

A Philosophy of Photography and of *Some* Visual Art in General

I would like to discuss here some elements that I think contribute to the value of many works of visual art, particularly photographs. This is not meant to imply or show that these are the only elements of value nor that they will apply to all art, to all visual art, or even to all photographs, because I think some artists have or could have other ideals and other quests, and because creative artistic ideas could always be thought of that would not fit my perhaps narrow ideas. However, I do think that art (including photography) does involve ideas, techniques, and or insights that can, however well or ill, be articulated in a way to help us evaluate the work. (Sometimes such articulations are even necessary. For example, a work of art that may be quite ingenious for some reason at the time it is created, may appear trite long after the innovations it has engendered become commonplace technique for less original artists. Someone looking at the work without knowing it was the first of its type, may not appreciate it fully without learning of its significance.) Artistic value is not just a matter of pure taste or simple emotional reaction. If there is something good (or bad) about any work of art, I believe that can be pointed out. There may be disagreement and debate, but such disagreement is itself a sign there is something objective to decide. Matters of individual, subjective taste -- such as what flavor ice cream tastes best to someone -- are not matters of debate; people simply state their preferences. The following is an attempt to point out what I think some of the aesthetic elements are involving photography as a visual art, and why.

First of all let me say that I think there can be, and often is, a big creative or artistic difference between good (or beautiful) pictures and pictures of good (or beautiful) subjects. This can be seen in a number of ways. (1) A technically competent photographer or artist can copy a great work of art with such detail that, for all intents and purposes, the copy looks the same as the original. But the original required not only the same technical skill, but the (original) artist's inventiveness, imagination, insight, creativity, etc. as well. The copy is not a great work of art, though it looks just like the original, which is. In a sense the work of art is not then just the final product, but the product along with all that went into creating it; and not nearly as much goes into creating a copy. (2) If a technically competent artist or photographer portrays an attractive scene or person pretty much just as they look at the time, that is almost like copying a previously done portrayal of them. One is simply copying God or nature's portrayal of them. Hence, the portrait is not much more of a work of art than would be a copy of someone else's portrait. In photography, just taking a picture of a person's face is essentially technically little different from copying a picture of them. (3) There are some very interesting works of art of otherwise ugly or plain subjects. (4) There can be bad or mediocre portrayals of otherwise attractive subjects.

I think it is important to consider what an artist "puts into" or brings to the subject that perhaps another person would not have seen or thought of. Even in portrait photography, photographers can see people in different ways. If two technically competent photographers photograph the same person, the photographs might look very different, and may not even look like the same person. Styles of photography and what the photographers themselves see in the person may be

very different. As a photographer gets to know someone better, the photographer often sees that person in a different way and would photograph them looking quite differently. Or a photographer might see and be able to capture the same quality even though the person has changed a great deal in physical appearance over a period of time. An interesting experience I had one time was when I met a woman I thought quite attractive and asked her to pose for me. She did; and then after she took home the portrait I made of her, she called to ask whether I had worked out of a different location nine years earlier, mentioning the specific location. I had. She said then that I was the one who had done her engagement picture when she was 21; I asked her maiden name and looked up her negatives and it was true. Neither of us had recognized the other (she had changed a great deal in her hair style and facial structure, and had lost weight). But she had recognized my portrait of her because twice, nine years apart, I had photographed her with almost the same "look" or essence that she liked and liked about herself and that no other photographer ever had. She figured I must have been the same person who had taken her previous picture. I have changed techniques considerably in the years and between her changes and mine the pictures are fairly different (one is even of her smiling and the other not), except for something about her look -- something very difficult to pinpoint exactly and something I cannot describe in words at all.

In landscape photography, a good photographer will not just take the first pretty scenery he sees but will (also) look for a better angle, a different perspective, will make sure the light is the best (or one of the best) lights to capture the beauty of the scene. Taking a great picture may mean moving four steps closer, crouching down, using a different lens or a different kind of film, selectively focusing on certain elements, etc., etc. In doing these things, the photographer may be trying to capture the picture that (1) shows best how he/she sees the scene, (2) how he/she feels about the scene, (3) is good but also different from any picture anyone else would have taken had they come across the same scene. The photographer then is bringing something of his own philosophy, talent, eye, perceptions, sensitivity, etc. to the landscape, not just "copying" it.

