

# THE MODERN PHOTOGRAPHER



Dear friend,

You hold a very powerful book in your hands. This book will attempt to create a new culture in photography – a culture of entrepreneurial creation, artistic experimentation, and thinking big.

Photography is at the intersection of art, commerce, and technology. With the pervasiveness of the internet, these fields are rapidly changing and we as photographers need to change too. We need **MODERN PHOTOGRAPHERS** for this modern time.

I wrote this book to share with you my knowledge, experiences, and ambitions for the photography world. Together with you I want to push the boundaries and reflect deeply about photography: What is a photographer? What is the value of a photograph? How do we succeed as modern photographers?

This book encourages you to ask both “Why?” and “How?” This is an philosophical primer to push you to advance your vision, to be in a constant state of ‘becoming,’ and to think about the difficult questions of purpose and legacy. This book is also a practical guide to provide you with concrete advice to grow and prosper in today’s digital age.

Modern photographers, let us pause to reflect, dream, and create!

ERIC KIM  
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# A NEW CULTURE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

In the past, the only way to 'make it' as a photographer was to have your works exhibited in galleries, to sell your prints and books, and to be 'respected' in the art world.

Today, times are different. The internet has revolutionized how art and photography is published, distributed, and consumed.

This is our opportunity to think big, innovate, and tap into the infinite opportunities of these changes as modern photographers.

Let's create a new culture and redefine the meaning of success in today's brave new digital world.







## **EVOLVE AND INNOVATE**

1. Everyone is a photographer.

—————→ *How do I stand out? What is my voice?*

2. We are drowning in a world of images.

—————→ *What is the value of an image? What is the meaning of a photograph to me? To society?*

3. The internet has changed the world of publishing.

—————→ *How do I become my own publisher?*



# PART 1



ON

VALUE



# WHAT VALUE DO I PROVIDE AS A PHOTOGRAPHER?

Value is a man-made concept. As the philosopher-poet Publilius Syrus once said 2,000 years ago:

→ “The value of something is worth what the buyer is willing to purchase it for.”

Everyone values things differently.

In photography, here are some things we value:

- Personal vanity with pictures
- Recording memory through pictures
- ‘Presentation of self’ – curating your own personal image with pictures of yourself
- Making art – photography as visual and creative expression
- Pictures and photographs as advertising – to get people to buy things
- Photos and picture as art – to be purchased as art objects

# WHAT IS THE VALUE OF A PHOTOGRAPH?

In the modern age, we are picture and image makers. We make pictures (via photography). And with our pictures, we convey an image, a concept, a feeling to the viewer.

Artistically, the value of a photograph and image can also have the following effects:

- Inspiration
- Aesthetic joy
- Appreciation of beauty
- Enhanced feeling of well-being and optimism
- Calm: the feeling of a beautiful sunset or landscape image
- Will to power: a picture that motivates people to action (pictures of social change, exotic destinations, consumer products, etc)

Therefore, you must consider the utility or the effect that your pictures have on your viewer:

- *How does my picture change the perspective, outlook, emotion, or perception the viewer has of the world?*
- *Do my pictures give the viewer or client an economical utility, an informative utility, or an artistic-emotional utility?*





**EFFECTS**

**JOY**

**BEAUTY**

**CALM**

**VIBRANCY**





**WHAT KIND OF EFFECTS DO THESE IMAGES CONVEY?**





# REFLECTION: WHAT IS YOUR VALUE?

## INTRINSIC V. EXTRINSIC VALUE

*Intrinsic value:* Self-dictated. Your own value of yourself. Only you determine this, no one else.

*Extrinsic value:* Dictated by society based on culture, 'market value,' and other economic considerations.

## DO YOU KNOW YOUR INTRINSIC VALUE?

For myself, I consider my intrinsic values as my self-determined useful skills, contributions, and assets as a photographer and entrepreneur:

1. My ability to distill and make sense out of vast waves of information in order to SIMPLIFY information into practical, actionable wisdom
2. I value my ability to cross-pollinate ideas and art from different fields, mixing and creating a new honey from art, photography, music, sociology, biology, physics, economics, psychology, cognitive science, architecture, and design.



## **BUILD INTRINSIC VALUE FOR YOURSELF**

Know your worth. Know that your labor is not free. Realize your life is short (memento mori). What do you want to personally achieve in your life before you die that has nothing to do with money, external wealth, power, fame, or influence?

To recognize and build up confidence in your intrinsic values here are assignments:

1. Write down a list of your skills, talents, and strengths on a piece of paper, your phone, or in a blog post. Do not be humble and modest. Feel free to brag and show off. Just be uncompromisingly honest with yourself.
2. Have confidence in yourself: Your inner-values are dictated by you and for you. Realize, you do not need to force your intrinsic value onto others. You can hold onto it as a reminder of your capabilities to give you a sense of purpose and meaning in life.
3. Ask yourself, "What value do I provide to society?"



## **EXTRINSIC VALUE**

To build extrinsic value, you must tell society:

“Hey guys, this is me. I’m valuable and worth your time, attention, and money. I am worth \$X an hour for my labor, and I am willing to exchange my time, attention, and labor in exchange for X.”

Extrinsic value in modern, capitalist society is dictated by dollars and cents. Euros and pounds. Yuan and yen. Quantifiable returns and investments.

Now, this isn’t ‘fair’— but it is true.

We all exchange our lives (time, attention, bodies, energy) in exchange for money. We exchange the money for food, housing, and toys. We seek additional money for personal vanity reasons, for self-empowerment, and additional comforts in life.



# HOW TO BUILD EXTRINSIC VALUE

## 1. *Build your following or popularity:*

In modern society, followers = influence = power. Thus build the popularity of your website, blog, social media channels, YouTube, etc.

## 2. *Increase your 'legitimacy' or 'expertness':*

Build social proof of how knowledgeable you are, which builds trust. People only trust in what you have to say, if they see you as an 'expert' with more experience or wider breadth of knowledge.

Think Academia: If you are published in a legitimate journal or work at a big university, your academic ranking and legitimacy rises.

Essentially, you have other 'influential' people telling others that you too, are important and influential.

For example, I was featured on DigitalRev on YouTube by Kaiman Wong (over 500,000+ views), the most popular photography YouTube channel. This helped me build my extrinsic value and legitimacy, because Kai and DigitalRev vouched for my legitimacy.

————→ **Assignment:** Collaborate or get featured on popular and influential platforms to spread your own popularity and legitimacy. You can offer to do a free talk, free guest blog post, or provide compelling content or information.



## INTRINSIC OR EXTRINSIC VALUE?

Ideally, you want to build both your intrinsic and extrinsic value. But can we build one without sacrificing the other? Can we build both at the same time? What is more important to you?

*The benefits of keeping your day job = focus on building intrinsic value*

If you already have a steady-paying day job, and do not have to make a living with your photography, you are in a good position. This will give you more artistic freedom with your photography. In this sense, you can focus on building your intrinsic value as a photographer. You can focus on making pictures for yourself that bring you joy, to focus on training your visual eye, and continue to build faith in your own visual artistry. Remember that making a full-time living as a photographer does not simply make you more 'successful' or 'accomplished.'





*What If I want to make a full-time living from my photography? Then build extrinsic value.*

If you want to make a full-time living from your photography, you must build your extrinsic value. To build extrinsic value, you must build your audience by gaining more followers and you must expand your reach by increasing your visibility, your popularity, and influence.

To make money from photography, you need to 'prove your worth' in the eyes of the market. You need to build your legitimacy and to build trust in your audience. You need people to be willing to exchange their money and resources to learn from you, to purchase your pictures, or to pay for your photographic services.





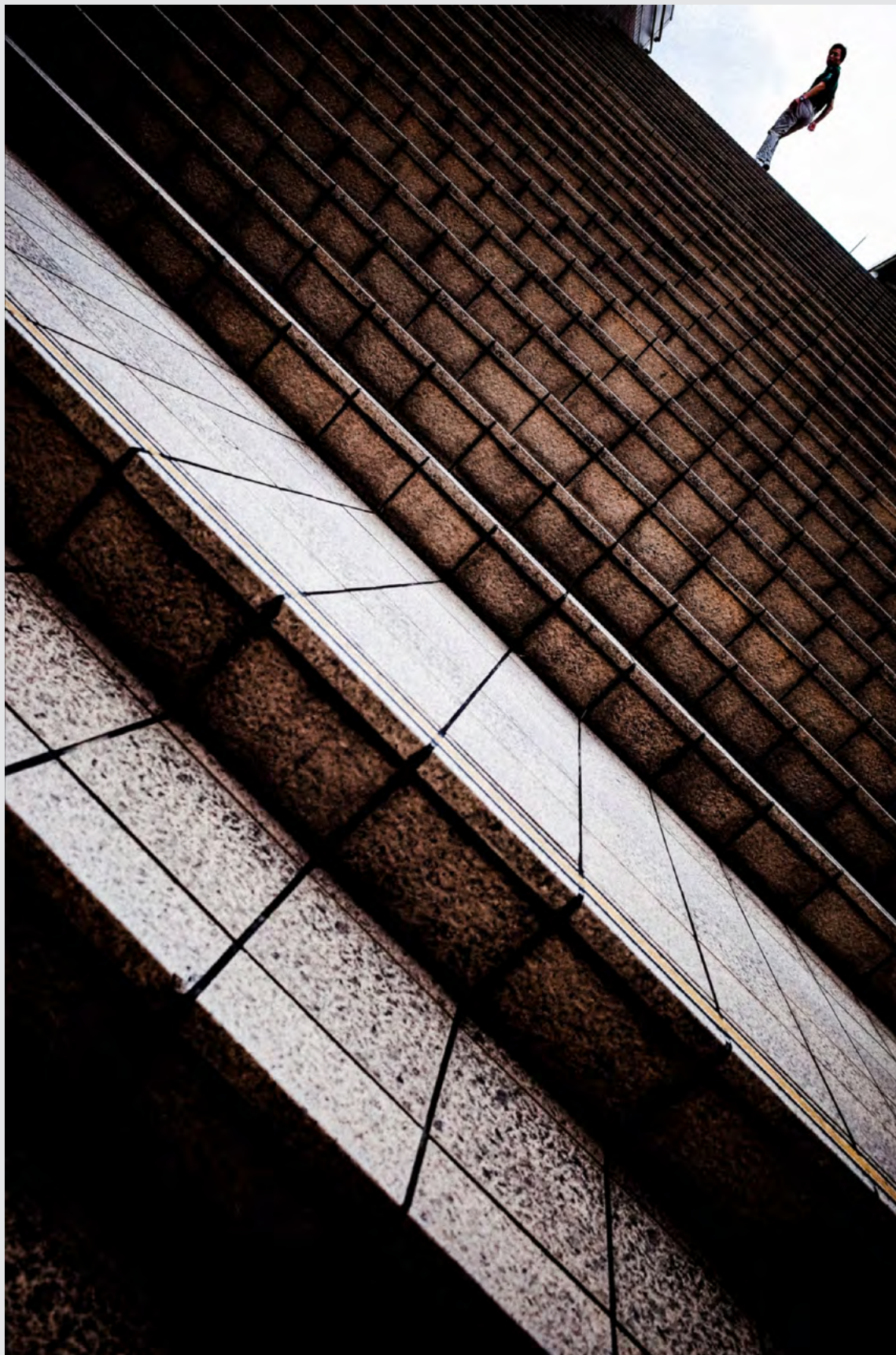
# FIRST BUILD YOUR INTRINSIC VALUE

In life you can build up both your intrinsic value and extrinsic value at the same time.

My personal formula and practical advice for you:

————→ First and foremost, always focus on building your intrinsic value.

My reasoning: The more you develop your intrinsic value, the more confidence and conviction you will have in yourself and your own images. The more you will show your uniqueness, and therefore stand out. This leads to courting others' attention and a higher extrinsic value of yourself.

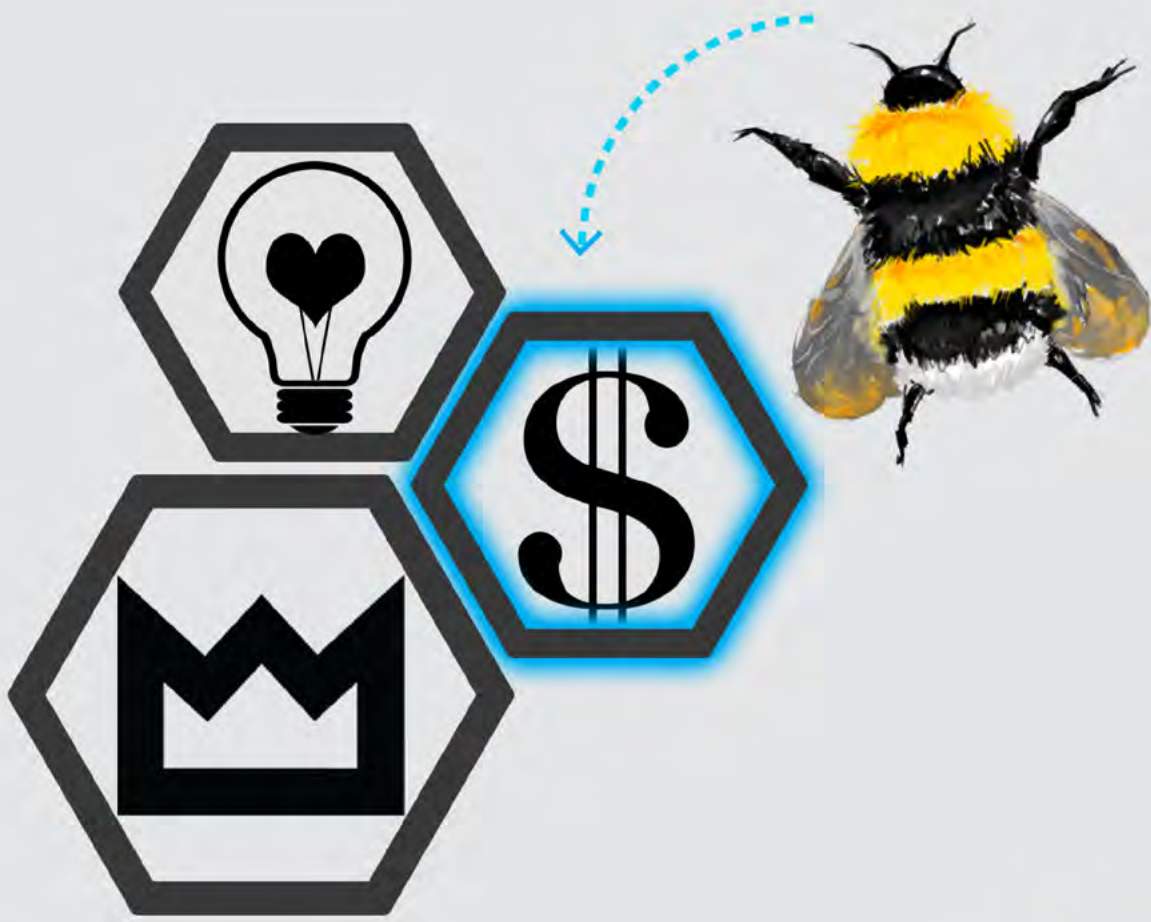


# HOW TO INCREASE VALUE AS A PHOTOGRAPHER

1. Be picky about the clients you take on. Say “NO” to offers you are not enthusiastic about.
2. Overpromise and overdeliver: Promise much in your marketing materials and exceed expectations.
3. Increase your popularity: Write guest blog posts on popular photography websites and blogs, present at photography conferences, start a YouTube photography channel and provide advice and unique resources for photographers.
4. Dominate a small niche in photography: Figure out which small niche in photography that you are passionate about, and devote at least 5 years getting to know everything about that sub-genre of photography. Attend workshops, interview leaders in that field, and continue to build specialized knowledge in that field.
5. Charge premium prices for your photographic services: Charge 25% more for your photography services than you think you should. Provide additional value to your clients by offering additional services, and seek to provide a 10x better service than any of your competitors or anyone else in your field.



