

Focus on Creativity: Exploring New Perspectives

by Photographer Raymond Klass

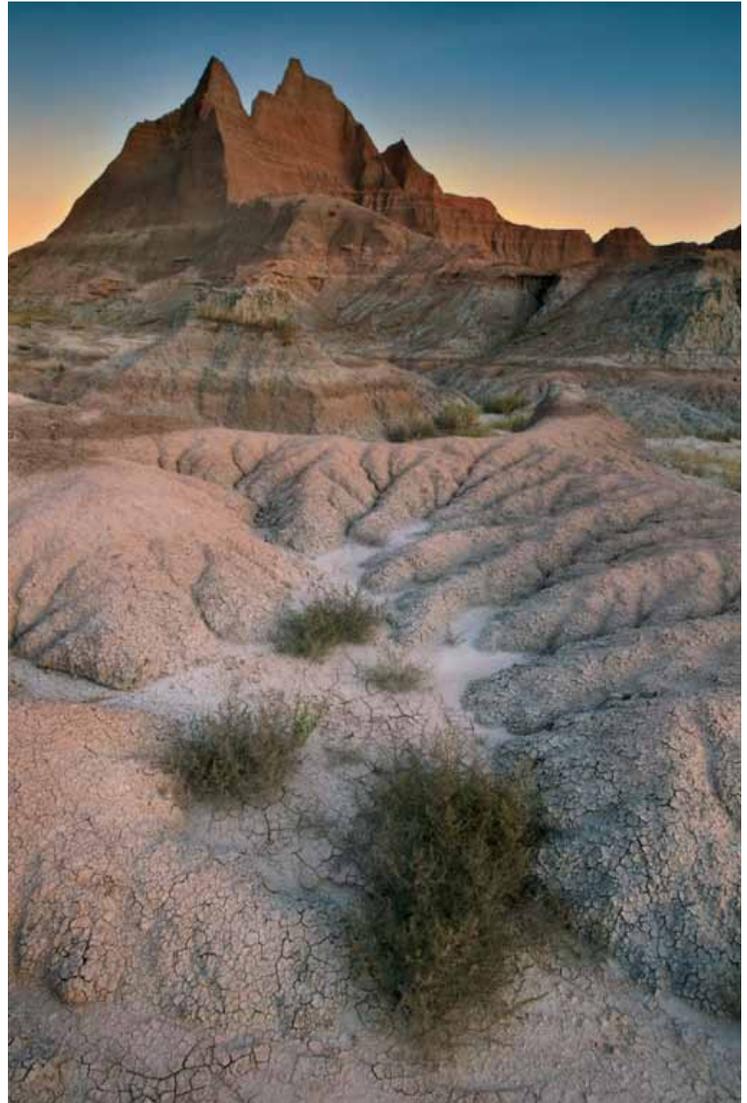
As artists, we all share some common threads. Regardless of our personal tastes we all want to feel successful in communicating our message. While there are many different aesthetic perspectives – we all share in our desire to become a better artist.

It's easy to see when our art successfully speaks to someone – you sell that print, hear that encouraging comment, simply watching a co-worker enjoying your latest photo-album. This positive encouragement, positive reinforcement, is what drives us to continue our art.

While some praise is necessary, too much can have a negative effect on your creative process. More often, innovation is a product of our own failure not of our success. So if we don't fail, if we don't fall flat on our faces, that motivation to move beyond what we did yesterday isn't there.

Art is a process, and with any process, there will naturally be both failures and successes. Our desire to be successful in everything we do can be one of the biggest killers of our creativity. It is not a bad thing to want to be successful, but it can become a hindrance when we begin "playing it safe" – or repeating things that have been successful for you in the past.

Sometimes when I begin to feel like I am stuck in a creative rut, I look to a self-assignment to force me to start looking in a different direction. Putting yourself on "assignment" can be a great way to develop new skills. You might start by looking at what images typically work well for you, and which ones you struggle with – then force yourself to tackle the problems that are most difficult.



One assignment that I sometimes use with my workshops is called "One Hour, One Lens". Participants are limited to using one focal length for an entire hour. This might mean zooming a zoom lens to a particular stop, then shooting at just that length, or putting on a fixed focal length lens. For an interesting alternative, ask a friend or family



member for a random number, and limit yourself to that length.

At my recent Rhode Island workshop we tried this assignment at sunrise along some rocky cliffs. I asked each student for a random number between 18 and 200 – they had no idea what the number was for before guessing. One participant who shoots primarily macro and intimate landscapes choose a focal length at the wide-angle side of the spectrum. It was amazing to see her progress in just the one hour.

Often we get comfortable with one perspective – in this case, the student was very accomplished as a macro photographer, but had often avoided wide-angle scenes. By choosing a wide focal length, she was forced to see with a wide angle eye. At first it may seem like a punishment, as your vision is accustomed to looking for that “safe”







perspective. After a short while though, she began to see the wide perspective, and not only did she get some nice images, but she learned a new perspective she'll be able to use in the future.

The idea of looking for new perspectives extends far beyond using a single lens for an hour; for another variation you might try shooting a subject you don't normally gravitate to. It might seem odd at first to start shooting architecture to improve your landscapes, but in the end, photography is all comprised of the basic elements of design and the heart we bring to the process. Sometimes we need to be out of our element before we can truly become pioneers.

The biggest piece of advice that I would give anyone about staying creative is simply to go out and photograph. For me, I've taken the biggest steps when I've invested the most time and energy into trying new things and throwing myself into new situations.

