

**Nothing is more fascinating than reality: An introduction to street  
and documentary photography**



Henri Cartier Bresson

## Outline

- What is street photography?
- What is documentary photography?
- History of street photography
- The role of Leica
- Street photography equipment
- Technique
- Success rate
- Strategy and obstacles
- Subject matter and composition
- Magnum photo agency
- Using a documentary style
- Wrap up, conclusions and resources

What is street photography?

Street photography is photography conducted for art or enquiry that features unmediated chance encounters and random incidents within public places. Street photography does not necessitate the presence of a street or even the urban environment.

What street photography isn't...

- Landscape or nature photography
- Studio Photography

Grey area:

- Posed or choreographed photographs
- Rural photography
- Photographs with no human element

## Travel



Steve McCurry

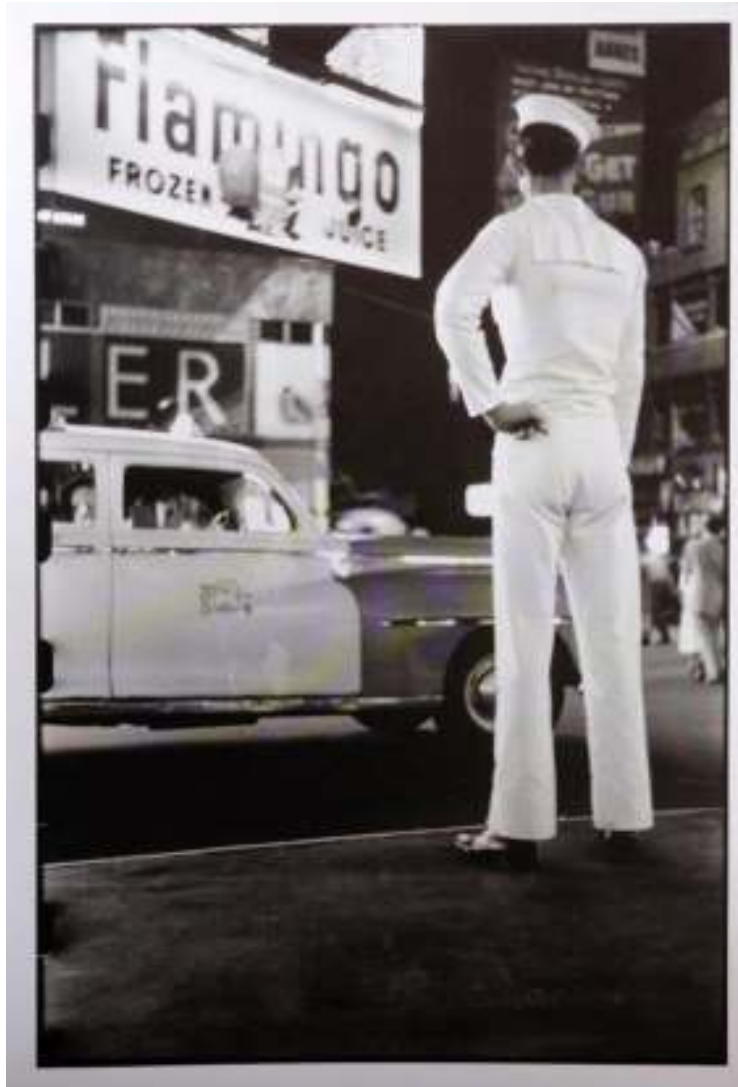
## Story telling



Henri Cartier Bresson



## Candid



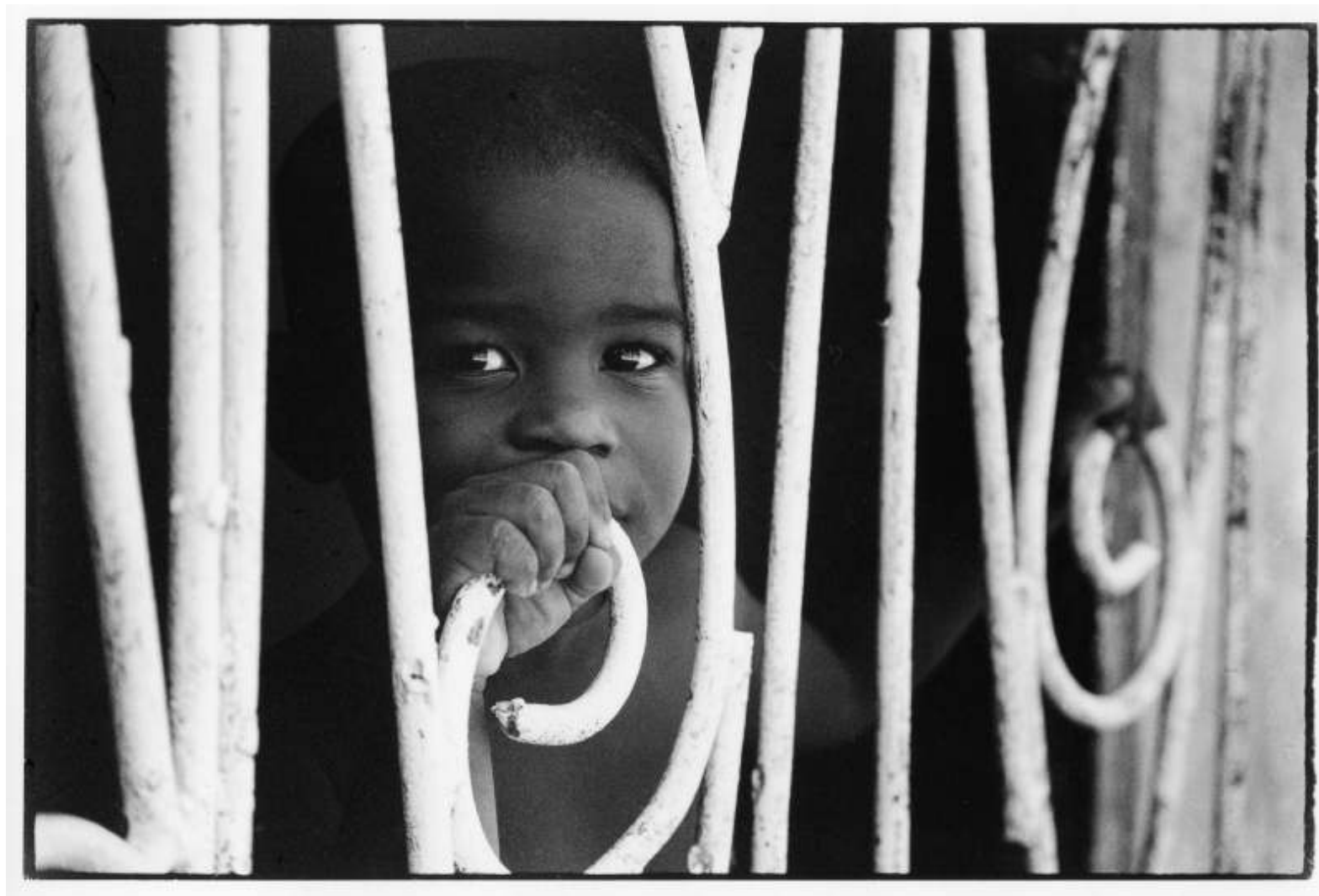
Elliot Erwitt

## Candid



Peter Turnley

## Candid



Richard Harmer

Posed?



Mary Ellen Marc

Posed?



Elliot Erwitt

Posed?



