

Unit 1

CULTURE

OVERVIEW

Culture is simply defined as the way of life of a group of people. Culture includes tangible objects, as well as the intangible behaviours and values that guide our decisions. The smallest distinct elements of a culture are called culture traits and the interaction of cultural traits form cultural complexes. Cultural complexes are found in culture regions, which can be as small as a neighbourhood or as large as a continent.

Culture is shaped by a number of forces. This unit will explore four forces in particular: economics, geography, history, and politics. Economics influences how we spend our money, and where we live. Geography influences our choice of food, clothing, and shelter. History determines our customs, holiday observances, our country of origin, and what languages we speak. Political decisions made by various levels of government directly impact our lives and shape our culture.

Culture is closely linked to the concept of identity. When people share a culture, they feel a sense of belonging. This group identity is composed of a set of collective characteristics and qualities. Having a group identity can create a sense of unity among its members. Symbols are used to represent group identities to other people.

Culture is constantly evolving. Today, change is occurring more rapidly than ever before. This is a result of advances in technology, and the increased speed of communication and transportation systems. Innovation, diffusion, or large-scale interactions cause the most culture change.



Experiencing The Arts

Exploring art forms and artistic techniques

Photography

“To me, photography is an art of observation. It’s about finding something interesting in an ordinary place ... I’ve found it has little to do with the things you see and everything to do with the way you see them.”

— Elliott Erwitt, photographer and filmmaker

The History of Photography

The world's first camera was a darkened room in Cairo, Egypt, where light entered a tiny hole in one wall and projected an image of the sunny outdoors on the opposite wall. The projected image was perfect in colour and perspective, but upside down.

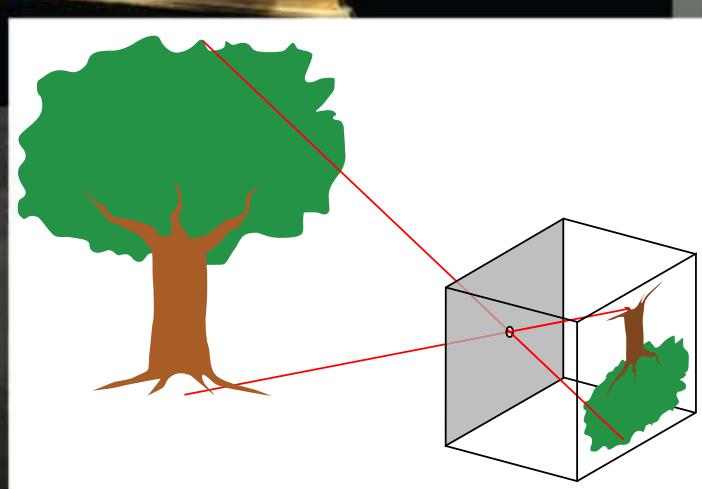


Fig. 1 A pinhole camera

Fig. 2 Diagram of how a pinhole camera works

"We did not invent this," wrote the inventor, Alhazen, around 1000 CE. The phenomena that Alhazen's "camera obscura" demonstrated had been observed 1500 years earlier by Aristotle in Greece and Mo-Ti in China.

For 800 years, camera obscura rooms and their portable spin-offs, pinhole cameras, served as toys for rich people and drawing tools for visual artists, but did not produce any photographs. Then, in 1727, a German professor, Johann Heinrich Schulze, accidentally left a flask of chalk, nitric acid, and silver exposed to sunlight.



Schulze observed that the compound in the side of the flask that had been exposed to the sun became dark. Using his compound and stencils to block the sun, Schulze captured the first light images.



Fig. 3 The Landing and Reception of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales at St. John's Newfoundland on the 24th. July 1860. is a lithograph print of a photograph taken by a Mr. Adams. Mr. Adams presented a print to the Legislative Council in December of that year. While most legislators were impressed, the Honorable J. Hogsett described it as “a ludicrous caricature of an auspicious event, which made his Excellency the Governor look as if he had been exhumed for the day and which grossly libeled the Volunteer Riflemen.” Hogsett’s remarks point out that photography lacked the glamour found in artists’ drawings that filled the papers of the day.

In 1839 Daguerre announced to a receptive world that he had invented the “daguerreotype.” These earliest photographs were silver-plated copper sheets coated in iodine.

