

# **The Elements of Design**

Space, Line and Shape

**Value, Color and Texture**

The **Elements of Design** are the parts from which the **Principles of Design** and good compositions are built. These are basic guidelines to help us look at what we see around us with an objective, more informed view

There are six **Elements of Design**

- Space
- Line
- Shape
- **Value**
- **Color**
- **Texture**

There are three **Principles of Design**

- Space Division (symmetry, asymmetry, radial, rule of thirds)
- Unity (repetition, variety, rhythm)
- Emphasis (contrast)

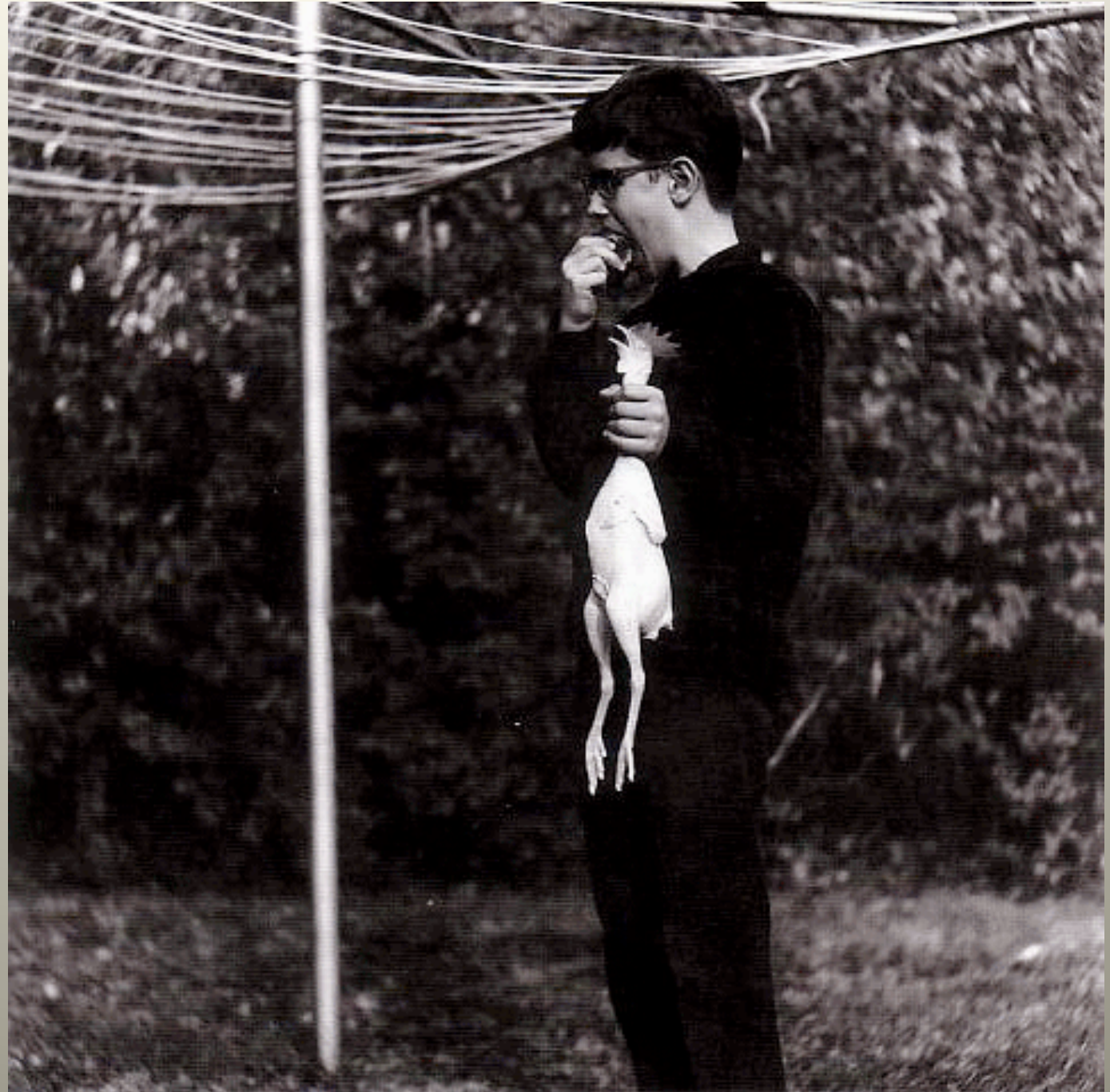
# Value

- **Value** is the range of possible lightness or darkness (not color) within a photograph. The range is usually thought of as the extremes from black to white and the grays inbetween. In the digital photograph this range is given as 256 values from black to white.
- In general a good photograph is one in which as much of this range as possible is used.
- **Value** is what gives objects shape. Without value a ball would look like a flat disk. A persons' head would look flat and 2 dimensional.
- **Value** or **grayscale** is very important in photography. A grayscale photograph can show the structure of the lighting or the bones of an image. Sometimes it is thought of as the cake without the icing. Grayscale photography is a unique situation in which we are able to see the world without color, to truly see what light is doing. Because of this grayscale photography has a very deep and rich history.
- Contrasting Values are a very important tool in creating **Emphasis**, one of the **Principals of Design**.

