

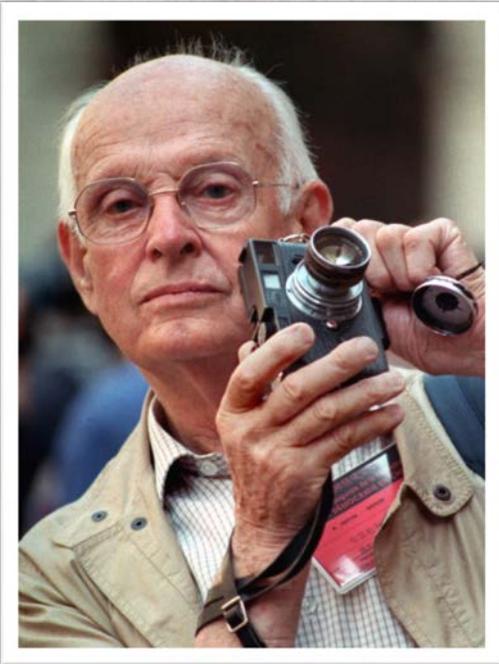


Comparative Study

Brian Huynh

This Comparative Study focuses on the analyzation of the work of two photographers: Henri Cartier-Bresson and Paul Calhoun. By carefully studying the formal qualities, intentions, and context of three pieces of their work respectively, I will evaluate their work's ability to tell a story and capture the essence of humanity. Furthermore, I will compare and contrast their work's formal qualities, cultural contexts, and composition. I have drawn inspiration from both artists and both artists' influence is apparent in my work.

Cultural Context of Henri Cartier-Bresson's Work



Platiou, Charles. "Henri Cartier-Bresson." *The New York Times*, The New York Times.
www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/cp/obituaries/archives/henri-cartier-bresson-photography.

Originating from Chanteloup, Seine-et-Marne, Henri Cartier-Bresson was a photographer and a pioneer of what would eventually become known as "Street photography." His work combined the artistic qualities with the photojournalistic aspect of photography. He documented life as it was and as it occurred naturally in front of him. In his words,

"...when you photograph, you aren't trying to push a point or prove something. You don't prove anything. It comes by itself." – Henri Cartier-Bresson

Cartier-Bresson's work took him across the world. With his 50mm lens and his Leica rangefinder, he focused on capturing historical moments and documenting their consequences on people. For example, Cartier-Bresson photographed China in the last months of the Kuomintang's existence. He preferred using a 50mm prime lens because of its minimal distortion and "true" field of view. He believed that it captured the world as the eye saw it. His work offers a glimpse into a world that was and into a history that will always be. He did not focus on the obvious and he did not pursue images. His shooting style was not elegant or grandiose, instead it was patient, swift, and thoughtful. He waited for what he called "the decisive moment". These were moments that would never repeat and that happened in the blink of an eye. Henri Cartier-Bresson captured truth as it appeared before him. Truth existed in the common people and in the moments that would otherwise go unnoticed had they not been captured on black and white 35mm film.

"...life is very fluid. Well, sometimes the pictures disappear and there's nothing you can do. You can't tell the person, 'Oh, please smile again. Do that gesture again.' Life is once, forever." – Henri Cartier-Bresson

Analysis of Function, Purpose, and Significance



During the Visit of George VI of England to Versailles 1938

Cartier-Bresson, Henri "During the Visit of George VI of England to Versailles, 1938" *Magnum*, Magnum Photos, mediastore.magnumphotos.com/CoreXDoc/MAG/Media/TRAd_min6/2/c/7/e/PAR46120.jpg

The natural and unflattering expressions emphasize the humanity of the moment.

The distinct figures in the background of the image clutter the composition suggesting a sense of energy and anticipation.

Asymmetrical balance is established with the background figures that have similar weight on the left and right sides of the images. The two women in the foreground possess similar weight and divide the image into two equal parts.

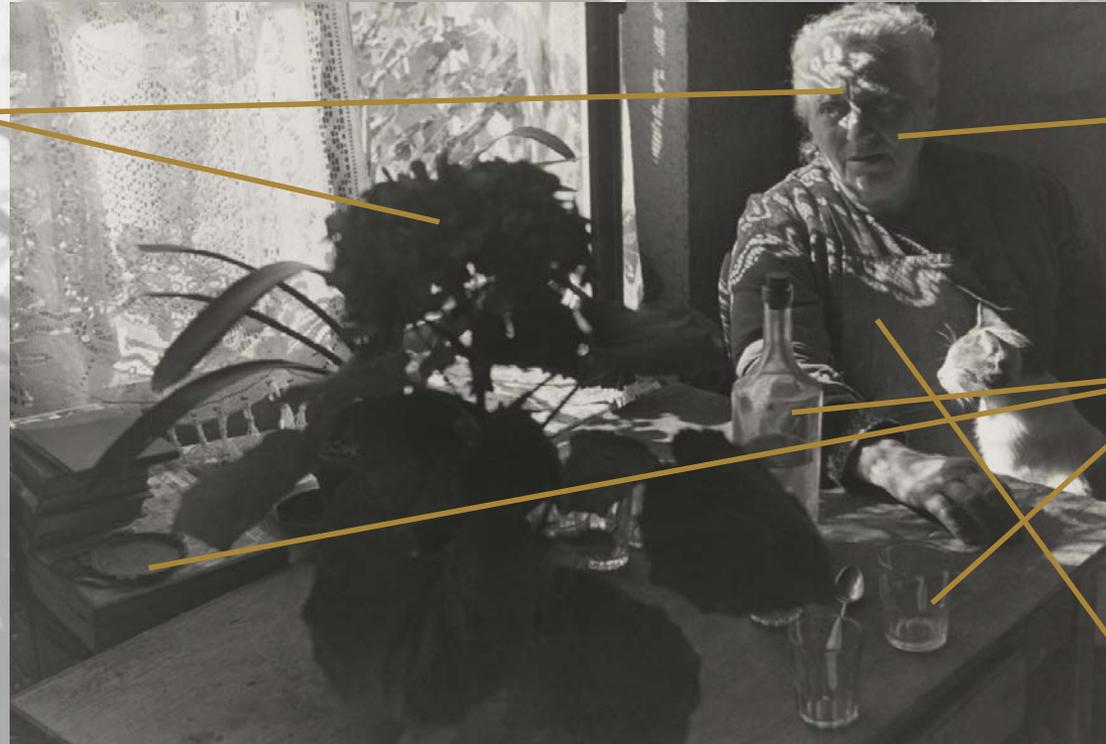
The photo captures the various emotions associated with George VI's visit to Versailles. This historical glimpse into the visit suggests that some were uneasy while others were excited. This captures one of the many divides between people which serves as commentary on humanity as a whole. While people are one, they divide themselves based on ideologies and beliefs.