It would be 100 years later (1827), on a sunny summer day in France, when Joseph Nicéphore Niépce took the first photograph in a camera obscura. It took eight hours to expose the image. We don’t have a copy of the photograph, since it faded very quickly. Louis Daguerre, a friend and heir to Niépce’s studies, found a way to preserve the image. In 1839 Daguerre announced to a receptive world that he had invented the “daguerreotype.” These earliest photographs were silver-plated copper sheets coated in iodine. After their exposure for as long as 10 minutes in pinhole cameras, the plates were immediately soaked in a silver chloride bath to “fix” the image.

On March 10, 1843, Newfoundlanders had their first opportunity to have a daguerreotype taken in their home country. Halifax portraitist William Valentine, and his colleague Thomas Doane, set up a temporary studio at the Golden Lion Inn in St. John’s. The first

local daguerreotype studio was established in 1850 by St. John’s merchant Charles F. Tousaint. Six other studios were soon to offer competing services, but we have only one surviving example of this first generation of Newfoundland photography. (See Fig. 3)

Daguerreotypes were soon replaced by a paper negative, which was printed on a paper positive. These “calotypes” were followed by wet glass plate negatives. In 1854 the “ambrotype,” a negative image on glass with black paper backing, was invented, making the image appear to be a positive. This was followed by “tintypes,” which used a metal plate backing. Then, in 1879, dry glass plates were invented. While daguerreotypes had to be developed as soon as they were exposed, photographers could now store their glass negatives and develop them later in a darkroom. This **innovation** led to the first hand-held cameras.



Fig. 4 Baffin Land

Photograph by Holloway Studio, St. John's.

Fig. 5 Postcard of Harbour Grace published by S.E. Garland, St. John's. Photography by S.H. Parsons Studio, St. John's (after 1907).

1879 was also the year that a young science teacher, Robert Edward Holloway, arrived in St. John's to teach at the Wesleyan Academy. Holloway introduced the first classroom laboratory to the country. He also shared his interest in photography with his students. During his 30-year career as principal of what would become the Methodist College, Holloway devoted his summers to photographing Newfoundland and Labrador. When he died in 1904, Holloway left hundreds of glass plate negatives which his son Bert and daughter Elsie printed and sold in their business, Holloway Studios.

Another early Newfoundland family of photographers were the Parsons of Harbour Grace. At the age of 10, Simeon Henry Parsons was fascinated by the work of the first daguerreotype photographer who came to his hometown. As a young man, Parsons partnered with a businessman named Squires, who bought a studio and equipment from Mr. Adams (see Fig. 3). Parsons travelled throughout Newfoundland taking photographs which would be published in the *London Illustrated News*, in books, and on postcards and stamps. S.H. Parsons and Sons would become the leading photographic studio in the country. The business



would be operated by Simeon's sons Charles and George until 1936 with a branch in Corner Brook. Back in Harbour Grace, their cousin Rubin Parsons maintained a darkroom in the rear of his furniture store, where he developed photographs of historic events in his community.

In Labrador, Moravian missionaries and superintendents had been making drawings and lithographs of coastal communities since 1752. With the advent of photography, the Moravians began to compile a record of their Inuit converts and the communities that built up around their missions. In many cases, these early photographs were taken by visiting missionary overseers. However, one of the early photographers was Paul Hettasch (1873-1949), who served as a missionary for 50 years. Hettasch's daughter, Katie, (1912-1987) took striking photographs until her retirement after 26 years of teaching in Nain and Hebron.

In 1892, when Dr. Wilfred Grenfell first visited Newfoundland's Northern Peninsula and Labrador's



Fig. 6 A 1920s era camera

southern coast, he documented his trip with photographs. The next year, when he returned with his fellow doctor Eliot Curwen, they brought cameras and dry-glass-plate negatives. Curwen developed the plates on the mission ship *Albert*. Staff and volunteers of the International Grenfell Association would continue to photograph the communities along the coast. Grenfell turned many of these photographs into lantern slides, a pioneer form of slide shows. He used these slides for fundraising lectures throughout Canada, the United States, and Europe. Many of these

March 10, 1843. *The Public Ledger*

NOTICE.

Daguerreotype!

