



Assignment 1: The season

Photography 2: Landscape

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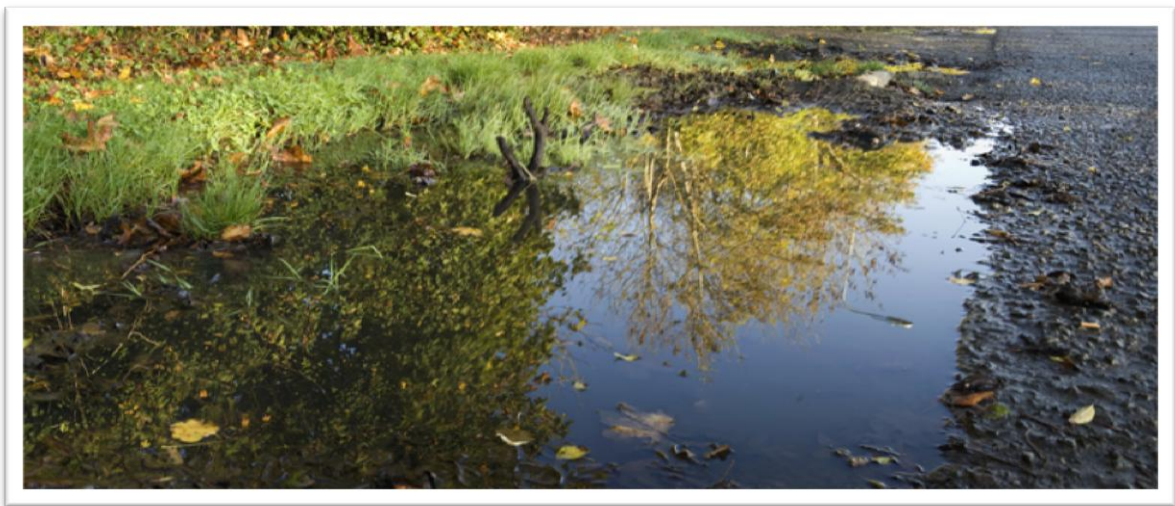
In this assignment we are asked to capture the feel of the current season and communicate our own personal response to this subject.

So where do I start? Well, I have two abandoned sets of images in my process of completing this assignment. I wanted to use this assignment to explore what landscape photography means to me. Landscape photography is new to me, and I would like to communicate images which resonate with my way of thinking.

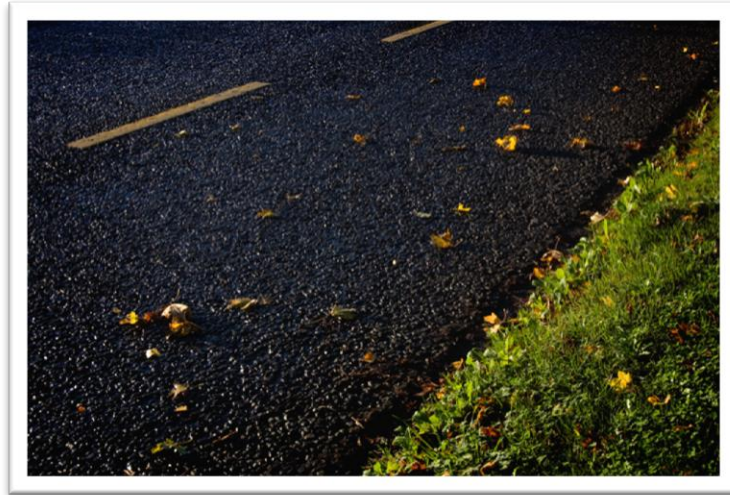
I have started to commute by car to work this year. I drive to and from work on the motorway, and I have become aware of new scenery. I see beautiful mountains and fields and the weather and light changing before my eyes. I often wish I could stop the car right there and capture the beautiful moment. But within my view is not only lovely nature, I also see the motorway, ramps, bridges, industrial estates, massive lamp posts, pylons.... This is the reality. Sugary postcard sunsets are an ideal interpretation of what we see. It's framing out any ugly objects.

