hanging. The bullet was intended to "split" taking out two of the intruders! Not sure if it actually worked but I like the ingenuity.) The Johnsons gave the castle to the Gospel Foundation upon their deaths in the 1940s. Scotty was allowed to live there until he died in 1954. He was subsequently buried on a nearby hillside. In 1970, the National Park

# Scotty's Castle: A Death Valley Side Trip

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Service purchased the property and began to offer tours of the "castle." Visitors now had a chance to see the interior furnishings, the tile work throughout the ranch, and the architecture of the structure.



**Porcelain Electric Toaste**



**Scotty and Johnson Dish**

Not the end of the story though as on the night of October 18, 2015, Scotty's Castle received 2.75 inches of rain— a year's worth of rain within a mere five hours. This followed a half-inch of rain the day before. The rain and hail fell on the steep slopes of Grapevine Canyon and quickly caused a flash flood of mud and rocks headed towards Scotty's Castle

flowing at an estimated 3,200 cubic feet per second.

The most severely damaged historic building was the garage, which functioned as the site's Visitor Center. The flood broke through windows, doors, and even walls. The flood left four feet of mud and rocks inside the building. An architectural/engineering firm has designed repairs. Due to a structural fire on April 22 of 2021, the Historic Garage was completely lost.



**Former garage converted into the Visitor Center destroyed in the 2021 fire**

The National Park Service conducted a business analysis to determine the course of action that most benefits the historic district and visitors. It was determined that structural reconstruction would be the most appropriate

# Scotty's Castle: A Death Valley Side Trip

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response to fulfill the future needs of Scotty's Castle Historic District. An alternate means for visitor services is being planned until the reproduction Garage is completed. In October 2019, the National Park Service and the California State Historic reservation Officer signed an agreement on how to mitigate impacts to the historic building and its artifacts. All of the contents were carefully wrapped and securely moved to an off-site location with proper ventilation and climate control as the infrastructure was all lost in the flooding.



**Inside the Castle Tower**

Reopening for Scotty's Castle is currently slated for 2024, nearly ten years after the Great Flood.

Joe Kennedy



**DVR Dinnerware Display**

# Stony Brook Camera Club Volunteers!

Images from 2023 - 2024



CONTRIBUTION

Christmas Photographs organized by Community Care Alliance

© Nancy Paradee, Billi Manning, and Lucia Hackett

# Stony Brook Camera Club Volunteers!

Images from 2023-2024

SBCC Volunteers! covered a wonderful event in January. Lantern-making workshops for Bellforge Arts Center's March 2 Lantern Parade and Festival were held on the grounds of the Medfield State Hospital, site of the planned new performing arts center. The two lantern-making workshops were taught by Gowri Savoor, visual and teaching artist and co-founder of "A River of Light Runs Through Your Town." A River of Light brings the joy and magic of lantern parades to local communities and organizations through social engagement, creative art-making and celebratory events. SBCC Volunteers! photographers were Sue Shirley, Suzanne Blake and Elizabeth Siftar.

© Sue Shirley, Suzanne Blake, Elizabeth Siftar



Lantern Making Workshop

# Stony Brook Camera Club Volunteers!

Images from 2023 - 2024



© Elizabeth Siftar



© Sue Shirley



© Sue Shirley



© Elizabeth Siftar

# Stony Brook Camera Club Volunteers!

Images from 2023 -2024

NEADS - National Education for Assistance Dog Services.

© Stephanie Sioras



NEADS Pulling 4 Paws Truck Pull 2023



Graduation Ceremony 2023

# Gestalt Principles in Photographic Composition

By Jim Borrebach

## INTRODUCTION

One of the primary things that I love about photography is how a group of photographers in the same place at the same time can take such a wide variety of photographs that are all different, yet visually compelling. We each bring our own personal life experiences to our photography, we “see” differently and we have differing interests. Photography is very personal.

*“The camera points both ways. Images reflect the light that the photographer brings to the relationship.” – Freeman Patterson*

*“Photography is an art of observation. It has little to do with the things you see and everything to do with the way you see them.” – Elliot Erwitt*

There are many components involved in making a compelling photograph.