Analysis of Function, Purpose, and Significance

Contrast of light and dark and juxtaposition of natural and human forms of equal weight, balances the composition.

The composition is cluttered with tight framing of the figure. This creates a sense of disorder and suggests that the figure is distressed.

The photo captures the pained expression of a woman as she glances, with a sense of dread, off into the distance. She does not address the camera or Cartier-Bresson. He captured a moment of sorrow filled peace. He contextualizes the image with objects like a bottle and flowers. But in the end, the audience is left to wonder why the woman is expressing such emotions.



Madame Mellie
1944

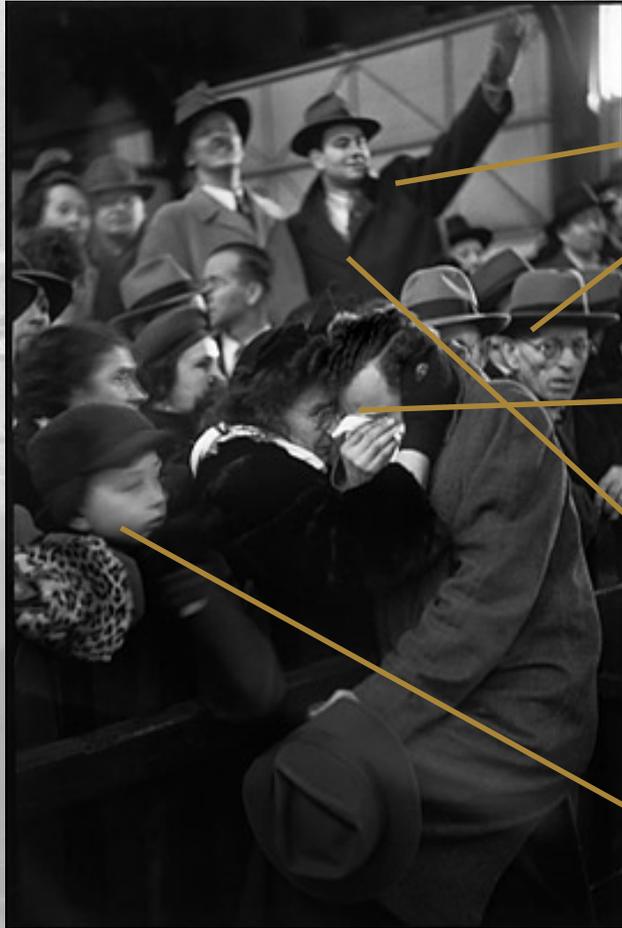
Cartier-Bresson, Henri. "Madame Mellie." *The Museum of Modern Art*, MoMA, www.moma.org/collection/works/49878?locale=ja.

Candid expression and emotion. Makes the audience wonder whilst giving them a basis to create their own interpretation of the story.

Objects surrounding the main figure give the image context and offer more pieces for the audience to interpret.

Relative to the entire photograph, the figure fills only a third of the composition. This establishes perspective while emphasizing the vastness of the space she occupies.

Analysis of Function, Purpose, and Significance



The crowd surrounding the main figures does not notice their emotional embrace. They are absorbed in their own feelings. Emphasizes the idea that life continues onward.

The two figures become the central focus of the image because of their emotional expressions that contrast with those of the crowd surrounding them.

Movement is established upward by the figure with outstretched arms in the background of the photo.

The blurry figures combined with the unfiltered emotion of the figures emphasizes the idea that the photograph captured a decisive moment in time that will not be repeated again.

The photo captures a loving embrace amidst a sea of chaotic people and movement. Time appears to be at a standstill as the two central figures are perfectly in focus while the other people around them are blurred. Cartier-Bresson establishes the idea that there are moments in life, in the darkest and most hectic hours, of clarity, beauty, and love.