I think it is more of a technological, rather than an artistic, achievement when a photographer takes a photograph of a pretty subject simply the way it superficially appears at first glance or to almost anyone, using the camera as a visual recording device. A picture that is, say, pretty because it is a photograph of a pretty subject such as a beautiful landscape or a beautiful woman or handsome man is a minimal artistic achievement. It is somewhat of an artistic and technical achievement because many people would mess up even that -- taking a pretty woman's picture in outdoor sunlight that puts shadows in her eyes or overexposes highlights, making them unattractive; taking landscape pictures from not quite the right vantage point, thus getting the pictures somewhat out of balance, not flowing, or containing extraneous elements that should have been simply cropped out, etc. Even the most attractive subjects can be photographed in ways that are unattractive, often quite easily. It is also somewhat of an artistic achievement because it shows a recognition of beauty when one sees it; and not everyone has "an eye for beauty". In fact, most of the time that one just tries to copy what one sees one will not actually get even that, and the portrayal will be very disappointing. What is in one's field of vision is not exactly what one perceives. Part of the art of photographic or artistic portrayals is to capture what one perceives not just what one sees or even what is in one's field of vision. More about that later.

To me it seems that a photograph of a pretty landscape simply is another natural phenomenon like a landscape -- a paper landscape or a fingerprint or footprint of a landscape. It is little, if any, more creative than setting up a camera in a moving vehicle to automatically shoot once in a while by itself and then finding you have the right confluence of chemistry, subject, mechanics, focus and light to have produced a pretty image. A "simple" recording of a beautiful person or scene is like a copy of a photograph or painting -- the original artist has done the creative or conceptual work, if there is any (in this case God, good genes, or "mother nature"). Taking a photograph, or painting simply a visual likeness, of an attractive scene or person, apart from the minimal technical skills required to adequately capture a resemblance, is more like plagiarizing nature or recording a concert or theatrical performance.

Something similar is true even of a work not meant to be pretty or attractive. One of my art history teachers once showed a slide of a work titled something like "Abortion" or "Backroom Abortion" or some such, a work she thought was a terrific artistic portrayal. The work was a three-dimensional arrangement of actual old beat up furniture and bloody-looking, old, dirty surgical utensils showing the aftermath of an unsterile abortion after all the principles had left the room but before anyone had cleaned up the room. She particularly liked the touch given by the bare bulb behind a dangling or torn lampshade on a bent-necked floor lamp. I did not think as highly of the work as she did because to me it had no subtlety, took no particular insight, and gave no message other than what it actually portrayed. It was as if the artist had simply gone out and gathered up the furniture in an illegal, medically unsafe, backroom abortion mill and had composed it back in the museum in exact replication of the way he had found it. Abortion under such conditions, if not at any time, is a sad and somewhat sickening and heart-rending thing. A police photo of such a room would have shown that; nothing was added by the artist to show anything more than such a police photo would have. His or her view did not put such a scene in any kind of perspective other than anyone would have had finding such a room after an abortion. Putting this arrangement in a museum makes a social statement, but I do not see how it makes an artistic statement. I still cannot figure out why my teacher thought that was a good work of art.

In regard to "copying" or simply rendering pretty subjects, this can make some pretty pictures but they are not thereby particularly creative or artistic pictures. Even a painting that only copies a work of nature, as if the artist were copying another painting, is less a creative artistic work than it might be, apart from the technical drawing talent required to draw what one sees. (More about this later, since the notion of "what one sees" is not as clear cut as it might seem.) Even a good photograph can have accidental qualities that make it a more interesting picture but not a more artistic or more creative picture, though you can not always tell just from the photograph whether the qualities captured were done so by design or by accident. Three examples I can point to are: (1) a close-up photograph I once saw of a flower with a bee flying right in front of it, face-to-face with it, just hovering. The photographer who had taken it used to say he was just photographing the flower, God photographed the bee because the bee just happened into the picture as the camera shutter went off. (2) I was photographing from far away with a long telephoto lens a seagull that was sitting on a huge rock that jutted out from the sea and that sloped to a rounded point. The gull was sitting on the point as I tripped the shutter and he was gone when my shutter finished shooting. When the negative was developed it turned out to have caught the gull just as he was taking off with his feet still touching the rock, but his body extended from the rock as if the rock was pointing the way. The sweep upward from the base of

the slanting rock to the tip of the gull's beak makes a strong, diagonally sweeping, dynamic and balanced image. (3) I was photographing a ballet "master class" for a group of young teenage girls. The teacher had flown to Birmingham from New York as part of a summer ballet workshop. When there were two parallel rows of dancers at the bar, with the teacher at the head of one of the lines, I shot along the two lines as they went into a motion that gave me really neat angles with their collective arms and legs in contrast to the two rows of torsos and the bars themselves. The picture I actually got took on an entirely new aura, but included those elements, because when I developed it, it turned out, unknown to me at the time, that the young lady right behind the ballet master had yawned a big, round yawn while in otherwise perfect form just as I was taking the picture. Beauty, ballet, and boredom.