MESSRS VALENTINE & DOANE beg leave to call the attention of the inhabitants of St. John's and its vicinity, to an ART which has attained great celebrity and popularity in almost every city of Europe and America. They have completed an apartment fitted for the purposes of **Daguerreotype Portraiture**, and have made other improvements and arrangements, by means of which they are confident of producing pictures of exquisite beauty. The truth and high finish of Portraits by the Daguerreotype process, and the rapidity with which they are accomplished, render the Art deserving of universal attention, independently of its great value as a means of obtaining accurate LIKENESSES, at a comparatively small expense. The Daguerreotype Rooms, at the Golden Lion Inn, will be opened on MONDAY, at 10 o'Clock, and will remain open daily from 10 to 4 o'Clock. Persons unacquainted with the art, are respectfully invited to call at the Rooms, and examine Specimens.

800 Portraits taken in any state of the weather. March 10.

Fig. 7 March 10, 1843, *The Public Ledger*

images were hand-tinted. The photographs show the interests of the southern urban volunteers in rural life, winter landscapes, and the local people.

Today these early photographs of Newfoundland and Labrador provide a record of life at the turn of the century, places that have been changed by the advent of highways and the introduction of modern technology. These photographs show communities and peoples caught in the transition from traditional ways into the modern era.



Fig. 8 The Saints St. Andrews Football Club, Tie Cup winners in 1900. Photographed by S.H. Parsons Studio, St. John's.



How to make Photographs

By this point in your life you have, almost certainly, taken some photographs. Many of them were probably taken as “snapshots” to record a particular experience. Other than making sure that you could see everything in the viewfinder that you wanted to include, you probably did not consider your picture to be a piece of **art**.

The purpose of this section is to introduce you to photography as an **art form**. In your lifetime you have most likely viewed many photographs that you considered interesting and inviting. These images captured your attention and engaged you in a way that got you thinking. They may have evoked an emotional response that involved feelings of excitement, sadness, or peacefulness. This is what you will be doing in this

section of the course – making photographs that are more than just snapshots.

Photographers who create powerful images do so with intentionality and purpose. They have a particular area of focus – the **subject** – and they want to capture it in a way that engages the viewer and communicates a unified effect.

Exercise One:

Make a viewing frame from some black cardboard with a 10cm x 15cm opening. Select a subject and, holding the viewing frame at arm’s length, experiment with the various ways that you can position your subject inside the frame. Try moving closer to your subject so that it fills the frame. Try moving further away. Try

shifting the position of the subject inside the frame to the left, right, top, and bottom. Change your angle. Look at the object from below, back or side on, and from above. This type of exercise is valuable in helping you think about how a subject will appear in a photograph.



Fig. 9 Analyzing a photograph

What is the subject matter of this photograph? What do you like about this photograph? How does it make you feel? What do you think was the photographer's intent?





This image is fairly typical of a "snapshot." While the photographer did think about the placement of the subject in the frame, he or she could have improved the image by applying some of the elements of composition and design.



Here the photographer used two techniques to improve this photograph. First, the photographer "filled the frame" with the subject, eliminating anything that might be distracting in the background. Second, the photographer used only a single light source to the right of the subject to add dramatic effect. For portraits, natural light from a window or a sunset is very useful.

In making photographs, two things are important above all others — the subject matter and you. Photographs are what happen when you and the subject meet, and use a camera to describe that meeting

In some photographs, the subject is everything and the photographer's task is to reveal its essence as accurately as possible.

In other pictures, the subject is unimportant in itself, but is important as a symbol or tool for revealing how the photographer thinks or feels.

I use the term "make pictures" deliberately, because people who love photography don't simply lift a camera to their eye and press the shutter release. You don't just "take" pictures. You do more than that, much more. You become involved with what you're photographing and, because you're involved, you think about what you are doing ... you care about your workmanship.

— Freeman Patterson, photographer and writer



Fig. 10

Exercise Two:

Take a few minutes to review how to use your camera. For our purposes in this section, just set your camera to automatic and don't worry about the technical aspects of the equipment. Instead, in this exercise focus on your subject. Select an object that interests you and photograph it in different ways – up close, further away, and from different angles. Make

between 10 and 15 images. After you finish making your photographs, review them and select one. What do you like about that image? Ask a classmate to review your images and have him or her select one as well. Did you both select the same image? Were there any similarities in the reasons why those images were selected?



