

# Telling stories

Editorial photography should engage viewers—and prompt them to imagine how the story unfolds

Expressive editorial photography is always based on storytelling. Such stories are non-linear. They do not attempt to offer viewers a beginning, middle or end. Instead, they interpret the facts of a story

## about the author

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its 39th year of training communicators in visual literacy.

Douglis, an IABC Fellow, is the most widely known workshop leader and columnist on editorial photography for organizations. Douglis offers training programs as one-on-one tutorial workshops in digital imaging and photographic communication. These tutorials provide flexibility in cost, length and content; extend from one to four days; and can be adjusted to cover everything from basic digital photography skills and photo editing to photographic expression. The tutorials are offered in Phoenix, Arizona, on dates selected by participants. For registration information, send an e-mail to [pnd1@cox.net](mailto:pnd1@cox.net). You can view Douglis's multi-gallery cyberbook on expressive digital travel photography at [www.pbbase.com/pnd1](http://www.pbbase.com/pnd1).

in an abstract way in order to express those essential human values we want our viewers to think about, understand and appreciate. If a story can create empathy and let the viewer vicariously live through whatever we experienced as we made our images, all the better. If we can make pictures that trigger the imagination, our viewers may ultimately see images in their own mind's eye that go well beyond our intentions.

In this issue, we look at three photographs that tell a story. They all deal with the same essential subject matter: someone dreaming on a motorbike. Yet each tells its story differently, and viewers will be able to take each one and make it their own.

Martin Crocker, an IABC member who works in marketing communication for Gemalto in Paris, provides our first example of storytelling photography (above right). He photographed a man in the streets of Zanzibar incongruously using the gas tank of a motorbike as a pillow. The man seems to be sound asleep. His body conforms to the shape of the bike—the curves of his legs echo the curves of the steel, while the shape of his head follows the curve of the tank. He seems welded to his machine. His dreams may well repeat the rhythms of the street itself. Crocker



MARTIN CROCKER/GEMALTO

**Photographed in Zanzibar, a man appears to be sound asleep on his motorbike. He seems welded to his machine, prompting viewers to wonder whether his dreams repeat the rhythms of the street.**

leaves us to imagine them.

I made the second example (opposite, top) at a market in Pakxe, Laos. It tells a story of a child who seems to be off in another world. The sleek lines of the motorbike he uses as a resting place contrast to the wall of straw market baskets that fills the background, a symbol of the burdens he may well have to shoulder as he moves through life. Although his eyes are wide open, there is a relaxed dreami-

ness in his facial expression, as well as in the way he holds his arms and rests his head on the huge seat of the motorbike. His dreams may seem small to us, but they loom large for him. He seems oblivious to the solid wall of baskets evoking a tradition of hard manual labor. The garish colors on the motorbike speak more of the future than of the past. As he grows, he will inherit both of these worlds.

I made the third storytelling



example (right) in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), Vietnam. We wonder if this woman is just tired or if her mind is full of dreams, as in the other two examples. Her mask and gloves, intended to protect her skin from wind, sun, fumes and grit, shroud her in mystery. By converting the image to black and white, I eliminate the color in her clothing and in the tourist bus parked across the street. I make her story represent that of all the harried commuters who run a gauntlet of roaring motorbike traffic twice every day along the city's polluted streets. My story is best told by her hand-to-head gesture, expressing the frustrating ritual of "hurry up and wait"—familiar to commuters everywhere. ●



The photo above sparks viewers' imaginations through contrast—the sleek, modern motorbike parked in front of a seemingly old-world wall of straw market baskets, with the young boy bridging the two worlds. Which world does he dream of? At left, the helmet, mask and gloves that shield this motorcyclist from polluted city streets also shroud her in mystery. Is she lost in thought, or frustrated by traffic?

#### take your best shot

Send photos for possible use in this column to The Douglass Visual Workshops, 2505 E. Carol Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85028 USA.