Mary Ellen Marc

## The decisive moment

“There is a creative fraction of a second when you are taking a picture. Your eye must see a composition or an expression that life itself offers you, and you must know with intuition when to click the camera. That is the moment the photographer is creative. Oop! The Moment! Once you miss it, it is gone forever.”- Henri Cartier-Bresson



## The decisive moment



Henri Cartier Bresson



## The decisive moment



Alex Webb

## The decisive moment



Peter Turnley

## The decisive moment



David Allen Harvey

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

Humorous or witty



Elliot Erwitt



Humorous or witty



Elliot Erwitt

Humorous or witty



Elliot Erwitt

Humorous or witty



Elliot Erwitt



Humorous or witty

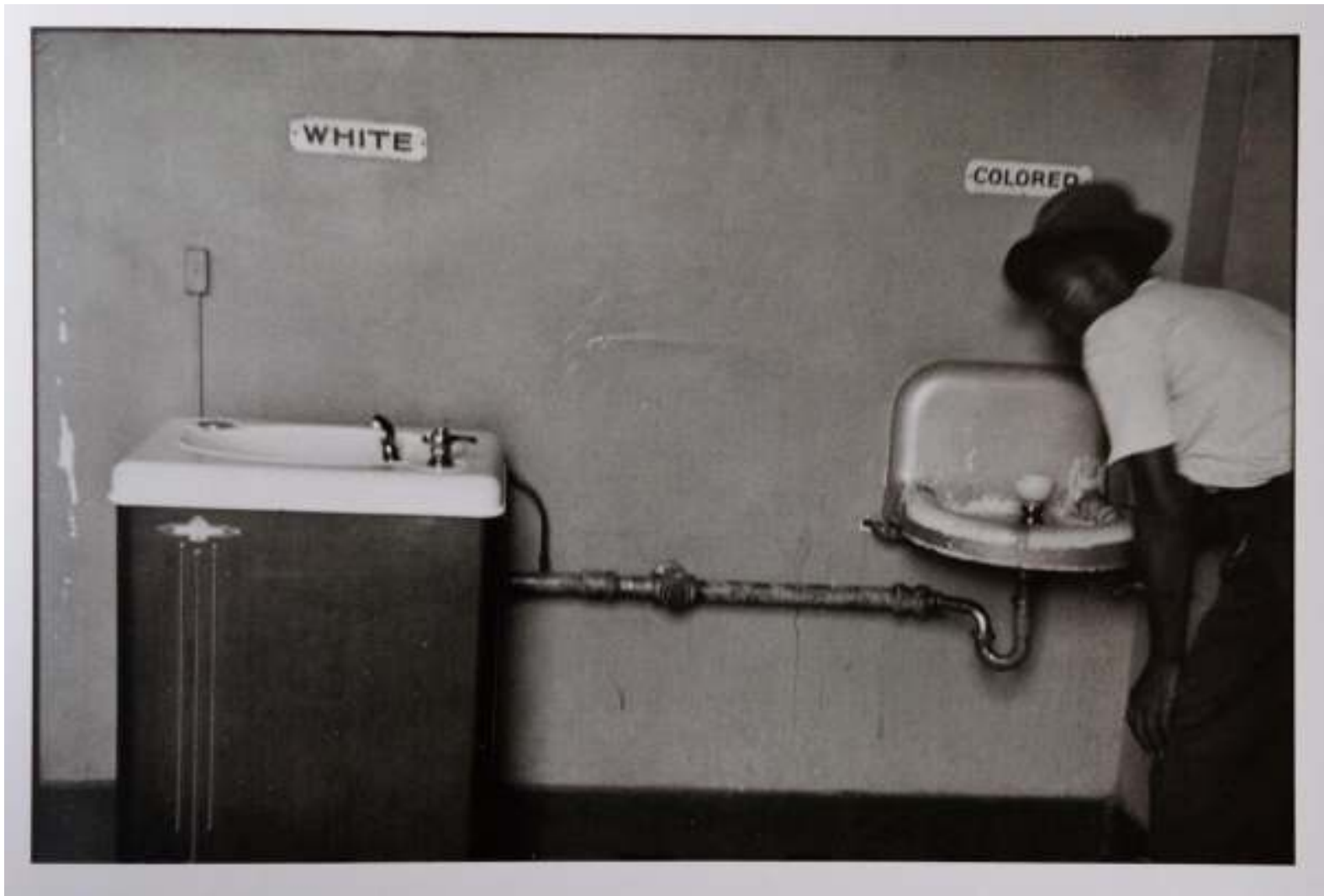


Elliot Erwit

What is documentary photography?