In my first attempt for this assignment I wanted to include the non-beautiful objects, to investigate if this can be landscape photography too. My first idea was to create panoramic images with the approximate ratio of 2:1. I quite enjoyed doing the projects in the course material which asked for panoramic images and stitching them together.

So I used a tripod and shot a series of photos for each view. But what I found when I went back to stitch them in post processing was that the view became “imprecise” and “non-distinct”. Maybe this was because the view wasn’t a conventionally beautiful view to start with and I wanted the non-beautiful objects to take a more prominent place than being part of a bigger panorama.



In my second attempt I then decided to use only one image from each view I had previously shot. This defined my concept better and I post processed the full set of images that the assignment asked for. But when looking through the full set of finished images, I thought it looked very messy. I admit that the idea of making non beautiful views looking beautiful may sound contradictory, but I felt that possibly technically or conceptually the images weren't to the standard that I would like to produce. I am still new to landscape photography, so maybe my original idea was a little bit too far-fetched. It's still something I would like to keep in mind though, for the future.



So in my third attempt, which is the one I present in this assignment, I have used more conventional landscape and views. Yes, you might say I'm playing it safe. Even though the course material is based on conventional landscape, I have an inkling that it's not what the tutors and assessors are asking us to produce, but the subject in this series of images is still my own take on landscape photography.

Autumn to me means warm colours of yellow, orange or brown. It means leaves and wet ground. It's a nice season, especially when the sky is clear and crisp. When I started to think about this assignment, the season was in between summer and autumn, and I wanted to wait for the full autumn colours to emerge. It also gets darker progressively much earlier in the autumn. This limited me in the times when I could shoot for this assignment, as it was dark when I came home from work. This left only the weekends, and then I was dependent on decent weather.

All images I present in this assignment were taken over one weekend in November, in the location of County Wicklow. As I'm trying to figure out what landscape photography can mean, especially to me, I have captured both larger vistas and close ups, also more abstract views. I am developing a feeling that we don't need to label the images as if they are landscape or nature or close ups. I do like finding a view that isn't obvious when first looking at the landscape. I like finding graphic shapes or rather framing the image to contain these interesting shapes. I suppose this comes back to what Project 6 in the course material points at – that we must create the image with our creative thinking.

In my quest for developing my style of landscape, I notice that I'm drawn towards abstract and close up images, rather than large vistas. I think it's because it feels more personal to me, as I can frame the image based on my individuality, rather than a vast landscape anyone can see from the same viewpoint.

So with this set of images I'm exploring how landscape photography can poetically express the feeling of love. Being out photographing and looking for images can be an introvert activity, feeling almost like meditation. It fills me with senses, in a similar way that love does. Therefore it was not difficult to translate the landscape imagery to poetic expressions of love. I am hoping that a viewer of these images can recognize these feeling when viewing these images. These images are not a finalized answer, they are rather a stepping stone towards this exploration - how nature can be a symbol of how we feel when we love and feel love.

Maybe my thoughts about love in these images reflect where I am in life regarding love – not in the first days of intoxicating passion and not being married for 40 years.

Technique

The general technique is very similar for all the photos in this series. I use a tripod, shoot on manual exposure with an aperture of $f/16$ and adjust the shutter speed accordingly. Many of the images are in low light (morning or evening) or in the shade, so the shutter speed would be too long for a hand held camera. I shoot as bright as possible, without clipping the highlights, so I check the histogram after each shot. The camera is set to shoot Raw image, in the RGB 1998 colour space and with automatic white balance, as this is something I adjust in post processing. For the images with water I have used a polarising filter to decrease the reflections.

Post processing

I follow more or less the same workflow for all the images in post processing. My aim is to bring out as natural a result as possible. Looking at the screen at the back of the camera, the image can look pale and bland. But a few touches in post processing make the image come to life and resemble the view as I remember it.