# PART 2



ON

MONEY

# REFLECTION: WHY MONEY?

We are not allowed to talk about money. But the more we talk about and reflect on money, then we can concretize our value, goals, and desires in life.

Questions to ask yourself:

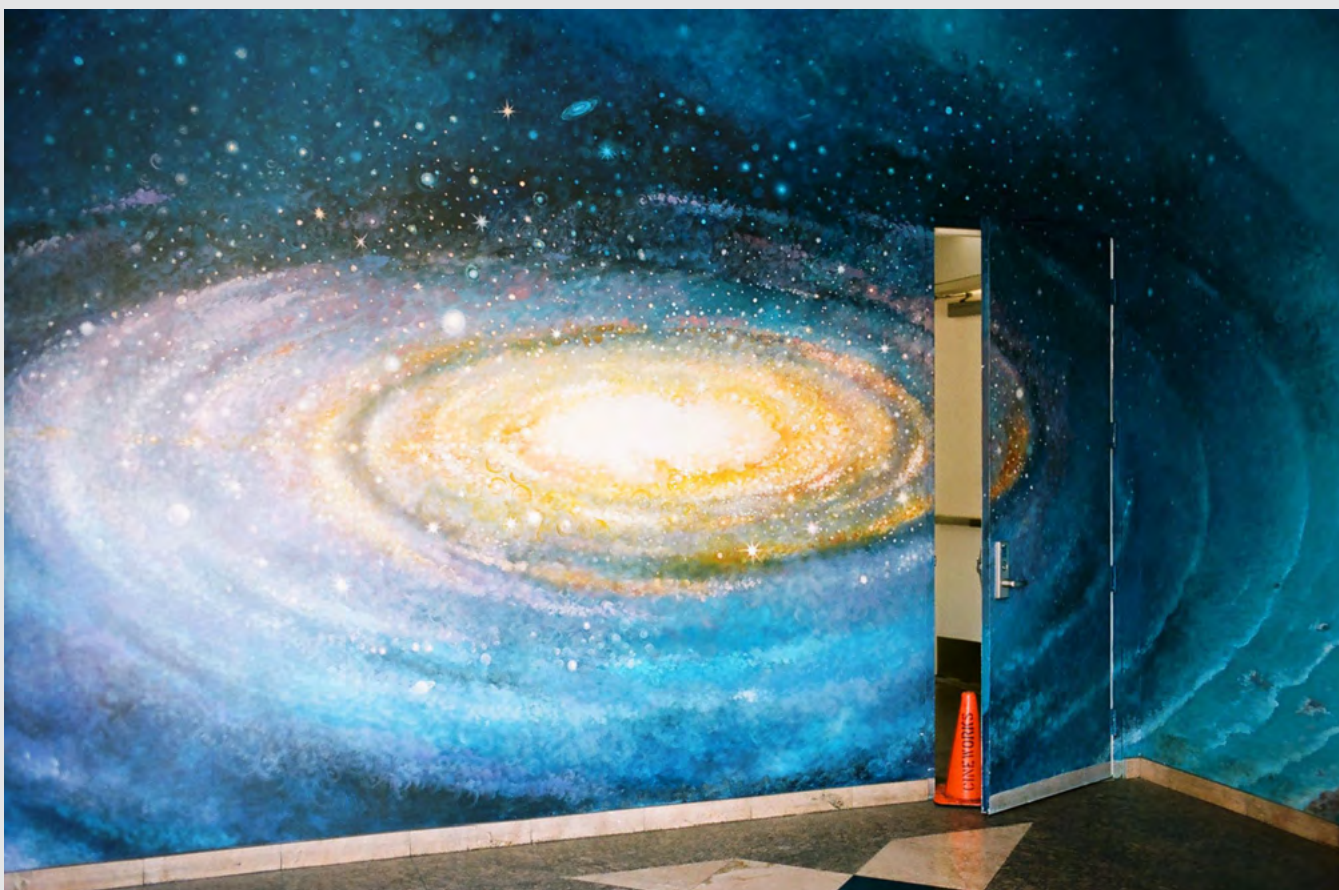
—————→ *What is the value of money for me?*

Do you desire to make a full-time living from photography? If so, why?

Do you desire to make part-income, or side income from your photography? If so, why?

Do you desire money as a way to 'quantify' your self-worth, success, and progress as a photographer and visual artist? If so, why?

—————→ *What does money provide in my life?*





*Some examples of what money might mean to you:*

1. **Money as a marker of success:** Do you feel more successful with a higher salary?
2. **Money as freedom:** The freedom to decide your own schedule and not listen to a boss.
3. **Money as ability for experiences:** The ability to travel, try new fancy restaurants, and pick up new hobbies and leisure activities.
4. **Money as buying stuff:** To have more money to buy clothes, cars, toys, bigger house, and gear – in thinking that buying more stuff will bring us more joy and satisfaction.





## TRADEOFFS AND PRIORITIES

Money is a tool for different things: security, comforts, and freedom. Decide what you actually want and need in your life.

For myself, I prioritize freedom and flexibility over comforts, possessions, and predictability.

I decided to be a photography entrepreneur because I prioritize freedom over my time, schedule, and life. However, in order to make this work I have sacrificed owning a home, a car, most material possessions, and predictability of income. It's what I decided was important in my life and works for me.

—→ *What do you prioritize in your life?*





# GO AHEAD AND “SELL OUT”

There is nothing wrong with making money from your photography and art.

Yet once you start to charge money for your photographic services or pictures, random trolls on the internet might yell: “Sellout!”

We must rewrite the notion of what it means to sell out, and also to clarify that charging money from our photography is not selling out.

## **DEFINITION OF A “SELLOUT”**

‘Selling out’ means to compromise your ethics and personal code of beliefs in order to make money.

However if you stay true to your own vision and believe that what you provide has value, you are not selling out.



# YOUR LABOR AND TALENTS HAVE VALUE

## **Your labor is not free.**

The most valuable asset you have is your time, your labor, and your unique perspective. Attention, energy, and time are your most valuable non-renewable resources. There is only one unique you.

Your labor, talents, and time are valuable.

————→ *Do you believe that your labor, talents, and time are valuable?*

Charging money for your labor and art is a social affirmation that your work is valuable. Recognize how much effort went into your photography and services. Charge money for your work because you believe it is valuable.

————→ *Why is my photography valuable?*



# BECOME YOUR OWN MASTER MARKETER

**Believe in the value of your work and make sure everyone else knows.**

As a modern photographer, you must become your own self-marketer. Your own self-promoter. Your own 'hypebeast' for yourself.

You must be confident in yourself and not be shy to state why you are valuable and important. You must build your own brand, image, and influence with your own two hands. You cannot outsource marketing or branding to anyone else.





# HOW TO BUILD A BRAND AND FOLLOWING

Would you rather be hated on or ignored? In marketing there are only two paths: be loved/hated or be ignored.

To build loyal followers, be unabashedly you. Do not filter yourself. This results in 'extreme' followers who either LOVE your brand or HATE your brand.





## EVOKE STRONG EMOTIONS

You want your picture to evoke a **STRONG** emotion in your viewer. You do not want your viewer to have a lukewarm or “meh” response to your pictures.

Someone who **REALLY LOVES** your pictures will purchase your prints, your books, your digital and physical products, will attend your workshops, and will spread the word about you.

Someone who really **HATES** your photographs or your brand will also benefit you – their shit-talking will help you become more notorious, popular, and controversial. Controversy is good for the modern photographer – because the more controversy you court, the more people will be attracted to and interested in you.





# MY IMAGES THAT EVOKE STRONG EMOTIONS









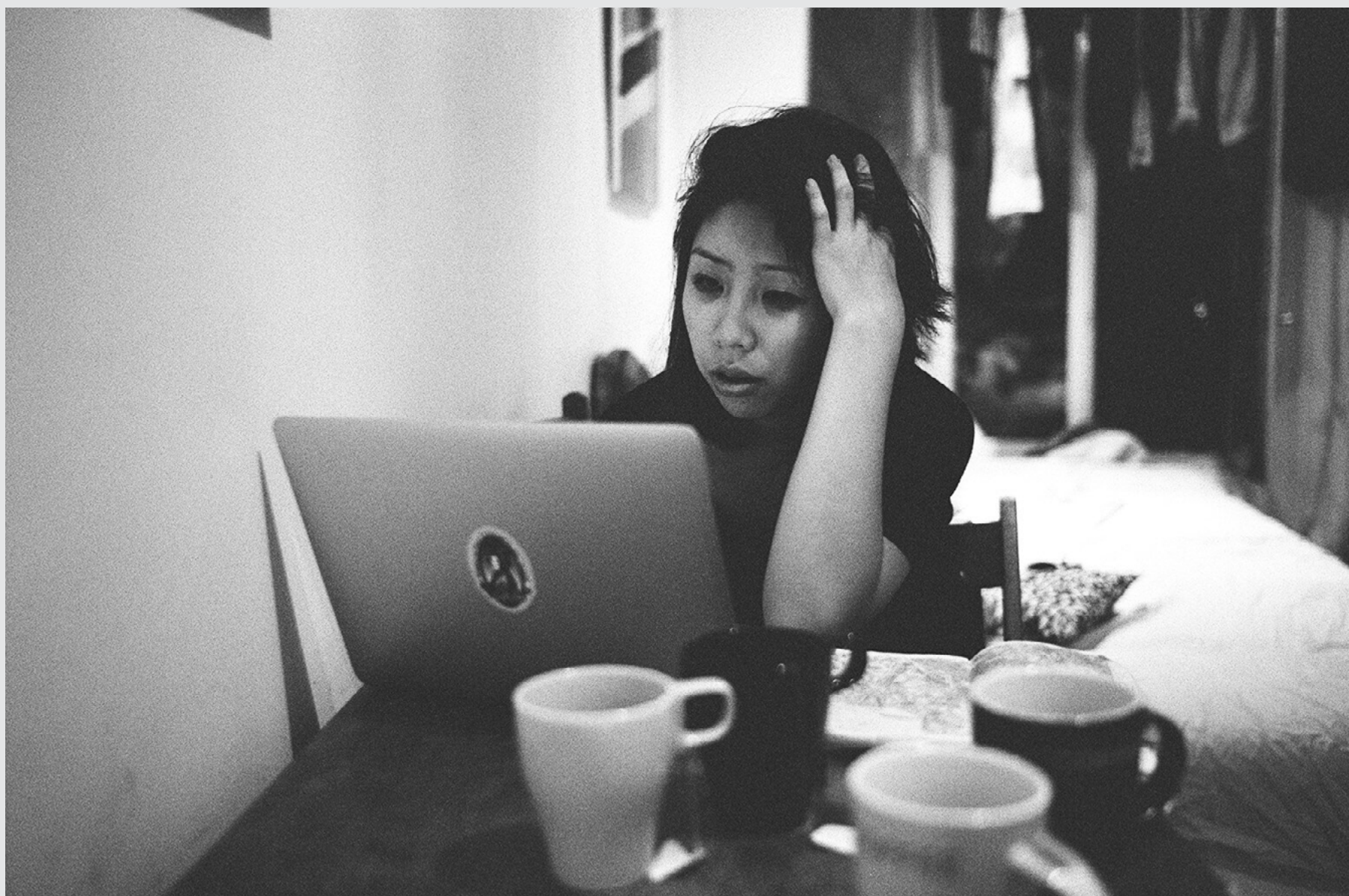
# MARKETING TIPS AND STRATEGIES

## SOCIAL MEDIA & 1,000 TRUE FANS

A principle I learned from technologist and futurist Kevin Kelly is that you only need '1,000 true fans' to make a living from your art. A 'true fan' is someone willing to spend money on purchasing your products or paying for your services.

The goal is not to build a massive following. The goal is to build a small and loyal following.

Therefore, it is important to be present on social media, but know that social media networks constantly change. Do not obsess over your social media followers. Instead focus on building your own e-mail newsletter.





## **E-MAIL NEWSLETTER MARKETING**

The best marketing tool we have at our disposal is the email newsletter. Why?

With email, you have the highest deliverability and open rates.

With social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), your deliverability rate is about 1% according to reported statistics. This means that your picture or post will not reach the majority of your followers. Of the 1% of your social media followers who see your post, very few will actually read your post or click on your link.

Therefore in short, social media is like a bonus – something nice to have, but can be very dangerous if you concentrate too much of your efforts into it.