Documentary photography usually refers to a popular form of photography used to chronicle both significant and historical events and everyday life. It is typically covered in professional photojournalism, or real life reportage, but it may also be an amateur, artistic, or academic pursuit.

## Documentary photography



Elliot Erwitt

## Documentary photography



Nik Ut



## Documentary photography



From 'The Americans' 1955, Robert Frank

## Documentary photography



Both images by Robert Capa. D Day landings, 1944

## Documentary photography



From 'First 100 Days' by Pete Souza



## History of street photography

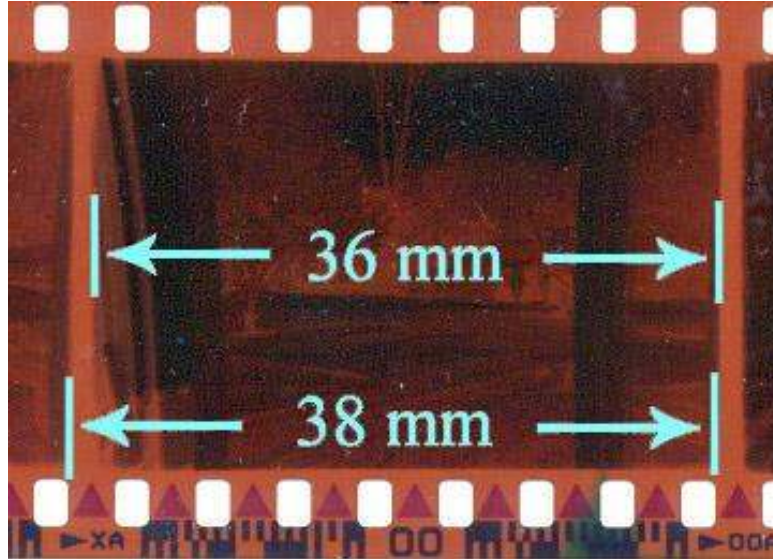


- Once photographing meant a large box camera on a tripod, shifting film plate after each shot - and working with a dark cloth over your head and the camera.
- Pre enlargement photography meant that a large negative was a necessity
- Photography was slow, methodical, precise, posed.

## Oskar Barnack and his role in the development of street photography



Oskar Barnack



135 film



Ur-Leica (1912): Precursor to the Leica 0 series (1923)

- Oskar Barnack was headhunted from Carl Zeiss to make the Ur-Leica. He made 2-3 samples in 1912-1913
- The camera was designed to test motion picture film stock for movies
- He had the idea of a small format negative and large final picture through enlargement
- “Not all iconic photographs were made with a Leica, but they were all made because of a Leica”

## Equipment: Rangefinder Vs SLR



### Rangefinder Viewfinder

Smaller than an SLR

See outside the frame

Does not show depth of field

Uses only a central focus area

Non exact framing

Allows you to see outside the frame

No blackout

Quiet shutter



## Equipment: Rangefinder Vs SLR



### SLR viewfinder

Larger than a rangefinder

Focussing at maximum aperture

Can show depth of field- but  
viewfinder goes dark

Exact framing

Cannot see outside the frame

Viewfinder blackout with each  
shot

Loud shutter





## Embrace proximity and master the wide angle

*"If your photos aren't good enough, you aren't close enough," Robert Frank.*

*"... the older I get, the closer I get," Bruce Gilden*

- 28mm or wider: Mary Ellen Marc, Bruce Gilden
- 35mm: David Allen Harvey, Alex Webb,
- 50mm: Henri Cartier Bresson



Alex Webb

On success rate...

*I am a tough editor of my work, and usually when I look at my contacts I find that I can go as many as fifty rolls without getting a good photo. But when I looked at this roll, I had not one but two of my best images ever of New York City. What a coup!" Bruce Guilden*

*1 keeper in 50 rolls = 0.05 % or 1 in 1800 frames*

On success rate...

