

How to Judge Your Photographs

A picture is worth a thousand words. Yet most people can't even come up with ten. How many times have you shown your pictures to others and got the same "it's nice" response. Ask people what they like about a photograph and most of them can't tell what it is about an image that they find interesting. I once showed a group of people a photograph by Ernst Haas which showed a street scene at night and asked if they liked the photograph. Their reply ranged from "it's not bad" to "it's OK." I asked them to look a little closer, and they did. Still they just saw an ordinary street with cars and traffic signs similar to any other streets we see every day. Haas a master of photography produced an extraordinary image of a street scene at night using bright colours that stand out against a black background. Colours are even, and do not dominate each other or the scene. You can almost feel the stormy evening. Haas used a telephoto lens which compressed the whole image. Everything from street signs, lights, and cars appear closer together, giving a sense of overcrowding. You can see an endless line of street lights to a point that they become less recognizable at the far end of the photograph, but even more noticeable. The long lens does not allow the viewer to separate the scene. Cars on the right of the photograph seem to have no choice but to move forward and into even a more compressed space, while the ones on the left seem to have just come out of it. Far-centre of the photograph looks the busiest and set against the dark background which does not give any clue of how far this scene goes. What's even more interesting is that no person is visible in this obviously overcrowded, manmade place. Unfortunately, I can't show you the picture because of the copy write laws. After I explained all the details of this photograph, everyone who saw it earlier, wanted to see it again, and this time they found the image much more interesting.

You have to pay attention to details when viewing your photographs or when you are to take one. Pressing the shutter release or using expensive equipment won't guarantee good images. Even a small object which does not relate to others, can destroy a photograph. Often a simple shape or colour can give better results. Ask yourself what it is that you find interesting about your subject. What is it that you want to show? You have to organize the scene by either removing or including different objects. Light is very important and affects your pictures greatly. Any ordinary photograph under good light can turn into a great image. Your subject is not as important as how you photograph it. A simple well composed subject under good light is much better than one taken of a more beautiful place with distracting backgrounds or colours. I still have my very first pictures when I had just started doing photography. I can't come up with a thousand words to describe any of them. Only four: What was I thinking? I can't believe I was that bad. All are distracting

with colours, shapes, and objects that do not relate to each other. Sharpness is a big problem. There is no order in any of them. Look at the picture below:



This picture has serious problems. Branches are covering the whole scene, disturbing the eye. Why were they included? The overcast sky is also disturbing. Remove the branches, and the gray sky distracts the viewer's attention. It makes the whole scene look dull. Look at the small gray spot at the top left of the photograph. A small gray spot, but an obvious distraction. The blurry water was intentional, but why is the rest of the picture unsharp?

Any place in the world can be a great photograph. Light and composition are extremely important. Next, organize the shot carefully and include what is really needed. Have a point of interest without creating any confusion for the viewer. Choose your equipment carefully as well as your exposure settings. Now look through the viewfinder and ask yourself why you should release the shutter. If you can give a convincing answer, go ahead and produce your image.