



Viewpoint Mike Smith

Mike Smith looks at the different ways in which images can be interpreted, and comes to some interesting conclusions

In the 29 October 2016 issue of AP, Roger Hicks lightheartedly noted the classification of modern photos as either 'fine art' or 'other'. The image up for discussion 'Cold Reflections' isn't fine art, so it's the latter – in this case, reportage with elements of the 'art-esque'. Broken down, these relate to the interplay of shape and symmetry, including the reflections off the water; the high contrast and overtones of lightness-to-darkness; the contrast between the striking built lines and ripples; and the people as a subject.

Strangely, when I looked at the photo I saw none of those things (well, other than the people). What I saw was an immediate cognitive response to one of Henri Cartier-Bresson's classic images 'Place de L'Europe' – Google it if you need a reminder.

Can you see a similar message and story in 'Cold Reflections'? I was first drawn to the legs, noting the blur of the figures to the left, and so their movement. I then looked at their reflections, liking the way they were framed by the ripples, before turning the page upside down and confirming the cane and, intriguingly, the stooped character, clearly looking at the photographer. My immediate response to 'reading' the photo was 'Why on earth are they still walking down the stairs when they can see all the water?' Why, indeed. Where is the passage going? Why are they going there? Are they prepared to walk through the water? How deep is it? I wanted to know about them as individuals, their relationship that had drawn them together on that day and their shared journey. What happened next?

What I didn't see was the symmetry – actually I find it jarring because it's not symmetrical, looking slightly off-centre. I subconsciously clocked the contrast, but didn't see it and wasn't particularly concerned by the shapes. My mind was entirely drawn to the similarity of Cartier-Bresson's shot and, indeed, I think is better in the sense that it asks far more questions. In fact, in my *Viewpoint* that week I commented on John



The *Final Analysis* page under discussion, from the 29 October 2016 issue

Berger's notion of every photo having a 'quotation' – the *length* of that quotation providing insight before and after the photo was captured. And that's what I really like about 'Cold Reflections' – it provides a long quotation, whereas Cartier-Bresson's image is far more immediate.

And, instinctively, we know that we bring our own prejudices and preconceptions to the reading of any photo – our own personal and social history. Some photographers like to be deliberately enigmatic and allow their work to be viewed in this way, while others prefer to provide direction to the viewer and so avoid misconception. That may be through the title and, sometimes, an accompanying description. And so there are two sides to this coin – the next time you view a photo, think about how it may be interpreted or construed beyond how you see it. And, similarly, the next time you 'present' a piece of your own work... wonder at the possibilities.

Mike Smith is a London-based wedding and portrait photographer. Visit www.focali.co.uk

Social life

Here are some of our favourite images from the world of social media this week



Simon Knight @knight_simon

Simon has photographed St Cwyfan's church from the bank of Cribinau, a small tidal island off the south west coast of the isle of Anglesey in Wales. The ghostly waves give the image a truly haunting feel.

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Greg Sheard Photography

Gary took this image at a Halloween dog parade in Liverpool last year. Despite being a few months old, it really couldn't be more opportune. The wig is a particularly nice touch.

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Pete Rowbottom

In this image titled 'Nowhere', Pete captured the minimalist shot he had waited so long to achieve. Despite the risk of having to clone out raindrops due to the torrential downpour, Pete fixed on his 10-stop filter and walked away with this image.

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