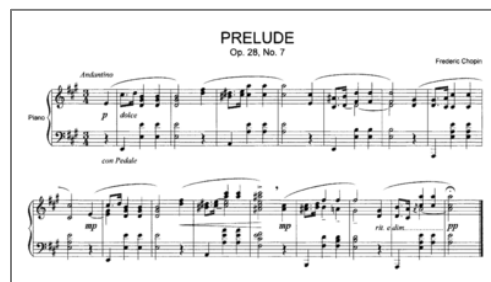
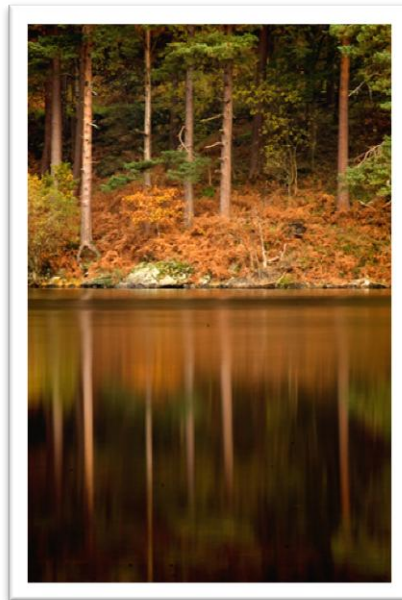
In the Raw interface, I change the white balance to what the programme suggests it should be, e.g. shade, and then tweak it a little manually. I might decrease the exposure a tiny bit. There shouldn't be any highlights to rescue, if I have been careful enough at the time of shooting.

I use Photoshop Elements 7, so there are no mask or curve functions. Instead I use adjustment layers to adjust black/mid/white points, contrast, and tiny saturation. I'm very conscious not to overdo this. Some of the images have a faint vignette to draw the eye into the image. Finally I remove any dust marks and sharpen the image.

1 - Harmony

When we feel love, we feel harmony. Nature can convey the feeling of harmony too. The trees remind me of a bar in musical notation, the beats create a rhythm and the bass line follows underneath. It creates a melodic harmony. In love we can follow the same tune but still be different. We don't have to look the same to create a harmonic melody together.

However, whereas both music and images can be composed to express the feeling of love, that is only what they are – compositions, expressions, translations. Love however cannot be composed. It is a part of the essence of life.



Example of what I mean by bars in musical notation.

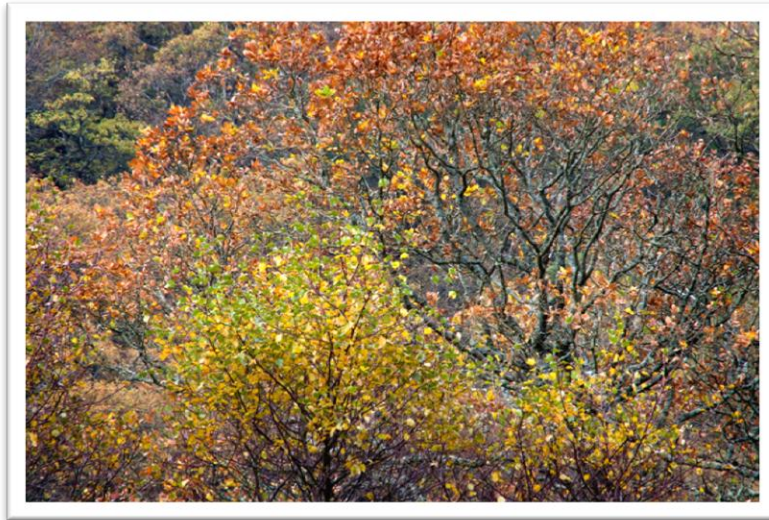
When I took this photo I wanted to create a balanced and symmetrical image. I composed the image tightly to crop out any interfering objects. The three seconds shutter speed makes the reflection very smooth and abstract, much more so than what I remember from reality. As I now look at the bottom half of the image, I find it very fascinating. It would be interesting to try some images based entirely on abstract reflections. Would that be landscape photography?

Technical data:

Lens: 18-200mm F/3.5-6.3 G
Focal Length: 18mm
Exposure Mode: Manual
Metering Mode: Multi-Pattern
3 sec - F/16
Exposure Comp.: 0 EV
Sensitivity: ISO 200

2 - Happiness

A sparkle, a glimmer – it makes us feel alive and happy. The vivid colours in this image give us a boost and make us feel energized. This is also the feeling when we share love.