Just capturing on film or on tape what is in one's field of view or range of hearing is not to capture what one actually perceives from a subject. That is easily demonstrated by films I have seen of things like classroom discussions, weddings, and ballet and theatrical performances, films that were made by simply setting up the camera at the back of the classroom, church, or theater. Such films make even the most dramatic, warm, wonderful, and exciting presentations seem dull, lifeless, cold, and distant. Paying attention to a teacher or to a performance, or witnessing a wedding involves things far different from simply sitting back and idly watching and listening. Even a personal or telephone conversation between two people is generally far more interesting and alive to them than is a taped version of that conversation. A good artistic portrayal of such things captures how we perceive them. It gives them the kind of elements and life, through whatever creative means work, that makes us perceive them on film or tape the way we would have perceived them in person. Or it even enhances them and how we could perceive them. Good art, good drama, good photography, etc. have or capture an impact or an essence, as well as just some sort of visual or auditory rendering of a subject.

What I generally like to do in photography is to try to isolate and depict or capture a particular quality or idea or the essence of some subject, especially if that quality or essence is elusive and difficult to discover and/or to portray. I like to do this in part so that I can show other people the way I perceive a subject so that they can perceive it that way too in case they never did before and might find it interesting and/or enjoyable. Sometimes then they also may "see it" afterwards emotionally the same way I do or with the same kind of perspective. Photography is in this manner a sharing and teaching experience for me. And even when people do already "see" some subject the same way I do, capturing that perspective on film is then a different kind of sharing experience -- one that simply expresses what we all perceive, and demonstrates to the group that we actually do feel similarly about the subject, or perceive it similarly.

Also, there is a creative aspect to this sort of thing that is simply interesting to me. I like to see if I can capture on film something that portrays a certain look or the quality that evokes a certain emotion just to see whether I can do it or not, whether I then show the picture to anyone else or not. Sometimes it is a very interesting surprise to find out just what you have to actually show in order to portray a particular quality or aspect of a subject.

In portraiture I think it is really exciting to be able to capture a beauty or glow or sparkle in someone that others or even the person him/herself might not have realized was there -- doing it with only such natural means as lighting, composition, angle, and the psychology to try to evoke a certain expression or look, not using touch up art that actually alters and disguises the person's

appearance rather than just bringing out in the best light what is actually there but which is perhaps usually hidden by daily hurriedness and unflattering sun or office light. For me it is usually more interesting and exciting to photograph a "plain" (to everyone else) person in a way that captures a beauty about them that then makes them beautiful to themselves and to others after they have seen the photograph of them than it is to photograph someone who is obviously beautiful (or obviously cute or "adorable", such as a child). In the latter case, the only challenge then might be to come up with an even more flattering or unusually interesting and attractive pose, angle, and expression. In group pictures it is interesting to try to capture individual personalities and relationships between the subjects instead of just "copying" a clump of individuals plastically standing or sitting together.

One example of a quality that would be interesting to depict is that characteristic which seems to me to give women in the city of London, England a look while walking that is unique, I think, and certainly different from the look women have while walking in American cities. There is something very nice about the way women carry themselves and the expressions they have on their faces and in their body language while they walk that I think lets you know you are in London even if you could only see them and no buildings or landmarks.