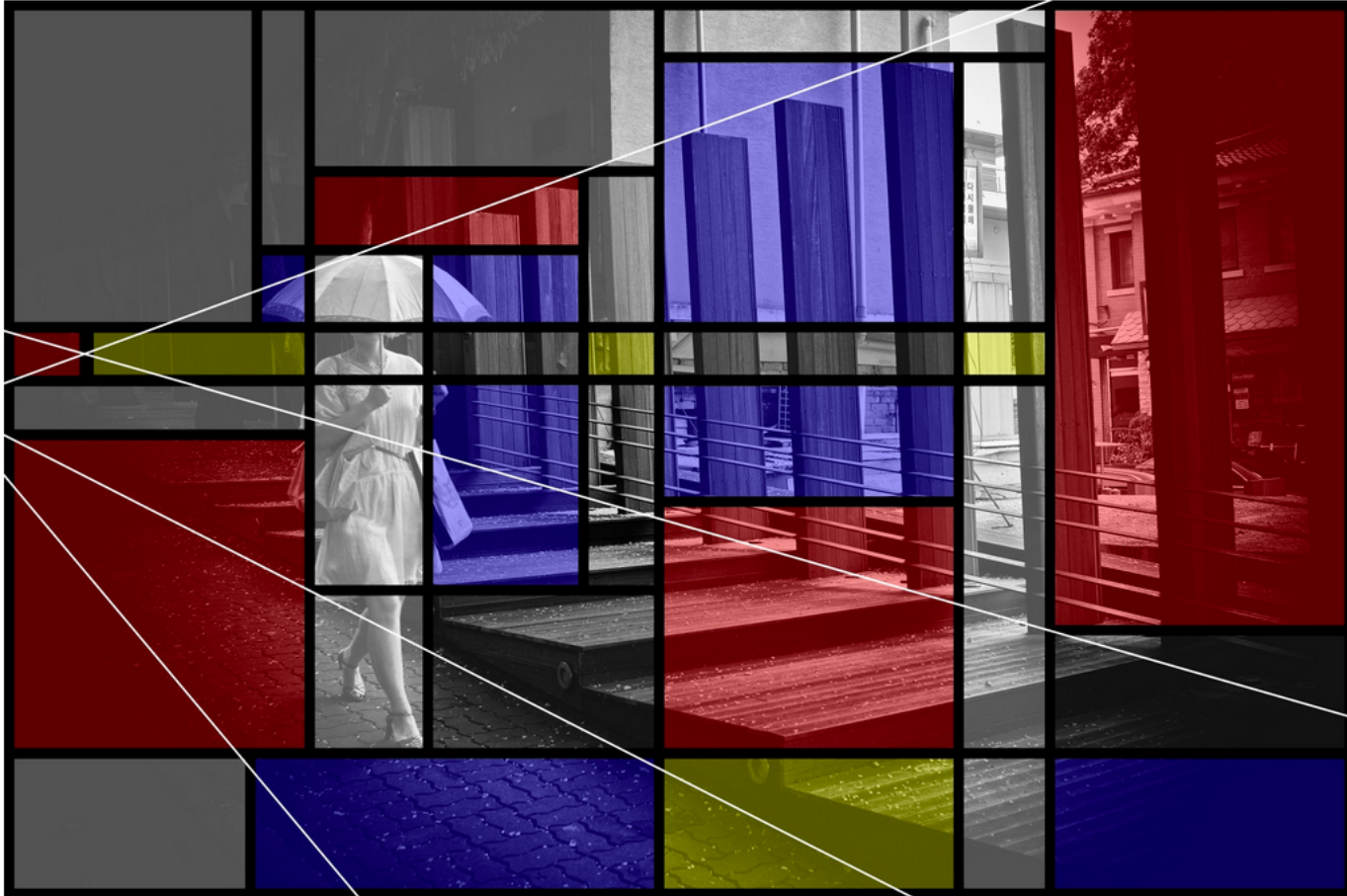
—————→ *Focus 90% of your marketing efforts on your website, blog, or building your newsletter and only 10% on social media.*

You do not 'own' direct access to your followers on social media. You must pay extra money to unlock or boost access to your fans.

Ultimately you will always be at the whims of mega social media corporations like Facebook (who owns Instagram) and their proprietary algorithm – how they decide what to show and not to show in the social media feeds of users.

# ERIC KIM NEWSLETTER

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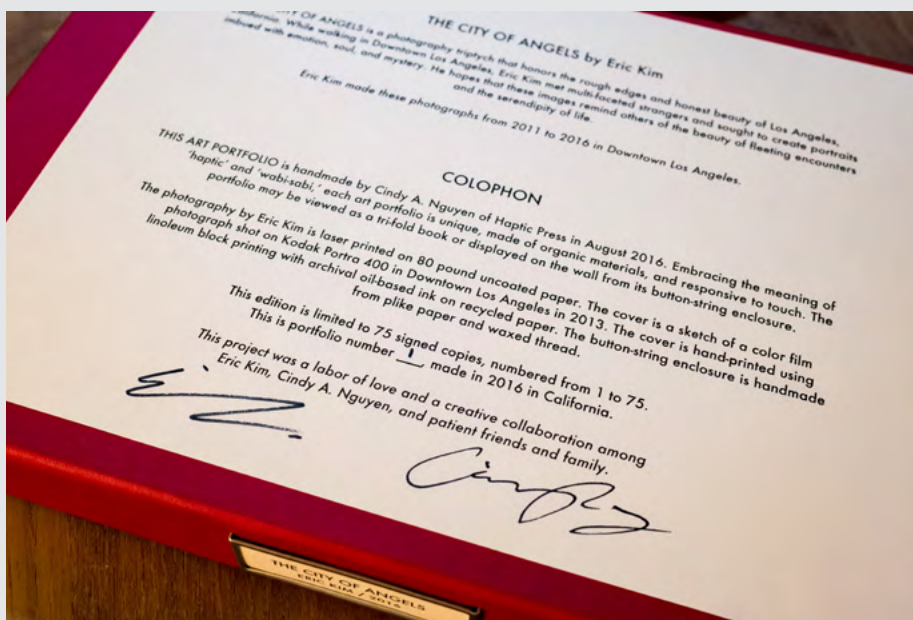
MailChimp

*I host [ERIC KIM NEWSLETTER](#) with mailchimp.com and sending e-mails only when you feel you have something significant to announce to your followers such as valuable blog posts, upcoming workshops, and free resources.*



# HOW TO MONETIZE YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY

1. Sell prints: You can start small by selling limited-edition prints of your work. Make a limited-edition of 10 signed and numbered prints. Your goal is to just sell one print, then you have a 'proof of concept.'
2. Charge 25% more than you think you should: As photographers, we always undersell ourselves. If you do not know how to price your prints, books, courses, workshops, or products, price it 25% higher than you think you should. Your goal is not to become a Walmart photographer – to sell millions of products for a low price. Be a specialty boutique: Sell less of yourself for a higher price.



3. Offer bespoke photographic services: Offer custom-tailored solutions to your client. Your client can be a photographer trying to improve their photography, someone requesting portraits or product photography, an advertising agency, government office, or a camera company in need of consulting advice.

To acquire clients, you can start off by offering a free 1-hour consulting service and then see if your services meet the needs of your client. Then start charging an hourly fee or flat-rate for your services.

My practical suggestion: charge at least \$100 an hour, or \$1,000 for a flat-rate package for your services. Then work your prices up as your demand goes up. By pricing yourself higher, you will become more premium. We all judge something by the price – if you price yourself too low, people will not see you as valuable.



For example, I offer photography workshops, 1 on 1 consulting, and collaborations with companies, organizations, and other artists.

For workshops, I brand them as "[ERIC KIM EXPERIENCES](#)" because they are full on unique experiences for the students.





# MEANING V. MONEY

To conclude this section, I think finding personal meaning and purpose is the most important thing in our photography. Money is just supplementary – and should be used as a tool in order for us to support our photographic artistry.

The question you must ask yourself:

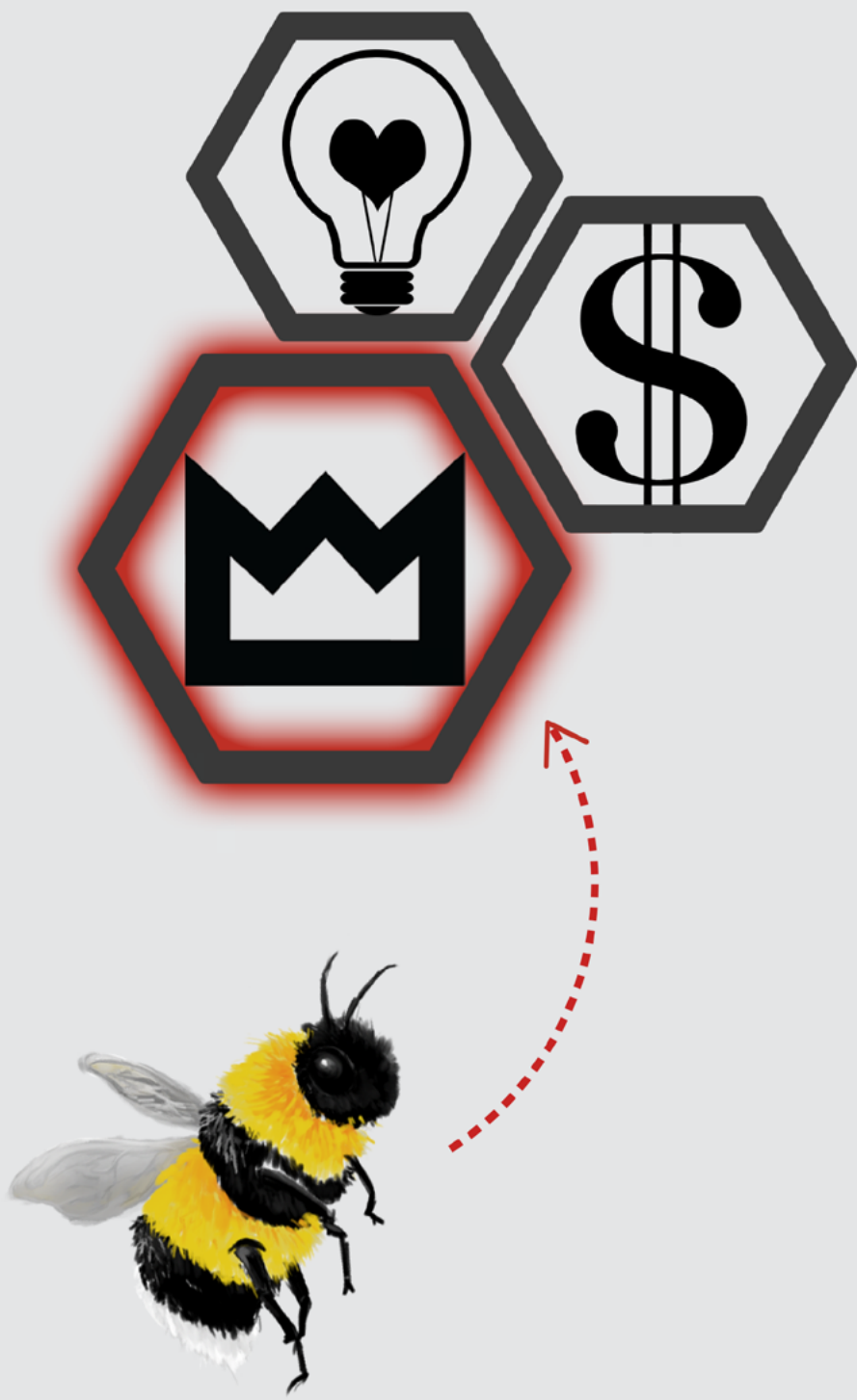
→ *What personal purpose or meaning does photography give me?*

Write down your answer in your phone or notebook. Stare at your response and see how you can change your life to meet your goal of personal fulfillment and meaning through your photography.





# PART 3



ON

YOU



# YOU JUDGE YOU

————→ *What are your personal goals in photography?*

What if you lived in a post-monetary society — a society where money was no longer a marker of success, influence, or power?

What if in your photography, you did not track your success or direction in terms of how many social media followers you have or 'likes' on your pictures?

As a new breed of modern photographers and visual artists we need new cultural instruments to measure and recognize growth, success, and artistic experimentation.



# WHY DO YOU MAKE PICTURES?

A question you must constantly ask yourself is:

————→ *Why do I make pictures? Do I make pictures just for myself? Or also for others?*

What happens when you do *not* make pictures? Do you get depressed, sad, antsy?

Do you make pictures to show your appreciation of life, and the inherent beauty in the world? Are you an optimistic photographer? Or are you a negative and pessimistic photographer – and you only see death, suffering, and gloom on the planet?

Are you a photographer that seeks to make social change with your lens? Are you trying to inspire, encourage, and uplift the souls of your viewers through your photography?

As a modern photographer, I encourage you to be brutally honest to yourself *why* you make pictures. You can decide if you want to share your reason with others.

Understand why you make pictures, and use that spirit to motivate yourself to continue making more pictures and to push your photographic vision.







# JUST MAKE ART!

To create value as a photographer, you must **CREATE!** You must experiment and put into practice new ideas and styles you find. Do not just consume, create!

Furthermore, you cannot just sit around and wait to get 'discovered' by others. You need to put yourself out there. You need to promote yourself and be your own 'hypebeast'.

Here are some practical tips, techniques, and tactics you can employ to create art and make more value as a photographer:

## **1. AVOID BOREDOM AND SATISFACTION**

Create new pictures that inspire you and your viewer. When you look back at your photos and they bore you, move on to something new. As a modern photographer, you are constantly in a state of flux – hungry and dissatisfied with your pictures.

Be both joyful and dissatisfied.

————→ Joyful from your progress.

————→ Dissatisfied knowing you can do better.



## **2. BE FLEXIBLE LIKE BAMBOO**

Give yourself permission to experiment, grow, evolve. Try out new approaches, techniques, and feel free to temporarily abandon them too.

Henri Cartier-Bresson's problem was he was too consistent with his photography. For several decades, he perfected his "decisive moment" style of photography, with his film Leica, 50mm lens, and black and white aesthetic focused on shapes, forms, and deliberate timing. But he just got bored of it after a while, and therefore retired from photography. Henri Cartier-Bresson became too much of a self-tyrant, imposing too strict rules on himself, which actually hurt and harmed his creative growth and evolution.