Technical mastery of your camera, the use of color, texture, contrast, etc., post processing techniques, and composition all play a part. When it comes to composition, there are many rules: The Rule of Thirds; The Golden Ratio; Rule of Odds; Keep the Horizon Level or the

Subject out of the center; and on and on. Personally, I am not a big fan of “rules” or “laws” in photography, but rather in using them as concepts or guidelines in composing a photograph.

*“Now to consult the rules of composition before making a picture is a little like consulting the laws of gravity before going for a walk.” - Edward Weston*

*“Beauty can be seen in all things. Seeing and composing the beauty is what separates the snapshot from the photograph.” - Matt Hardy*

My purpose in writing this article is to provide you with a framework of composition techniques, in this instance the Gestalt Principles, so that you can consider them while making photographs. My purpose is not to present them as rules or laws that must be followed without exception but rather as guidelines that you can use in your photography. Hopefully, as you learn about and use the various principles of composition, including the Gestalt Principles, in your photography they will become engrained in your thought processes, and you won't necessarily need

# Gestalt Principles in Photographic Composition

By Jim Borrebach

to consciously consider them.

*“We need to understand technique so well that we are freed from its constraints and liberated to pursue our vision.” - John Barclay*

## GESTALT THEORY

Gestalt is defined by Merriam Webster Dictionary as: *something that is made of many parts and yet is somehow more than or different from the combination of its parts.* Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka and Wolfgang Kohler developed Gestalt Theory in Germany during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to describe how humans perceive stimuli and organize them into something meaningful.

Gestalt Theory suggests that the brain will try to arrange and organize complex sensory information into a coherent whole, rather than as disparate parts.

Gestalt Theory has many applications in photography and can be used generally or specifically in photographic composition. It also has many other applications, including in psychology, but we will concentrate primarily on its use in photographic composition.

## GESTALT PRINCIPLES

Some of the Gestalt Principles that have relevance in photography include:

**Figure/Ground:** How we perceive the relationship between the

subject (figure) and the background (ground).

**Proximity:** How we perceive elements that are near one another.

**Similarity:** How we perceive objects that share certain characteristics, such as color, shape, and/or texture.

**Continuity:** How we perceive lines or curves in a scene.

**Closure:** Our tendency to complete fragmented or incomplete information.

**Pragnanz:** We prefer and interpret images in simple organized forms. Also known as Simplicity.

## GESTALT PRINCIPLES AND THEIR USE IN PHOTOGRAPHY

### Figure/Ground

In the Figure/Ground principle, the “figure” is the subject of the photograph, and the “ground” is everything else or the background. Our brain uses differences in contrast, color, focus and texture, among others, to discern the subject of an image. We associate figure as the positive space and the background as negative space.

# Gestalt Principles in Photographic Composition

By Jim Borrebach

We typically want the figure to stand out from the ground. There are several ways to achieve this separation:

We can use selective focus or a wide aperture to keep the subject in focus while allowing the background to be out of focus or use complementary or analogous colors to highlight the subject. We are typically attracted to the area of highest contrast in an image first, so making the subject either the lightest or the darkest object in the image, and avoiding competing light or dark areas, will help viewers visualize the subject.



In this image, the canoeist is a very small portion of the overall image yet is immediately perceived as the subject due to the human form, and the high contrast between the canoeist (figure) and everything else (ground). Our eyes are immediately drawn to the human figure despite the small size. The foggy

surroundings (ground) impart a calming effect to the scene. As I was taking this picture, I perceived the canoeist as a lone figure in a much wider/larger world, moving towards the unknown, yet with an overall calm feel. It remains one of my favorite photographs, and is hanging on a wall in my home.



The elephant silhouette is the figure and the surrounding plain, hills, and sky are the ground. While the elephant lacks any detail other than its outline, the outline is so familiar to us that we immediately know and recognize it. The dusty surroundings, enhanced by the numerous safari vehicles traveling near the scene, added to the atmosphere and overall mood of the photo. In post processing, I darkened the grass in the lower portion of the photo as I wanted the elephant to appear to be emanating from and connected to its

# Gestalt Principles in Photographic Composition

By Jim Borrebach

surroundings. It was truly a stunning moment in a stunning place, and my favorite photograph from my recent safari in Kenya.