An essence that has often intrigued me but which I have never yet figured out how to portray in a single photograph is "the first warm day of spring after a cold winter." When I lived in Ann Arbor, the first warm sunny day after months of continuously cold, often bitter cold, weather seemed to have a particular character -- a character different from any other warm day. I can vividly remember the sight of the vast steps of Angell Hall on the University of Michigan campus dotted for the first time in months by students and professors sitting around reading, talking, or just basking in the sun. I particularly remember seeing a bearded professor in tie and shirtsleeves sitting in bright sunlight with his back against one of the building's massive columns as he read the newspaper and soaked up the sun. Somehow that image seemed to reflect the essence of the spirit of the day. Yet I have never figured out how to capture on film this particular essence, because any such photograph I have thought of doing always just looks like any other warm, sunny day. Part of the trick of capturing essences is not only technically recording the characteristic that conveys it, but **figuring out in the first place what that characteristic is -- figuring out what the essential qualities are and what characteristics convey and capture them.** In the case of "the first warm day of spring", it may not be a visual characteristic at all; it may be something like the way the heat feels so good to your skin or bones. But I think there is something visual about it because I think people look different in some way on the first warm day from the way they look on any other day, and certainly different from the way they look late in the summer -- and I am not talking about the amount of tan or color in the skin, but something about manner or body language, or ... something.

One time I saw a painting, "Afternoon Tea" I think it was called, that seemed to depict even the kind of air and light that only autumn has. The objects, including the air, and their tones and colors in the painting said, among other things, that this was autumn -- though it was not of leaves or any such, but only people and normal man-made objects. Quite an achievement, I think.

If a painting or photograph depicted autumn by simply showing autumnal colors of trees, it would not have been that much of an achievement apart from whatever drawing or painting

talent is required to draw or paint leaves the way they look in real life. Discovering and depicting difficult to discover and/or portray qualities counts for much. One of the differences sometimes between great painting and great photography depends on the idea that difficulty of portrayal counts for something, since in some cases what is difficult to portray in one medium may not be difficult to portray in the other. A painting that is extremely accurate in minute detail is to that extent some sort of personal technical skill achievement, but for a photograph that is only a technological achievement. In painting it is easy to disguise or hide flaws of a subject -- just do not paint them in; in photography that is not always an easy matter. In painting imagination can provide any subject; photography -- apart from darkroom wizardry and computer generated negative images, which are more like painting with chemicals and electronics than it is like "taking pictures" -- requires an actual subject.

Of course, the same element may be difficult both in photography and in painting. It may, for example, be most difficult not so much to put on tape or canvas what makes, say, a ballet performance so exciting or so exquisite, but to discover or figure out in the first place just exactly what it is that makes it that way. Once one discovers what the elements are that we actually attend to that makes us feel the way we do about a performance, it may be easy to capture them on film or canvas. Sometimes the biggest problem in taking a picture is just figuring out exactly what sort of thing one needs to take in order to show it the way one wants it to come across. Once you can figure that out, taking the picture is often fairly easy.

Now a photographer or artist isolates a subject and at least some elements from it to begin with in two immediate ways-- (1) by selecting his subject to begin with; that is by leaving out or cropping out things surrounding the subject that are irrelevant or unattractive, and thus saying essentially "This is what I want you to look at", and (2) by "reducing" a whole experience or whole perception of something to just its visual aspects.

The first is easy to see. I once traveled to a small town on the English Channel that turned out to be a very commercialized resort town, with each hotel and place of entertainment having as large and unattractive a sign as seemed possible, all crowded together. But I found a hilly promontory that afforded me, by using a telephoto lens, to get an angle on the harbor that cropped out all this ugliness while photographing a sailing boat returning as the sun set behind it. It is a very idyllic looking picture in one of the least idyllic places I traveled to during that trip. Some people do not take proper advantage of just the simple cropping out power of a camera because they forget that their eye or mind can "zoom" in to concentrate on or attend to just part of what is in their field of vision. I processed a roll of film one time for someone who was shooting pictures at a football game. He was really excited because he was certain he had taken a perfectly timed picture of the catch of the winning touchdown pass. He had; but he had used a normal (rather than telephoto) lens to photograph the game and the catch had taken place some 50 yards diagonally across the field from him. The player making the catch was so small and so far away in the picture that it was almost impossible to tell what it was a picture of other than just half a football field under a huge night sky with a bunch of one half inch tall players all just running around. The photographer couldn't understand why the play was not as clear, nor the receiver as big, in the picture as they had been to his eye. It was because he was concentrating on only a small part of the field of vision he had in his viewfinder as he aimed and shot. His eye or mind "zoomed" in, only attending to the aspect of the whole field of vision he was interested in. But the camera, the way he was using it, caught the whole field of vision he actually had. This is a very common

mistake. Even when not making quite so pronounced an error as this, many people make the mistake of getting just a little too much in their pictures instead of cropping out things that tend to spoil the picture, though not perhaps obviously. A half-length or full length picture of a person may contain enough surrounding background so that the balance of the picture is destroyed, its subject is not the obvious focus of attention, and/or the expressiveness of the subject's features are not emphasized as they should be.