Be like bamboo – flexible to try out something new, yet also strong and focused on your creative vision and ultimate purpose.



## **2. CREATE EMPOWERING CONTENT**

One of the best ways to market yourself, and build your extrinsic value is through 'content marketing' – by writing blog posts, articles, essays, YouTube videos, or books that inform, educate, and empower your reader/viewer. The more you can build your legitimacy through your knowledge, the more you will build the trust in your follower. And the more interesting your content is, the more followers you will gain.

## **3. MAKE CONTENT FOR YOURSELF**

It is impossible to know what the 'masses' want. But you know what you want, and what kind of content you like to consume.

For example, I like to read blog posts in list format (like 10 Things Henri Cartier-Bresson Has Taught Me About Photography), because for myself personally, it is easier to consume, read, and integrate practical lessons to improve my own photography.

Also when making YouTube videos, I like to make videos that I would like to watch. I like to ask questions (or answer questions) that I, myself, am personally curious about.

The benefit of making content that would interest or please you: you draw like-minded people to you. You find your audience that shares similar values, worldview, and life philosophy as you.

————→ Assignment: Write 1 blog post or upload 1 YouTube video that you yourself would like to see.



# THE ART OF CROSS POLLINATION

You are a visual bumblebee. Collect sources of inspiration from different fields and flowers and make your own unique visual honey.

## **STUDY OTHER FORMS OF ART**

To make more interesting pictures, find inspiration outside of photography. Study different forms of visual art (impressionists, Bauhaus, pop art, Renaissance, architecture, sculpture, cinema).

Find visual inspiration from the masters of art, and integrate those ideas, concepts, into your own pictures. This is one of the easiest ways to make your artwork more unique.

Some of my personal favorite artists to study:

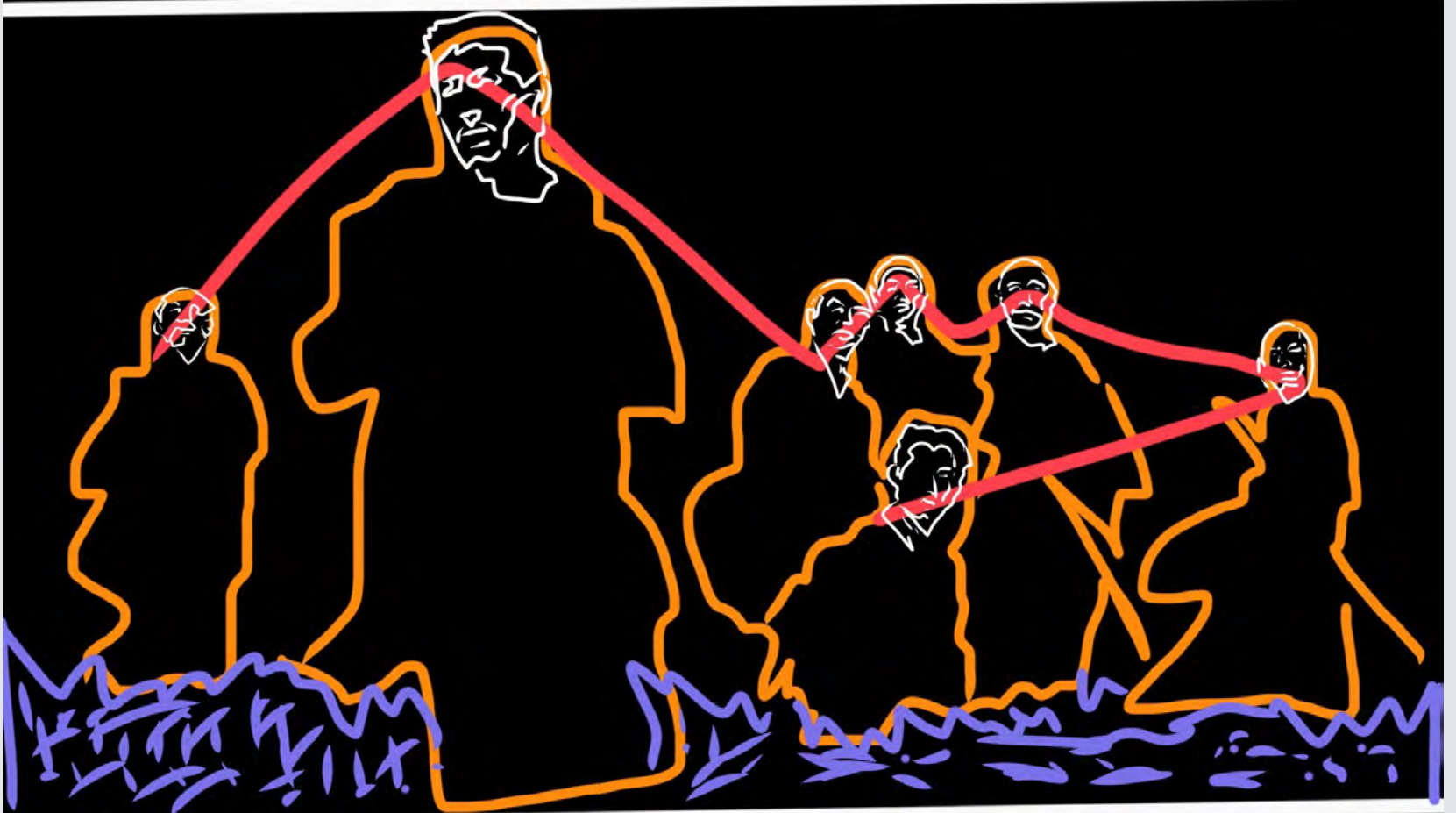
- Akira Kurosawa (cinema)
- Piet Mondrian (abstract art)
- Andy Warhol (pop art)
- Jean Michel Basquiat (pop art)
- Monet (impressionist)
- Leonardo da Vinci (painting)
- Zaha Hadid (architecture)

*I studied Akira Kurosawa's cinematography to understand composition. Specifically, I traced his composition and learned how to space subjects.*



*Golden Triangle Composition in scene of boy in flowers in Seven Samurai (1954)*



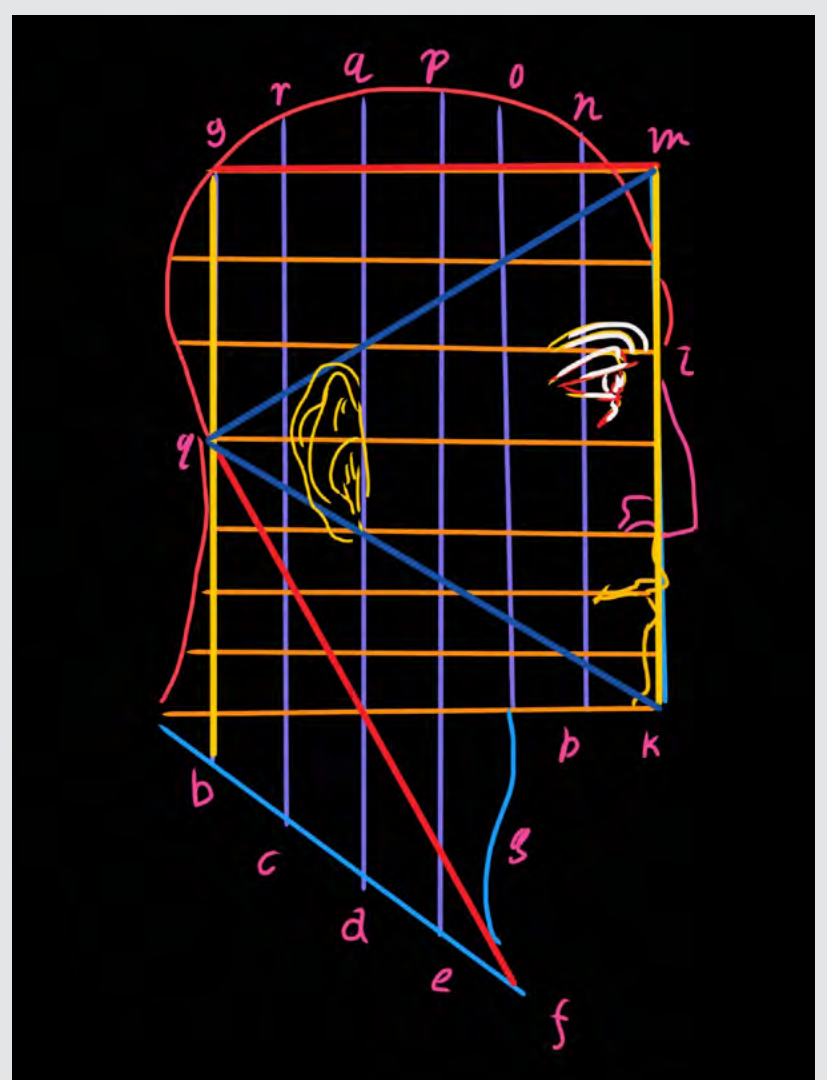
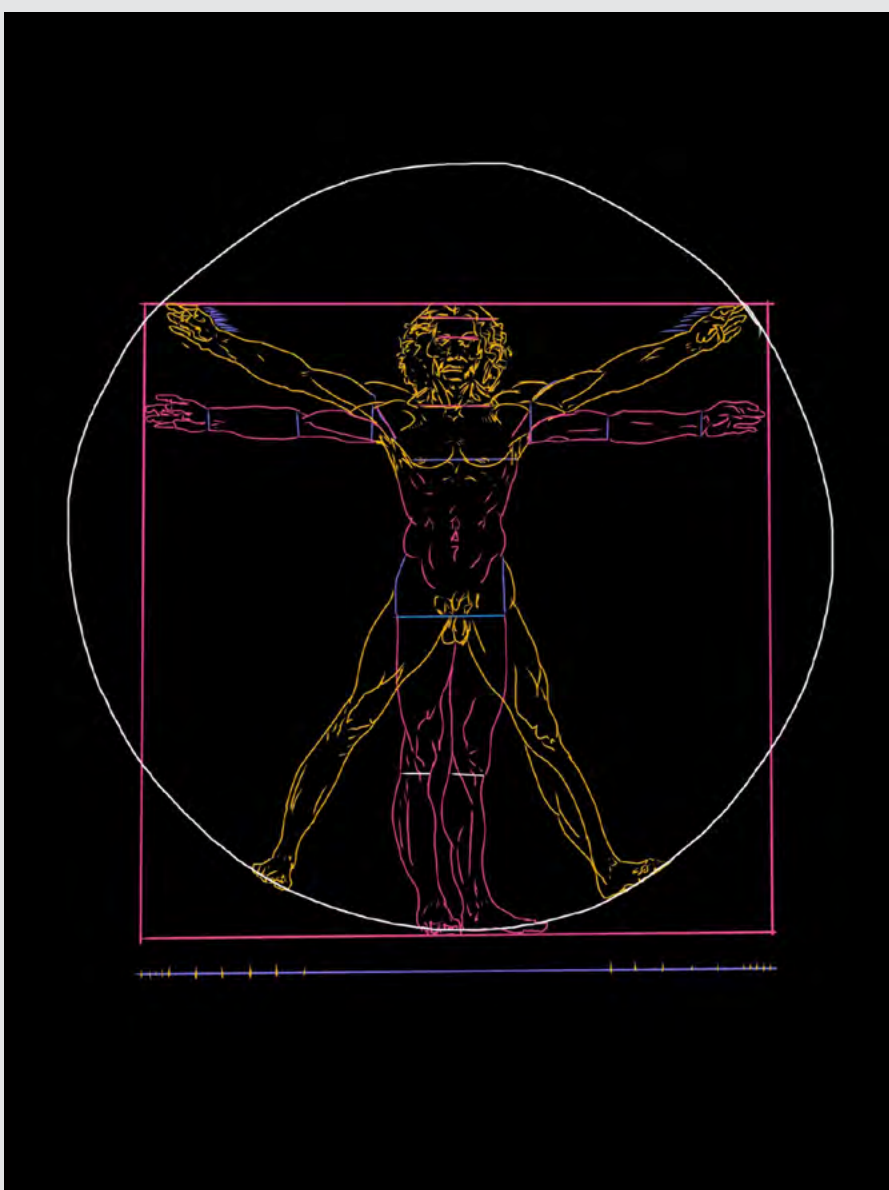




# TRAINING YOUR VISUAL ACUITY

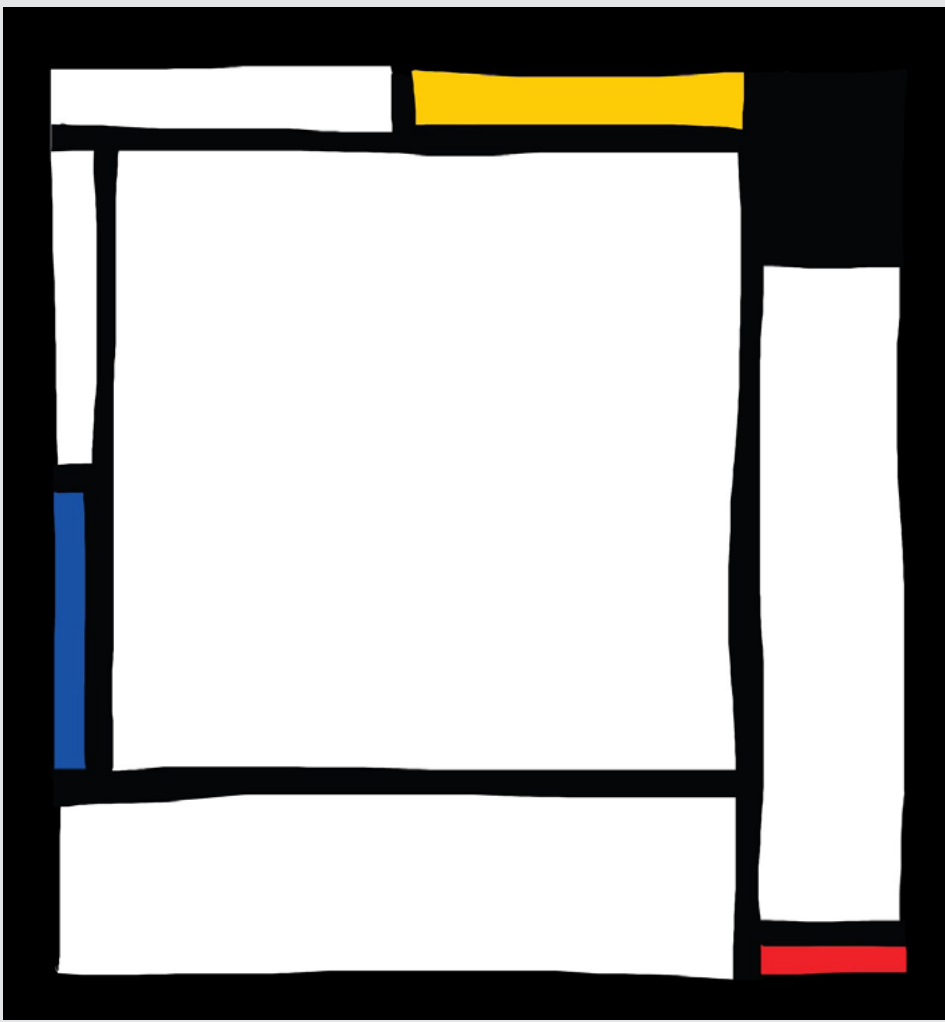
Other genres of art such as architecture, painting, and cinema can help to train your eye.

