



## **THE VISION COLLECTIVE: WEEK TWENTY FIVE.**

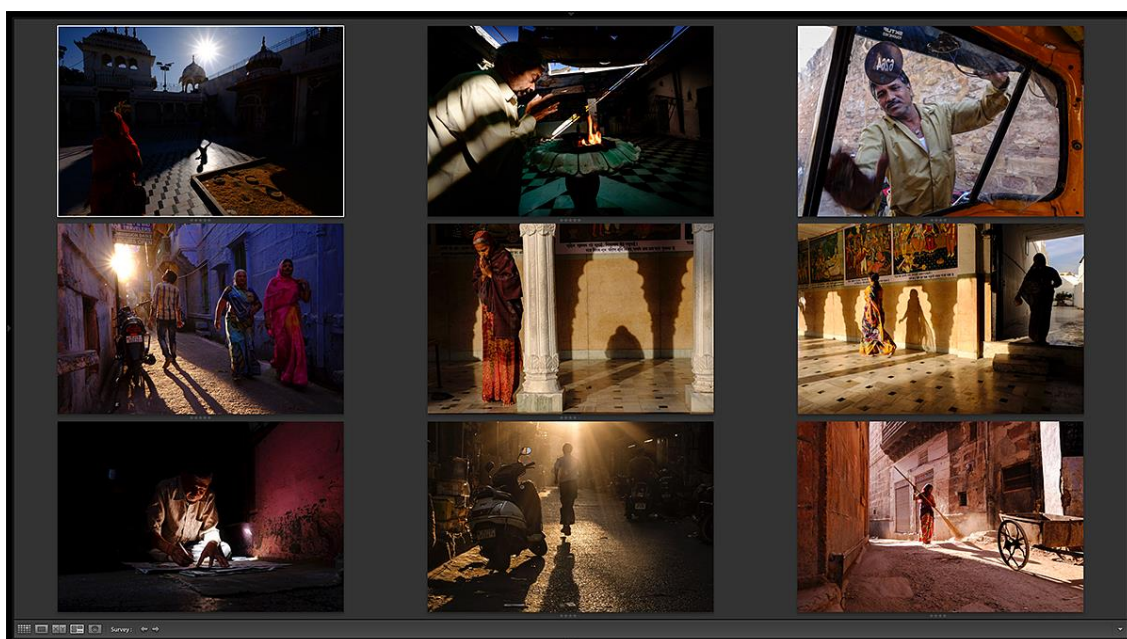
### **Bodies of Work**

At the beginning of these 26 weeks, I asked you to create a body of work comprised of a series of 12 images that work together. Counterintuitively, I gave you no more direction than that. Here's why: I wanted you to wrestle through it. I wanted you to make it yours. Some of you will have done it, some of you will have considered it optional. If you did it, good for you! It probably hasn't been easy, especially without any more guidance from me than telling you to get to it. But I'm guessing you learned more from the effort than had I laid it all out for you; I'm hoping that's the case. If nothing else, the effort will have raised questions for you that might give context to the following discussion.

Over the last couple years, the idea of intentional bodies of work has become increasingly important to me. The idea that single images can work together in a more powerful way and explore a subject

with greater depth or breadth in collaboration with each other is not new. Artists have long allowed their work to exist as a body: in part, I believe, because so few of us get it right the first time and our efforts to do so create variations and exciting detours. It's also usually the case that one image alone is not as powerful as a series, and that is enough of a reason to pursue this idea. Below are three things you might want to consider and explore when working on your next body of work.