Along with simply cropping out unwanted features surrounding a subject, there are more subtle ways of softening or eliminating them. One might especially highlight or color something one wants to particularly feature, leaving other things more "lost" in the picture. In a colorful setting, something black and white often stands out; in a white, gray, and/or black setting, something very colorful can stand out. One can also use selective focusing or similar elements to bring attention to particular elements of a photograph. One can use special compositional "tricks" such as sweeping diagonals that lead the viewer to look at certain parts of a picture. In real life, not just art, a deep V-neck sweater of the right color or shade tends to cause a viewer's eyes to look at the chest of the person wearing the sweater even if one is not particularly interested in looking at their chest for other reasons; it is difficult for a man not to notice or keep looking at a V-neck even if it is on another man. A "V" is a particularly compelling design to attract or distract the eye.

The second isolating factor is more interesting to me at this point in my photography and study of visual art -- isolation of a subject and elimination from it of everything other than its visual features and components. This aspect of the visual arts (and it is generalizable to other arts such as music which eliminates non-auditory and, in instrumental music, non-verbal elements of certain kinds of perceptions) can be a problem or a boon.

It is a boon, for example, when you show a photograph of a very scenic place that, aside from its scenic beauty, is a very unpleasant place to visit because it is hot, humid, smelly and/or noisy. Photography, because it is purely visual and captures only visual elements, eliminates the unpleasant non-visual elements. It is a problem, if you are trying to show a place that may be somewhat scenic, but where a strictly "representational" photograph does not adequately portray its pleasant temperature, humidity, floral fragrances, ocean breezes and sounds, etc. In the latter case, creativity is required to try to show these features in some indirect way -- people enjoying themselves sailing or lying in the sun but not perspiring or looking parched or drained, etc.

In cases where there is little difference in technical skills displayed, I firmly suspect one of the differences between a good painting or photograph of a landscape, scene, or portrait on the one hand and a mediocre or poor photograph or painting of one on the other, is that the good one better captures or creates more qualities or more essential qualities of the subject, particularly perhaps those that do not lend themselves to direct representation in the media being used.

Now essences are interesting in that the aura surrounding something or the impressions something makes are often stronger than the actual images that produce them. For example I often can quite vividly recall the colors of a certain shirt or dress worn by a performer in a movie, even though I realize later that the movie was black and white and I am misremembering it as being in color. There was something about the scene that influenced my mind into thinking what the colors must be. Almost always when I see a foreign language film with subtitles I

strongly "recall" it, even shortly after seeing it, in English with the actors own voice speaking in an accent. People can look at a black and white picture and swear they can tell what colors the clothing must have been. Once, as a newspaper photographer, I attended the fiftieth reunion of a high school class. The organizers had cut out the high school senior portraits from the yearbook and pasted them onto each person's respective nametag. To me there was no resemblance between the way these people looked at age 18 and the way they now looked at age 68. Yet they could recognize each other from across the room, even though some of them hadn't seen each other in decades, and in a few cases since graduation fifty years earlier. I heard people honestly telling each other, after such recognition, that they had not changed since high school and I firmly suspect it was because their personality or aura or the impressions their physical appearance made was much stronger than and more important than the physical appearance itself, and it was the auras or essences that these people recognized in each other. I once had a man tell me that the picture I took of his wife on her seventieth birthday was the finest picture he had ever seen of her in the more than fifty years of their marriage; she did not like it. I suspect he was seeing the personality I had captured and she was seeing the physical lines time had created. I once had a man tell me that the portrait I made of his 60 year old wife captured the essence of how she looked when he first fell in love with her in high school. I could just as easily not have captured that; there is much luck involved in doing such a thing. It is just as easy to take attractive pictures of people that those close to them agree are attractive but which they say simply "don't look like" the person. But the point is that there is something that can be displayed beyond the mere "surface" visual image. It is most interesting to me that one can display in a purely visual medium, such as photography or painting, qualities that are themselves not particularly visual, such as qualities of character and personality, presence, attitude, etc.. One can capture them; or in the case of theatrical or dramatic pictures of poses that have to be coached or contrived, one can create them. Not all pictures of someone have to capture their "normal" character, personality, or look; sometimes it is exciting to do something of them that is very theatrical or unusual for them that they and you have to work to achieve. It is still a picture of them -- just "another side" of them, a side that has not previously come out or does not normally or otherwise ever come out.

