

**STEVE MCCURRY
LESSON 20 - LANDSCAPE**

APPROACHING THE LANDSCAPE

“I really am more interested in how people relate to their environment...to me, that’s the best landscapes.”

Steve discusses different styles of landscape photography and his own methods of producing great landscape shots. Steve is rarely interested in simply the landscape itself, but on how people interact and relate to the landscape.

“I don’t feel you have to define yourself as a landscape photographer”

Steve does not rigidly define the boundaries between types and styles of photography. In this lesson he encourages photographers to follow their intuition and instincts, without letting rules and restrictions dictate your shots.

“I think the lesson to be learned is that persistence pays off.”

Many of Steve’s great photographs were born through perseverance, following a scene and waiting for the right shot. Steve tells the story of some of his favourite shots and how his persistence and patience ultimately led to success.

STEVE MCCURRY PROJECT LESSON 20: EXPLORE TAKING LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHS

“My approach is often more about people and how they relate to the environment, how they interact with the landscape. So for me...it’s not so much just the mere rendition of a place, or a landscape, or a sunset. I really am more interested in how people relate to their environment. And to me, that’s the best landscapes.”

Create a series of landscape images, some with and some without people in them.

Try to capture people interacting with their environment, photography showing not only the landscape, but also human activity. It’s also maybe a way into also making a portrait of somebody in an environment.

Landscape photography is often about persistence. You will need to spend time waiting and watching. Return to your chosen landscape at many different times of the day to get different light. Your landscape will change radically from dawn to dusk.

Try to capture the spirit of the place as well as the beauty and light. Be patient and persistent. Look in edit at your pictures for the best story they tell.

TRANSCRIPT

There's many different ways to approach landscape photography. There's many great landscape photographers who don't include people or animals or any living thing. And that's a very valid, wonderful approach.

My approach is more people and how they relate to the environment, how they interact with the landscape. So for me, that's really what I'm looking for, not so much just the mere rendition of a place, or a landscape, or a sunset, or whatever. I really am more interested in how people relate to their environment. And to me, that's the best landscapes.

So I don't feel you have to define yourself as a landscape photographer anymore than you would a portrait photographer or wildlife photographer. I think there's-- you can shoot anything that you want in any way you want, whatever interests you.

You may see some incredible situation where people are playing or working or whatever with this-- in a broader landscape. And that's a great landscape photograph. If it's people interacting with their environment, I think it's kind of a way of showing not only the landscape, but also human activity. It's also maybe a way of making a portrait of somebody in an environment.

So follow your intuition. Follow your instincts. Let your imagination and your creativity take you where it will and don't feel encumbered to photograph in this way or that way. There should be no rules and there should be no restrictions. You should be free to follow your own intuition and your own instincts. And let that take you where it will.

I made this picture in Burma with the world's largest pagoda. But what really interested me was the monastery, which was just out of sight behind me. And these novice monks going up to the pagoda to do some ceremony or some activity.

And what caught my eye was this enormous difference in scale or size between this enormous-- the enormity of the pagoda and these small little novice monks in that environment. So this is what really intrigued me. It wasn't really so much the landscape itself, but it was how people were interacting with their space, with their environment.

So they happened to be wearing these maroon robes, which is traditional in much of that Buddhist world. And it was a nice contrast. It was nice accent. It was a way to draw your eye to these three novice monks. So it was kind of a lucky serendipitous moment where you had this sort of-- it actually created a very nice color palette between the pagoda and then these monks kind of walking through the landscape.

This picture I made on the Afghan-Pakistan border. It's of a camel caravan kind of winding its way through this mountainous region.

But to me, it's really more about persistence, because I had followed this caravan for more than an hour. I didn't know where they were actually going.

I saw them pass by the house I was staying in. And I ran after them. I followed them. And they were on a very flat plain.

And after about an hour, this sort of valley opened up. And it was getting dark. And rather than continue to follow them, I just let them continue on ahead.

And the man and the camels and this sort of S-curve, which went through, which turned out to be a really wonderful picture. And what I love particularly about it is the man at the end with this sort of white robe, which really draws your eye in the picture, really kind of as the anchor, a visual anchor for the picture.

I made this picture on Kodachrome 64, which I think, in my view, was the best film ever made.

I think the important point about this picture for me was that I saw an interesting situation unfold, and I decided to stay with it and keep photographing. And the payoff was when they went down to this small valley and created this really wonderful shape.

I think the lesson to be learned is that persistence pays off. And if you have an instinct, if you feel something that could possibly be interesting, it's best to stay with it and to follow your instincts.

This picture of some people in Bangladesh walking along a railway track I made on Kodachrome film during a story I was working on about the monsoon.

And what was interesting about this particular situation was that, as you can see in the picture, the area to the left and the right was completely flooded. And the only way these villagers could get around was by using-- walking on the railway tracks.

So I actually followed-- walked with them from one village to the next. And as we walked, I photographed them. And this was a rainy afternoon. It was raining intermittently. And they had their umbrellas open. I thought it really was a nice, graphically interesting picture with them kind of silhouetted against the sky.

What works in this picture for me is the simplicity of the background and the fact that the one person sort of dressed in color happens to be sort of separate from the group. And your eye sort of tends to go to him dressed in his colorful shirt. And the umbrellas are up above the rest. So graphically, I think there's a simplicity to it. I think the shapes of the people are kind of nice, have a nice contrast with the background.

But the simplicity of the color palette, I think, is important. Sometimes when there's too much color, your eye gets confused, and you can't kind of follow the picture.

I think this gives a good sense of place. I think we see the pier, and the fisherman at the end of the day, the sort of mudflats out there. I think it's quite a nice scene.

So he was coming down this pier with his nets. And there's all these sticks coming out of the water. And I thought if I waited until he cleared those sticks, it was-- just sort of the background is clean here so his shape would be distinct as opposed to kind of lost in all those-- that graphic chaos, all that noise.

So right in this area is a nice, clean background. So I was kind of waiting for him to come into that.

So we're here with the fisherman. This is an incredibly old fishing boat. So right now it's at low tide, so this boat is kind of sitting on the mud.

It's like I want to get a picture of him through the glass in this old boat.

Yeah, I like the colors. The colors are kind of red, white, and blue. It's kind of interesting. This is a great face.

I'm trying to show something more than just the face, some kind of-- something to do with the environment. It's really wonderful. This guy has a great face. So I'm just going to shoot a few more pictures.