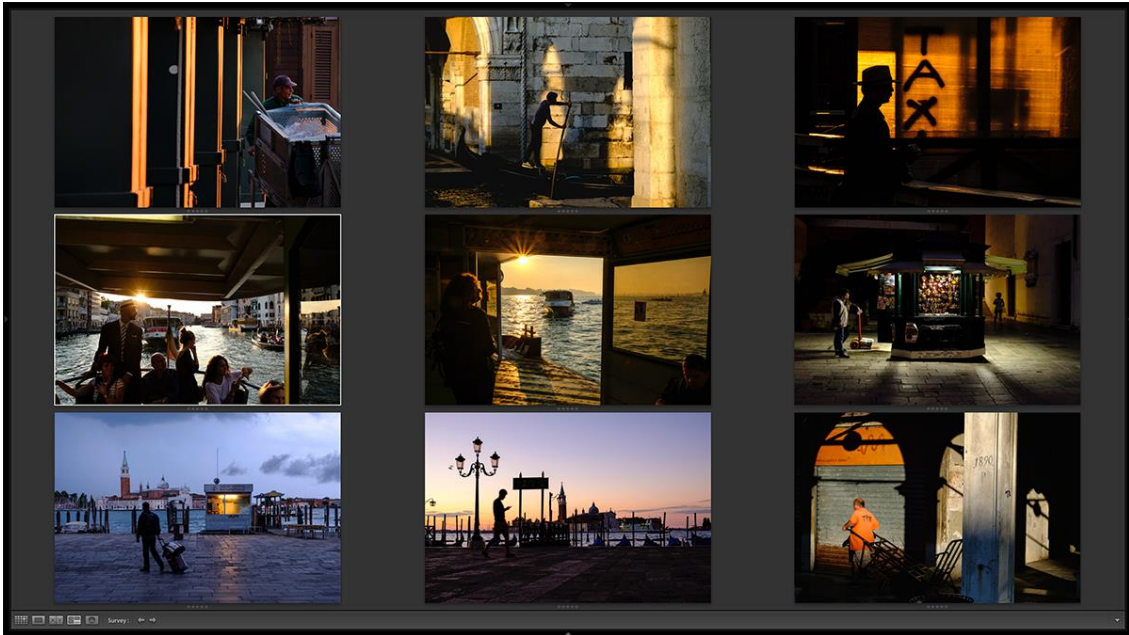
*The images below are from an India series, one characterized by strong shadow and light play, rich colours, and the inclusion of human elements.*



## Theme

A theme is an idea that you hang the work upon. It's the concept that unifies the work, regardless of how you execute it. Themes might include explorations of street food in India, expressions of ancient faith in the modern world, colours in the New York subway, or dogs and their owners. It's the idea—the vision behind the work—and if you can articulate it well before you get moving on the project, you'll have a better sense of the direction to move in. Be aware that ideas have a habit of changing form, especially as you explore those ideas. For example, what started as a series about dogs in Paris might become something bigger, like dogs and their owners around the world. Roll with it. But at some point, you'll have to nail it down and get to work.

*The images below are from a small body of work focusing on Venice in the morning; the waking up of a city, if you will. That was my theme.*



### **Cohesion**

A good body of work is marked by cohesion. When done well, theme provides conceptual cohesion, and your creative constraints can provide visual cohesion. The constraints you choose are up to you. Will they all share a similar colour palette? A similar or identical aspect ratio? Will they be black and white? Will they all include a specific element? What matters is that the images work together. Some will complement each other and others will contrast with each other, but they are stronger for being presented together. You might want to go back and re-read the discussion about choosing constraints in Week Seven. Well-chosen constraints can be extremely helpful in creating a body of work. Personally, it is the second thing I work through: the first is my theme, the second are the constraints that will provide the visual cohesion.

*The images below are from a long-term project in Kenya, but it's a smaller part of the work focusing on the need for and the scarcity of water. They are all horizontal and black and white, and for the most part, shot with a very inclusive, intimate feeling created by using wide-angle lenses.*



