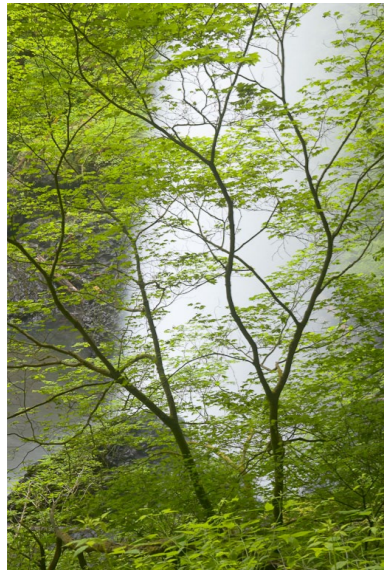


The Tuesday Composition

Echoes

Centered compositions often describe or emphasize a relationship between one half of an image and another. “What is similar between these two? What is different?” These compositions succeed because the image itself provides the answer to these



Backlit Foliage, North Falls

questions. Reflections are a simple example of this, answering, “They’re the same, just mirrored,” making the relationship between the reflection and the reflected object the subject of the photograph.

Simple reflections and symmetry aren’t the only place where images gain power from visual relationships between parts of an image. I refer to these visual relationships as “echoes.” These echoes invite us to compare and contrast. More generally, echoes can take on other forms beside

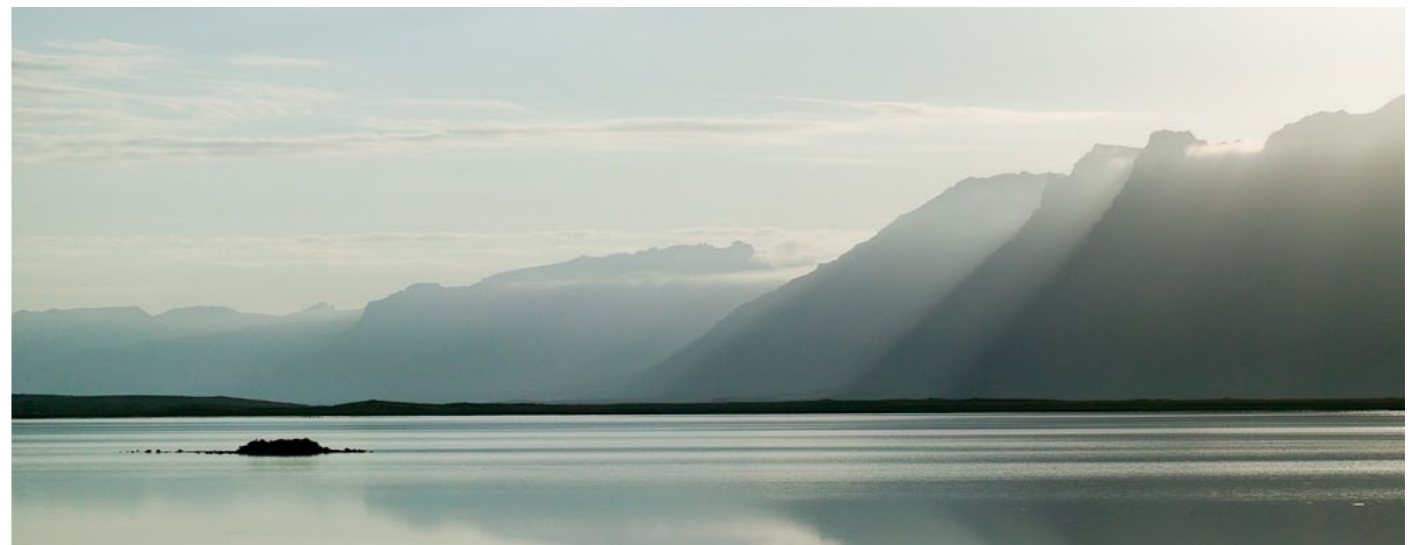
simple reflections, and may be based on correspondences between line, form, texture, and color.

Simple repetitions of line and form are the easiest type to notice. *Backlit Foliage, North Falls* practically screams a simple relationship between two branches with their almost-reflected Y-shapes. Besides the visually appealing

aspect of that reflection, the similarity between the two branching points instantly makes the connection between them. We don’t have to think much to perceive that they are the same tree. We simply know it by observing the relationship; we just “see” it. While few if any viewers of this image will ever say to themselves, “These two branches are part of the same plant.” The message comes through nonetheless—we have discovered a bit of order in an otherwise chaotic flow of nature.

It’s easier to spot echoing elements in an image when they are close together, as they are in *Backlit Foliage*.

Because we assimilate visual echoes so intuitively, echoes seem to simplify an image, or more precisely, make the image seem simpler and easier to assimilate. *Afternoon Light Shafts* uses this effect. The four or five light shafts echo each other so directly that we see



Afternoon Light Shafts, Snæfellsnes Peninsula

The Tuesday Composition

them as a group of shafts, rather than five objects that we “see” individually.

Consider a hypothetical image with a group of five very different things—each varying in shape, form, color, and line. That image would be far more complex; it would be, well, *messy*. This isn’t.

Visual echoes can also be effective when they establish a relationship between *different* kinds of things.

The result is a compositional simile. *Rock Bubbles* illustrates this, finding a similarity primarily between the texture of the rock and the textures in the clouds above. Composing the image so that

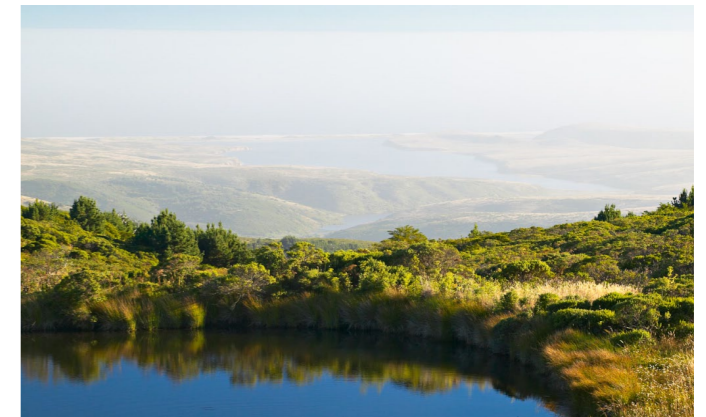


Rock Bubbles, Pebble Beach

those textures (as well as the close curves of each near the other) echo each other highlights not only that similarity, but also the contrasts in color (yellow/blue), tone (light clouds/dark bubbles), and weight (light clouds/heavy rock). The echo invites us to see all these comparisons.

Echoes do not need to be as obvious as these to be effective. *Pond and Drake’s Estero, Point Reyes* succeeds largely because of a less direct visual echo. The primary visual relationship between the pond and the estuary is simply that it’s an enclosed area. That they are both enclosed areas of water helps the comparison along. Once the visual echo has provoked us to compare the pond with

the estuary, we see the different levels of contrast and saturation between the two, and immediately perceive differences in distances between the two from the camera. The enormous difference in the distances between us and those two subjects in turn highlights the depth and scale of this mountain vista. This echo helps us read a greater sense of distance and size into the image. All of this “reading” is helped by that single visual echo.



Pond and Drake’s Estero
Echoes don’t have to be overt to be effective.