1. Piet Mondrian has taught me about color theory (dynamic tension between the colors Red, Yellow, Blue)
2. Leonardo da Vinci has taught me about the structures of the human body and face, proportions, and gestures.
3. Andy Warhol has taught me that pop and cultural icons can be integrated to be used as a social, political, economic, and cultural critique.
4. Jean-Michel Basquiat has taught me that it is not important to make 'realistic' looking pictures. Rather make pictures that reveal our inner emotions and express it with visual force.

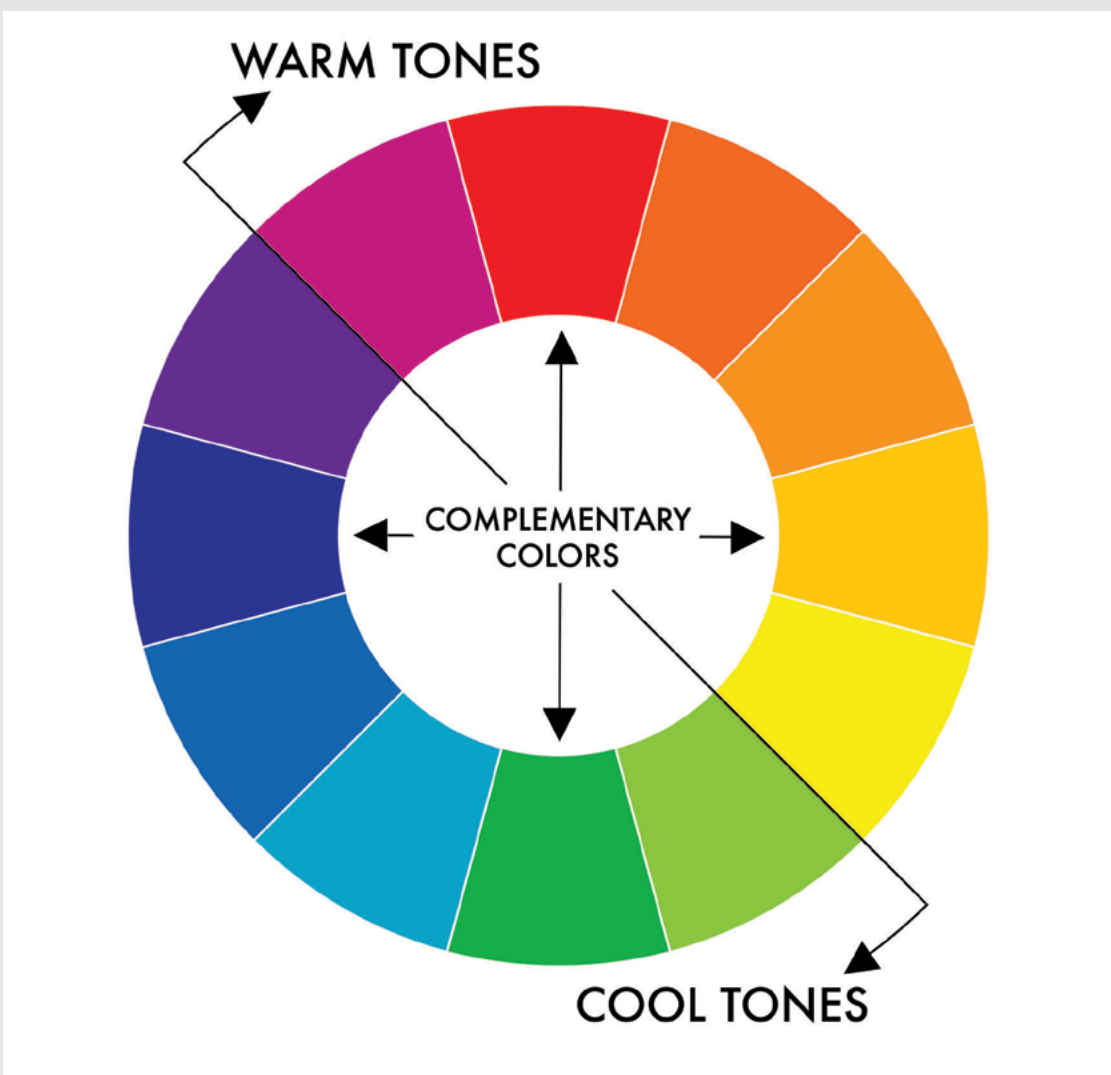
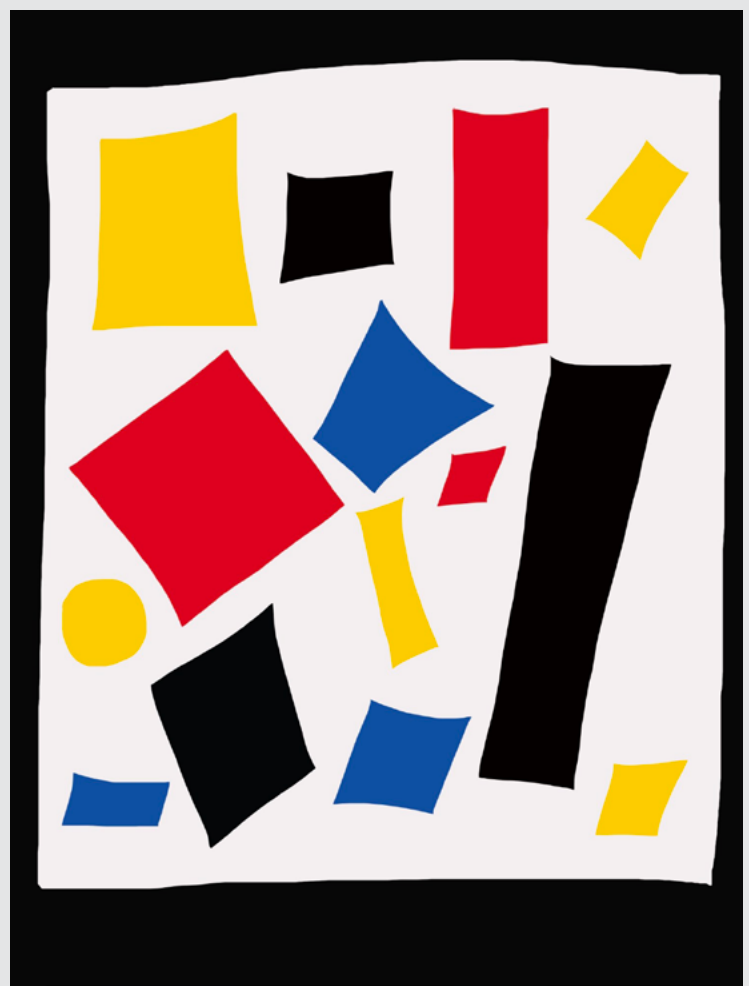


*My studies of Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks*





*My studies of Piet Mondrian and color theory*



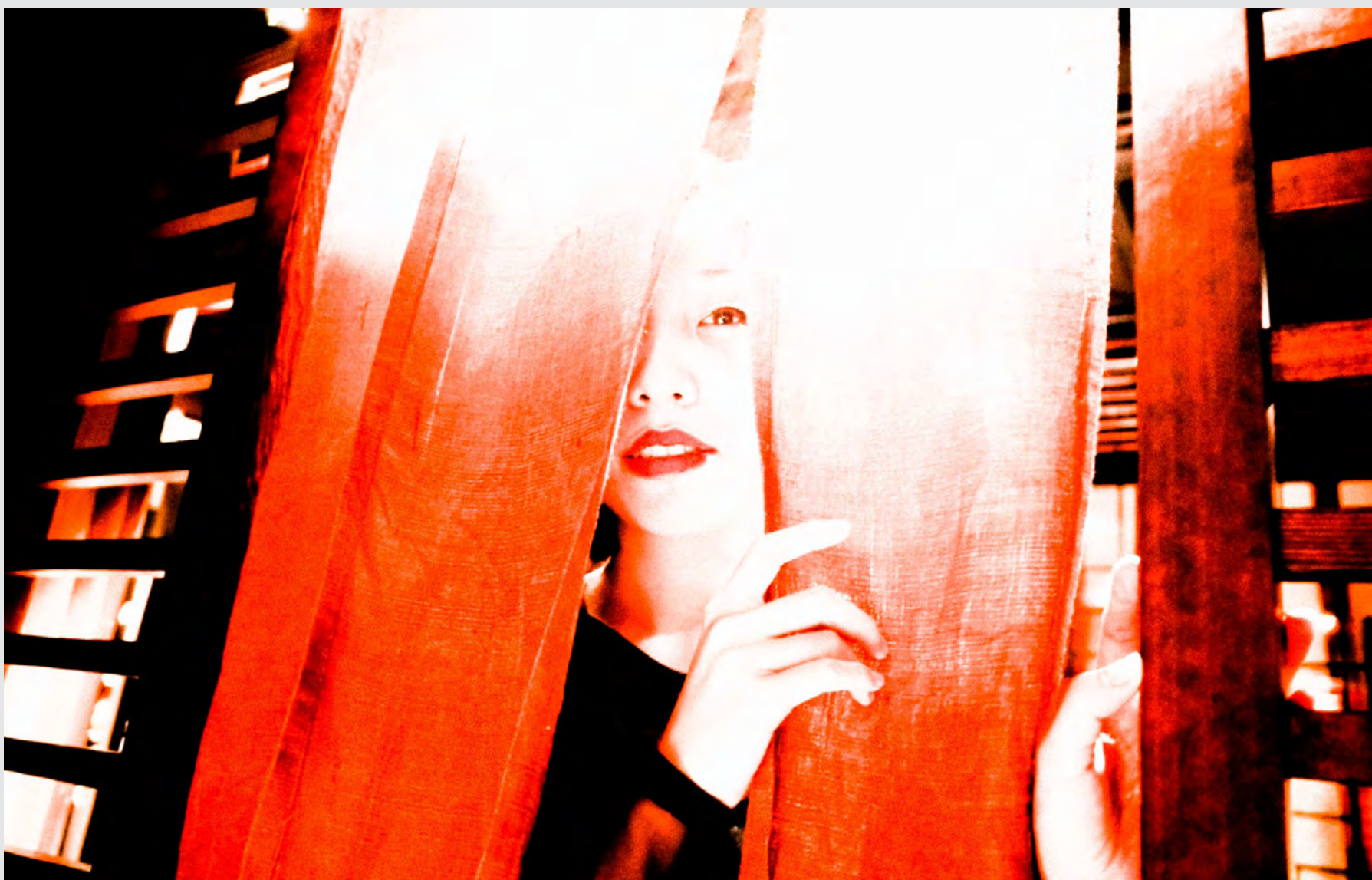


*How color theory influences my photography  
- I focus on red, blue, yellow and the different  
emotions they convey.*





*Red = warm, powerful, intense images*





Combining powerful colors with  
dynamic compositions

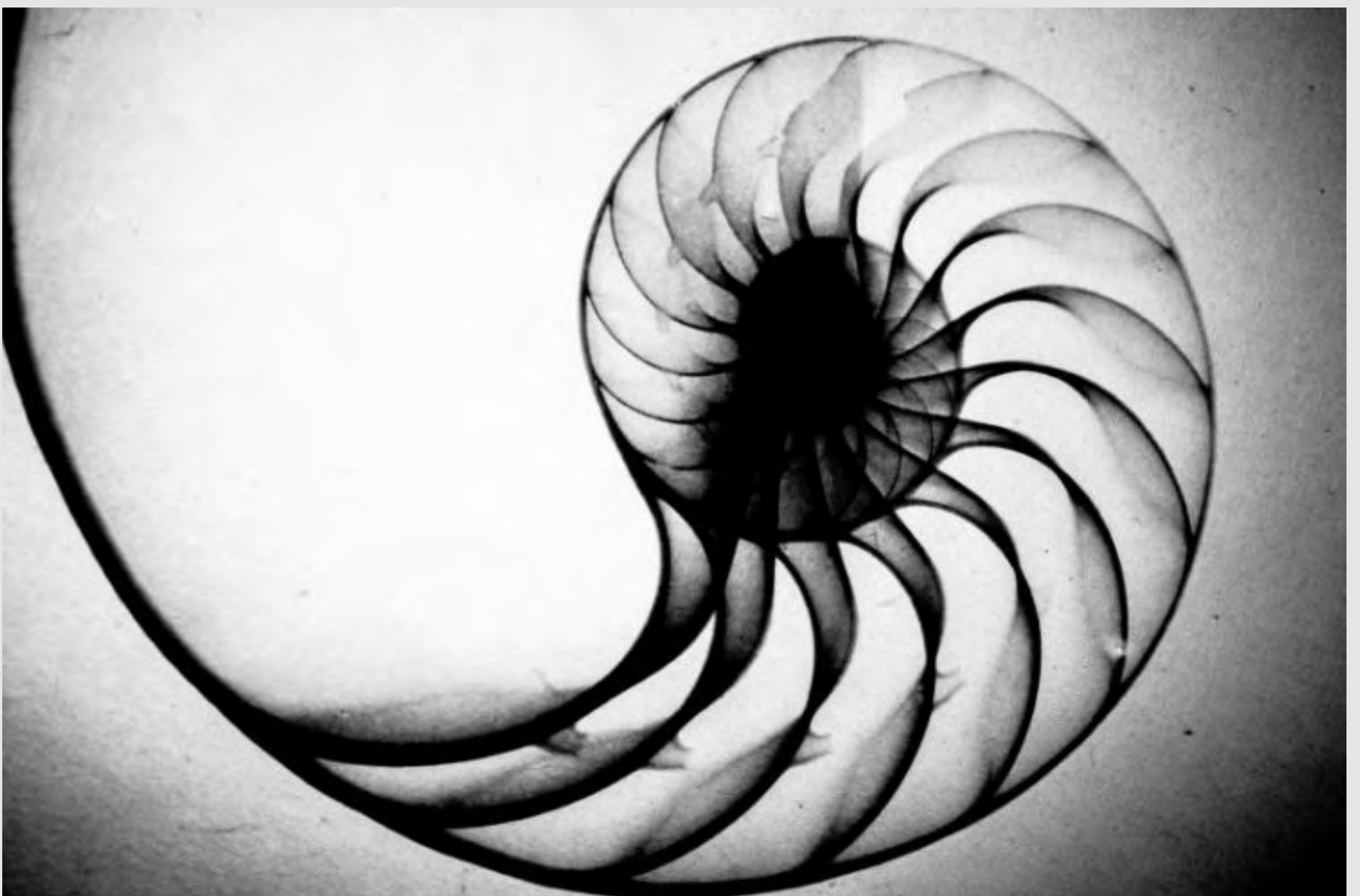




## **CROSS POLLINATION BEYOND THE ARTS**

Studying other fields such as engineering, physics, quantum mechanics, and computer science has given me new ideas that I have been able to integrate into my visual art.

