The 12 Elements of an Excellent Photo

Presentation by Chane Cullens and Charlie Batchelder
for Flagpole Photographers Camera Club
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Based on work by the Photographic Exhibition Committee of the Professional Photographer Association
The 12 Elements of a Merit Image

"Any image, art piece or photograph will reveal some measure of all twelve elements, while a visually superior example will reveal obvious consideration of each one."

Impact

The sense one gets upon viewing a photo for the first time

- Impactful photos evoke laughter, sadness, anger, pride, wonder or another intense emotion
- There can be impact in any of these 12 elements

Technical Excellence

Charlie Batchelder

The quality of the photo itself as it is presented for viewing

- Lighting, focus, exposure, printing, mounting, color, retouching, manipulation ...
- The nuts and bolts of photography. Be wary of going too far with corrections.

Creativity

Fresh expression of imagination to convey an idea, message or thought

- It's looking at an ordinary subject and finding an extraordinary way to portray it
- In photographic competitions, you get bonus points for creativity and originality

Style

A specific genre or recognizable characteristic to showcase an artist

- Has a positive impact when the subject matter and the style are appropriate for each other
- Your work can be anything from traditional to surreal, candid to abstract, hard or soft light

Composition

Elvis Vasquez

Bringing all of the visual elements together to express photo's purpose

- Holds the viewer in the photo and prompts the viewer to look where the creator intends
- Do you follow the standard rules of composition? When you break them to enhance the photo?

Presentation

Affects a photo by giving it a finished look

- The mats and borders used should support and enhance the photo, not distract from it
- Applying digital borders, customized for each photo, can either make or break your photo

Color Harmony

Chane Cullens

Color tones working together enhance the emotional appeal

- Color balance is not always harmonious and can be used to evoke diverse feelings for effect
- Are your colors and corrections pleasing to the eye? Do they look like they belong together?

Center of Interest

Pixabay

The point or points where the viewer should stop as they view the photo

- Can be subtle or strong, regardless, they allow the eyes to pause in preconceived areas
- Occasionally there will be no specific center of interest

Lighting

Bess Hamiti

How dimension, shape and roundness are defined in a photo

- The strength of your subjects should be portrayed by of the strong lighting choices you utilize
- Whether the light applied to a photo is artificial or natural, proper use enhances a photo

Subject Matter

Pixabay

Should always be appropriate to the story being told in a photo

- Keep it interesting and appropriate
- Subject matter is often linked to the competition category or photo title

Technique

The approach or perspective used to create the photo

- Printing, lighting, posing, capture, presentation, … are part of the technique applied to a photo
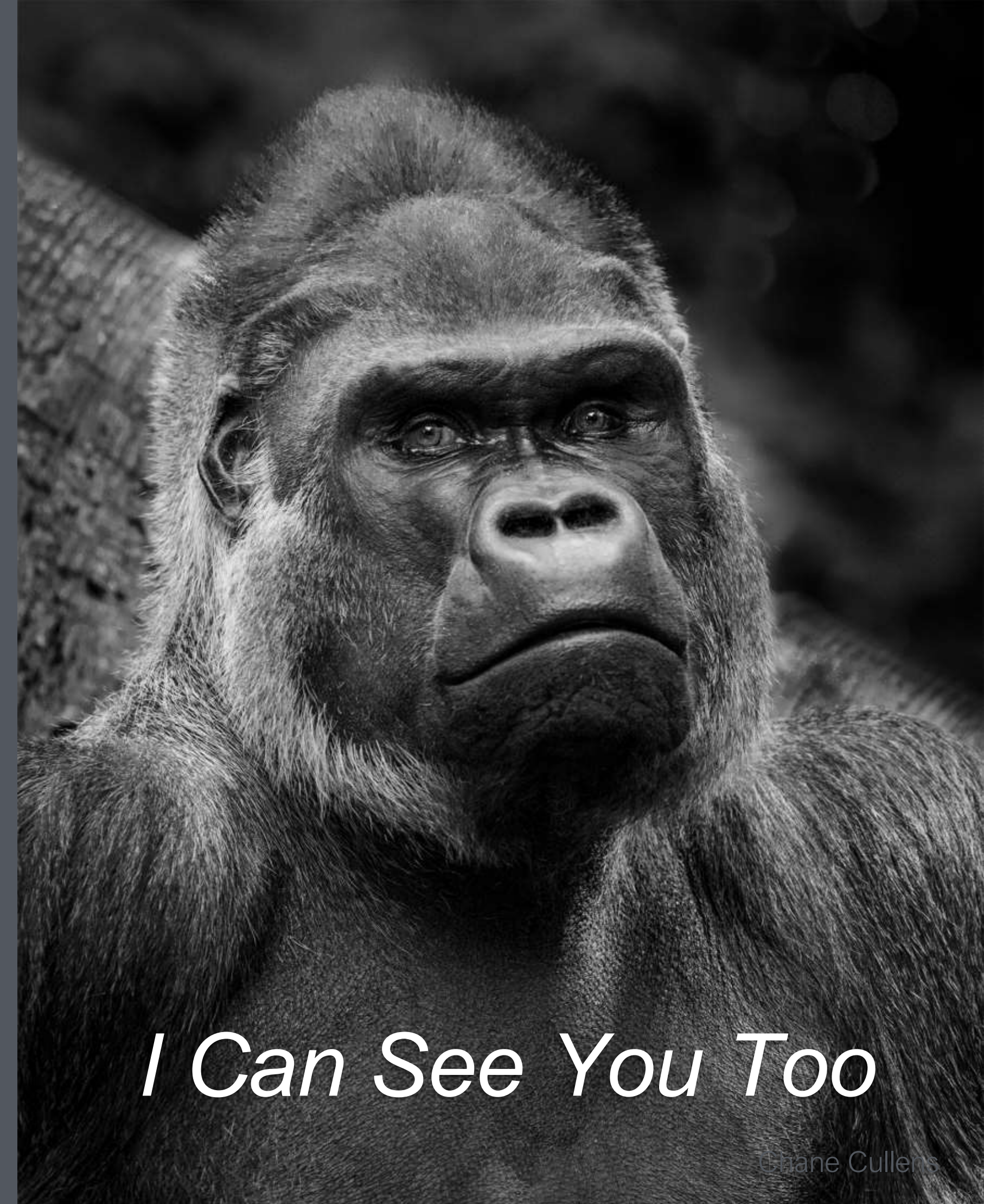- Including camera angle, lens choice, a certain style such as forced perspective

Story Telling

Rhonda Cullens

The photo's ability to evoke imagination

• Take a step back to see what kind of stories your photos can create
• One beautiful thing about art is that each viewer might create their own message or story

One More Thing

Title

I Can See You Too

Diane Cullen

Use the title to provide the judges an emotional connection to the photo

- At a minimum, use the title to tell the judges where to look
- Don't waste the title to name the location (Niagara Falls) or obvious object (Gorilla)

The 12+ Elements of an Excellent Photo

1. Impact
2. Technical Excellence
3. Creativity
4. Style
5. Composition
6. Presentation
7. Color Harmony
8. Center of Interest
9. Lighting
10. Subject Matter
11. Technique
12. Story Telling
13. Title

- Each elements is important on their own

- Also remember, they overlap
  - Subject matter directly relates to your story
  - Technique and color balance are intertwined

- The more elements you use, the stronger your photo is

Let's Be A Judge

Group Activity

Staring into Wisdom

Flagpole Photographers Camera Club
Newtown, CT