TEXTURE

ELEMENTS OF COMPOSITION IN PHOTOGRAPHY

Texture provides drama and it is what makes for a captivating image.

Drama is what differentiates a snapshot from a photo.

Photography is a two dimensional medium, which means that one of the biggest challenges photographers face is making a two dimensional image look three dimensional.

But there's plenty you can do to fool your viewer's eye into believing that it is looking at an object that exists in three dimensions.

Highlighting the texture of your subjects is one way to accomplish this.

Texture, of course, exists in the surface details of your subject.

It is that quality that makes an otherwise two-dimensional object seem like it could be experienced through touch.

Focus on the six classic design elements, which includes line, shape, form, color and space.

The simplest way to convey texture is with a detail shot.

Using a macro lens, get close to your subject and capture just the texture itself, without the context.

For example if you decide to shoot the peeling paint on the old boat for detail, your viewer is probably going to have no idea that the paint in the image was on the hull of an abandoned boat.

But…

Zooming out so that you capture both the context of the texture as well as the texture itself will add drama to your image.

Now your viewer can see the boat in its entirety, and the texture of the peeling paint merely adds to its overall visual impact, rather than becoming the subject itself.

When shooting any kind of texture photograph, make sure that you use side lighting instead of direct overhead light. The magic hour. Side lighting creates longer shadows, which in turn enhances the texture of your subject.

Your subject will also need to have a broad range of tones.

If you're shooting for black and white, make sure you have a true black, a true white and a strong range of grays in between.

If you're shooting for color, look for good contrast between colors.

Leading lines can be used to enhance texture.

Lines act almost like arrows, by drawing the viewer's eye into an image and, in effect, telling the eye what it should be looking at.

But if you can find the line within the texture itself, you are going to be a lot closer to that dramatic image.

Finding line within the texture will not just lead the viewer towards your focal point but through it, which encourages the viewer to take in each part of that image.

Texture is everywhere, but finding interesting texture can be a little challenging. Start by looking for texture in ordinary objects, such as the fibers in a sweater or the bark of a tree.

Now branch out into the less ordinary. Instead of taking yet another photograph of your adorable but seen-a-million-times dog, zoom in on his nose instead.

Instead of photographing that snowman standing in the park, zoom in on some water droplets that froze on the nearby park bench.