Fig. 11

Elements of Composition

A photograph is an image placed inside a frame. The key to turning a good photograph into a work of art is to decide what to place inside that frame and how to arrange it. That is the essence of **composition**. As a photographer, you will tend to arrange your subjects guided by your personal idea of what looks right. Composition falls into two general areas in modern art work: symmetrical and asymmetrical composition.

Symmetrical Composition

As you will remember from math class, something is symmetrical when it can be divided into two equal parts. **Symmetry** creates a sense of balance in an image. With a photograph, symmetry is not exactly the same as in mathematics – that is, your image will most likely not be divided exactly into two equal parts. However, the arrangement of objects that are equally “weighted” will create a sense of balance.

Using symmetrical composition, the artist aims to balance one element in his or her art work with another element. Ned Pratt's *The Pink Shed* (below) is an excellent example of symmetry. In this photograph the building is in the middle or centre of the frame; as well, the horizon is centred horizontally, dividing the land and sky equally.

At first, Jamie Lewis' photograph of the fisherman throwing a line (below) does not appear to be symmetrical. However, if you were to place your pencil diagonally between the two boats you can see that the weighting of the objects creates a sense of balance. While this photograph was taken quickly to catch a moment in time, Lewis spent time in the darkroom cropping his photograph so that the focal point of interest dominates the frame.



Fig. 12 Ned Pratt
The Pink Shed, Northern Peninsula (2008)
Pigment Based Archival Print on Ilford Paper



Fig. 13 Jamie Lewis
Throwing the Line St. Mary's Bay (1993)
Silver Gelatin Print

Asymmetrical Composition

In Scott Walden's photograph *Unsettled #6* (below), the church steeple is "off centre." This is an example of **asymmetrical composition**. Using this approach, the artist arranges the subject matter until it looks right. Walden placed the subject to the left of centre. This allows the space around the subject to contribute to a unified effect. Clearly the church appears to be sinking into the trees. The trees and the church have an equal sense of weight, and appear heavier than the distant background and sky. Thus the balance in this image could be described as somewhat "bottom heavy," emphasizing the effect of gravity and the sense of sinking.

The image below by Jamie Lewis is also asymmetrical. Lewis carefully arranged the position of his subject. In this photograph, the boat in the foreground is the subject and the space it occupies is called positive space. Lewis created a sense of depth by including the smaller boat behind the subject. By leaving empty space – or negative space – around the main subject, our attention is drawn to the boat in the foreground. It is very important in photography to make sure that the background does not distract from your subject matter. In this case the background complements the image and strengthens the artist's intent.

Fig. 14 Jamie Lewis
Shared Isolation –
Witness Bay (1993)
Silver Gelatin Print



Fig. 15 Scott Walden
Unsettled #6: Parson's Harbour, South Coast (2001)
Silver Gelatin Print

THE RULE OF THIRDS

A common technique employed by artists is to apply the rule of thirds. Imagine that your image is divided into equal spaces by using two horizontal lines and two vertical lines. It is sometimes helpful to consider locating your subject at the point of intersection of those lines when thinking about how you might compose your image. Also, the horizontal and vertical lines can be used as gridlines to help you focus your composition.

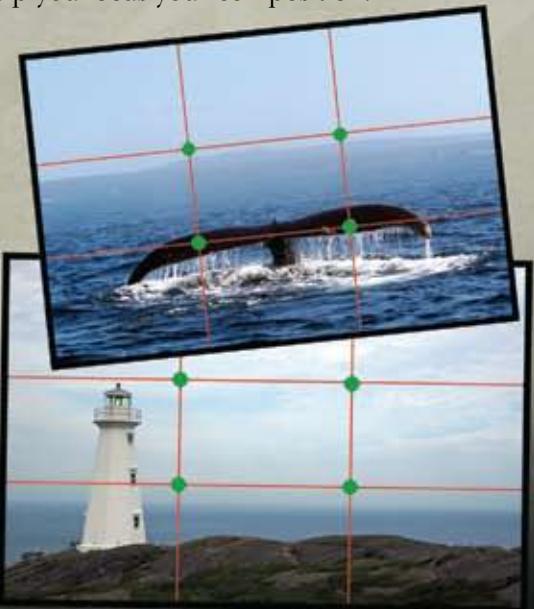


Fig. 16 The rule of thirds

Exercise Three:

Select a subject and photograph it from five different angles, using symmetrical composition. Then photograph the same subject from five different angles, but this time use asymmetrical composition. After you complete this exercise, examine each image to assess how it is balanced or weighted. Which photograph is the most aesthetically pleasing? Which one achieves what you intended?