*“Luck – or perhaps serendipity – plays a big role... But you never know what is going to happen. And what is most exciting is when the utterly unexpected happens, and you manage to be there at the right place at the right time – and push the shutter at the right moment. Most of the time it doesn’t work out that way. This kind of photography is 99.9% about failure.” – Alex Webb*

On success rate...

*“Don’t be afraid of taking a bad photograph. The key to taking a small number of good photographs is to take a lot of rubbish,”* Martin Parr



On success rate...

"Your first 10,000 photographs are your worst." – Henri Cartier-Bresson

Technique- Focus on the moment, not the technical aspects



Vivian Maier

“All the technique in the world doesn’t compensate for the inability to notice.” – Elliott Erwitt

“There is nothing worse than a sharp image of a fuzzy concept.” – Ansel Adams

Technique- Focus on the moment, the composition not the sharpness



Henri Cartier Bresson

## Technique- Zone Focusing



Z Tarek

## Technique- Pre-metering and manual exposure



Robias Toss



Strategy, Obstacles and Solutions

Find the geometry, then wait



Henri Cartier Bresson

Find the geometry, then wait



Henri Cartier Bresson

Ask Permission- Steve McCurry



Steve McCurry

Ask Permission- Steve McCurry



Steve McCurry

## Ask Permission



Richard Harmer



Ask Permission



Richard Harmer

Build trust with the subjects: David Allen Harvey



David Allen Harvey

## Build trust with the subjects: David Allen Harvey



David Allen Harvey



Build trust with the subjects: Mary Ellen Mark



Mary Ellen Mark

Get extremely close, and react fast. Do not ask permission



Bruce Gilden

Get extremely close, and react fast. Do not ask premission

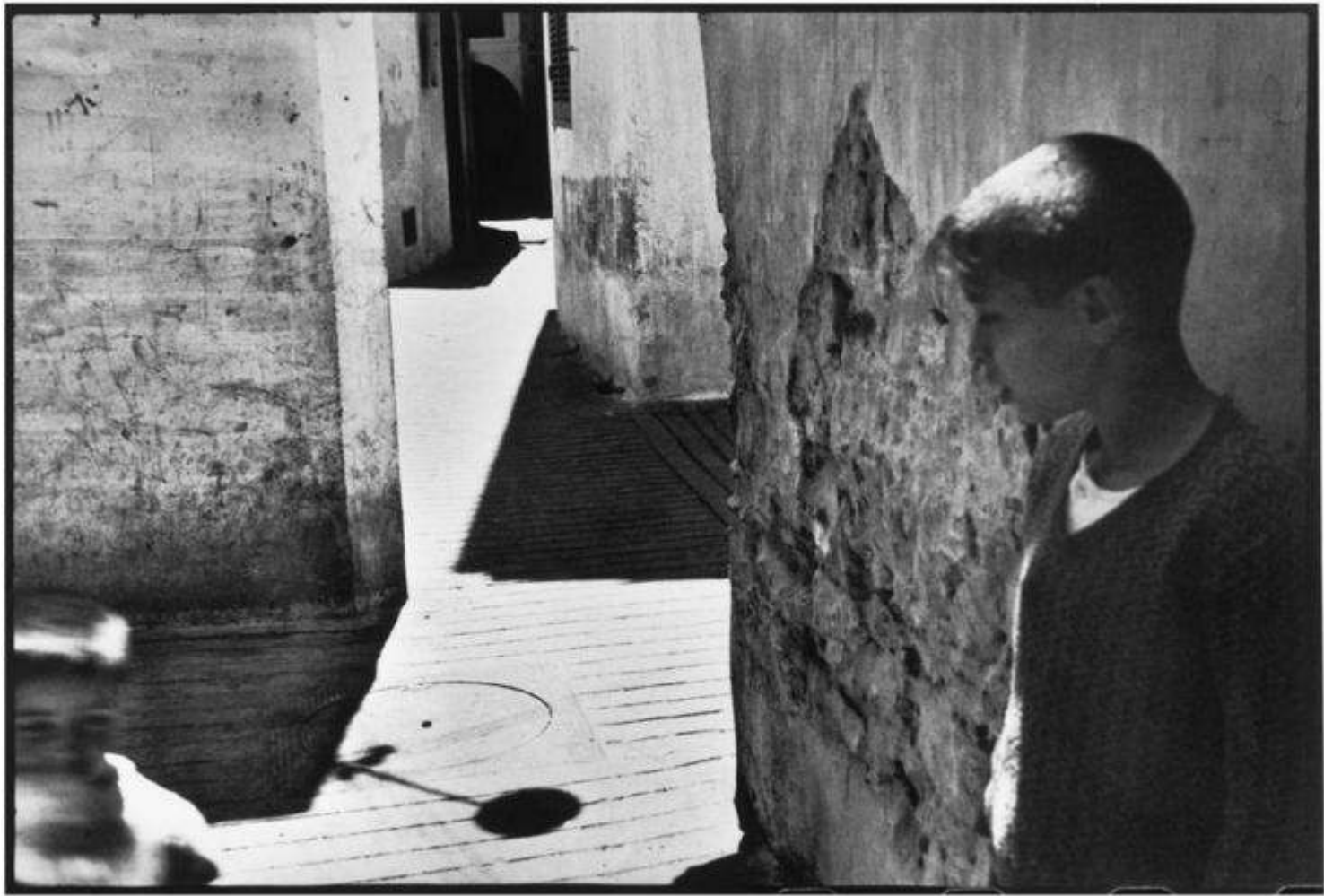


Bruce Gilden



## Composition for Street or Documentary Photography

## Geometrical Composition



Henri Cartier Bresson

## Geometrical Composition



Henri Cartier Bresson

## Geometrical Composition



Martine Franck

## Frame within a frame



Davied Allen Harvey



## Frame within a frame



Elliot Erwitt



