

Traditional, Photorealistic, Creative

Understanding what we mean by these terms in the digital age of Photography?

Firstly we need to understand what photography is - **the capturing and recording of reflected light from an object which can be stored as a digital file in a camera's storage system or in days gone by on light sensitive material in the form of film.**

Traditional photography in the digital age should reflect the definition above; captured light taken with a camera during the single opening and closing of the camera shutter. Once light is captured as an image on the digital sensor it will be saved without any further electronic or artificial processing in the camera's processing or storage system. In other words what you see is what you get!

During the exposure the photographer's skill, judgement and understanding is used to control what will happen to the resulting image by setting up and adjusting the camera's functions and settings e.g.

- from the use of different apertures of the camera lens to vary the quantity of light entering the shutter and the depth of sharpness,
- the focal length of the lens,
- the exposure time (length of time the shutter is open) which will also affect the quantity of light reflected from the image and recorded on the sensor.

Let us imagine taking a picture of a waterfall. The shutter speed is set to 1/125 sec. What will the water look like as a recorded image? This will depend on the speed of the water. It may be a trickle travelling at 5mph and the water is frozen in the split second of the shutter opening and closing. Or it might be a mighty fall in flood travelling at 30 mph (6 times faster, more reflected light from the water passing through the open aperture) and so the water appears to be blurred as much water has sped past the shutter in the time it was open.

Which is traditional, which is creative? Both are traditional images because both were a single capture of light in a certain time but which give different results. This will be true of all moving objects and it is up to the photographer and the viewer to decide subjectively which is the more aesthetically pleasing but not which is right or wrong!

Shutter speed can be a fraction of a second or any amount of time where light is captured before the shutter closes.

Natural history, sport and street photography are examples of images where traditional photography would be expected to be employed.

What about Monochrome?

Here there needs to be an exception to what is recorded on the sensor as mono is *the* traditional / original form of photography. A digital camera can exclude the colour information and store the image as mono image or editing software gives a variety of options for mono conversion. In line with national and international rules one tone covering the whole image is permissible for an image to be classified as monochrome.

Can the photographer do anything to change a traditional image?

YES!

An image stored in the camera as a digital file or on film will have all the information about the light recorded. But the camera system is not perfect and may not be able to record every bit of information about the light accurately throughout the image. So an image recorded in bright sunlight may have strong shadows. The camera may not be able to record the light intensity accurately for the brightest areas and these may look too bright or over exposed. The shadows may appear too dark or blocked up and lose the details compared to what can be seen with the naked eye.

For over a hundred years, photographers, using their skill and judgement have been editing their images to give the best interpretation of the image they recorded. Using the dark room for film or nowadays using editing software photographers have sought to produce an idealised version of the original record but always to enhance the aesthetics without altering the reality of the original record / file. Only when reality has been sufficiently altered after the light was captured does it become a creative image.

This means competency is necessary in editing the original image and making informed decisions on whether to override the information stored in the original file for such things as:

- brightness
- contrast
- exposure
- colour balance

Using electronic tools and techniques should be part of the photographer's skill set to ensure the final image is an idealised but accurate version of what the photographer perceived and intended to capture on the camera sensor.

Techniques used to achieve a final idealised version of the image include:

- dodge to lighten
- burn to darken
- levels adjustment
- colour balance adjustment
- hue and saturation adjustment

What is photorealistic?

The intention of the photographer in producing a photorealistic image must be to convince the viewer that the image in front of them is a traditional image although the photographer will know that appropriate modifications have been made to the original file. There should therefore be a greater understanding on the part of the photographer to balance the lighting and compositional elements into a seamless final image which to the viewer is indistinguishable from a traditional image.

A photorealistic image aims to build on the techniques described above but with the aim of introducing elements to an original image that were not part of the original digital file. These could be substituting parts of the original image with elements from another file. Replacing a bland, grey sky with a more interesting one would be an example as would adding a figure as a means of enhancing the pictorial interest. Removing distractions such as unwanted elements, distracting light etc using appropriate techniques are all permissible.

Editing techniques include:

- cloning,
- cutting and pasting to introduce new elements to the original,
- colour correction, replacing and balancing colour
- using software to introduce the idea of traditional film grain

Creative Photography

The aim of a creative image is to ensure the viewer understands that the photographer has moved far away from the original and wishes to interpret and convey a concept using different photographic elements and appropriate techniques to create an image that is believable in its photographic content and technique but which may pose questions about how the final image was achieved and what it is intended to convey. This may be to tell a story, convey an emotion or explore a photographic theme. The finished image should hang together as a coherent pictorial entity which can be traced back to its photographic elements wheresoever they originated.

The expertise of the photographer should reflect a wide range of competences be they simple or complex but which show a command of expression and confidence to draw together a unified final image. Creative photography may be of any genre including:

- landscape
- portrait
- pictorial
- abstract
- still life

but shows a level of sophistication and technique setting it apart from traditional or photorealistic images. A variety of elements, filters and overlays (textures etc) may be expected to contribute to the overall effect of the final image.

Can traditional be creative?

YES!

Photographers have been creative since the invention of photography.

Using wide angle lenses, shallow depth of field, slow shutter speeds and the setting up of scenes using props such as in still life or portraiture give scope for any amount of creativity as long as the image retains the rule that it was captured in one single exposure within the camera.

Presenting the Image for competition

Any presentational features can be applied to all images after the completion of any editing with the exception of nature photography. Darkening of edges / vignetting should not be viewed as part of the final content of the image but as a frame to set off the completed image.

Frequently asked questions.

Q. I have taken images of dancers with a slow shutter speed so that the whole image is very blurred. Is this traditional?

A. *Yes, as long as no other changes have been made to the original image file as stated above.*

Q. I have panned some horses in a race so that the horses are sharp and the background blurred. Is this traditional?

A. *Yes for the same reason as above.*

Q. I have added noise to my mono image. Is this still traditional?

A. *No because this was not recorded on the sensor. If done carefully, or a film effect filter is applied over the whole image it is photorealistic. If parts of the image use noise it is creative.*

Q. I saw a photographer photographing some trees putting vaseline on her skylight filter to create a blurred / stripy effect on the image. Is this traditional as the saved image has not been altered once it was captured on the sensor?

A. *This is creative as the image has been deliberately altered and is different from the original perception as seen by the human eye. However it is creative photography done in a 'traditional' way.*

Q. I have used high dynamic range for some of my images.

A. *This may be classified as photorealistic as it could be convincing to the viewer that the tones are original light taken at the time of taking. However, HDR software provides options that give artistic effects, which alter the reality of the original and are creative. The photographer should be careful when entering such images in a competition especially those that say 'traditional e.g. definitely not for nature.*

Q. For a competition I want to enter an image of a cricketer being hit by the ball but the ball is not shown on the image. Can I add a ball to add impact to the picture?

A. *You can do this quite easily and it would be photorealistic. However, it is probably not in the spirit of the competition to do this. A sport or street competition like this asks for the skill of the photographer (or his luck) to be judged in capturing the image rather than creating it. Check the rules.*