Elements of Design

Line

One of the fundamental elements of art is the line. Lines are used to define shape and contour. They can also be used to suggest pattern as well as movement, which can be either abrupt and sharp or graceful and smooth. Line also contributes to the creation of a sense of depth.



Fig. 17



Fig. 18 Scott Walden
Unsettled #28: Petit Forte, Placentia Bay (2002)
Silver Gelatin Print

Shape

When lines intersect and create a closed area, a shape is created. Generally there are two types of shapes, geometric and organic. Geometric shapes include circles, triangles, rectangles, and squares. Geometric shapes are frequently represented in human creations, such as architecture. The natural environment also contains these shapes. Geometric shapes tend to be symmetrical.

Organic shapes, as seen in leaves, seashells, and flowers, are found in the natural environment. Generally they are free-flowing and sometimes irregular. Organic shapes can be symmetrical or asymmetrical.



Fig. 19



Fig. 20 Jamie Lewis *Labrador Coastal Boat Near Battle Harbour* (1994)
Silver Gelatin Print

Texture

Texture refers to the surface quality of an object. A brick might be rough and hard while a piece of silk is smooth and soft. In works of visual art, such as photography, texture refers to the way the artist made the surface of an object appear. With a photograph, because it is only

two-dimensional, the artist can only try to represent a sense of texture. By considering how light illuminates the surface, an artist can achieve varying effects in terms of texture.



Fig. 21



Fig. 22

Perspective

Perhaps the most powerful element that an artist can manipulate is the point from which the subject is viewed. Perspective, or point of view, helps to establish emphasis in an image. As an artist, you are able to control how the subject is perceived. For example, the relative size or dominance of the subject can be increased or decreased.

Look at Lewis' photographs. In the photograph of the men storing the boat (see Fig. 24), Lewis positioned his

camera below the boat and the men, so that the boat looms over the viewer. When Lewis wanted to emphasize shape and pattern, he photographed the three boats from above, looking down – so that all three are of equal importance (see Fig. 20). A photographer can change the whole emphasis on his or her subject by coming close or moving far away or changing the angle of view.



Fig. 23



Fig. 24 Jamie Lewis
Storing Away – Port au Choix (1993)
Silver Gelatin Print

Exercise Four:

Review the photographs that you have made to date. Identify examples of how you may have incorporated the elements of design discussed in this section. Take a magazine or book and examine the photographs it contains. Identify what you feel are effective uses of the elements of design. Discuss your selections with a classmate.



Let There Be Light

The word “photography” comes from two Greek words. The first word “phos” means “light.” The second word “graphis” means “paintbrush.” Together this literally means to “paint with light.”

Light is one of the photographer’s most powerful tools. Understanding the basic properties of light and how they can be used helps an artist to create powerful images. At high noon on a clear day, the sun is extremely strong. It generates a hard light with deep crisp shadows. It also is coming from directly overhead. This will create a particular effect, depending on your subject. If the sky is overcast, the clouds will diffuse the light, resulting