New York, 1947

Cartier-Bresson, Henri. "New York, 1947." *Time*, Time, imgtimeinc.net/time/photoessays/2010/cartier_bresson/cartier_bresson_07.jpg

Analysis of Cartier-Bresson's Formal Qualities

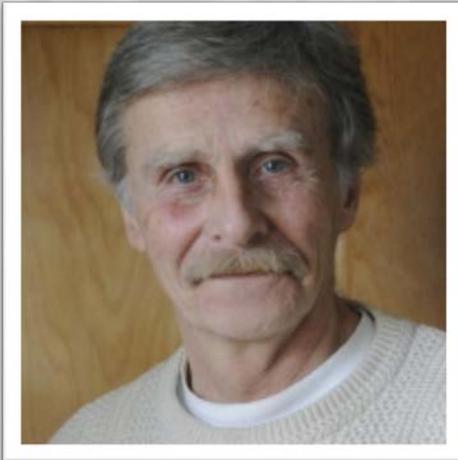
Henri Cartier-Bresson focused on emphasis and space to establish context and emotion in his photographs.

In Cartier-Bresson's photos, especially the photographs featuring people, the subjects are emphasized through juxtaposition, hue, light, etc. This is evident in *During the Visit of George VI of England to Versailles* where the dark clothing of the women contrasts with the bright background. Cartier-Bresson focused on specific subjects and encouraged the audience to pay attention to them by guiding their eyes through the photograph.

Despite his emphasis on particular subjects, Cartier-Bresson composed his photographs in a way that embraced the space around them. Rather than isolating his subjects, he gave them context and emotion by uniting them with their surroundings. In *Madame Mellie*, her surroundings provide clues to the audience that help them develop their own stories about the subject depicted in the photo. It makes the audience wonder who or what the subject is and draws them into the moment Cartier-Bresson captured. By embracing the natural state of his subjects and their surroundings, he allowed audiences to explore the natural world and its citizens who became representations of past moments in time. Cartier-Bresson showed the world its own reflection and allowed it to interpret its own stories.



Cultural Context of Paul Calhoun's Work



"Portrait of Paul Calhoun." MIAD,
MIAD,
www.miad.edu/images/stories/people/calhounweb.jpg

Paul Calhoun is a photographer based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His photographs transcend time and feature various countries undergoing social and political change. For example, he documented the changes in lifestyle from Soviet control to independence in Georgia. Calhoun's work is best described as documentary with emphasis on capturing unadulterated truth and reality. As a result, his work possesses depth, emotion, and an explicit truth about humanity. Calhoun's photographs are the bearers of history and the preservers of people. Through the juxtaposition of light and dark, his images provide a cinematic look into the lives of people whose stories are not often told. His style is deliberate and seemingly effortless. He freezes moments in time with a sense of grace, beauty, and finality.



Interpretation of Function, Purpose, and Significance



Beacon of Freedom

Calhoun, Paul. *Beacon of Freedom*. Paul Calhoun,
www.pscphotographs.com/bridge_over_the_ocean/paul/images/b-25.jpg

The angle at which the photograph was taken creates a sense of depth and emphasizes the human figures. The balance of the composition places more weight on the middle of the photo with a modified rule of thirds where the horizontal grid lines are slanted and the vertical lines are untouched.

Juxtaposition of countries and ethnic backgrounds provides cultural and historical context.

The subject of the photo is faced in the direction of the audience yet their eyes are directed elsewhere. This establishes movement while the figure's expression creates mood.

Interpretation of Function, Purpose, and Significance

The darkness and depth of the black establishes a somber tone and calls to the audience's emotion.

The monochromatic color palette emphasizes the figure and forms. It draws attention to the curtain and person while identifying their position relative to the walls.

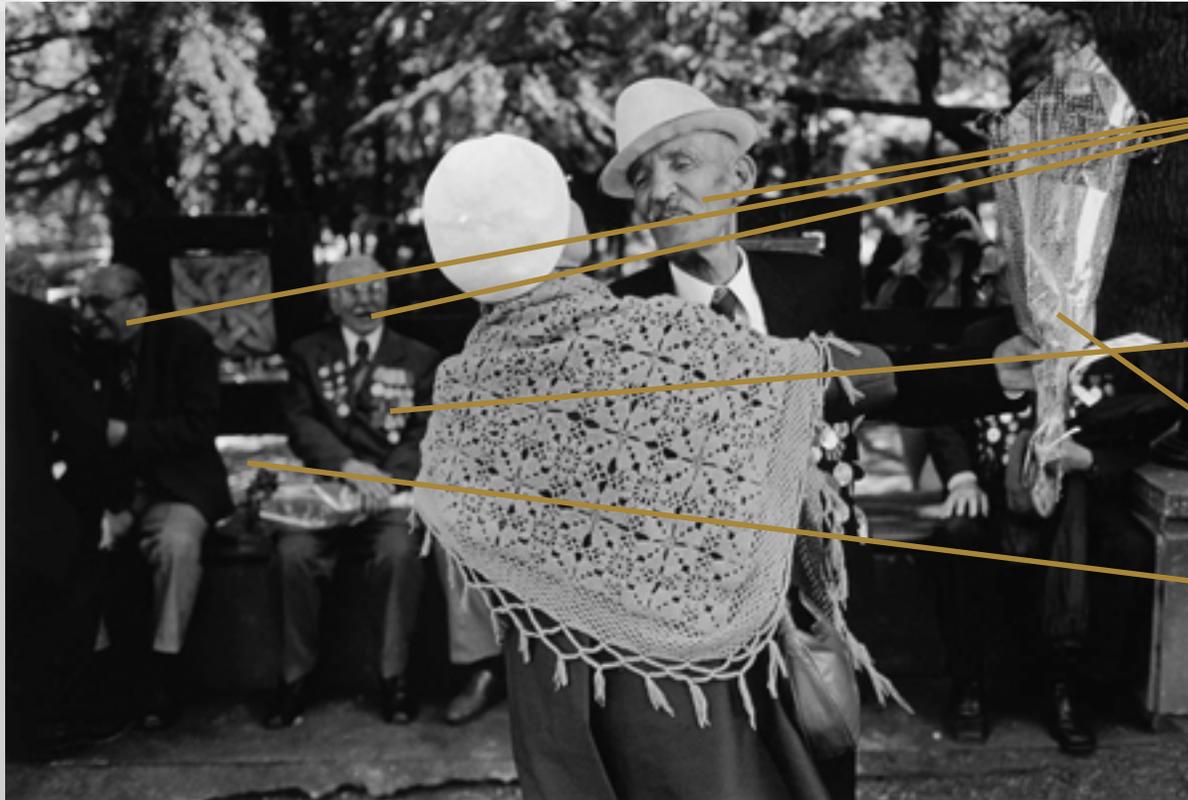
Juxtaposition of black and white and rigid and free forms connects to the overall duality of life and death.

