ART ACTIVITY

PHOTOGRAPHY + MINDFULNESS

This activity was created by former Emerging Artist in Residence Mar Hester. See Mar’s photography and artwork at aimlesslight.com or @aimless.light.

With all of us online now more than ever, we are being bombarded with beautiful imagery of daily lives. While many of us rely on our phones to capture memories and for sharing, we don’t typically take the time to consider what makes a good photograph. Well what if you could capture images that reflected more on the beautiful memory you were making or the feeling you were trying to portray? Here are a few small tips for making your phone photography the best it can be without downloading a new app, using filters, cropping afterwards or getting a new phone.

1. **Pay attention to the background.** Sometimes a slight shift to the left or right or a slight angle can cover up unwanted backgrounds and help make your photo stronger by removing distractions.
2. **Simplify your photographs.** Single out subjects, remove all the mess around an object or a person. Keeping a composition simple is always the way to go.

3. **Use the portrait mode even if you are not photographing a person.** Now this is only an option if your phone has “portrait” mode, but it is a great way to help eliminate the background and focus on an object. But be careful, sometimes it can “blur” unwanted parts.

4. **When in doubt, look up** - A lower angle helps make any subject interesting. For example, if you would like to photograph a beautiful flower, taking the photo from a lower angle to include some of the surroundings creates a much more dynamic photo.
5. **You don’t always need a flash.** Many people rely on their cameras to decide about a flash. But most of the time the flash just creates harsh lighting and unflattering glares. Even in a darker room, you typically have enough light to get a great photo (see next tip on how to use the aperture function).

![Flash.glare](image)

6. **Your phone camera has an aperture function.** Aperture controls the amount of light let into the lens. Everyone knows to click on the subject they want in focus. But did you know that the little sun icon that pops up next to it allows you to control the aperture by increasing or decreasing the lighting? It’s a great way to ensure you always get the shot you want, including the lighting. (It’s also why you don’t need to use a flash 9 out of 10 times.)

![Aperture.control](image)
7. **Use the rule of thirds.** Have you ever noticed that grid that divides your image into 9 even parts when you use the camera? Most people think of that grid as a guide to center subjects. But it is also there to help you capture more dynamic images. You can use the grid to help you off-center and only fill 1/3 of your frame - that can help make a striking image. Also, by placing points of interest at the intersections of the grid lines also helps make a great photo better. (Hint: If you do not have the grid when you open your camera app, check your settings and be sure it is turned on.)

8. **Use the rule of odds.** This rule is subtle but one we see everywhere. Humans are more attracted to odds in a composition. It’s a fact that it can help create a more interesting composition, guiding the viewer’s eye and creating interest in any image or piece of art. Pay attention when you look at advertisements or photos you like - see how many utilize the rule of odds.
9. **Look for leading lines.** OK, so you know all about the rule of thirds and the rule of odds. But how about using leading lines? These lines can be real or implied and can be used to guide a viewer’s eye to the subject. Leading lines could be roads, buildings, railings, tunnels, trees or even the shadows cast by an object.

10. **Most Importantly - SLOW DOWN.** Rushing to grab a photo means you are not considering everything in the frame. Take your time to set up the shot, move your subject around, position yourself, get out of the car, whatever it takes to get the shot you want. The best advice I can give is hold up your camera, frame the shot, take a deep breath, and scan every single part of the photo you framed - especially paying attention to corners. If something bothers you or catches your eye wrong, more than likely your viewers will feel the same.

So now that we know what to do, let’s take a moment to reconsider the familiar. Many of us are feeling trapped in our home with little to do. Practicing your photography is a great way to pass the time at home or you can brush up on your skills while on a daily walk - still keeping that social distance. The fact is that we all are experiencing our everyday lives and everyday world in an entirely new light. Let’s take the time to slow down and reconsider our surroundings. Who knows, you may discover a whole new way to look at your day.
Challenges:
1. Capturing Feelings: Where are you at this moment? What draws your attention if you slow down and close your eyes and breathe for a couple of minutes? Now use the tips and tricks to help you capture those feelings and thoughts via a camera. Make the things you see daily reflect your feelings. Try it.

2. A Modern Still Life: Who says still lives have to be boring and filled with flowers and fruit? You can create a still life from the objects you have around the house. Use the composition rules to help you bring together a great image. This can be a combination of silly, unique things you have, items relevant to current events to make a statement (such as gloves, hand sanitizer, soap, etc.) or just a nice combination you enjoy. The rules are the same - pay attention to the background, have an odd number of items, keep it simple, place items appropriately for the compositional rules, lower your angle when taking the photograph, etc.
3. Ready for a real challenge? Found lines: Practice finding leading lines and angles around your home or in your yard to create a strong composition without moving anything other than yourself. Think of these lines as a way to guide the viewer’s eye around the photograph as well as towards a subject matter.