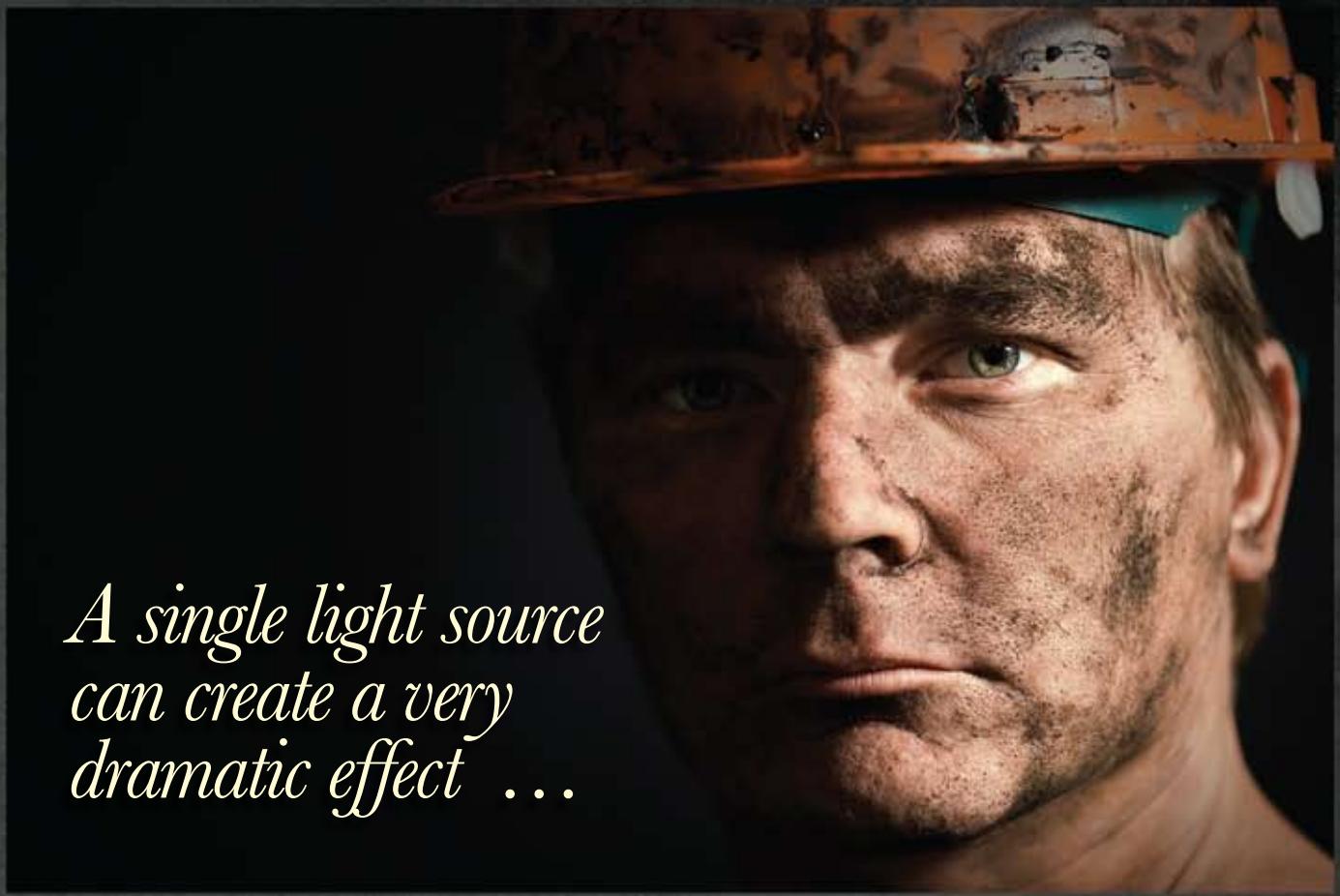
in very few shadows. Light in the early morning or late evening is warmer, and will affect how reds, greens, and blues are illuminated.

In *Taxi Cab Series: Kings Bridge Taxi #1*, Steve Payne created very dramatic results using a single light source at night. In broad daylight this taxi stand will look entirely different. Night photography requires a slow shutter speed which means you must keep your camera absolutely steady. If you don’t have a tripod, try laying your camera on something stable such as a fence or car.

A single light source can be very useful in portrait photography.

Fig. 25 Steve Payne
Taxi Cab Series: King's Bridge Taxi #1, (1988)
Silver Gelatin Print

Fig. 26



*A single light source
can create a very
dramatic effect ...*

*Natural light in the early morning
and late evening is very “warm”
and can intensify certain colours.*



Fig. 27

Fig. 28



*Cloud and fog scatter light in all
directions, creating a soft, almost
dream-like effect.*

Exercise Five:

Try photographing a subject that is illuminated with a single light source in two different settings. For the first, make a photograph of a person sitting next to a window, illuminated by natural light. In the second, make a photograph outside using warm light from the early morning or late afternoon. Share your images with a classmate. Critique each other's work. In the critiques, focus on what you like in each image that makes it work.