The prominent figures of the piece fade into the negative black spaces suggesting a sense of finality. This also emphasizes the vastness of the space.

Capturing the back of the figure gives the person a sense of anonymity, drawing attention away from individual identity and instead drawing attention to what the figure represents: reflection, sadness, and longing.



Interpretation of Function, Purpose, and Significance



Unscripted expressions and emotions establishes a cheerful tone and mood.

Background figures and their attire give the photo context and develop the stories of the photographed figures.

Asymmetrical Balance is established by the background figures on the left half and the bouquet of flowers on the right half of the photo.

The photo captures a moment of peace and happiness. From the open gestures to the facial expressions, this image evokes a sense of love and vitality. With this image, Calhoun shows that the road to recovery is not always painful. He shows that in life, there is always room for joy and laughter.

Dancers

Calhoun, Paul. *Dancers*. Paul Calhoun.

www.pscphotographs.com/bridge_over_the_ocean/paul/images/b-2.jpg

Analysis of Calhoun's Formal Qualities



Paul Calhoun explores human experiences and emotions through visual storytelling with emphasis on human figures as well as the interplay of light and dark.

Calhoun emphasizes humans as the subjects of his photography by drawing the audience's eye throughout his compositions in a way that subtly or explicitly incorporates human figures. He also accomplishes this by contrasting the subjects and their surroundings with use of light and dark. By capturing a single-unplanned moment in time he also captures raw emotions that speak to the audience. The backgrounds of his photographs offer context to the emphasized figures through small details such as the political poster in *Beacon of Freedom*. Calhoun offers a visualization of a moment in time and allows the audience to interpret their meaning.

Comparison of Cartier-Bresson and Calhoun

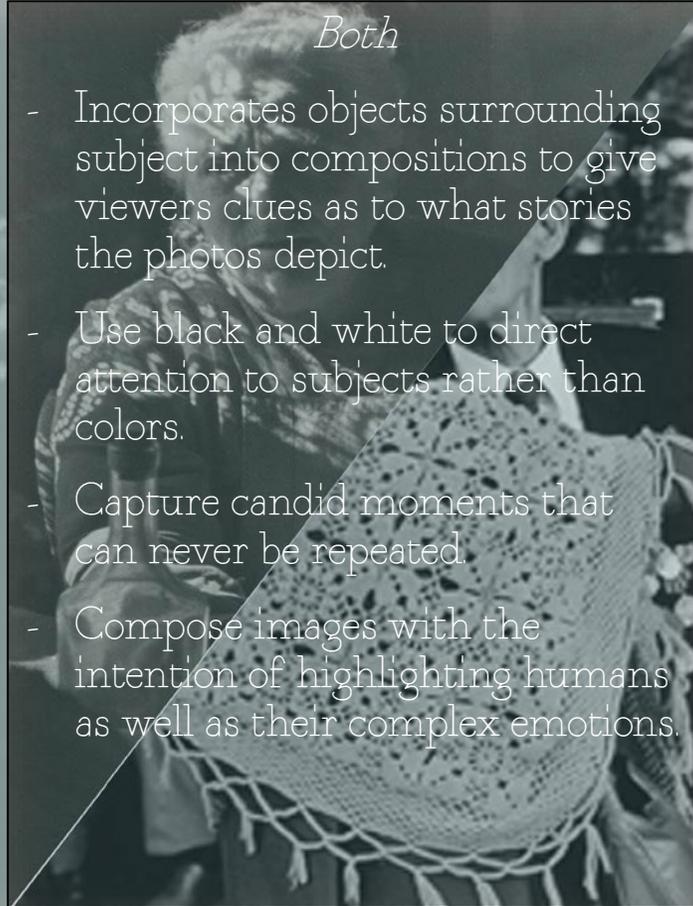
Henri Cartier-Bresson

- Frames subjects with human figures to enhance storytelling.
- Emphasizes objects and people surrounding main subjects of photographs as an integral part of their stories.
- Uses multiple focus points to guide the audience throughout compositions.