1. Physics has taught me concepts of “tension”, “kinetic energy”, “potential energy”, vectors, and force –which can be applied as visual concepts.
2. Studying nature has helped teach me mathematical principles of composition, such as the Fibonacci spiral, the golden mean, dynamic lines and proportions, the Golden Triangle, geometry.

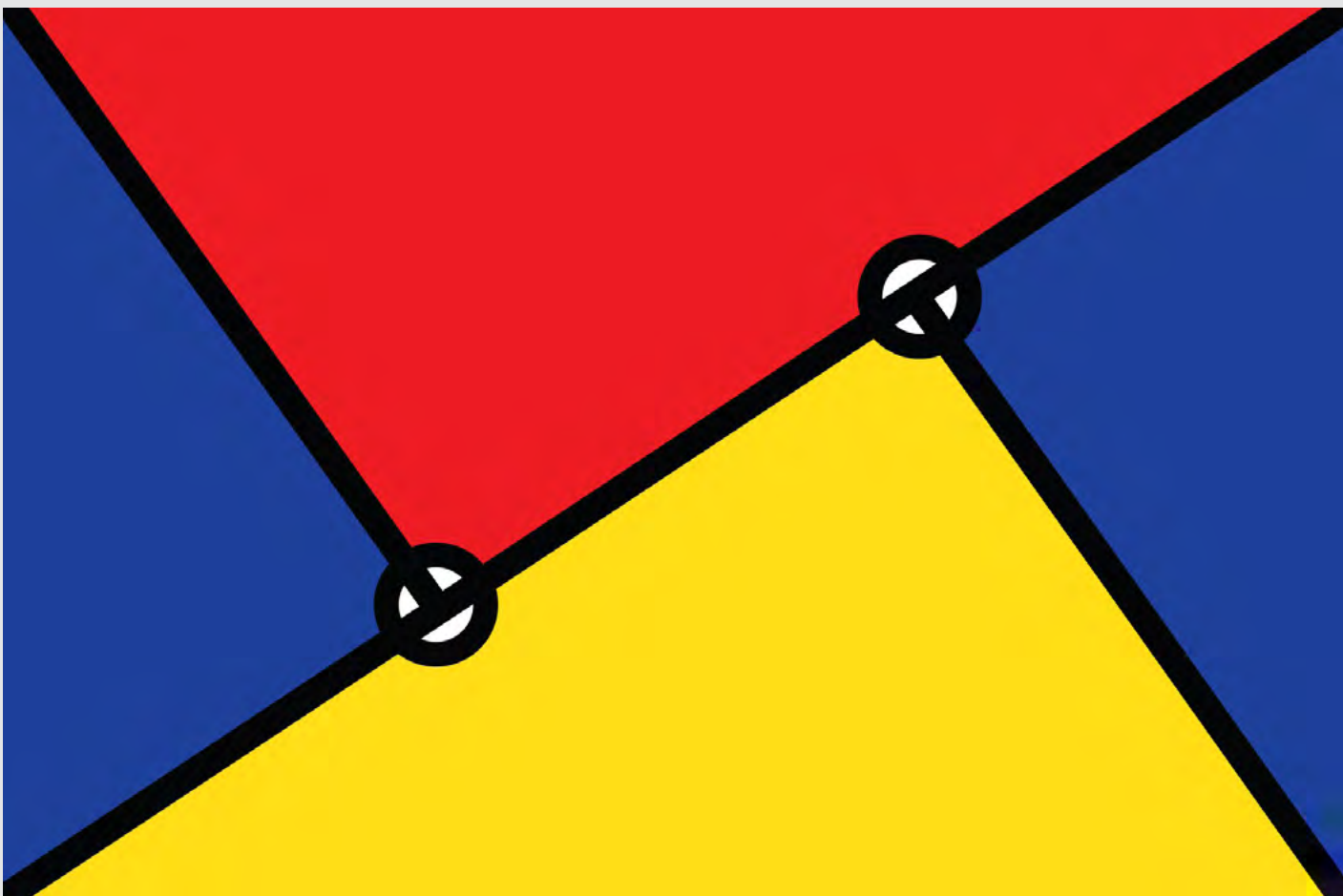




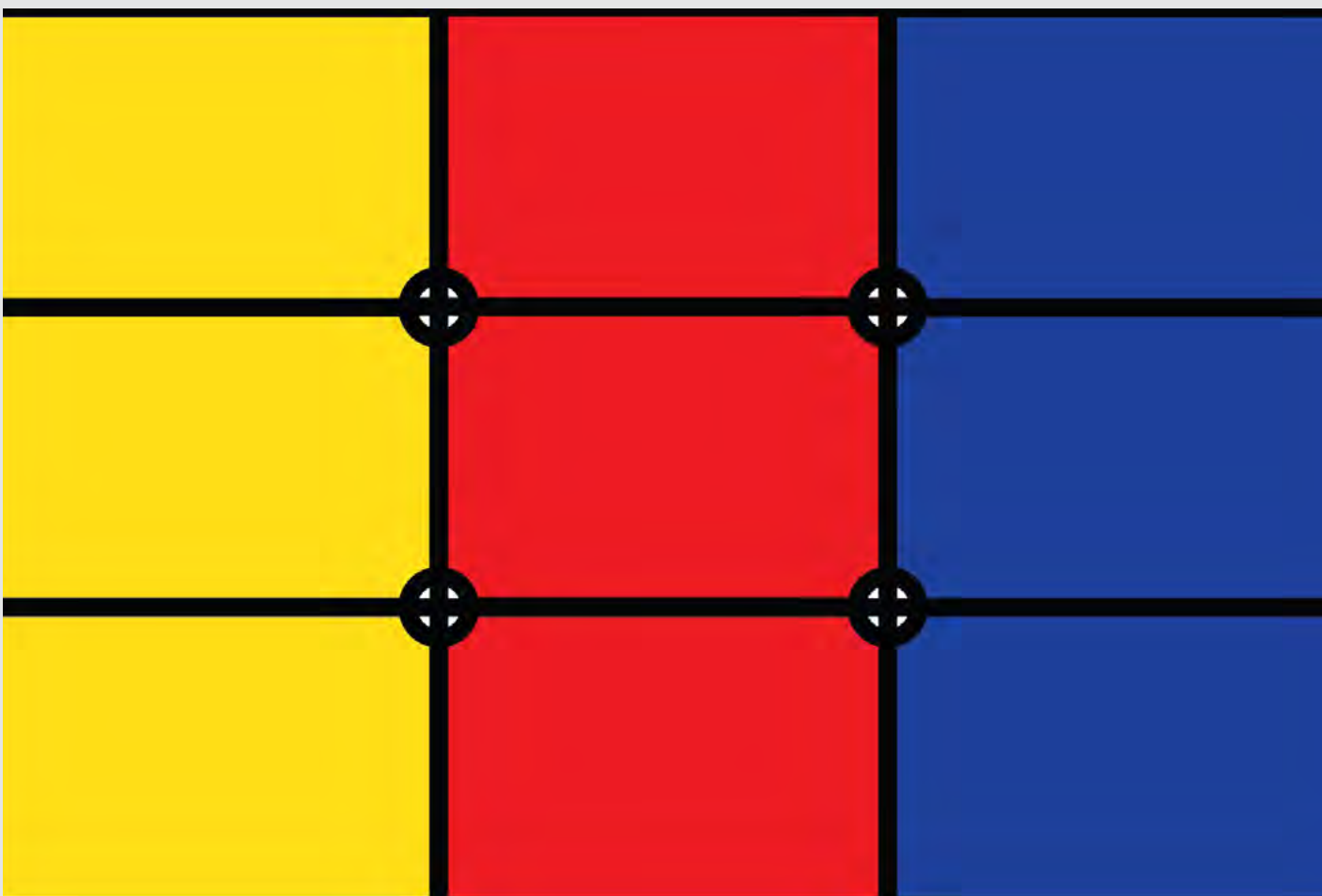
# FIBONACCI SPIRAL



# GOLDEN TRIANGLE



# RULE OF THIRDS

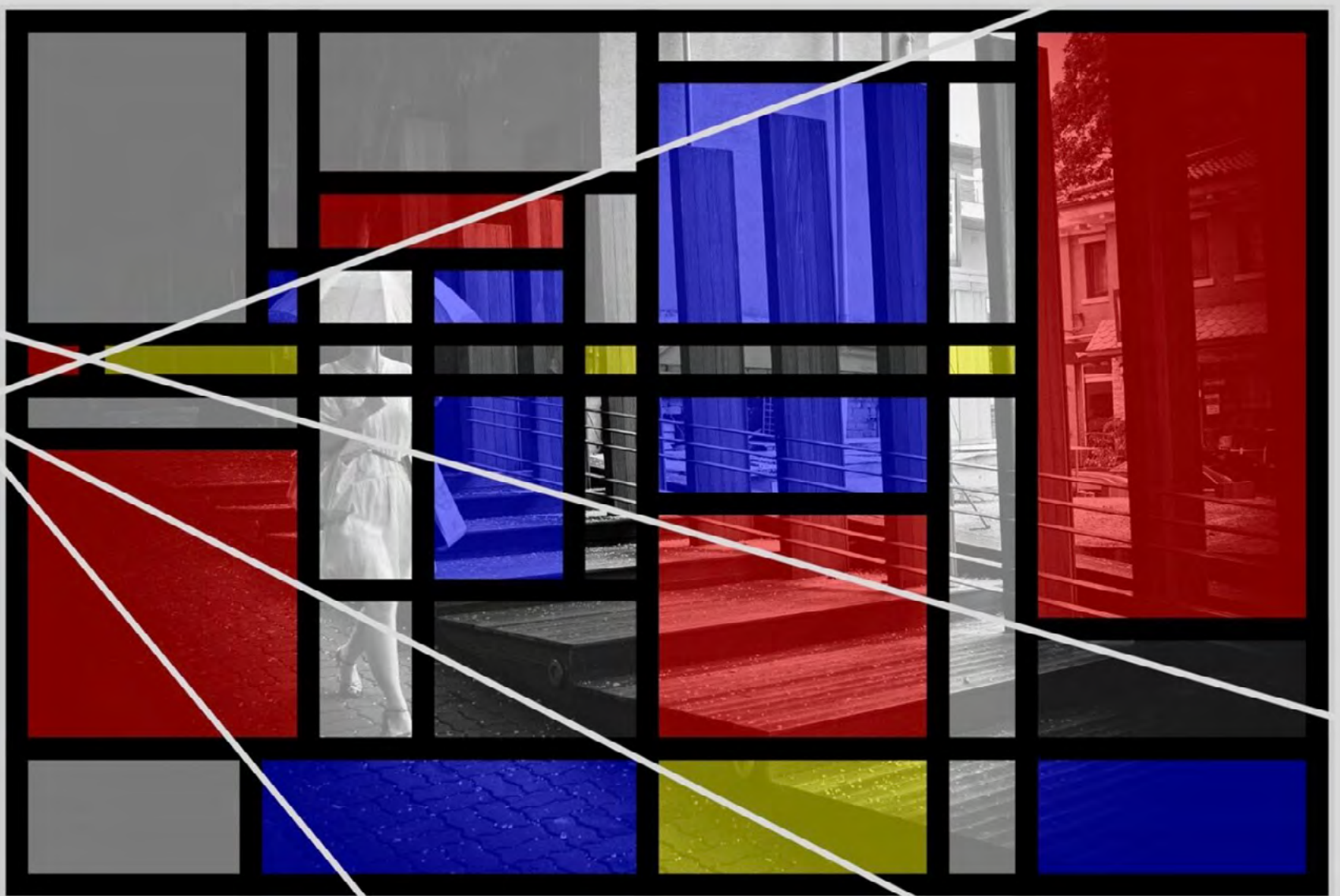


# YOU ARE A VISUAL ARTIST

You might choose photography as your primary form of visual communication and expression. But do not let the label of 'photographer' limit you. Instead call yourself a 'visual artist'.