## Frame within a frame



Elliot Erwitt

## Frame within a frame



Steve McCurry



## Minimal overlapping elements



Davied Allen Harvey

## Minimal overlapping elements



Richard Harmer

## Minimal overlapping elements



Richard Harmer



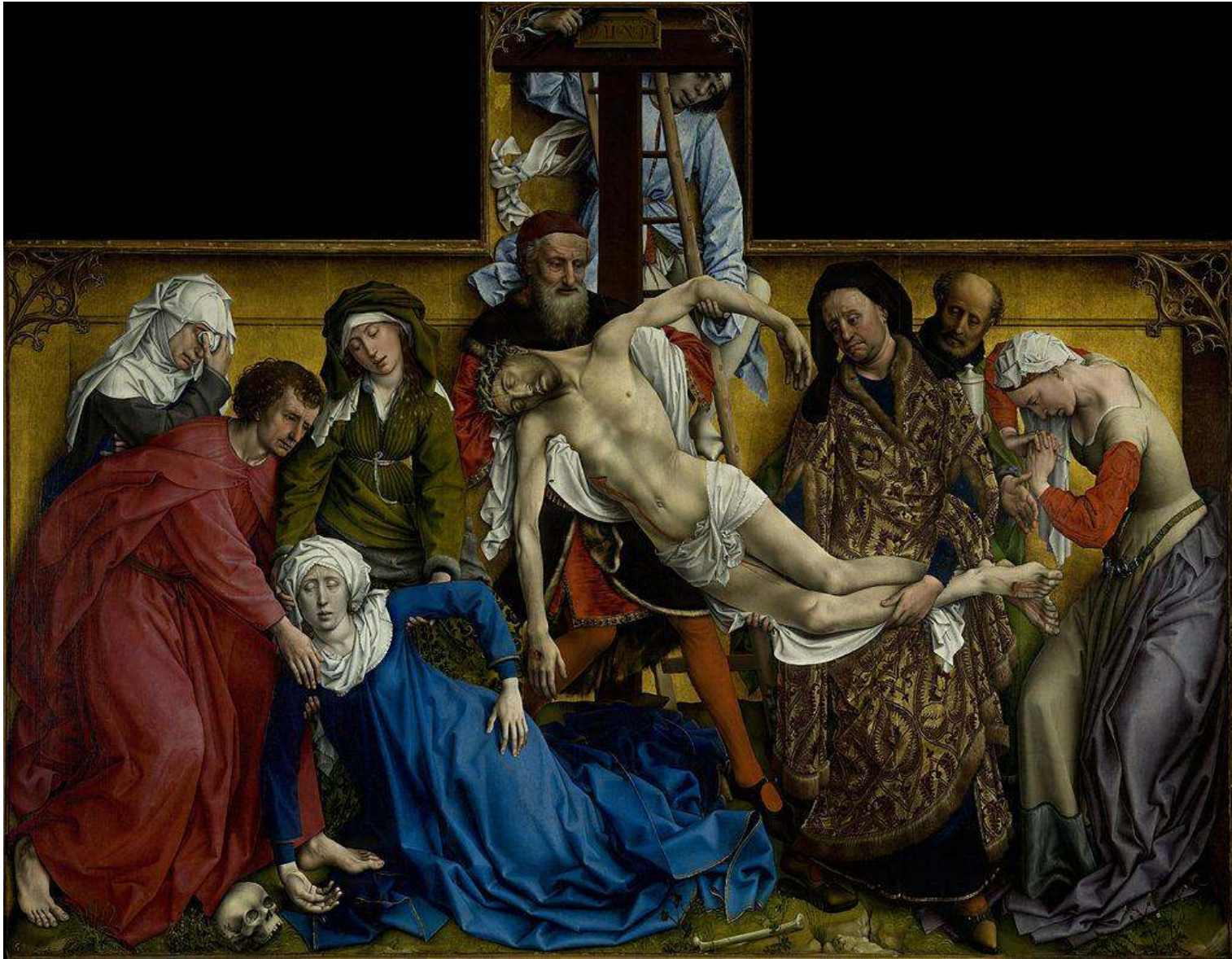
## Renaissance Composition



Slander by Botticelli



## Renaissance Composition



The descent from the cross, Rogier van der Wayden



## Renaissance Composition



Annie Leibovitz



## Renaissance Composition



Kazi Mushfiq



## Renaissance Composition



Gabi Ben Avraham

## Renaissance Composition



David Allen Harvey



## Renaissance Composition



Joel Goodman



Not telling the whole story

*“Lately it’s been striking me how I really love  
what I can’t see in a Photograph,” Diane Arbus*

Not telling the whole story



Trent Parke

Not telling the whole story



Kazi Mushfiq

Not telling the whole story



Eric Kim

Not telling the whole story



Richard Harmer

## Use of light and shadow

“I am forever chasing light. Light turns the ordinary into the magical.” – Trent Parke



