



## THE VISION COLLECTIVE WEEK ONE

### Discovering Vision

Robert - Welcome to the Vision Collective. This is the first of 26 weekly emails and I want to take a little time to introduce the idea behind this course.

There is a lot of information out there for photographers. In fact, there might be too much information. And so much of it is completely without context and often it's without much vision or passion. That's where mentoring is so helpful, and while mentoring isn't really scalable, I wanted to try anyways, to create a connection between other photographers (almost seven thousand of you, as it turns out) and me - and walk together through a somewhat organic curriculum designed to restore some passion and bring some context, heart, and action to all the technical information out there.

For most of us, and I include myself in this, our problem is not a lack of technical information. We already know how to focus and expose. What we struggle with is the bigger stuff: vision, story, visual language, and composition. We struggle with knowing where our work fits in the short but rich history of the photographic arts. And, if we're honest, we struggle with just getting on with it, and making meaningful work.

What I'm going to ask you to do with me in the following 26 weeks is focus your efforts. I'm going to ask you to give a damn about things bigger than just technical competence, which is always going to be part of the onward journey. If you wait until you have mastered every technical aspect of photography before you begin diving deeper into this craft, it will never happen.

Now is the time.

I want to begin the course with a short discussion of vision. I have given a lot of thought to this subject. I have written at great length about it and don't want to drag this on. So I'm going to use questions. Whether you answer them or not is up to you. But I'm going to use questions a lot in this course. Good questions are invaluable.

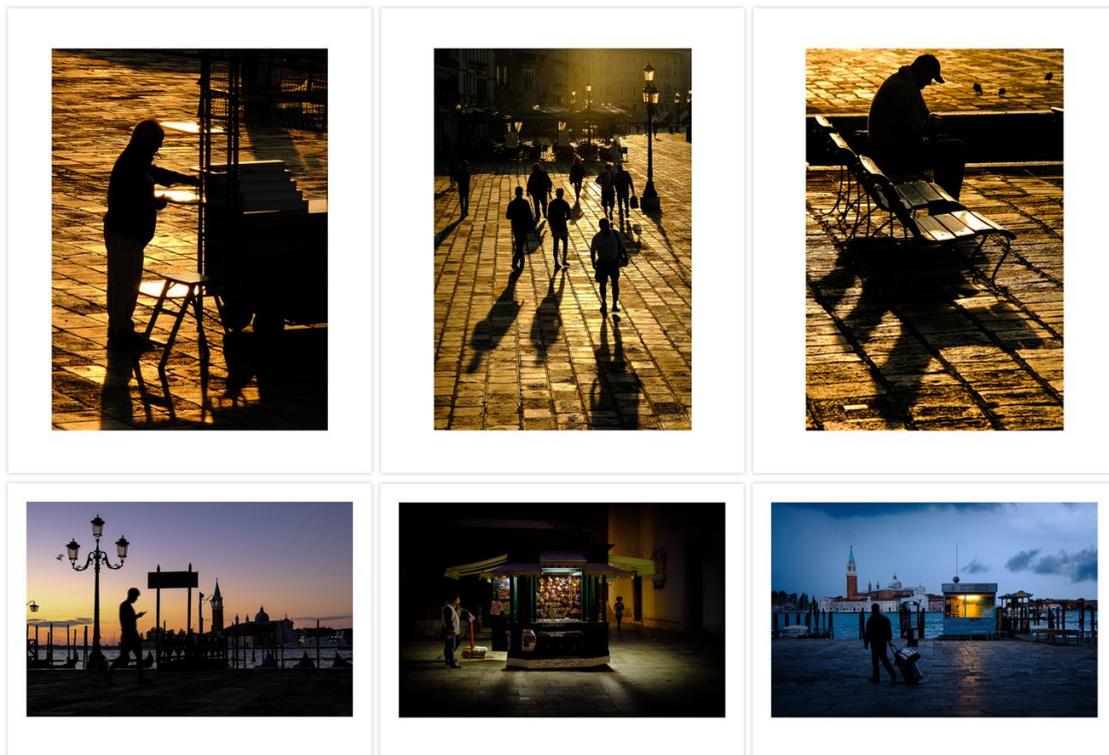
**First**, I believe that everyone has vision. Everyone sees the world in a particular way. Everyone cares about some things more than others. Everyone has different tastes and desires. Those will grow and change with you. What matters is that you claim that vision and find ways to express it.