This image was taken in cloudy midmorning light. The overcast weather acted as a big diffuser between the sun and the scene. This makes the tonal range of the image flat and quite easy to expose for. However the warm colours fill the entire frame, making the image far from dull.

Technical data:

Lens: 18-200mm F/3.5-6.3 G
Focal Length: 18mm
Exposure Mode: Manual
Metering Mode: Multi-Pattern
2 sec - F/16
Exposure Comp.: 0 EV
Sensitivity: ISO 200

3 – Drowning in your soul

When we're in love, we want to dive into the soul of the other and find out what lies beyond the surface. We want to be immersed by the sea of the other's soul and find the roots of the personality.



Again, this photo was taken in cloudy midmorning light. I have composed the image carefully, to give the impression of an endless sea of trees. You can't see the edges of the woods. The result is an abstract image, proving that landscape photography doesn't need to have skies and horizon.

Technical data:

Lens: 18-200mm F/3.5-6.3 G
Focal Length: 18mm
Exposure Mode: Manual
Metering Mode: Multi-Pattern
1.60 sec - F/16
Exposure Comp.: 0 EV
Sensitivity: ISO 200

4 - Calm

The water surface is calm, and the lungs of the forest breathe slowly in the background. There are no loud noises, no unsettling winds. Resting within love, we can feel completely calm, relaxed and at ease.



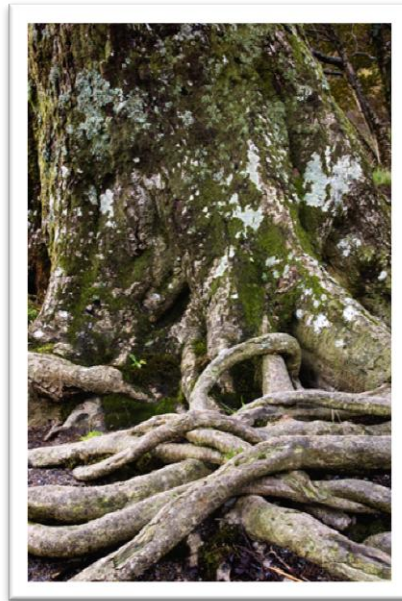
The misty morning light makes the colours soft and muted. I like this tonal range and colour range. However, looking back at the composition now, I think it's not as efficient as it could have been. The composition is not as neat as I would have liked it. The horizon is neither central nor at the rule of thirds. The same applies to the stone, even though it does add some interest to the foreground.

Technical data:

Lens: 18-200mm F/3.5-6.3 G
Focal Length: 18mm
Exposure Mode: Manual
Metering Mode: Multi-Pattern
1/2 sec - F/16
Exposure Comp.: 0 EV
Sensitivity: ISO 200

5 – Intertwined

Our lives, and our soul, become more intertwined the more and the longer we love each other. We grow together like the knotted roots of the tree. The roots grow stronger and deeper and can withstand the autumn storms.



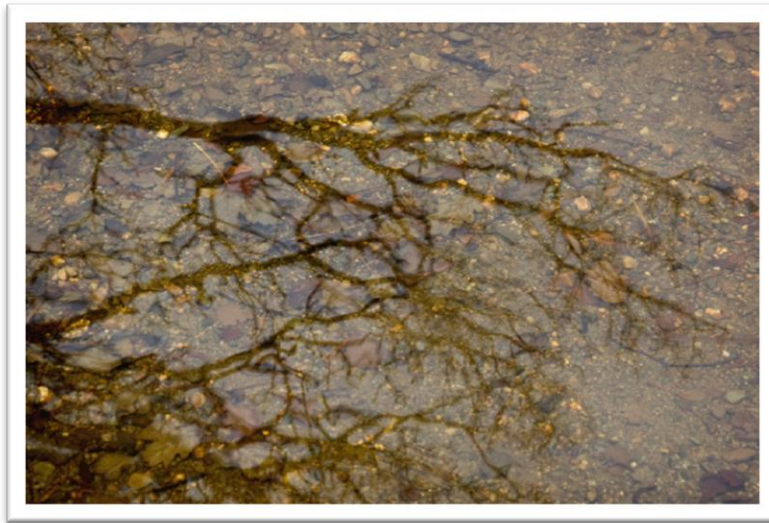
The quality of this image lies in the structured and graphic shapes. Therefore I composed the image as a close-up, cropping out items that could have interfered with the graphic look. The muted colours suit the images well, as the image is more about shape than colour. It could also work as a desaturated image. It was taken in cloudy mid-morning light.