## Proximity

The principle of proximity suggests that objects that are close to one another are perceived as being related more than if they were far apart.

The objects don't necessarily need to be similar to one another in shape, color, texture, etc. but, as long as they are in close proximity then they could be considered as one subject.

The principle of proximity can also create confusion in discerning the subject of the photo. I don't know about you, but I have a lot of photos with unsightly lightpoles/trees and other things in the immediate background such that the proximity of the objects detracts from our perception of the main subject.



In this image, the subject is clearly the bee and

the mountain mint flower primarily due to their proximity to one another and as both are in focus. In preparing to shoot this photograph, I purposely positioned myself where there was nothing distracting behind the bee and flower. The background was rendered out of focus and doesn't intrude into/onto or detract from the subject of the image.



The proximity of mommy and baby giraffe causes us to group them into one subject. However, despite using a telephoto lens with a fairly wide aperture, there was minimal separation between the subject (the giraffes) and the background, especially the trees growing out of momma giraffe (two out of her neck and one out of her backside – I overdid myself!), which makes it more difficult to clearly identify the specific subject (Figure/Ground). This image was less successful than if there

# Gestalt Principles in Photographic Composition

By Jim Borrebach

had been a greater separation between the subject and background.

## Similarity

The principle of similarity suggests that objects that are similar in color, shape, size, and/or texture are more related to one another than elements that are different. Similar objects are more likely to be perceived as a group rather than as individual elements.



We approached the flamingos on the shore of Lake Bogoria slowly and carefully so as not to disturb them as wildlife photography ethics dictate. A later arriving group was not so thoughtful and rushed right up to the water's edge causing a mass takeoff. I took advantage of the situation. In this image, the flamingos' similarity to one another tends to make us group them together as a whole, rather than

focusing on any individual bird. Grouping in this way helps the viewer perceive the energy and action in the scene.



An overlap between the animals, along with a slow shutter speed and panning were used to photograph this foursome of wildebeest causing us to group them together as one subject. One of the shots on my "shotlist" while in Africa recently was to make a picture like this to replicate an old cave painting. Most of the wildebeest were stationary (they were busy eating), and this one group was the best that I saw. How'd I do?

## Continuity

The principle of continuity is based on our perception of lines and curves in an image, and how we follow them beyond the end of the line, curve, or image. This principle basically

# Gestalt Principles in Photographic Composition

By Jim Borrebach

describes leading lines, which are used to direct the viewer's eyes through the image.

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In this multi-club competition winning image from Fort Rosecrans National Military Cemetery in San Diego, the arrangement of the gravestones forms lines that direct our eyes through the image both along the rows and along diagonals so that we take in the large number of grave sites, and hopefully gain insight into what was given by so many who have sacrificed so much for our country and for each of us.



In this image of the Borrego Badlands taken from Font's Point at Anza Borrego State Park in California, the curvilinear washes and the ridgelines help guide our eye into and through the scene. The crepuscular rays highlight areas of the scene directing our eye further into the background and we intuitively understand where the sun was located even though it wasn't included in the scene; all of which help to enhance a three-dimensional feel to the two-dimensional photograph.

## Closure

The principle of closure relates to the mind's ability to form shapes out of incomplete information. Including incomplete forms and shapes in a photograph can help to hold the viewer's interest, and help the viewer to understand the primary subject of the photograph.



# Gestalt Principles in Photographic Composition

By Jim Borrebach

In this image, the primary subject consists of a stump forming a triangle on top of two boulders forming a rough circle and rectangle (well, more like a pentagon). Even though these shapes are incomplete, we visualize them as being completed. The autumn colors, trees and fog add visual interest, but the subject is clearly the stump and boulders. I arranged the subject centrally in the image, which is against some of the “rules” of composition, due to the strong graphic components of the boulders and stump.