You can also find interesting textures in your human subjects–the weathered skin of a construction worker on a job site, for example, or the hands of an old woman knitting yarn.
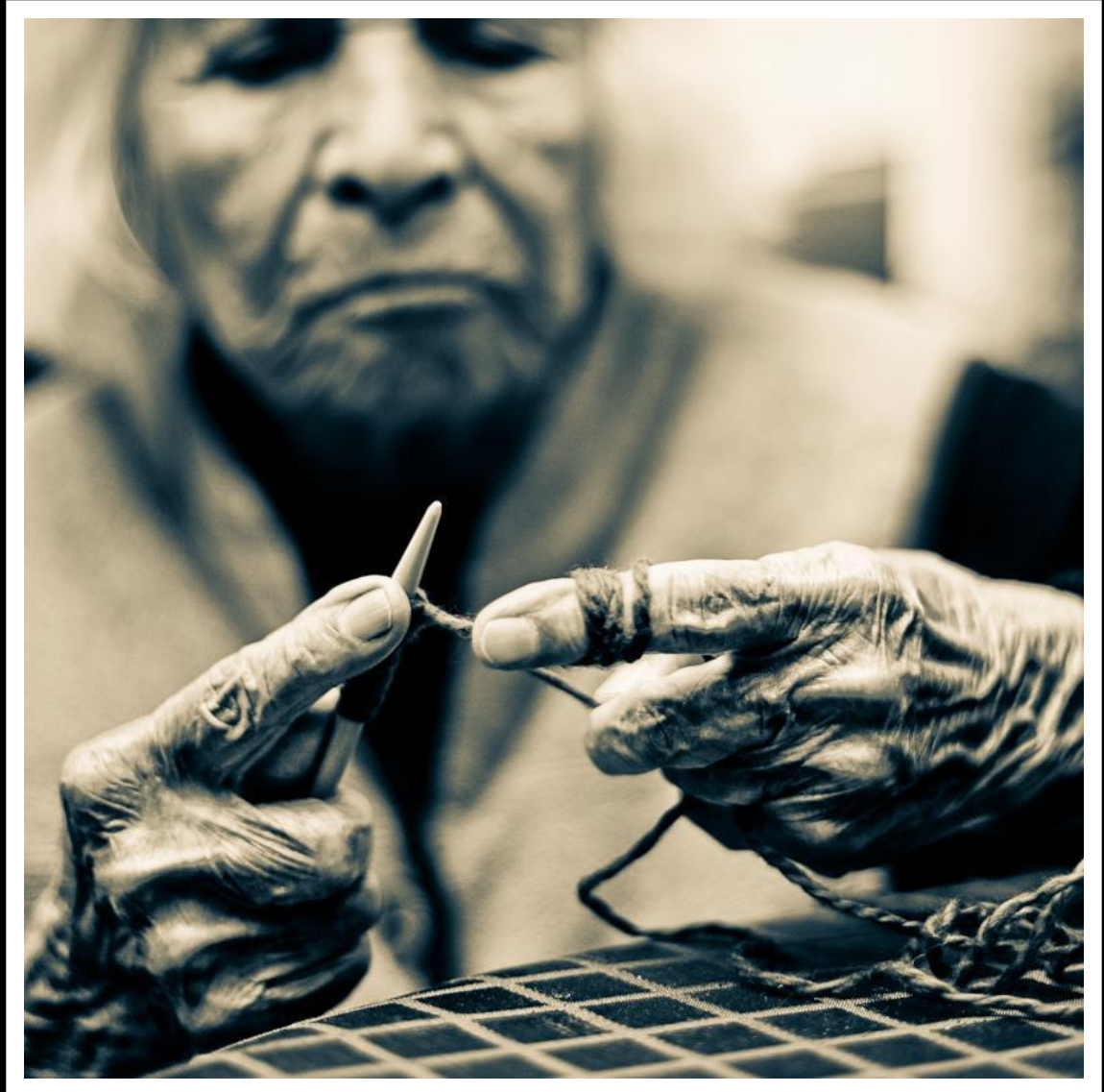
When photographing ordinary, subjects that have been shot millions of times such as brick walls and cobblestones, try to discover something unique in each subject, something that will make it more than just another photo of the texture on a wall or walkway.
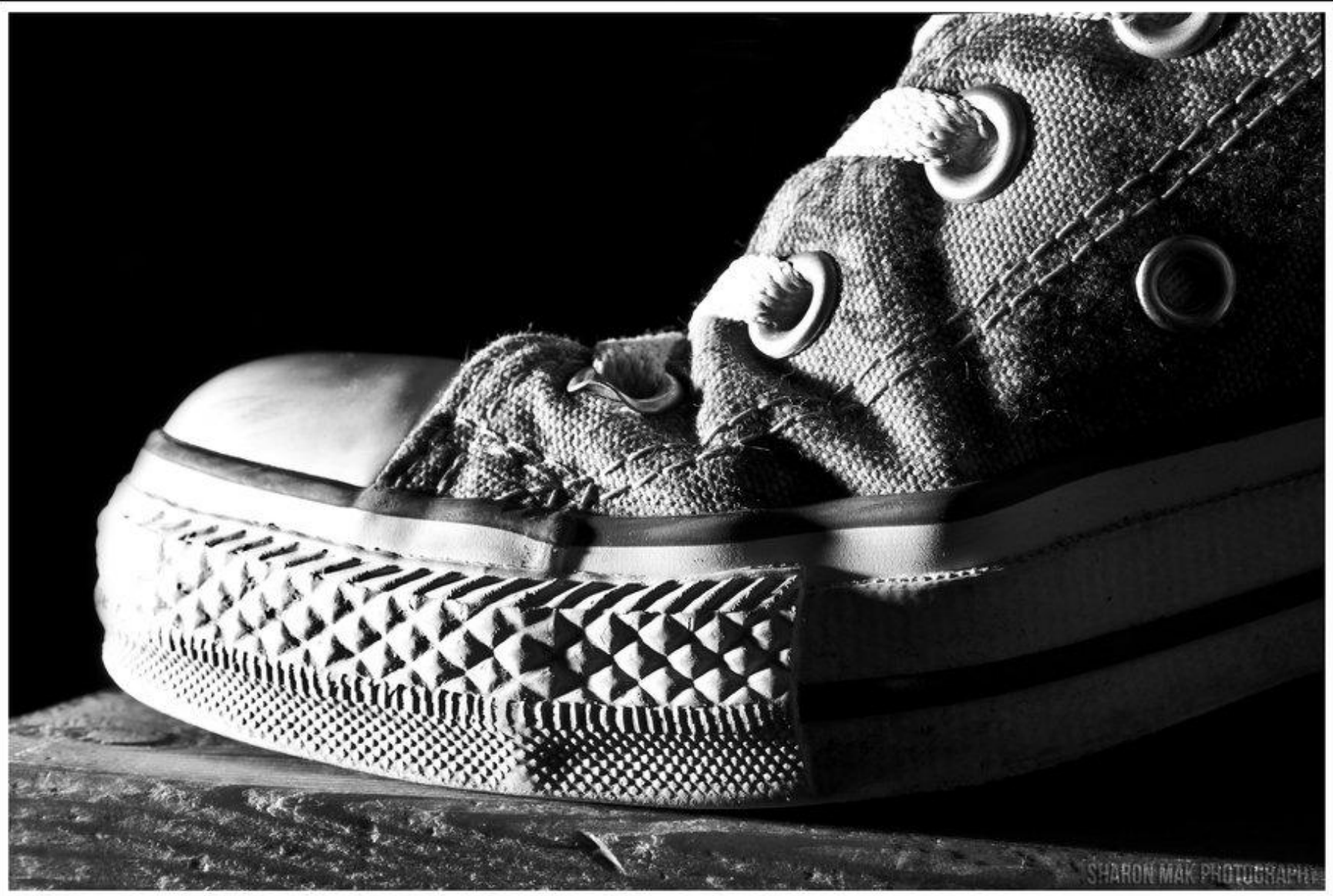
For example, you could include the leaves and other bits of debris that have gathered at the bottom of the wall. You could photograph the small puddles of water that collect in the grooves between cobblestones just after a storm.

Like all photography,
taking successful
texture images
is all about finding
a unique way of
seeing the world.

Dunes spreading to the Columbia River, Oregon
Photograph by Jim Richardson