Technical data:

Lens: 18-200mm F/3.5-6.3 G
Focal Length: 18mm
Exposure Mode: Manual
Metering Mode: Multi-Pattern
1 sec - F/16
Exposure Comp.: 0 EV
Sensitivity: ISO 200

6 – One – but we're not the same

In love two become one, even though we are completely different entities. Here the reflection of the tree and the bottom of the lake merge into one entity – one image. The title for this image – a phrase from a U2 song – came instinctively to me when I contemplated this image.



Taken in cloudy mid-morning light, I was standing with my tripod and rubber boots in ankle high water. It proves you have to be prepared to get wet and muddy when doing landscape photography. I used a polarising filter to eliminate the surface reflection on the water. By turning the filter, the stones on the bottom of the lake emerge clearly.

Technical data:

Lens: 18-200mm F/3.5-6.3 G
Focal Length: 78mm
Exposure Mode: Manual
Metering Mode: Multi-Pattern
1/5 sec - F/16
Exposure Comp.: 0 EV
Sensitivity: ISO 200

7 – Listen

Listen to yourself; be true to yourself and you will know if your love is right. Be a good listener and you will be trusted. When you need to talk, you can trust your love to listen and offer support. When I saw the ear on the tree, it gave me the impression of being a quiet, solid and reliable listener, someone who would never pass on your secrets.



This is certainly a close up picture, and it could be argued that it's not landscape photography. I don't know what the definition or limit is for a landscape image. But I don't want to be limited by landscape parameters, even though I'm doing a course in "landscape photography".

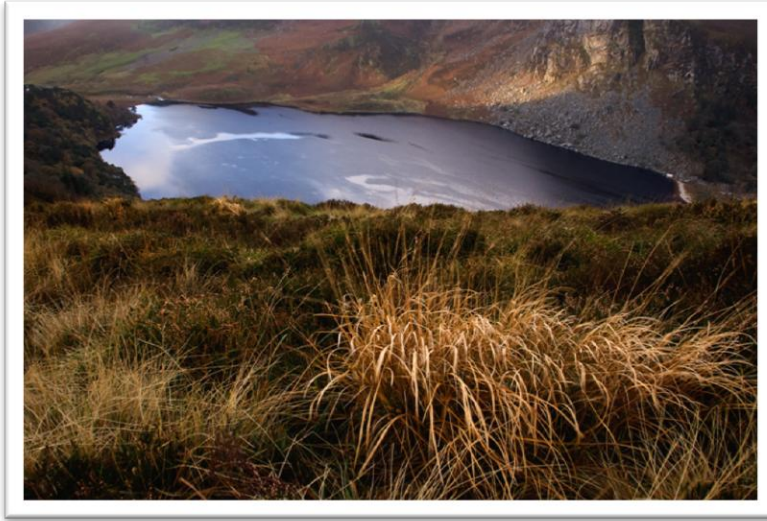
Even though I like this image with "the ear", I think it might have looked better with a bit more space around the ear, not so tightly cropped.

Technical data:

Lens: 18-200mm F/3.5-6.3 G
Focal Length: 80mm
Exposure Mode: Manual
Metering Mode: Multi-Pattern
2.50 sec - F/16
Exposure Comp.: 0 EV
Sensitivity: ISO 200

8 – Touch me

Love is sensual. Experience love with all your senses, touch being one of them. Feel the texture with your hands. Pull your fingers through the grass. Feel the smoothness of the water surface.



The morning light is very delicate and soft. I often find myself being fascinated by the texture of grass. Therefore I composed the image with the grass in the foreground. I think I could have had somehow composed the image to give even more emphasis on the grass, and could have given the image more punch.