This Image-of-the-Year winning photo of a family of Great Blue Herons illustrates the principle of closure in a couple ways; the crossed bills and curved necks of the adults form a heart shape, and the bodies of the adults and the nest form a circle around the two chicks. The pointed bill of the bird on the

right, and the extended wing of the bird on the left also form leading lines directing our view downward to the chicks.

## Pragnanz

The principle of pragnanz or simplicity, suggests that when we are confronted with complex shapes or ambiguous elements, we will interpret them in the simplest and easiest manner possible. Personally, this is a principle that I strive to include in my photography.



In this image of lily pads and stems, the overall components include only the circular leaf forms and curvilinear stems. In post processing, I underexposed the background to remove distractions and to allow the viewer to concentrate solely on the graphical quality of the image. I found the curvilinear arrangement of the stems particularly alluring.

# Gestalt Principles in Photographic Composition

By Jim Borrebach



In this image of a birch tree in full autumn splendor, I simplified the photo by eliminating much of the surroundings, which would have been distracting, and concentrated on the form and texture of the tree trunk and branches and the color of the leaves as a fractal pattern, all of which simplified what could have been a more complex and distracting image.

## SUMMARY

Understanding and using compositional guidelines, such as the Gestalt Principles, the Rule of Thirds, and many others, can help us take more visually compelling photographs by maintaining/increasing viewer interest in the scene. These guidelines should not be taken as rules to be followed without fail but, rather as general concepts as we consider how best to photograph a scene to express the thoughts and feelings we are experiencing and want to impart to the viewer.

Think about the Gestalt Principles and other composition techniques and incorporating them into your photography. Don't worry if you struggle, or if doesn't come together right away. As Eliot Porter said:

*"You learn to see by practice. It's just like playing tennis, you get better the more you play. The more you look around at things, the more you see. The more you photograph, the more you realize what can and can't be photographed. You just have to keep doing it."*

And finally,

*"No [person] has the right to dictate what other [people] should perceive, create or produce, but all should be encouraged to reveal themselves, their perceptions and emotions, and to build confidence in the creative spirit."* Ansel Adams

Don't be afraid to try new things; keep working on developing your vision by making photographs that you love of scenes that have personal meaning for you. Others might get it or they might not but, don't let that stop you. Get out there and shoot. Have fun!

# Woodstock 1969 and Beyond

By Pamela Ruby Russell

What bliss! Yes, I was at THE Woodstock in 1969 and have a super photo to prove it! The iconic and beloved late photographer, Baron Wolman was responsible for the lion's share of photographs memorializing Woodstock as well as the Rolling Stone Magazine's Special Editors' Edition documenting the giants in music who performed for 500,000 festival goers and helped change a generation, or two, three....! His photo of me in the magazine's Special Edition, the blond in the white pants sitting with some folks on the Bridge to the Groovy Way has been for me, a touchstone and a reminder throughout my life, of what more could be possible if respect, love, kindness and generosity were the norm. Before Mr. Wolman passed, we had communicated online and became friends on social media. I had been bugging him to check and see if he in fact was the photographer that had taken my photo with a few other folks. Finally, he called me, and kindly sent me original prints of the photo. It only took a ten-year exchange of emails, but I feel so lucky to have had those talks and emails. What a life he led. What a gift! Sadly, we did not get to meet in person, but we had some wonderful phone conversations.

This past week I was asked to be part of an interview project being conducted by the Museum at Bethel Woods, in Bethel, NY. The new Woodstock Museum in upper New York State is located on the same farmland where music rang out across the hills and fields so many years ago. The head curator was my interviewer and of course, one of the very first questions he asked me was, "where were you living in 1969?" Well, I was in between schools, caring for my mother, learning how to take photographs, and I went Woodstock. But the actual address of where I was living... it totally escaped me in the interview. What I did recall was what was happening in my life prior to Woodstock. I needed Woodstock. I could be so much more than where I was at with it. We had Vietnam and horrific segregation. In April of 1968 we lost Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. We as women had illegal, deadly abortions if we could get them. And many middle-aged adults were caught in the major swing of the pendulum. Life was changing so rapidly back then.