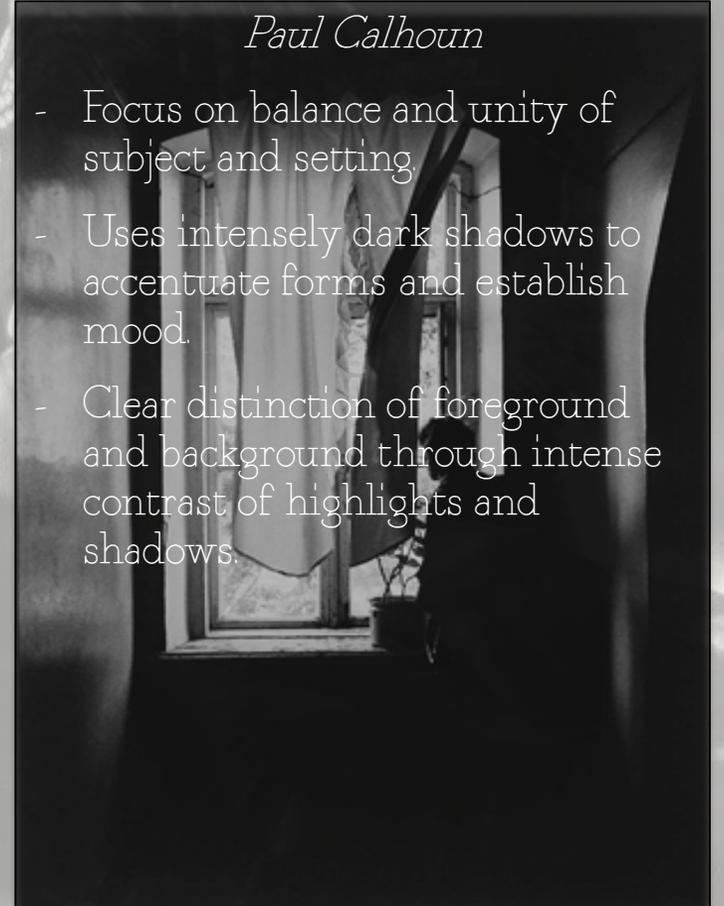
Both

- Incorporates objects surrounding subject into compositions to give viewers clues as to what stories the photos depict.
- Use black and white to direct attention to subjects rather than colors.
- Capture candid moments that can never be repeated.
- Compose images with the intention of highlighting humans as well as their complex emotions.



Paul Calhoun

- Focus on balance and unity of subject and setting.
- Uses intensely dark shadows to accentuate forms and establish mood.
- Clear distinction of foreground and background through intense contrast of highlights and shadows.



Comparison of Composition

Henri Cartier-Bresson

- Embraces all objects, forms, and people surrounding main subject to capture the essence of a decisive moment.
- Guides audiences through compositions with various figures of differing weights.
- Fills composition with people and movement at differing points of focus while establishing a main subject at the heart of the photo.

Both

- Incorporate area surrounding main subject into compositions to give audiences clues as to what is occurring in their photographs.
- Encourage audiences to wonder about the stories behind their photographs by capturing candid moments.
- Establish unity by embracing all elements of photographs as devices for storytelling.

Paul Calhoun

- Focuses on isolated subjects to keep audiences engaged in particular areas of photographs.
- Achieves balance asymmetrically by equally distributing weight throughout photograph.
- Distinguishes between background and subject through juxtaposition of light and dark.

Comparison of Function and Purpose

Henri Cartier-Bresson

- Balanced light and dark tones establishes realism and truth.
- Clean images appear soft around edges to render photos true to life.
- Captures emotion to document moments in everyday life.
- Composes photographs with multiple areas of contrasting weight to guide audience throughout images.

Both

- Contextualize photographs by including background and foreground elements like signs and flowers.
- Emphasize people and emotions as main focus of images by composing around subjects or by giving subjects more weight than other elements of the photo.
- Capture movement to highlight the continuous and busy nature of life.
- Highlight the finality of life by freezing a brief moment in time that will never occur again.
 - Capture raw emotions and unrepeatable actions and gestures.

Paul Calhoun

- Dramatic juxtaposition between light and dark tones separates subject from background.
- High contrast photos are sharp and dynamic and establish intense mood.
- Captures emotion to document history and social change.
- Composes photographs with specific areas of intense weight to guide audience directly to subject of images.

Comparison of Cultural Context

Henri Cartier-Bresson

- Documentary photography focused primarily on capturing the decisive moments of daily life.
- Photographed during times of extreme global unrest and major wars.
- Active from 1930s to the early 2000s
 - Documented extremely historic moments like the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.
- Candid portraiture of famous historical figures like Malcolm X.
 - Work has global implications and contributes to overall understanding of history.

Both

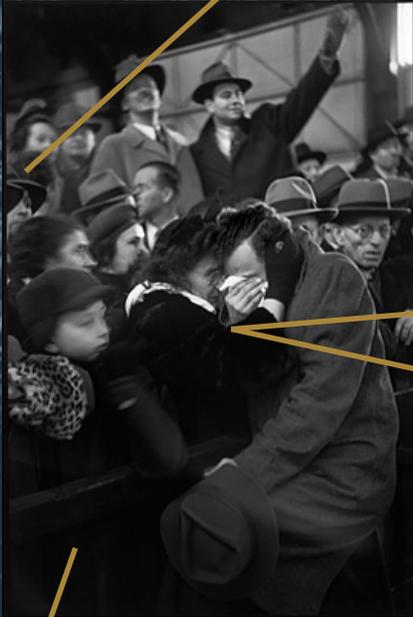
- Capture the truths and raw emotions of the human condition.
- Documented reactions and effects of social and political unrest.
- Illustrate the struggles and emotions of people in distress or those experiencing great change.
- Visualize the state of humanity via photographs that demonstrate how people feel and interact with their environments.