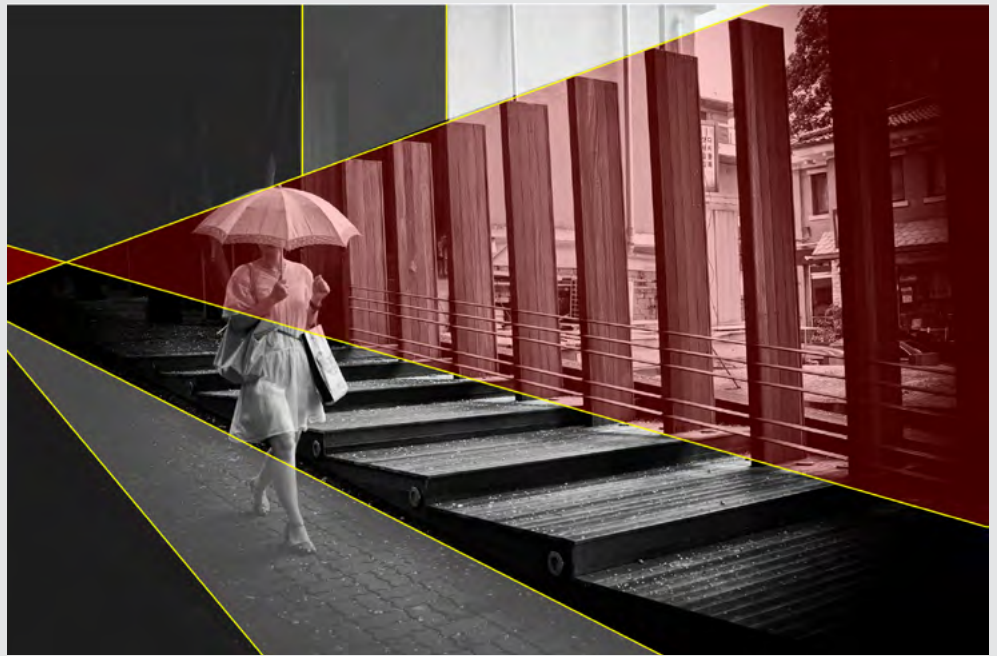
'Visual art' is a more expansive, experimental term: you can make pictures with a camera, pen, phone, iPad, paint, video software – and it can be digital or analog.

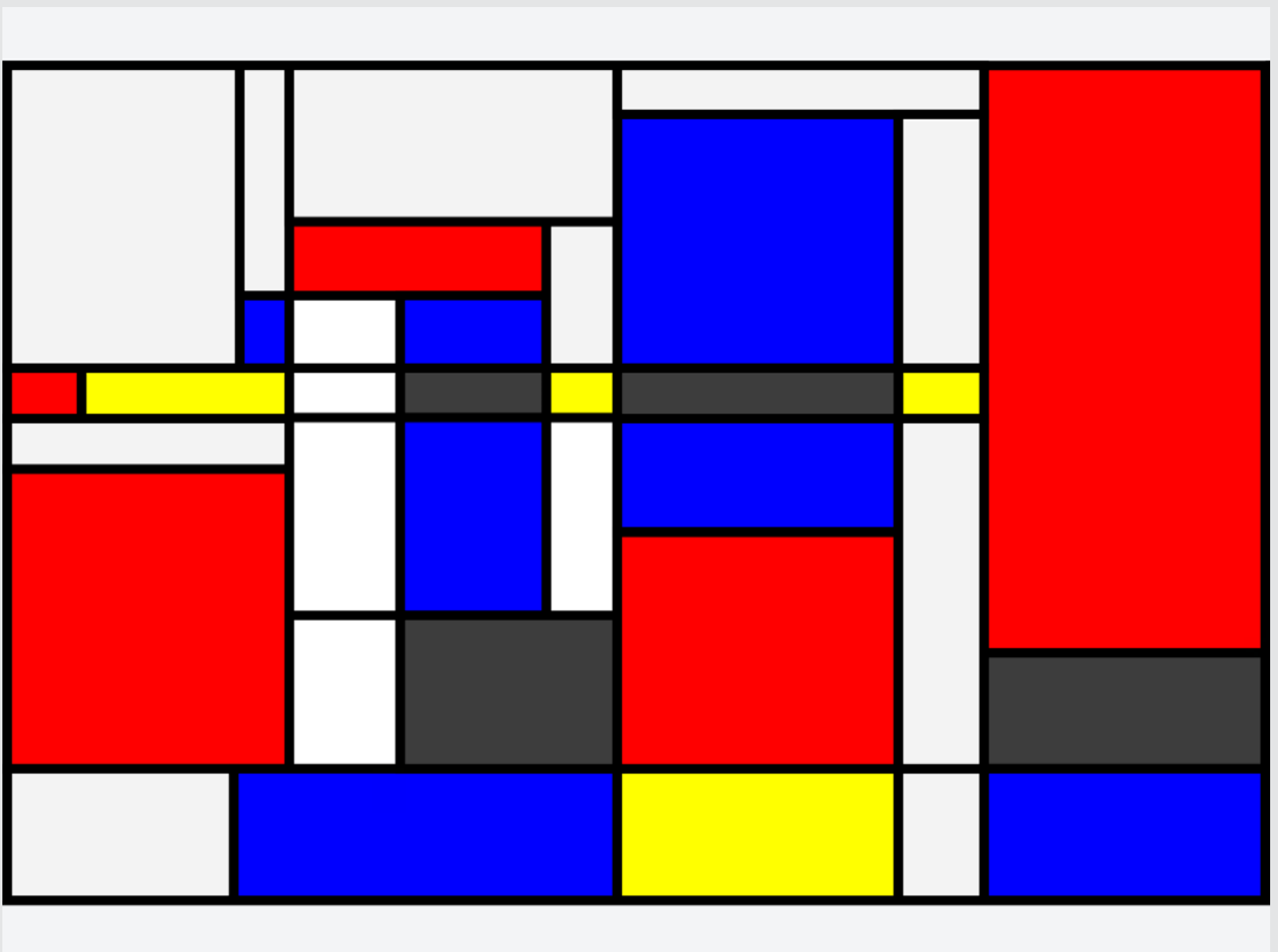
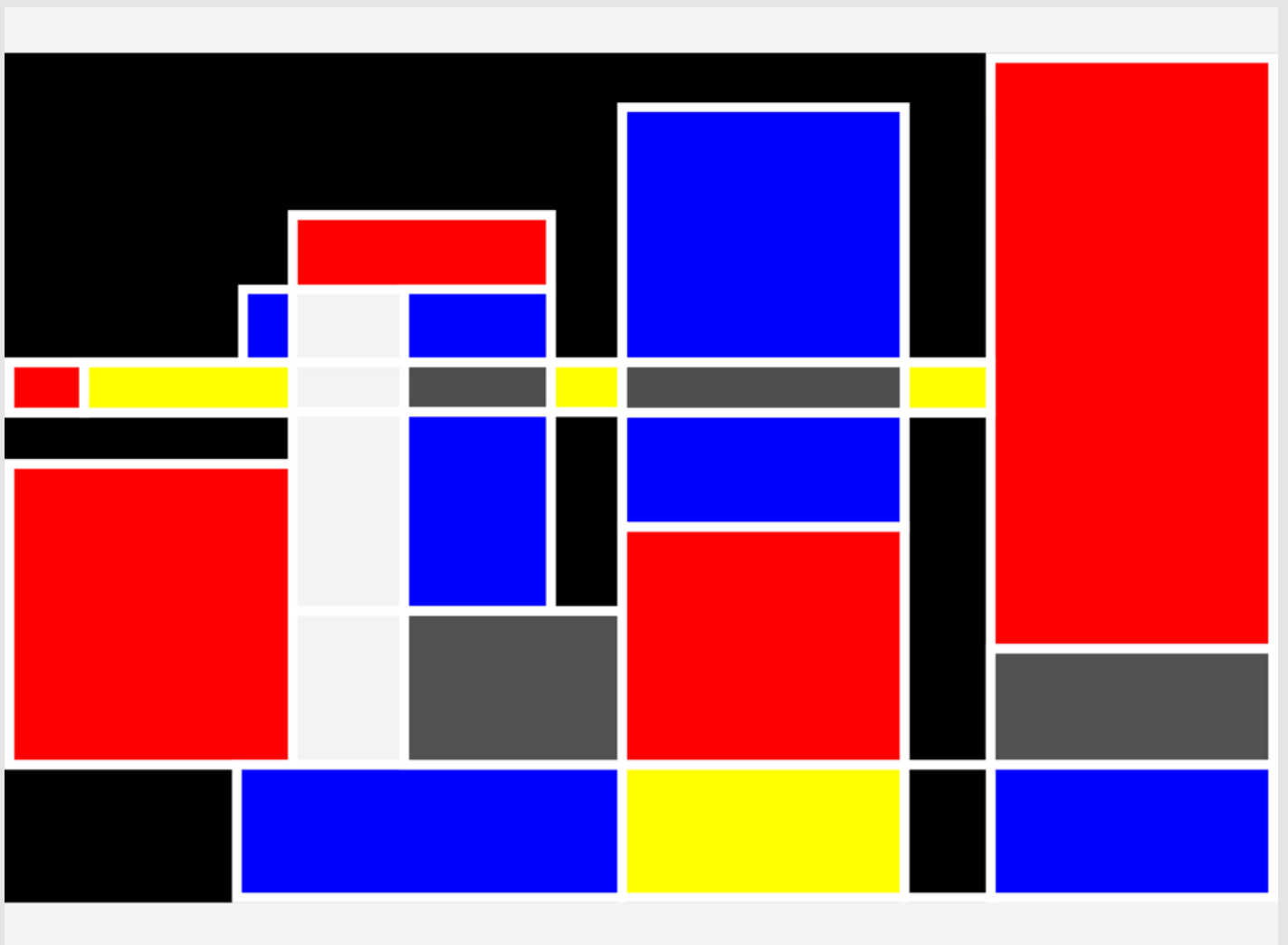
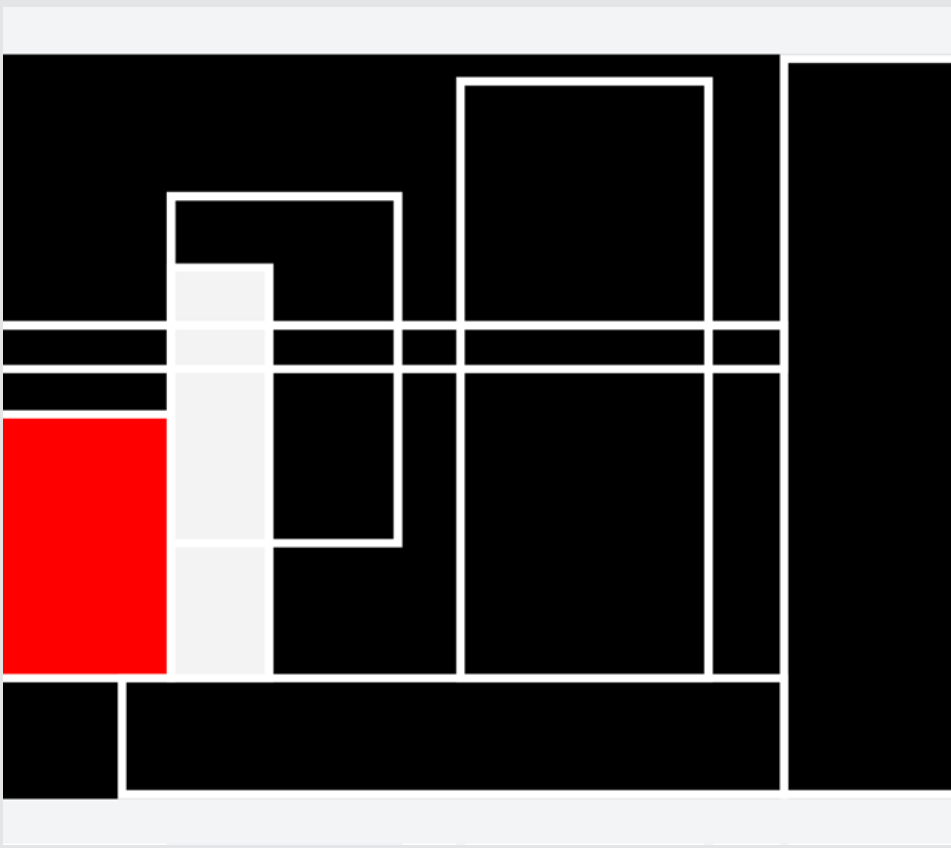
Being a visual artist will help you be more productive and inspired, because you can always make pictures whenever, and wherever you are. As a visual artist, you will expand your horizons, and elevate your potential. Also, by not always taking photos, you can discover new types of pictures to make.





**VISUAL ART**  
**Photography meets Illustration**  
**ERIC KIM x ANNETTE KIM**







# VISUAL ARTIST

## SKILLS TO CROSS-POLLINATE

In today's world, to just make photographs is not enough to succeed. A photographer is also a publisher, a writer, a teacher. Artistically a photographer is also a storyteller and philosopher.

A few skills to cross-pollinate with your photography:

- Programming
- Website design
- Education
- Video production
- Illustration
- Business
- Print and Layout





# LEGACY

What kind of legacy do you want to leave as a photographer – to your friends, family, and future generations of photographers and visual artists?

Integrate modern technologies and techniques into your photography, and strive to make timeless pictures. Make pictures which reveal your soul. Make pictures that evoke emotions in the heart of your viewer. Make pictures which will document and create history.

You are a visual honeybee. Keep cross-pollinating and making your own unique visual honey.

Never be satisfied with your pictures, but find joy in the process of creating your images.

Continue to push your visual limits, and strive to achieve your personal maximum– then push even further.

It is your duty as a modern photographer to drive the whole genre of photography forward.

BE BOLD,  
ERIC

**EPILOGUE**

**LIFE**

**HACKS**



# MODERN PHOTOGRAPHER STRATEGIES

1. Do not call yourself a “photographer”— call yourself a “visual artist.” This will give you more flexibility and options in your visual art.
2. Do not feel guilty charging money for your photography or services. You are only a “sellout” if you compromise your personal ethics and morals.
3. Find infinite inspiration in your visual art by ‘cross-pollinating’ your photography with other forms of visual art like drawing, painting, sculpture, architecture, fashion, and cinema.
4. Be the brand and be your own platform. Build your own website and photography blog with [wordpress.org](https://wordpress.org). Signup with a host like [bluehost.com](https://bluehost.com) or [1and1.com](https://1and1.com), and register your own domain name with your first name and last name, or first and last name [photo.com](https://photo.com) (like [erickim.com](https://erickim.com) or [erickimphotography.com](https://erickimphotography.com))
5. Start an email newsletter with [mailchimp.com](https://mailchimp.com) to have direct access with your fans and followers. Get people to subscribe to your newsletter by linking to it on your website, blog, and on social media.