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I borrowed a pair of white pants from a stranger after a mud bath. White pants at Woodstock? Were they yours? I got to sit right up-front during Jimi Hendrix' sunrise anthem performance! Actually, I woke up to his magic. Later that year I saw him perform at Midnight on New Year's Eve at the Fillmore East. I also saw Janis perform a second time as I had also seen her perform at the old World's Fair in Flushing, Queens, NY early on as she careened towards lofty heights of a way too short career.

Oh, that whole weekend in August 1969 was life changing. A whole world of possibilities, being an artist, living an alternative lifestyle, feeling like there were no strangers... Life did change for me AFTER Woodstock! A world of possibilities opened up for me. got into photography. I HAD always been a writer of poetry and short stories, but between working at a record store, the Record Hunter in NYC as the first cassette buyer and going to lots of live concerts at the Fillmore East, I eventually started humming melodies to my poetry. On my rather circuitous journey I became a songwriter, a photographer and writer, with some world traveling and music school to keep me inspired and learning. Starting in the 1980's and on I released several collections of my songs along with photographs for each song. And a camera was always on my neck or in one of my huge sacks I carried around.

Woodstock and the powers of music and photography, all forms of authentic and honest creative expression, can bring people together in peace, love and harmony! This belief has stuck with me all these decades. That's what I experienced at Woodstock and that is what has been my North Star, my Life's journey ever since. Doing good and helping others to better their lives through the pursuit of artistic endeavors, to have hope and succeed in their dreams, who knows, it could even save the human race!!

And that brings me to The Stony Brook Camera Club. Though not as "in attendance" as I used to be since I am so busy with my music these past few years, I owe so much to the camera club, the wonderful friends I have made, and all that I have learned. When people gather together for a common goal, bettering themselves and helping others to achieve their goals and dreams... that is a powerful thing. That is what I experienced in part at Woodstock. When we stand up and give support and encouragement to others, we pass along peace, love and yes, understanding. There's an artist in all of us, I do believe and I am so proud that the friends I have gathered over the years walk with me on that

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path, creating each in their own way, beauty, kindness and honest art, whether it's cooking a meal, printing photographs, carrying for elders, driving a truck or putting broken bodies back together in hospitals and underfunded clinics. I know I am rambling a bit, but, when I was talking to the curator of the Woodstock Museum, I realized, for me life has been like a scene in an Indiana Jones movie. trusting that the bridge, across the canyon, though I couldn't see it, I knew it was there... I had hope and faith in goodness. Being at Woodstock gave me a taste of what it could be like. Maybe someday in our nation, and our world. I won't give up.

A few years ago, I received an email from a fellow named Danny, an old college sweetheart, saying that he was so grateful I had been there with him at Woodstock! We had a reunion a few years ago and found that time had stood still in so many ways, as it does for old friends. The experience of having been at Max Yasgur's farm with 500,000 other peaceful Souls intent on enjoying good music and camaraderie, that will always be with me!

Walking up the hill with my two buckets of water resting on a pole, my shoulders aching, though I was young and still quite strong then, trying not to spill even a drop of water, I remember passing by a teepee. I'd swear on a stack of Bibles that it was Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix, him on an acoustic guitar inside that teepee, jamming with Janis! I stayed outside and listened for a while, until my buckets became too heavy!! Of course, I could have been mistaken, but it was amazing music all the same! Who knows? And I didn't even bring my trusty Nikon FE! What was I thinking? Sleep deprivation can do all sorts of things. I probably would have lost it. The joy of that weekend remains crystallized within my heart and Soul. Precious memories that I hope I will never forget! Perhaps that is why I am writing this down now.

So, I am putting out a challenge to the young and old, the ones in between, folks who read this, to everyone, whether you were there at Woodstock in 1969 or not. Take in all the stories you have heard about the 1st Woodstock and the magic. Read Michael Lang's book about how Woodstock came to

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be and then think about your own dreams and goals. your life's journey. How can we all create a more loving and life-supporting world, safe for the generations to come. We tapped into something really special over half a century ago, perhaps each one of us can find the magic again. Our Native American People, they tell stories, theirs in an oral tradition. I think of Woodstock and the interview I took part in this week... and I pass it on to you.