## Use of light and shadow



Trent Parke

## Use of light and shadow



David Allen Harvey

## Use of light and shadow



Elliot Erwitt

## Use of light and shadow



Shiomy Evron



## Use of light and shadow



Steve McCurry

## Leading Lines



Elliot Erwitt



## Repeating Patterns

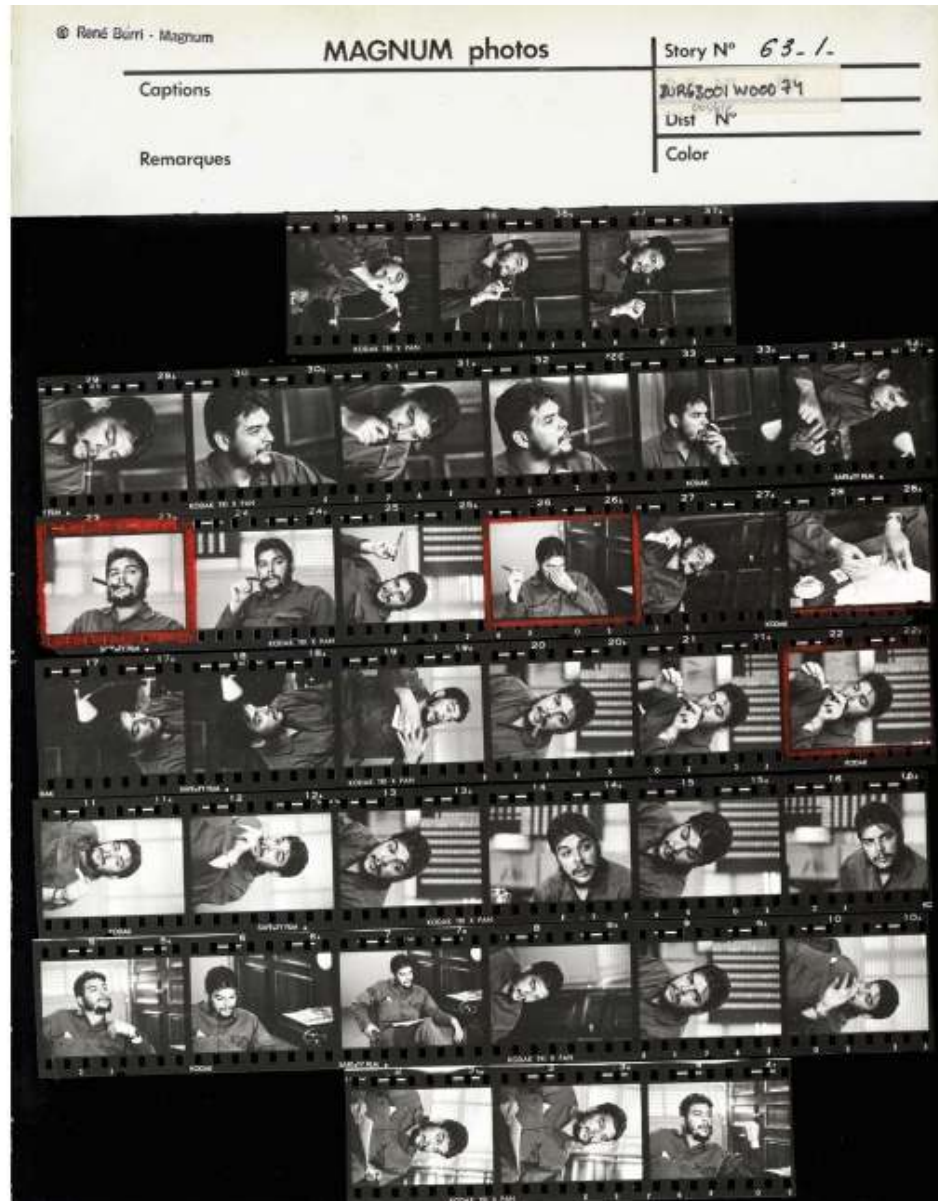


Garry Winogrand

## Magnum Photos

*“It can be difficult to make a decision because you can like this frame for this reason, and that frame for that reason. Each photograph has its particular strength. **But you only pick one. One has to represent all.** So I am always trying to put everything into one image: the statement, the foundation, the composition, the story, the individual personality – all of that together into one image...”* Leonard Freed- Magnum

# Magnum and the contact sheet



Rene Burri

## Magnum and the contact sheet



Rene Burri

## Magnum and the concept of the contact sheet



Elliot Erwitt- President Nixon and Premier Nikita Khrushchev





## Magnum and the concept of the contact sheet



Elliot Erwitt- President Nixon and Premier Nikita Khrushchev

## Applying a documentary/street style to your own photographs



Richard Harmer

## Resources

- Eric Kim Street Photography Blog
- Magnum Photos (and Magnum Contact Sheets)
- Leica Blog
- Instagram
- Flickr Group HCSP (Hard Core Street Photography)