

Lesson Ten Seeing

Actively utilizing photography in the design process is essentially about actively seeing the world. Becoming more conscious of the formal and theoretical aspects of photography, we learn to slow down and focus on what we are seeing. This slowing and focusing of the mind opens our eyes to details and relationships. We look longer because we are actually seeing and thinking about what we see.

Through this process we learn how to see both with and without the camera. Like drawing or painting the technical and formal aspects of photography can be applied in the presence or absence of a camera. A friend of mine who grew up learning and painting watercolors with her mother says she looks at the world and thinks about how she would paint certain scenes. She applies her sense of color, form and light (learned from watercoloring) to how she sees the world. I do the same, but with my photographer's eye. I think about light, shadow, depth, composition and relationships. I think in color and black and white. I think about what I see and how I can change what I see with a filter, or a different exposure time or aperture setting. I also think about how I can change the scene in the darkroom or on the computer. This act of seeing and thinking is an act of designing. I am actively participating in my environment and envisioning different possibilities. I am a designer both with and without the camera.

Photography is a way to become more sensitive to our surroundings. It helps us notice more as we learn *how* to see. To truly see with the camera we must engage in the photographic process more fully, not just point and shoot. Next time you pick up your camera and look through the viewfinder count to ten and *really* look at what you see. Move your eye around the frame, look at what shapes and relationships are formed. Now take your eye away from the camera and look at the scene again. Did something change? Did you see something you didn't see before? Notice I didn't even ask you to take a picture, just to look more intently.



Anne Godfrey. from The Osola Valley Series.
2002

Each of these lessons can be applied in the presence or absence of the camera. The core of each of these lessons asks for attentive and active seeing. They ask for our full attention, the use of all of our faculties. The same state of mind and eye should be applied to the act of designing. Attention and thoughtfulness must be combined with a critical eye and mind. Style is not the primary concern here, but rather full engagement in the process.

Learning how to see is a slow and multi layered process of discovery involving the mind, the body and the spirit. Paying attention to our physical and emotional reactions while seeing the world raises our awareness and sensitivity. Each of us can take this sensitivity and travel through life sharing our thoughts and teaching others how to see and value the world around them.



Anne Godfrey. Drifting in Place. 2003.