We need to make drastic, immediate changes if our species has any hopes of thriving. It is up to each one of us! Our sense of humanity, community in my opinion, is in trouble, as humans continue to turn eyes and hearts away from facts and truths. My generation has gotten old. Yes, we're old. At the end of my time here on Earth I want to feel like my life was of value and worthy of remembrance. I want people to say, "Pamela Ruby Russell, she meant well," and that I did well.

WEBSITE: [www.PamelaRubyRussell.com](http://www.PamelaRubyRussell.com)

Pamela's photos and music can be enjoyed there.

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## PSA Photo Gathering

MEMBER

# 2024

September 18 through 21, in Tucson, Arizona

<https://psa-photo.org/page/future-festivals>

# Stony Brook Camera Club 2023 - 2024 Meeting Schedule

Date	Program	Location
9/7/2023	Sweets & Treats, Business/Budget, Volunteer, Programs, Awards?, Slideshow	In Person
9/14/2023	Competition and Image Study Overview	In Person
9/21/2023	Wayne Fisher - Architecture	Zoom
* 09/23/2023	Rick Sammon - Cell Photography Saturday	Zoom
9/28/2023	Rick Hulbert - AI in Photography	Zoom
10/5/2023	Competition - Digital BW, Nature, People/Portraits	Zoom
10/12/2023	Ellen Kawadler - Painting Your Images in Photoshop	Zoom
10/19/2023	Image Study with Ray	In Person
10/26/2023	Jackie Kramer - Artistic Floral Photography	Zoom
11/2/2023	Competition - Prints Color & BW, Digital Open	In Person
11/9/2023	Silvana Della Camera - Night Photography	In Person
11/16/2023	Image Study with Ray	In Person
11/30/2023	Chane Cullens What Judges Look For	Zoom
12/7/2023	Competition - Digital BW, Nature, People/Portraits	Zoom
12/14/2023	Cole Thompson - Black & White	Zoom
1/4/2024	Competition - Prints Color & BW, Digital Open	In Person
1/11/2024	Charles Batchelder Still Life	Zoom
1/18/2024	Image Study with Ray	In Person
1/25/2024	Jim West - Prints	In Person
2/1/2024	Competition - Digital People/Portraits, Macro/Close Up, Altered Reality	Zoom
2/8/2024	Cabin Fever * In Person Only	In Person
2/15/2024	Ugo - Tanzania Safari	Zoom
2/22/2024	Joe Brady - Panaroma	Zoom
2/29/2024	John Slonina - Nature	Zoom
3/7/2024	Competition - Chane Cullen judging on Color & B/W Prints and Digital Nature	In Person
3/14/2024	Image Study with Ray	In Person
3/21/2024	Jim LaSala Street Photography	Zoom
3/28/2024	Talk Photography *Zoom Only	Zoom
4/4/2024	Competition Digital Open, B/W and Travel	Zoom maybe In Person
4/11/2024	Alyce Bender - Impressionistic Photography	Zoom
4/18/2024	Mark Bowie - Moonlit: Art of Photographing by Moonlight	Zoom
4/25/2024	Ron Wyatt - Sports Photography	Zoom
5/2/2024	Competition - Image of the Year	In Person
5/9/2024	New Member Showcase	Zoom maybe In Person
5/16/2024	S.I.Gs Special Interest Groups	Zoom maybe In Person

# Stony Brook Camera Club 2023 - 2024 Meeting Schedule

5/23/2024	Show and Tell	Zoom
5/30/2024	Image Makers	Zoom
6/6/2024	Women vs Men Challenge	Zoom
6/13/2024	End of Year Banquet	In Person