Paul Calhoun

- Documentary photography focused on illustrating political and social change in struggling countries.
- Focused on documenting change and transition to normalcy after unrest.
- Photographed during times of regional unrest but overall secure global security.
- Images offer insight to global audiences about the struggles of lesser known people.

Connection to Own Art: Henri Cartier-Bresson

The positive space surrounding the main subjects creates a frame that emphasizes their emotions and organic gestures. It creates a sense of scale that suggests they are merely a page in the vast story of life.



The juxtaposition between background and subject places emotion and the human condition at the forefront of the images. They illustrate the connection between humans and the beauty of togetherness in times of struggle or isolation.

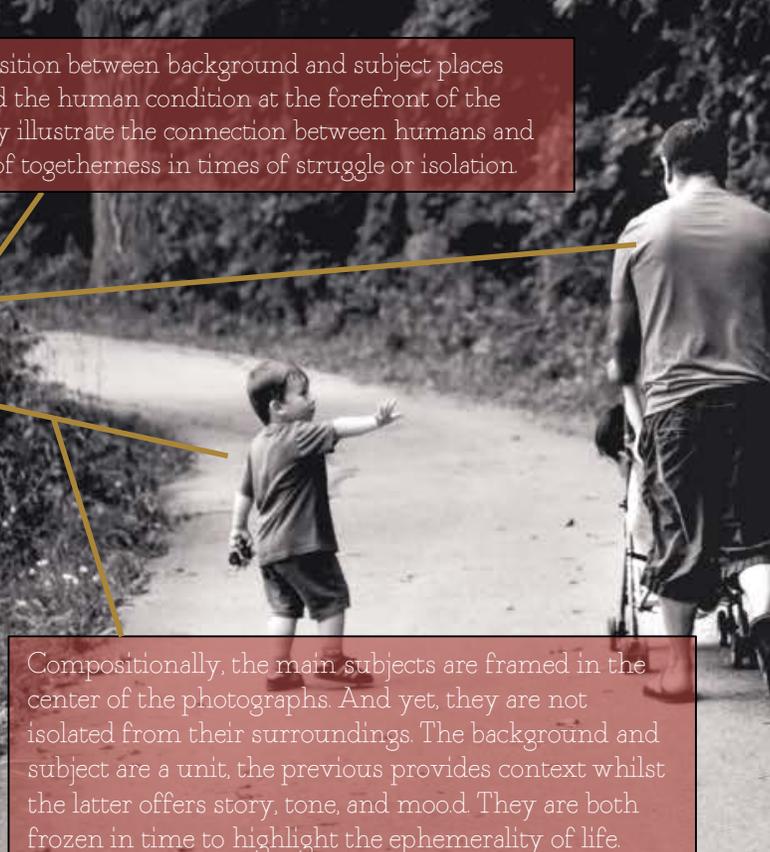
Compositionally, the main subjects are framed in the center of the photographs. And yet, they are not isolated from their surroundings. The background and subject are a unit, the previous provides context whilst the latter offers story, tone, and mood. They are both frozen in time to highlight the ephemerality of life.

Intense contrast between light and dark creates a vignette that establishes movement toward the center of the images. Human emotion is symbolic, it is the light that balances the darkness that would otherwise drown the photographs.

New York, 1947
Cartier-Bresson, Henri. "New York, 1947." *Time*, Time, imgtimeinc.net/time/photoessays/2010/cartier_bresson/cartier_bresson_07.jpg

Part 3 of Photo Series *Exposure*
Brian Huynh

Henri Cartier-Bresson's photography has greatly inspired my work. I have learned to view life as a collection of beautiful moments happening simultaneously and endlessly. He has instilled in me the idea of the decisive moment and the role of the photographer as capturing unadulterated truth. We both captured our respective realities without muddling the stories we froze in time with color. We are both of the same mindset that monochrome is a means of stripping a moment down to its purest form; it is how we choose to represent decisive moments that will never happen again in their most honest state. We defy the ephemerality of life by preserving the emotions and human experiences that would otherwise be forgotten by time. From Cartier-Bresson's peculiar taste in equipment, I adopted the sole use of a 50mm lens, a lens he and I both believe best captures what the eye experiences. It forces one to be close to their subject. Rather than distance ourselves from our art, we immersed ourselves in the experiences and emotions we captured. Granted, the moments we captured are innately different. Cartier-Bresson was active during a time of global unrest; he traveled the world to capture an uncertain humanity. The emotions he photographed ranged from joy to utter sorrow. I live in a time of a different social unrest brought about by progressivism that seems to enjoy moving backward. I do not capture the aftermaths of war; I instead capture the emotions of the world I experience everyday. Like Cartier-Bresson, I don't give a warning before I make a photograph, I capture the truth as I see it. In my life, I see separation, angst, uncertainty, and hope. As such, my subject matter is much like Cartier-Bresson's. We capture the cultures we are surrounded by. And we represent the human condition as a mixture of happiness, sadness, tranquility, and chaos.