Technical data:

Lens: 18-200mm F/3.5-6.3 G
Focal Length: 18mm
Exposure Mode: Manual
Metering Mode: Multi-Pattern
1/5 sec - F/16
Exposure Comp.: 0 EV
Sensitivity: ISO 200

9 - Forever

Looking out from the top of the mountain in the hazy morning light, the landscape seems to continue forever. Some passages are brighter, some are darker. It goes up and it goes down. But we can sense that it never ends, even though we don't know what's around the corner.



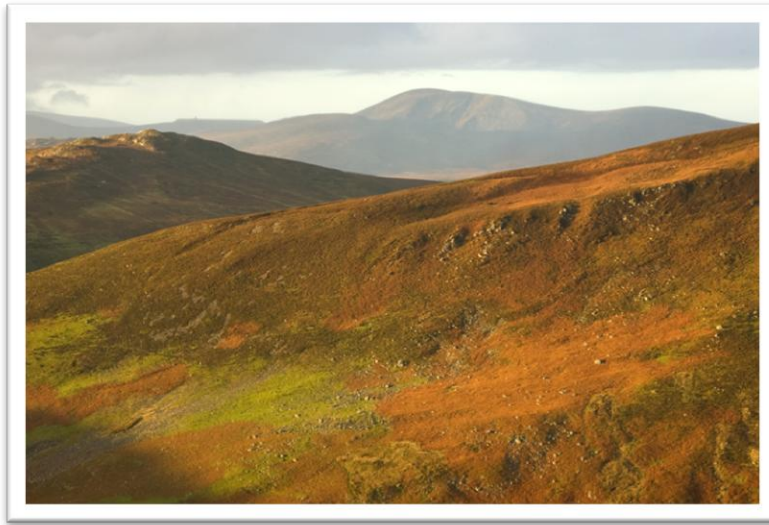
The colour palette in this image is very mild, and the tonal range stretches from bright to dark. I think the bottom left corner is too dark. This could have been remedied by blending two exposures especially in that corner. Apart from that I like how the light shifts across the landscape and how the light catches in the river.

Technical data:

Lens: 18-200mm F/3.5-6.3 G
Focal Length: 52mm
Exposure Mode: Manual
Metering Mode: Multi-Pattern
1/13 sec - F/16
Exposure Comp.: 0 EV
Sensitivity: ISO 200

10 – Warm

When we're cold we can step into our lover's arms and feel the warmth. A glowing feeling start in the stomach and soon we feel warm all over. In this image the early morning sunlight warms up the hills and caresses it with golden tones.



I like this image because there are many different layers, similar to a theatre stage backdrop. There are different textures, colours and distances in the image. There's not one single viewpoint, but is rather emphasising the vastness of the landscape. It was taken early in the morning, so the sky wasn't too bright, needing a grad filter or blending exposures.

Technical data:

Lens: 18-200mm F/3.5-6.3 G
Focal Length: 70mm
Exposure Mode: Manual
Metering Mode: Multi-Pattern
1/20 sec - F/16
Exposure Comp.: 0 EV
Sensitivity: ISO 200

11- Smooth

In a loving relationship, two people enjoy being together and they understand each other without much explanation. Obstacles are overcome and love makes life smooth.



This was taken amongst trees, omitting sharp light. The two second shutter speed makes the water surface smooth. I like specifically the mini waterfall – it looks like it's combing through the water. I used a polariser here to omit reflections on the surface.

Technical data:

Lens: 18-200mm F/3.5-6.3 G
Focal Length: 56mm
Exposure Mode: Manual
Metering Mode: Multi-Pattern
2 sec - F/16
Exposure Comp.: 0 EV
Sensitivity: ISO 200

12 - Embrace

The trees are lovingly embracing the river as if it wants to protect it. The trees reach out their arms to show how they belong and how they want to be close.



I like the twirly shape of the water in the bottom right corner. There is also a surprise character somewhere among the trees when you look closer. It adds some mystery to the image I think.

Technical data:

Focal Length: 35mm
Exposure Mode: Manual
Metering Mode: Multi-Pattern
2 sec - F/16
Exposure Comp.: 0 EV
Sensitivity: ISO 200