



Tipsy. I captured this image just off the Royal Mile in Edinburgh, Scotland, with my Nikon D750 and 24-120mm Nikkor lens at 44mm. The truck is tipped and the load highlighted by the red square seems one-sided. The loader is bending like a Gumby under the weight of the keg. Capturing street images such as this one requires patience and observation.

Street Photography



By Ed Wojtaszek

Photos © Ed Wojtaszek

Street photography originated with French painter Henri Cartier-Bresson when he picked up a Leica® camera in 1932 at age 24 and never returned to painting. Cartier-Bresson published several books, and a definitive one is *Henri Cartier-Bresson Photographer*, published in 1979. I study my copy of the first edition because his work remains relevant for street photographers today. He was a co-founder of the influential Magnum Photos agency (<https://www.magnumphotos.com/>) in 1947 and was active in photography until the early 1970s before his death in 2004.

My own interest in street photography began without the knowledge that the discipline of street photography existed. In mid-2010 I was living and working in England near London. The job was stressful and I worked long hours, six days a week. Every week, I took one day to rest and travel the area by bicycle, riding over 25 miles each time and taking photographs along the way. After I tired of capturing images of the local architecture and landscapes, I turned to capturing images of people.

These were my first street photographs, captured using a small digital rangefinder camera, a Canon® PowerShot D10.

That year I retired and dabbled in various photographic projects until I dedicated myself to street photography in 2016. In preparation for the trip to Scotland with my wife, I purchased a Nikon® D750 and a 24-120 mm f/4 kit lens. The goal was to have a great tour of Scotland and to use the opportunity to capture unique images of people on the street. From the time we arrived in Edinburgh, toured to the north, and departed Glasgow, I searched continuously for compelling scenes. Still, I was not aware that I was doing street photography.

When we returned from Scotland, I began to take photo hikes in Boston near home, capturing the activities of people and using Boston as the backdrop. As I looked for guidance, I found other photographers who were doing similar things and discovered the world of street photography. I studied the work of others and began to develop my personal approach.

Soon I settled on some personal techniques to make my results more consistent and predictable. One that I like is to use aperture priority with point autofocus, adjusting the ISO for conditions as I hike. The aperture gives me artistic control of the bokeh. The decision to select my focus point rather than use full multi-point autofocus forces me to think about framing and composition before pressing the shutter button. As I approach a subject, I set the focus point with a concept of where I want the subject to be positioned in the frame. My focus point is rarely in the center of the frame. If I didn't have the opportunity to move it, the subject will still be in an interesting place in the frame.

Along the way I settled on using a prime 50mm lens. There are two reasons that this is a good choice for street photography. First, 50mm is the focal length that best mimics the scale seen by the eye. When I see a scene and lift the camera to my eye or frame it in my screen, I see very much the same scene that I see with my eyes. That is an advantage since timing is important for street photography, and zooming is an activity that takes time away from capturing an image.

The second reason for using a 50mm lens is that I like to be close to my subjects. As a photographer, a zoom lens would place me far from the action and the emotion of the moment. It is too easy to miss nuances and opportunities

when you are fifty feet away from a subject, relying on a 200mm focal length. At the same time, it is critical to avoid influencing the scene by drawing attention to yourself. One technique to help avoid that problem is to use live view on the camera rear display to frame the photo rather than raise the camera viewfinder to my eyes. Looking through the viewfinder signals that you are taking a photograph, while looking at the back of the camera could be anything, including reviewing settings or images.

Even with a 50mm lens, the DSLR got to be heavy, even though I adapted it for my hikes using a sling instead of the stock camera strap. My neck was getting sore on my long photo hikes and I needed a lighter camera. I purchased a micro four thirds camera, a Panasonic® Lumix DMC GF1 for \$100 along with a prime 25mm (50mm equivalent) f/1.8 lens for \$200. That decision worked so well that I now mostly use a micro four thirds camera for street photography. From the GF1, I went to an Olympus® Pen F and currently to a Panasonic Lumix DC G9, all excellent street cameras.

The gear is probably less important than style and art. There are some guiding principles and ethical considerations that inform my style. Street photography is not “in-your-face” intrusion into the lives of people. As a street photographer, my goal is to stay out of the way and capture events as they happen rather than to influence them by forcing

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As English as a Mini-Cooper. A Mini-Cooper Rally in Brighton, UK, taken with my Canon PowerShot D10. There was a lot of action and I only needed to wait a few moments for something new to happen. Crowds of people at an outdoor event almost always provide subject matter for a street photographer.



Alpaca Fetish. This was captured using my Olympus Pen F while riding a bicycle on Cape May, New Jersey. I had stopped to hang out at an alpaca farm and this scene unfolded as the subject successfully attempted to attract an alpaca to the fence. Sometimes context makes it possible to anticipate a good shot.



Check! Taken at Mary Soo Hoo Park, Chinatown, Boston, using my Nikon D750. The men are playing Xiangqi, a Chinese game similar to chess. The decisive move, the fiery cap of the player, and the studied concentration of the observers are key elements. The black and white rendering helps to draw attention to the player because his white jacket pops out of the frame. There are only fractions of a second available to a street photographer to get ready and shoot.



Riding about Town with a Friend. This image was captured while I was pedaling my bicycle on a trail in Arlington, Massachusetts. I spotted the man and his dog from behind and took my iPhone XS out of my pocket. As I pulled alongside, I was able to capture two or three shots and this was my favorite.

myself into a situation. It is to capture all of the uncommon nuances of life rather than the routines of existence. Gratuitous images of homeless people, for example, are not acceptable.

Finally, there is the question of whether or not street photography is art. I do not want to presume that I can define “art” or that anyone can for that matter. A characteristic of art is that a work will evoke an interpretation or an emotion. A good street image has something to say that rises above the commonplace. That can be evoked by shapes, colors, facial expressions, or action. Good street photography stresses the senses of the photographer who is looking for that decisive moment. It takes time and patience to identify those moments and there are many failed attempts along the way.

As art, street images are not technically perfect. The street photographer has little control over light and must react quickly to subjects who are acting independently. Fine adjustments to focus and exposure are not always possible. Street images are often not the polished final products found in studio or posed images. Editing is limited to cropping and color correction without the luxury of being able to add interesting objects or delete distractions.

Street photography makes me happy and I am very satisfied when I am able to walk around or ride my bike among people, looking for the definitive shot. It is gratifying to return to my workstation to cull the images and choose those that are worthy and meet my artistic standards. Talking about it makes me want to get out and shoot. See you on the streets. ■



Clandestine. This image was captured using my \$100 Panasonic Lumix DMC GF1. The image achieved first place in a local exhibit themed “Shadow Play.” This was February in Boston and I was using the long shadows to create drama and mystery.

Ed Wojtaszek is a retired engineering manager and member of PSA since 2017. He is an active member of the Arts League of Lowell in Massachusetts as a videographer, exhibitor, and sponsor. Since retirement, he has learned that he has a love for street photography. He says his images have evolved and he strives to record images that have impact, almost always involving people. His blog at <https://www.edeksphotos.com/> hosts his street portfolio and he can be found on social media @edeksphotos.