Connection to Own Art: Henri Cartier-Bresson



Tadpole
Brian Hrynn

Madame Mellie
1944
Cartier-Bresson, Henri. "Madame Mellie." *The Museum of Modern Art MoMA*,
www.moma.org/collection/works/49878?locale=ja



Henri Cartier-Bresson taught me that great photography does not have to be forced or staged. I try to emulate his style of wandering, seeing, and capturing swiftly. His work inspired me to look toward the everyday people around me for inspiration. The most breathtaking decisive moments are not found in perfection, they are found on the streets and in the unflattering representations of people. In terms of composition, we both use the rule of thirds often to balance our images whilst emphasizing people and emotions. This is evident in my piece *Tadpole* and his photograph of *Madame Mellie*. His image captures the dreadful expression of a woman staring into the distance. My photo depicts the peaceful expression of my cousin blowing out his birthday candles. Neither individual addresses the camera. Neither individual knew they were photographed until the shutter opened again. Our images are candid, the emotions we captured are raw and unadulterated. While *Tadpole* tells a story of youth and innocence, *Madame Mellie* spins a tale of aging and sorrow. Our photos juxtapose light and dark to emphasize the pained and content expressions on the faces of those we captured. The shadows fight with the light, a symbolic contrast representative of the struggle of the human condition between rapture and pain. Both images incorporate the setting to contextualize the images with objects like cake or flowers. These become the basis for the stories the audience will create to rationalize and attempt to comprehend the photographs. This an integral part of Cartier-Bresson's influence on my work. I learned through his photographs, that the role of the artist is to capture their truth. It is not our duty to interpret the photograph for the audience however. We offer clues through our compositions that awaken the creativity and empathy within the people who view our photographs.

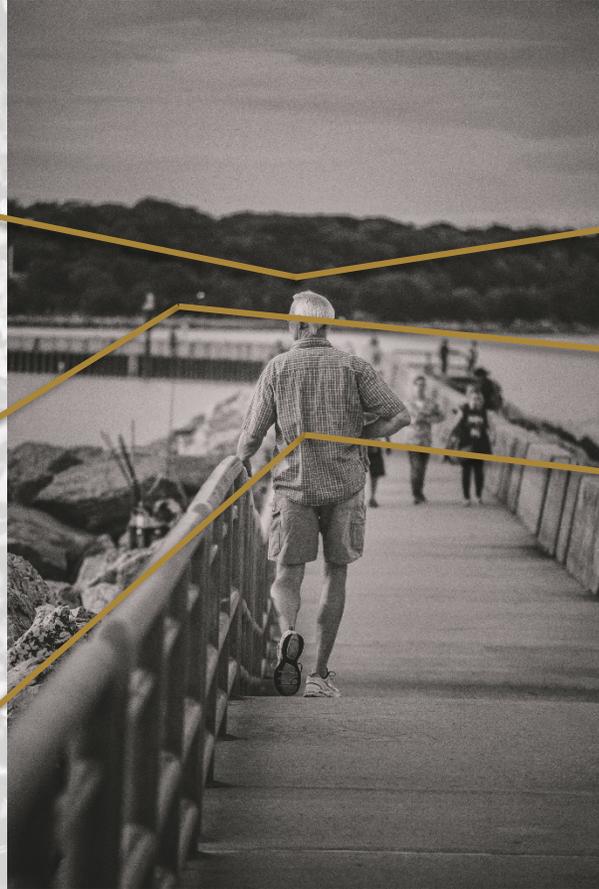
I grew up in a world much different than Henri Cartier-Bresson. I am creating photos in a time where people are addicted to technology and in person communication is a thing of the past. The significance of my work, is in the fact that I am documenting the human condition of my contemporaries. Much like Cartier-Bresson's work is a peek into the past state of humanity, my work will one day remind the world of who they once were and of the emotions they once felt.

Connection to Own Art: Paul Calhoun

The contrasting dramatic elements surrounding the main figures emphasizes the vastness of the space. This is a visual representation of humanity's place in the universe. Compared to their surroundings, these figures are small.

The monochromatic color palette juxtaposes light and dark, emphasizing the organic shapes and forms.

Anonymity is created by photographing the backs of the figures. This draws attention away from their identities and emphasizes their emotions. Both figures look off into the distance to suggest a sense of longing and reflection.



Part 1 of Photo Series *Cotton*
Brian Huynh



Intensive Care Hospital
Calhoun, Paul. *Intensive Care Hospital* Paul Calhoun,
www.pscphotographs.com/bridge_over_the_ocean/paul/images/b-15.jpg

In terms of aesthetic, my photographic work is most similar to Paul Calhoun's photos. Because we both utilize digital formats as opposed to 35mm film, our work shares a similar smoothness and depth in terms of shadows and forms. Unlike Cartier-Bresson's work, our images do not possess the gritty texture attributed to film photography. I've incorporated Calhoun's storytelling through the juxtaposition of light and shadows as a symbol of the duality of life and death into my personal work. His use of intense darkness has also influenced my work; by increasing the intensity and depth of shadows in my photographs, I have learned how to appeal to my audiences' emotions. It also aids in the manipulation of tone and mood within my compositions. Our photographs are a testament to the truths of humanity. We aim to go beyond capturing a moment in time and instead we desire to expose the cinematic qualities of the human experience through the interplay of light and dark. In this way, we eternalize the beautifully ephemeral nature of life.