I once saw on exhibit a photograph that is far superior to any I had seen before or have seen since. It is a black and white photograph of an old woman in an old black cloth coat standing at an intersection of an old European brick-paved street. At her side is her plain black bicycle with a bare, simple frame, and a wicker basket hanging from its handlebars. She is facing toward the camera dully and patiently waiting to cross the street, but she (and the others around her) cannot cross because there is a bicycle race in progress with strong young cyclists racing intently in the street before her and in the path between her and the camera. She is motionless and in sharp focus and stands out because of composition, lighting, and her appearance from the others waiting to cross and from the racers between her and the camera who are slightly out of focus and in a slight blur. The picture has pleasant lines, angles, and lighting, so it is a pleasant photograph compositionally to look at, and it says so much about the contrast between youth and age, strength and frailty, patience and hurriedness, motion and stillness, and is so well done in terms of composition, differential focus, moment of shutter release, lighting, focus of attention etc. that it is virtually a perfect photograph. It portrays a great deal in one still image.

In contrast to a picture like this is Pablo Picasso's 1943 Bull's Head, made simply out of a bicycle seat hung on a wall attached to the handlebars with the handles pointing upward. No alteration was made to the seat or the bars, yet it gives the exact simple image of a bull's or steer's head. There is no message, but an essence is captured in a simple form. There is a kind of elegance to the idea, an elegance like that of simplest mathematical proof of some theorem.

And just as in mathematics there is an added value for the more simply one can prove something that is all the more complex, I think there is an added value or interest to art that can the more simply and minimally capture the essence(s) or qualities of more complex things. Neither in art nor in math is relative minimalism or simplicity a necessity; it is simply an added bonus or gives an added interest. Art that captures elusive essences one wants to portray is to that extent good art; art that can capture relatively complex elusive essences or qualities in minimal or simpler images is perhaps even more intellectually interesting whether it is more aesthetically interesting or not.

What You Perceive Is Not Always What You Think You See

Trying to capture qualities in a purely visual way is often difficult because what we perceive or feel, or even seem to see, about something is not always what we actually see. I have already discussed about the football play that was so clear to the eye but so minute a part of the field of vision that the film could not portray it the way it appeared. And I have mentioned how cold and dead a play or classroom presentation seems on film photographed from the back (or even the front) of the room, though it might be a quite exciting presentation to those in the audience at the time. Similarly, you have seen movies made from cameras attached to cars or peoples heads as they drive or walk about; and the way such scenes look to you is not anything like anything really looks to you when you walk or ride in a car. In a still photograph, you can get all kinds of terribly distracting things you never even noticed at the time you took the picture. If there are geometric lines such as the lines of the edges of walls and ceilings in the background of a picture, if you are at any but the squarest of angles or at some geometrically interesting angle to those edges, the room will look distorted and badly built. None of the edges will look correctly vertical or horizontal. A beautiful face outside in the noonday sun actually has terrible shadows in the eyes and socket area because of the protrusion of people's brows. But you do not notice that when you are talking to someone. So if they and their eyes appear beautiful to you, it is not just because of the way they look, or the way they would look if you painted or photographed them accurately. If you take a close-up head and shoulders picture, with a normal camera lens (for example, a 50mm lens on a 35mm camera), of an adult, you will get just enough distortion in the proportions between the nose, eyes, and ears that the portrait will usually be unsatisfactory though it may not be apparent why or what exactly is wrong. Yet, while looking through the camera's viewer the face will probably have seemed normal proportion to the photographer.

Part of the art or trick in film or tape or in painting is to get what you want to portray to "appear" the way it does or can instead of the way it actually would look if you just copied it. You need to capture an essence or a perception rather than a strict physical appearance. So you have to discover or decide what the essence or the perception is first; and that is not always easy. In portrait photography, one of the things that makes someone attractive sometimes is their personality, not just their physical looks; so in order to capture their beauty you have to somehow capture their personality. If you don't and they do not have much beauty in just their looks, you will get just a very unflattering and unattractive picture.