At the Light Box

Exercise Six:

You have just been promoted to photo editor. Your task is to pick the “best” image from this group of photographs. Examine the photographs and determine what (if any) design elements and lighting techniques were used in each. Allot one point each for effective use of a light source, usage of line, composition, etc. Then, study the photograph(s) that has the most points. Is it the “best” photograph in the group? Which combination of design elements and light sources do you think works best together? Do you think this is how career editors and designers make their decisions? Why?

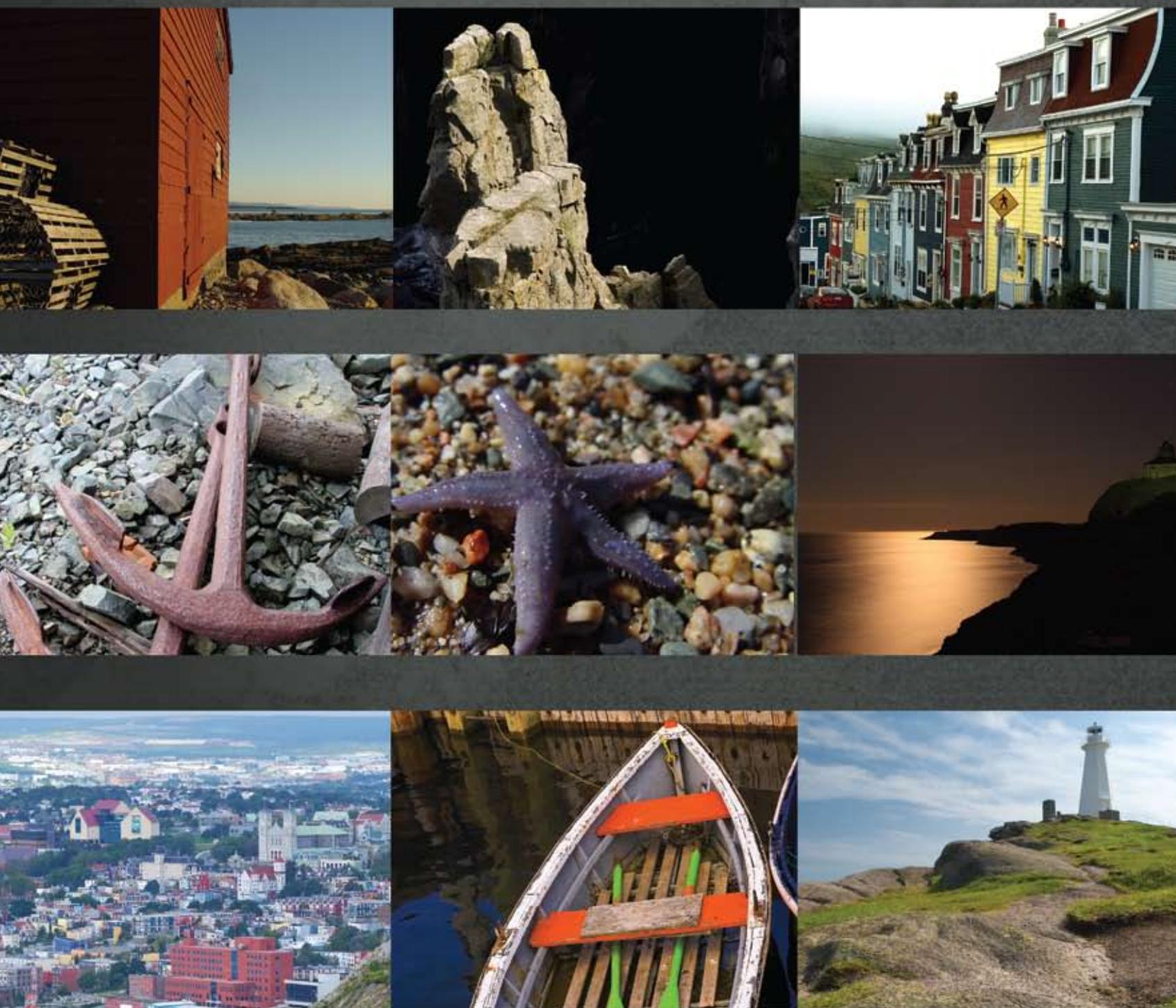


Fig. 29



Fig. 30

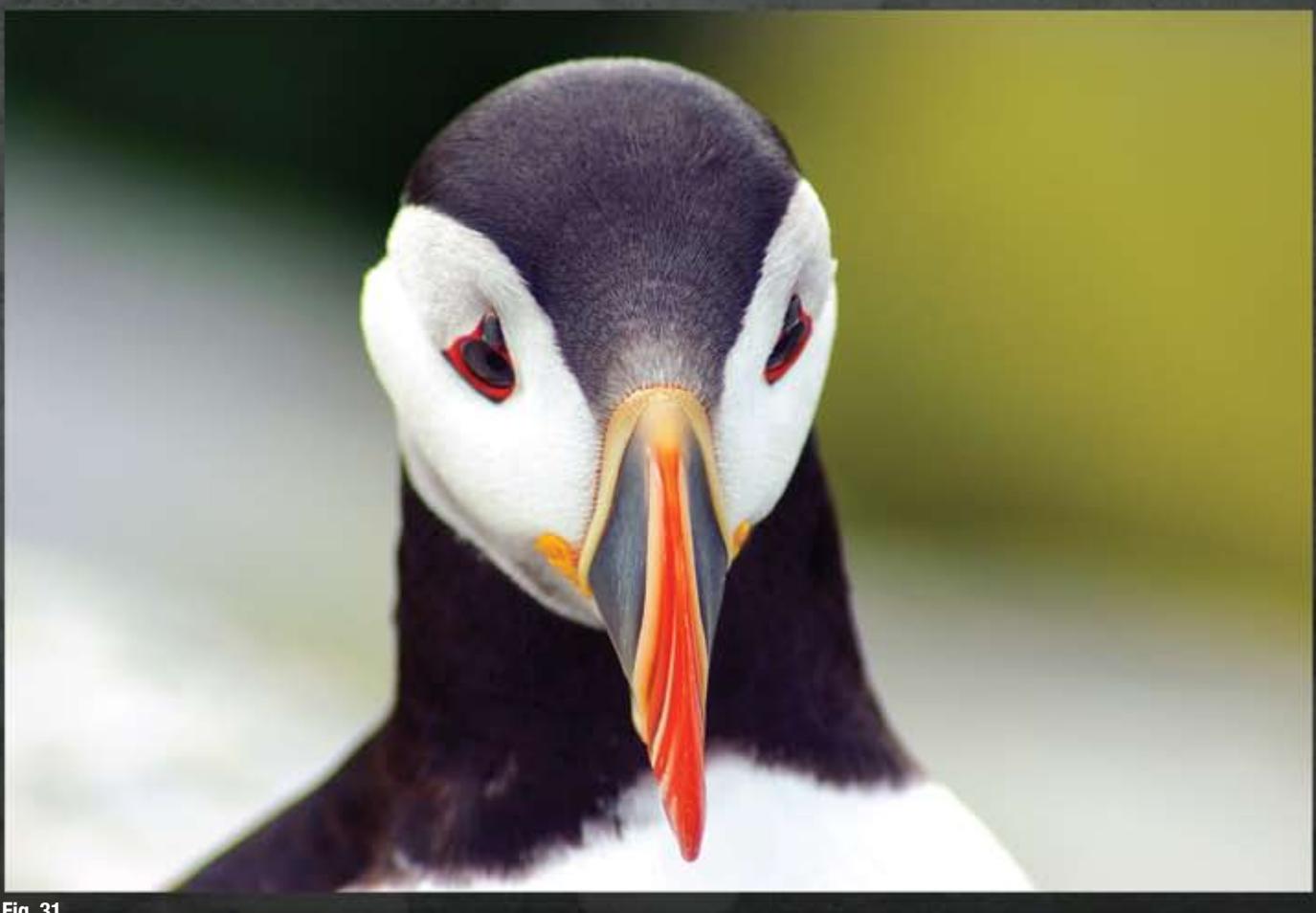


Fig. 31

“It takes a lot of imagination to be a good photographer. You need less imagination to be a painter because you can invent things. But in photography everything is so ordinary; it takes a lot of looking before you learn to see the extraordinary.”

– David Bailey, British photographer