Connection to Own Art: Paul Calhoun



Dancers

Calhoun, Paul. *Dancers*. Paul Calhoun.

www.pscphotographs.com/bridge_over_the_ocean/paul/images/b-2.jpg

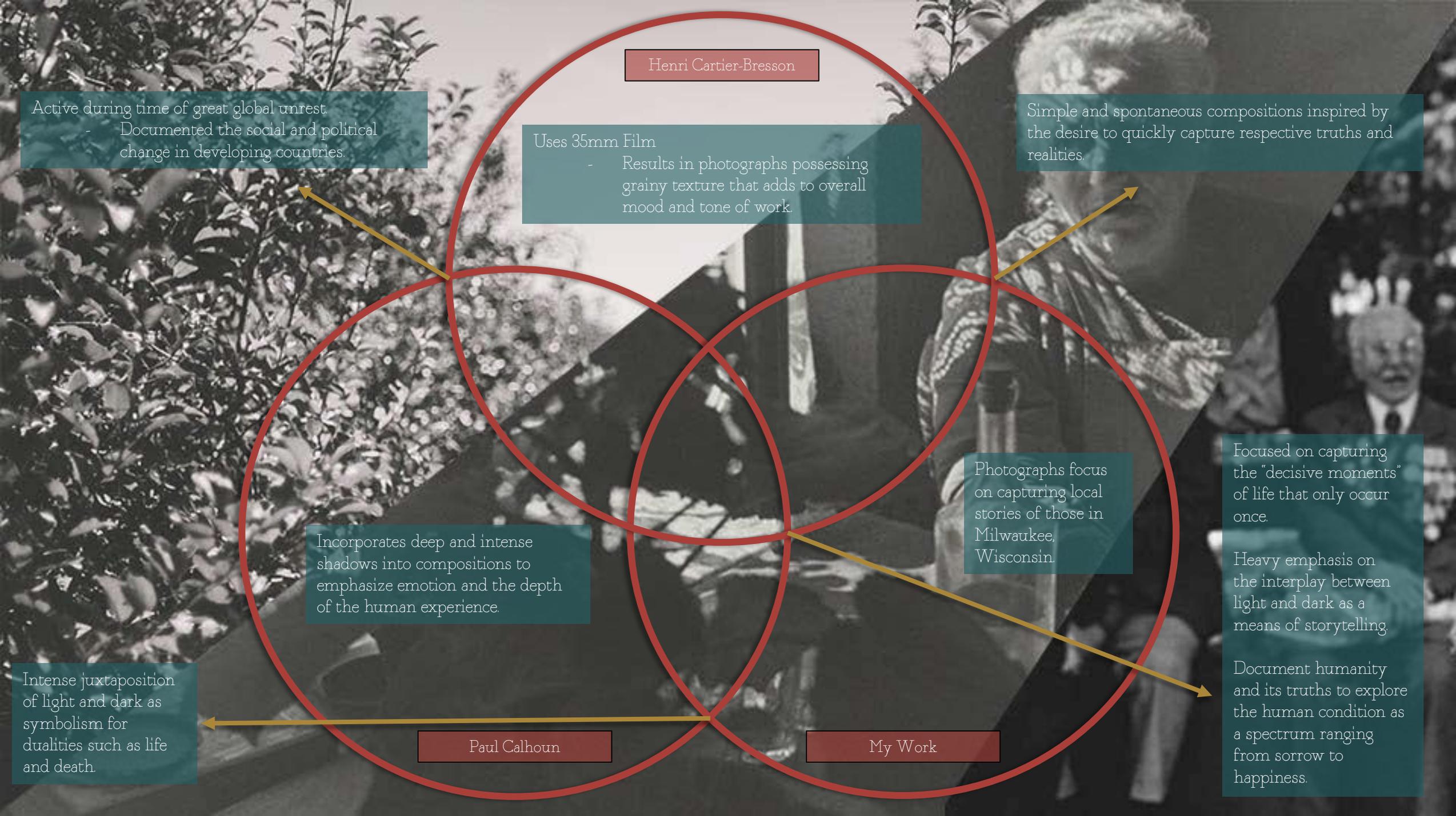


Part 2 of Photo Series "Cotton"

Brian Huynh

Background and surroundings contextualize photographs and help develop the stories of the figures in the photos. The figures are composed in the center of the frame with the left and right thirds of the composition filled to balance the images.

Although Paul Calhoun and I are both local to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the cultural context of our photographs is drastically different. Calhoun's work focuses on documenting the people of countries experiencing social and political change. In contrast, my photography focuses on documenting the stories of those within my local community. Despite this difference, our work is similar on a fundamental level. I drew inspiration from Calhoun's emphasis on encapsulating unadulterated, raw, and explicit truth within his photographs. I strived to achieve the emotional depth present in his work through my intense shadows and juxtaposition of light and dark. The human condition is defined by a spectrum ranging from pure bliss to absolute horror and our work subscribes to this notion that life is an emotional rollercoaster. Despite the underlying tension established by the intense contrast of black and white, we demonstrate that life is a balance of good and bad. Our monochromatic color palettes are symbolic; black and white is a duality that represents the relationship of life and death, happiness and sadness, and of good and evil. We place emphasis on the human experience by placing humanity at the forefront of our compositions. Often, humanity appears to be surrounded by darkness but the brightness of our human figures breeds vitality and warmth into our photographs. We document the human experience to visualize the hope we possess even in times of hardship and struggle.



Henri Cartier-Bresson

Active during time of great global unrest.
- Documented the social and political change in developing countries.

Uses 35mm Film
- Results in photographs possessing grainy texture that adds to overall mood and tone of work.

Simple and spontaneous compositions inspired by the desire to quickly capture respective truths and realities.

Incorporates deep and intense shadows into compositions to emphasize emotion and the depth of the human experience.

Photographs focus on capturing local stories of those in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Focused on capturing the "decisive moments" of life that only occur once.

Heavy emphasis on the interplay between light and dark as a means of storytelling.

Document humanity and its truths to explore the human condition as a spectrum ranging from sorrow to happiness.

Intense juxtaposition of light and dark as symbolism for dualities such as life and death.

Paul Calhoun

My Work