- *What do you love enough to spend your short life, or your limited free time, photographing?*
- *What are you curious about? Enough to spend hours looking at it through your camera?*
- *What photographs by other photographers most resonate with you? Why?*
- *You didn't skip over that last one did you? "Why?" is the most important question of all? Do you have books of photographs? What is it in those images that you most love? Is it something about the lines, the light, the kinds of moments represented? Is it the use of colour? Is it the subject matter? Is it how that subject is represented? All of these are clues to your own vision.*
- *Look through the last year of your work. What commonalities do you see in the work? What themes repeat themselves? Which images do you love? Why?*

You get bonus points if you start writing this down. I use a small Moleskine notebook and I'm always jotting ideas and thoughts down. Think about this stuff. Wrestle with finding answers. The clues are there. It's more important that you look for your vision than it is that you find it. Why does it matter at all? Because if, as the old tired saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words, then we must begin with something to say with those thousand words. Something to express.

*What's important to you? Leave the rest.*

**Second**, you don't have to have your vision figured out before exploring it. It's often much more a journey of discovery more than it is a specific, and known, destination. All you need is a clue. If you've got any answers at all to the questions I've asked you then you have enough to begin exploring. The best photographers I know are curious and they run with half-baked ideas all the time. But they start. They begin. They don't just waffle with a list of maybes and what-ifs. Start now to explore your vision with the camera. The camera is good at this stuff. Pick three ideas. Or one. Now get on with it. How? Keep reading.



### **Creative Exercise**

In the following 26 weeks create a body of work - twelve images - that explore one aspect of your vision. Is it your kids? Is it the importance of home? Is it your dog? Is it portraits of friends and

family? Whatever it is, you better care deeply about it, or be deeply curious about it. I'll talk later about bodies of work and personal projects, but for now, just begin. I can't do this for you. But your deadline is May 01. 12 images that work together to explore that one thing. Start now. Don't ask how, there are no rules. The exercise is that you do it, and that you do it your way, not that you do it right.

*The images above are from a larger personal project I undertook recently in Italy, exploring the waking up of a city, which in turn lead me to explore the going to bed of a city - the rhythms of a city at the edges of day. I focused on silhouettes, shadows, reflections, and bright colours. There was no magic and I had no idea if I could pull it off or not - just a whim and some commitment to do it.*

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vincentmunier

**Study the Masters**

Every week I'm going to introduce you to a new photographer, most of them from a generation or more before us. I do this in hopes of directing your attention away from contemporaries with whom it's so easy to compare ourselves, and I do it to help you begin accumulating a visual vocabulary broader than your own sphere of influence of Instagram feed.

This week I want to introduce you to a contemporary, a French photographer named Vincent Munier. Vincent is a wildlife photographer and you can see his work on his website. Spend 30 minutes looking at it in context of this conversation about vision. What does Vincent care about? In what particular ways does he see his world? What commonalities are in his compositions and use of colour? What do you think is strong about his work? Visually speaking, pay particular attention to his composition and his consistent use of scale and isolation. And, related to the creative exercise I just gave you, note how his photographs work so well together with each other as cohesive bodies of work. If you have a spare 10 minutes, [watch this beautiful video on Vimeo about Vincent and his work, Arctique.](#)

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### **Further Study**

Each week I'll close my email to you with a few resources to follow up on as you have time.

- Read this [article about Personal Work.](#)
- Read this article about [finding your vision](#), and this [follow up to that article.](#)
- Read the [Helsinki Bus Station Theory Article.](#)
- Consider reading my short eBook, [The Vision Driven Photographer.](#)

### **Two Last Things**

Thank you so much for trusting me with this part of your journey. I'm going to ask you to do something hard and I'm hoping you'll consider doing it. While you're doing this course would you consider narrowing your focus on your photography education? I know I'm not mentoring you directly, but most of us have only so much attention we can give to things. So we spread it around. Which means there's a good chance many will glance over this email, look for a few nuggets, and move on. This isn't that kind of email, and if you approach it that way you're not going to get the most benefit out of it. The benefit is in the narrowing of focus, exploring the questions I ask, and studying the work of the photographers I introduce you to. There's no magic. The work on this course isn't mine - all I have to do is spend a couple hours a week writing to you. The work is yours.

If there's magic at all, it's in doing the work. Most of us don't have time to do all this, think deeply about it, and still read every blog and photography magazine out there. It's just an idea, but I hope you'll try it: give yourself a break from all those other voices for a while.

Lastly, here is my commitment to you: I am going to pour my heart into this. I'll write about what I know and deeply believe to matter when it comes to making great photographs. And I won't hold back. Which means I'm going to come off as opinionated once in a while. I might swear. I'm getting old enough that I'd rather be genuine and passionate than polite to a fault. It won't be my intention to offend you. I promise. But I care too much about this to pussy foot around. Don't, however, mistake my passion for belief that my way is the only way. Test my ideas. Adapt them to your way of seeing the world. Disagree with me. Art is not about consensus. Take what is useful to you, leave the rest.

Thank you again. See you next week. Now get to work on that assignment. Begin now. That's where the magic is. You learn this craft as much with your hands as with your head, if not more.

If you're looking for me, you can find me on [my blog](#), on [Facebook](#), and on [Instagram](#).

For the love of the photograph,  
David duChemin