6. Start your own YouTube channel: Develop your personal brand with your personality. Be real, raw, and uncensored. Keep your video production simple and publish videos which are '80% good enough'. Aim for consistent video content, and remember to have fun.

7. Constantly challenge and push yourself 25% more than you think you are capable of. Charge 25% more for your photo services, seek higher personal goals for your own photography, and avoid boredom at all costs.

8. Give yourself permission to change and reinvent yourself. Work on new photography projects, and when you're bored of your work, start a new style.

9. Never be satisfied with your visual art (in order to keep producing) but also be joyful and have fun during the process (in order to stay motivated and grateful).

10. 'Kaizen' process to self-improvement in photography: Make your next picture 1% better than your previous picture.



# THINK BIG, THEN THINK 10X BIGGER

To succeed as a modern photographer, you must **THINK BIG**.

Why think big? Because if you think big and shoot for the moon – you will continue to push yourself in new, unexpected ways.

I think it is better to aim big and meet your goals 50%, than to aim small and hit the goal.

## **THINK 10X BIGGER**

10x thinking is thinking ten times bigger than what you think you're capable of. Instead of aiming to sell 100 copies of your book, aim to sell 10x as many (1,000 copies).

In order to achieve a 10x goal, you must push yourself to think 'outside the box' and discover novel solutions to market yourself on a wider scale. You might create video marketing materials, do guest blog posts on other websites, or offer referral rewards to your customers.

Let's say you 'fail' and only sell 300 copies (instead of your 10x goal of 1,000 copies). Be happy: You over-exceeded your initial goal of selling 100 copies, by selling an additional 200 copies. It is always better to aim high and 'fail' than to aim low.

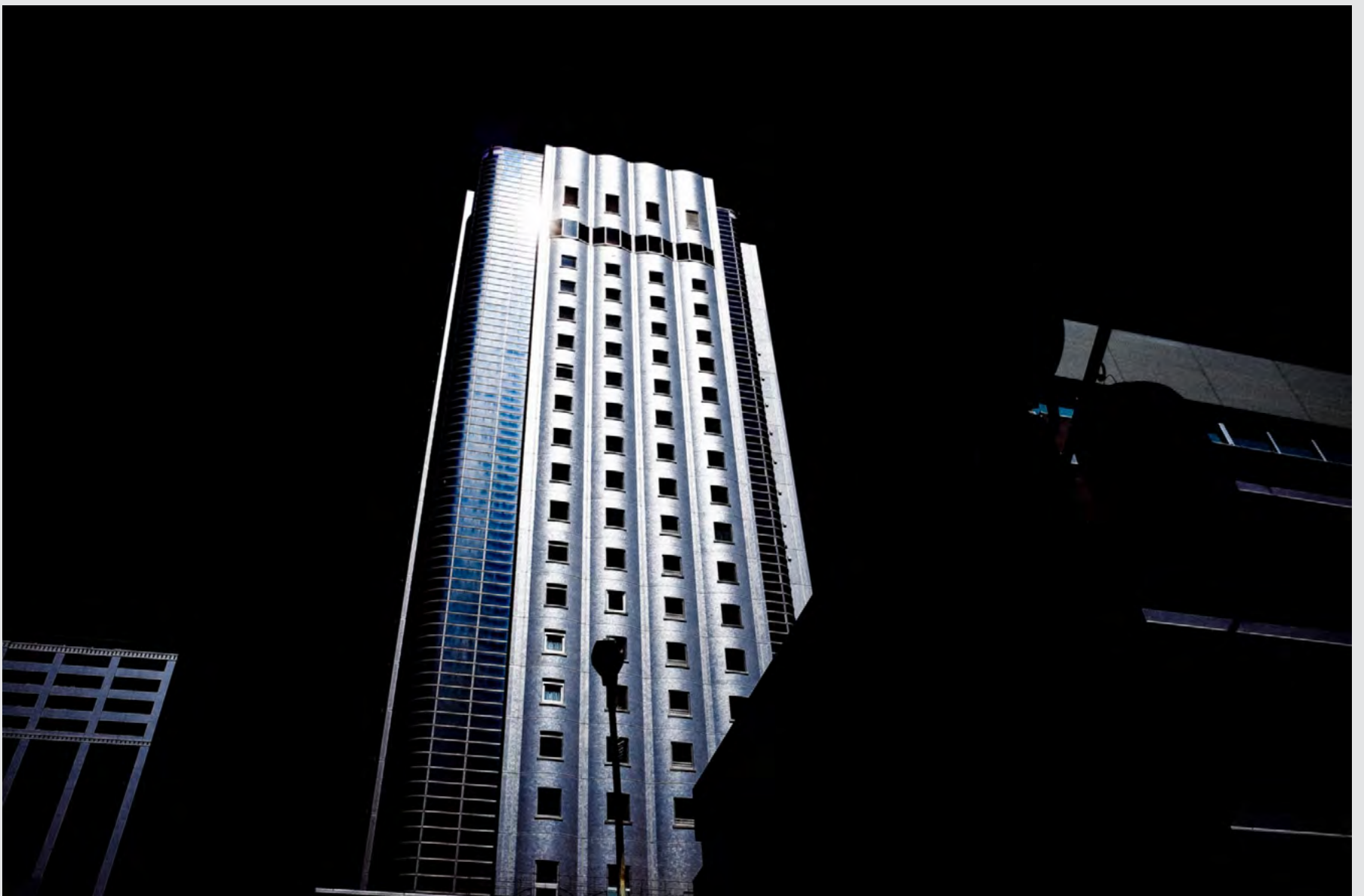
## MOONSHOT THINKING

Remember in the past, the so-called 'unrealistic' goal of landing on the moon? Do you remember how unrealistic and ridiculous that goal seemed? Yet we stayed hungry and foolish, and put the first man on the moon.

For your photographic life aim to do the same: Aim big. Shoot for the moon.

For example, in 2009 my moonshot goal was to become #1 in Google for "Eric Kim" and "Street Photography". I became #1 on Google for Eric Kim in 2011, and became #1 on Google for "Street photography" in 2016. Aiming big made me hustle.

My next moonshot goal is to become #1 on Google for "photography". It might take me another decade, but it's a goal I'm willing to hustle towards. Because even if I fail, I will be proud of myself knowing that I aimed high.





# ITERATIVE THINKING

As a modern photographer, you are constantly evolving, in a state of flux, and in a state of 'becoming.' You must seek to grow and evolve incrementally, or else you will die as a visual artist.

Consider the evolution of iPhone as an iterative process: each new iPhone is not radically different. Each iPhone goes through many iterations, and each new version is a tiny improvement. There are not radical changes, but the changes are meaningful, powerful, and a step forward.

The same for you – seek to make daily, incremental, and iterative progress. Continue to learn from feedback and input that new knowledge into your next iteration.

If you improve 1% everyday, you will become 3800% better by the end of the year. This is the Japanese 'Kaizen' approach – continuous, steady, incremental progress.

## ITERATION EXERCISES

1. Make your next picture 1% better than the prior picture.
2. Increase your audience by 1% each day.
3. Build your visual library 1% each day by studying the masters of visual art.

# "MY LABOR IS NOT FREE" BY CINDY NGUYEN



As a female immigrant and refugee, I was taught that my labor was cheap.

## **TO WORK IS TO EAT**

My family ran a small restaurant for over twenty years. We spent many of our Thanksgiving family dinners there because we could not afford to close for the holidays, for a family vacation, or when somebody fell ill.

As kids we partook in the evening ritual: Vietnamese royal dramas and wrapping plastic silverware. My family believed that it was obviously cheaper to wrap silverware ourselves than to purchase it prepackaged. A thin napkin laid vertically in my



palm, a spoon, then a fork, a flick of a translucent rubber band—then tossed into a reused cardboard box marked “Oriental Times Fortune Cookies.” After Sunday mass my family of six canvassed car parking lots of fancy shopping malls, each with a stack of hand-folded takeout menus that we made from our school printers. The trick was to place the menu on the driver’s side. And to ignore the judgmental stares, disgruntled screams, or to pretend we did not understand English.

In Vietnamese, the word “to work” means “to make enough to eat (làm ăn).” We worked, all the time. We never paused to think about how much we needed to work, because we did not have the privilege to think. We just did what we had to do to eat, to survive.

## **SILENT LABOR**



On a functional level, our family labor cost the restaurant nothing. Our work, our time and energy only meant as much as it could help us to “cut costs.” Anything leftover equalled our family income to have “enough to eat.”

In this state of existence our labor was a means to an end. We silently poured our sweat and tears into work. We never counted our hours, acknowledged the blisters on our hands and feet, or realized that some families never worked at home.

Instead, we made work our home. Work kept us fiercely dedicated to helping each other. Work familiarized us with the state of constant fear and unpredictability. And finally every so often we took a breath between the stormy stress of self-employment, looked around at our lives, and laughed together out of exhaustion and pride.

## **ALWAYS WORKING TO INTRINSIC VALUE**

In one generation, my family jumped social and educational classes: from my refugee parents who never graduated high school and lived paycheck to paycheck, to my siblings and I who are pursuing graduate degrees and building up savings and investments.

Now, we have the privilege to think about the meaning of "work." Work is not just a means of survival, but it is an expression of our "intrinsic" value. How much tangible and intangible value do I believe I provide? How much is my labor worth? My time? How much am I worth?

## **ALWAYS WORKING IN THE ACADEMY**

As a female academic, I am surrounded by a bizarre truism:

*I must always work, but my labor is worth nothing.*



I am expected to spend every hour of my waking day and night:

- to answer e-mails
- to present at conferences
- to stay relevant and connected with current news
- to think about and “work on” my research
- to publish: articles, books, blog posts
- to participate on committees, associations, working groups
- to win grants
- to reassure advisors and grant agencies that I am making progress on work
- to only do all of the above and nothing else.

I must always work, but the payoff for that work is delayed, ambiguous, and uncertain. My labor could help me:

- to build up my resume/CV
- to meet other researchers and find new “opportunities”
- to build “prestige”, “respect”, and a “name” for myself

To even talk about the ultimate payoff for my labor is met with frustrated scowls and patronizing sneers:

Condescension: You should not have entered the Academy if you wanted to make money.

Apathy: The job market is not what it used to be.

Disillusionment: Once you get a tenured track job it should be fine.

And the ever hilarious: If I ever wanted to make money I could have found a company job. Easily! But I chose this sacrificial path to pursue knowledge.

## TACTICS: HOW TO VALUE YOUR LABOR



For all of my life, I had to work in order to survive. I never acknowledged my labor and I never knew how to stop working. My labor was invisible to others because I normalized it. And the side-effects of my work—the chronic pain, the all-nighters, the emotional toll on relationships—must be hidden or else be taken as signs of weakness.

Now, I work because I believe in the value of my work. My work is important. I am important.

There is a quiet social shroud that conceals the labor and value of so many in this world. That shadowy weight is so deeply hegemonic that it convinces us to believe that history has been achieved by a few great men, that our voices do not matter, that our labor and our life is replaceable.



As a woman of color, refugee, academic and artist, I want to share a few tactics on how to throw off this shroud and to value your labor:

## **1. Quantify your labor.**

Do you know how much time and energy your work cost you? If you do not know, you should start. Try to quantify it either through recording how long it took you to do something or how much energy it cost you.

For example: I love to teach. But it is physically painful for me and emotionally exhausting. A 1 hour lecture actually costs me 17 hours:

- 5 hours of research

- 2 hours of lesson planing

- 30 minutes of emotional preparation (yoga, chamomile tea)

- 7 hours good night's sleep

- 2 hours of decompression time after the lecture

- 30 minutes of correspondence and followup with students

Quantifying your labor helps you to visualize your labor, track progress, and evaluate if something is worth your time. You are not just making it visible to others but also to yourself. Making visible your work can remind you the importance of giving yourself emotional high fives and rewards for your accomplishments.

For example, I rewarded myself for my hard work with the following: 'off days' where I did not work, social time with friends, and nice three-hour dinners.

## 2. Be your own hypebeast.

Do people know how much time and energy you put into something? Do you remember how hard you worked? Every so often, in conversations with colleagues, friends, and yourself drop the following lines:

That took a lot of time and energy.

That was not easy.

I worked hard on this.

I made this.

This is really good work.

I am proud of this.

If someone says "Great job!" do not reduce your work by saying, "Oh, it was nothing." Acknowledge the comment with the above statements.

Own your work.

For example, I made [HAPTICPRESS.COM](http://HAPTICPRESS.COM) to show my work and the talented and inspiring work of others. I, Cindy Nguyen made this.





### **3. Charge money for your labor.**

To charge money for your intellectual work and your art is to recognize that your work has a cost. It took time and energy. It did not come naturally and easily. Furthermore, to charge money for your work recognizes that your work is important and has value for society.

If someone asks you to do something “pro-bono” or with the promise of future reward, explain that your labor and time is valuable and you will not do it for free.



## 4. Say NO to “opportunities”

Saying “no” is both an art form and an exercise. It takes a certain panache to reject something and then the strength to move on (and not feel guilty about it). But saying no is also a way to affirm that your time and energy is valuable and limited.

For example, recently I told myself: I will not entertain ‘bro-meetings.’ This means, “networking” or “social” meetings that do not have a clear sense of purpose. They are ‘bro’ in nature because in my line of work I recognized that meetings where I am the only woman or person of color inevitably led to me being talked over or spoken for. I am not saying that I surrender to injustice. I repeat, I am not backing down from an opportunity to engage in constructive discussion. But I decided that I will not waste my intellectual labor in a space that refuses to acknowledge my value.



*(my badass mom)*



## Conclusion

For most of my life, I just knew how to work hard but never questioned why or what my labor was worth. To work was to be a good daughter, sister, human. I was worth as much as I could help my family to survive.

But now, I am working to understand my intrinsically defined value. I am worth a lot. My time is not free, my energy is not limitless, my life is short. It is about time I stopped treating my labor and my life like it is cheap.

Know your worth,  
Cindy





# YOU ARE A MODERN PHOTOGRAPHER.