**Color Key:**

Guest Speakers
Internal Speakers
Internal Programs
Competitions
Image Study

## OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS

### OFFICERS:

PRESIDENT: Cynde Cusack  
VICE PRESIDENT: Amy Letourneau  
SECRETARY: Billi Manning  
TREASURER: Ed Goltz  
PAST PRESIDENTS: Tom Amsterburg, Jim Borrebach, Silvana Della Camera,  
COMMITTEES:  
COMPETITION COMMITTEE:

Tony Mistretta (Chair)  
Patricia Cabral  
Bob Doyle  
Dan Gyves  
Alan Litchfield  
Prasanth Parshak  
David Marshak  
Ed Goltz

### DIGITAL STUDY GROUP FORUMS

Jim West - Landscape/Cityscapes, Deb Boucher - Macro, Cynthia Vogan - Nature, Lynda Appel - Astro/Night, Silvana Della Camera - Infrared

### IMAGE STUDY:

Ray Guillette

### NECCC REP:

Ray Guillette

### NEW MEMBERS:

Cynde Cusack

### NECCC DIGITAL REP:

Patricia Cabral, (Chair) Amy Letourneau

### NECCC PRINTS REP:

Tony Mistretta

### NOMINATIONS

Don Steele (Chair), Faith Martin, Stephanie Sioras

### PSA REP

Ed Szymanski

### PROGRAM COMMITTEE:

Ed Goltz, Faith Martin, Silvana Della Camera, Hali Sowle, Allen Litchfield, Cynde Cusack, Amy Letourneau (Chair), David Marshak, Ed Szymanski, Tom Ddavis,

### PUBLICITY:

### REFLECTIONS:

Donna Parker (Co-Editor), Tom Amsterburg (Co-Editor)

### SCHOLARSHIP FUND:

Billi Manning (Chair)

### Multi-CLUB COMPETITION:

Mark Landman

### FOUR SCORE RAFFLE

Jim Borrebach

### VOLUNTEERS

Janet Casey (chair), Cynde Cusack, Jim Borrebach, Elizabeth, Siftar, Tom Amsterburg, Nancy Paradee, Patricia Cabral, Sue Shirley, Stephanie Sioras, Donna Parker

### WEBSITE:

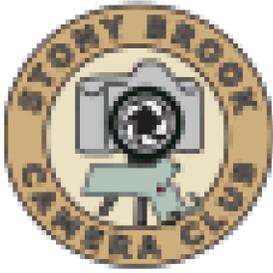
Charlene Gaboriault (Webmaster)

### WORKSHOPS

Ellen Kawadler, Donald Steele

### TECHNOLOGY

David Marshak (chair), Jake Jacobson, Amos Lu, Ed Szymanski, Jim West



Donna Parker and Tom Amsterburg,  
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#### MEETINGS:

Currently the Stony Brook Camera Club meets virtually via zoom every Thursday of each month; no meetings in July and August. Consult SBCC Calendar of Events. All meetings start at 7:30PM.

#### DUES:

Regular member	\$75
Student member	\$50
Senior member	\$50
Family: 2 or more regular members	\$125
Family: 2 - one senior member, one regular member	\$100
Family: 2 senior members	\$75

#### NEWSLETTER:

Published quarterly solely for the information, guidance and enjoyment of the Stony Brook Camera Club, Franklin, MA. All issues are available [HERE](#)

#### WEBSITE:

Visit our Website at [www.stonybrookcc.com](http://www.stonybrookcc.com) for the latest schedule, updates and breaking news, and photographs from our competitions, members and activities throughout the year.

#### FACEBOOK:

Our Facebook page is for current Stony Brook Camera Club members. You must register with Facebook before requesting to join our group. Any questions, email David Marshak from the SBCC website email tab (you must be logged in to view).

#### OFFICERS:

Elected annually and serve as the executive committee with two past presidents. SBCC is affiliated with the New England Camera Club Council (NECCC) and is a member of the Photographic Society of America (PSA).

#### MISSION STATEMENT:

**Stony Brook Camera Club:** To promote enjoyment and proficiency in all aspects of photography through education, fellowship, exchange of knowledge and experience; and a broad appreciation of nature and our environment.