## Flow

How you choose to present your work is up to you, be it a web gallery, a monograph, a book, or a gallery. But know that once you present, you are creating an experience and you'll want to consider how that work flows from one image to the next. This is an important part of editing your images and you'll want to consider how one image looks adjacent to the next. Does it flow neatly into the other or is the transition very abrupt and jarring? One is not better than the other, so long as it's done intentionally and with purpose, hopefully in a way that supports the expression of the theme you're developing. If your work is softer, such as a series of pastel impressionist images, you're more likely to want a softer flow with a gentler rhythm (perhaps the colour palette changing slowly from cool to warm) rather than just throwing them all together with no thought to the movement from one to the next. But if you favour grittier images, like a black and white series about life in a crack den, you might want the flow to be a little more jarring or surreal. Or you might want the progression to tell a story, in which case you'll want it to feel logical or sequential, with a strong beginning, middle, and end. However you do it, consider the body of work as a whole, not just a collection of individual images; it's cohesion that you're looking for to support the bigger idea.

I'm not suggesting this is the only way to create photographs or that it's the *best* way; like storytelling, it's just one of various ways of making photographs work more powerfully. Some of my best work stands all on its own (apart from any real body of work), some work well as a trio, and others work well in longer series. Only experimenting with the form will tell you whether it's useful to you.



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## Creative Exercise

If you haven't done the personal project yet, you've got a week to finish, but this exercise assumes you've been working on it for the last 25 weeks. If you *have* been working on your project, either lay your prints out in front of you or if it's still in Lightroom, pull your images into a grid. Now consider these questions:

- What was the theme of this project? Did it change as the project took shape?
  - What creative constraints did you impose on yourself? Did they change as the project developed? Did those constraints help you creatively? How do those constraints provide visual cohesiveness?
  - How does the work flow? Are there sequences that could flow better?
  - What are you going to do with this work now? Is there somewhere you can share it, such as an image a day on Instagram for the next couple weeks? Perhaps an album on Facebook? Maybe printed out and given as a gift to someone.
  - What would you do differently next time, and why?
  - What's next? Don't lose the momentum. Can you further develop this work? Did you encounter new ideas as you worked on this series that you can now follow with a new series?
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## Study the Masters

I want to introduce you to **Hiroshi Sugimoto**, knowing he's not going to be completely understood or appreciated by many. I like his work; it's conceptual, for sure. If you know his work at all it's from the cover of the U2 album, *No Line on The Horizon*. The photographs featured in his book, *Seascapes*, are mesmerizing; those in *Theaters* are just plain intriguing. For *Theater*, he made long exposures during a movie, and there's something about the idea that the whole movie is somehow in those images fascinates me. And even if it's not your thing, his work is an interesting study in how bodies of work can be created around the simplest of concepts. Here's what he had to say about the idea behind *Theaters*:

*"Around the time I started photographing at the Natural History Museum, one evening I had a near-hallucinatory vision. The question-and-answer session that led up to this vision went something like this: Suppose you shoot a whole movie in a single frame? And the answer: You get a shining screen. Immediately I sprang into action, experimenting toward realizing this vision. Dressed up as a tourist, I walked into a cheap cinema in the East Village with a large-format camera. As soon as the movie started, I fixed the shutter at a wide-open aperture, and two hours later when the movie*

*finished, I clicked the shutter closed. That evening, I developed the film, and the vision exploded behind my eyes."*

You can see more [on his website](#), though the collection is disappointingly small. A Google search will pull up more of his work, though not with any real flow. And if you want to see it printed, pick up copies of *Seascapes* and *Theaters*.

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### **Further Study**

Here are a few resources to follow up on as you have time:

- [This great video from Ted Forbes](#) talking further about Hiroshi Sugimoto, for those of you who don't necessarily understand it and those who want to explore it more.
- [A second video from Ted Forbes](#) on the similarities between Sugimoto and painter Mark Rothko.
- [This short article](#) about Sugimoto's *Seascapes*.

### **Final Comments**

Thanks for joining me on this journey. We've got one more week to go, and I'm hoping the journey has been worth the time and effort for you. As always, you know where to find me: on [my blog](#), on [Facebook](#), and on [Instagram](#), and if you're missing any of the weeks, [you can get them all here in the archive](#).

For the love of the photograph,  
David duChemin