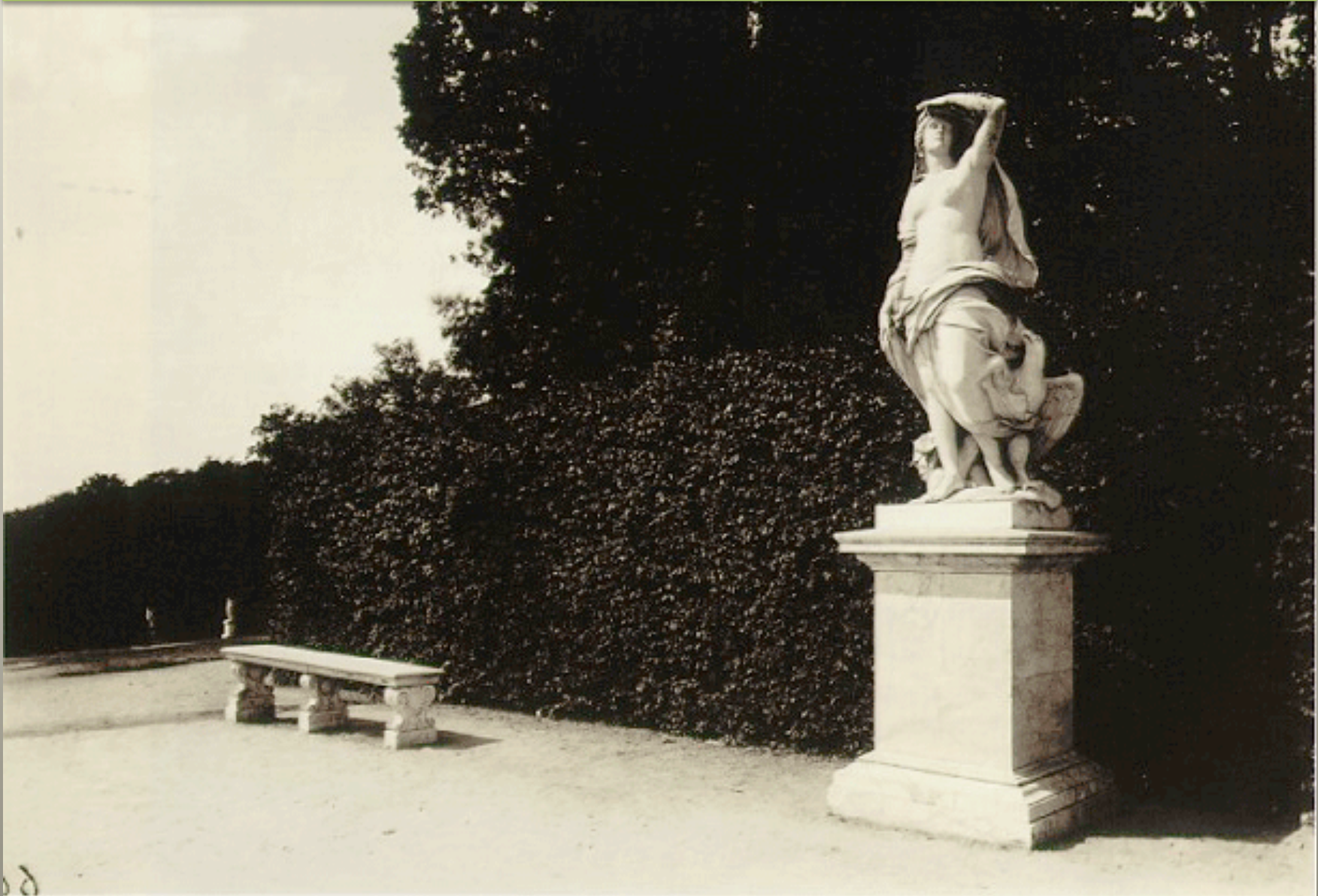


This image by Imogen Cunningham is a wonderful example of a photograph using the complete range of Values.

In this photograph by Ralph Eugene Meatyard, notice how your eye is immediately drawn to the chicken because of the extreme contrast of Values. It also appears that the photographer may have darkened (burnt) the bushes around the figure to increase the contrast even more. Also notice the frame within a frame space division used to bring your eye to the subject.



Generally your eye enters from the left. In this photo by Eugene Atget notice how your eye enters along the contrast edge between the trees and the sky, follows the bushes to the high contrast area of the statue.



Contrast in Value is what allows us to see. High contrast draws the eye. If the figure in this photo by Bill Brant were seen against the grass, there wouldn't be a photograph. Also notice how the perspective of the trail continues to draw your eye back into space.



The big question is; when do you convert an image to grayscale? A rule of thumb is when color is not essential to the picture, convert it to grayscale.

In the photograph below the essential element is the **Value** contrast between the white t-shirt and darker background behind it and the relationship between the t-shirt on the boys head and the rock which appears to be sitting on his head. All these elements become much stronger in grayscale photography.





# Color

- Whole books have been written about color.
- Color is nice, but, as frosting isn't necessary to a cake, color isn't necessary to a photograph.
- For the purposes of this course we are only going to consider Color as an element of design.
- For a color photograph to work, color must be an essential element of the photograph. In other words, the photo will not make as much sense, or its meaning will not be as clear without the use of color. In a sense the photograph needs to be about color to be in color.

In this photograph by William Eggleston the column and the sky behind it are almost of the same Value. In the color version we know we are looking at the play between the blue sky and the green column and the lines created by the light cords. In the grayscale version we don't really know why we are looking at this picture. Our eye doesn't really know why to do.



In this photograph by Joel Meyerowitz you can see how essential color is to the image. Our eye is immediately drawn to the red coat. The red is by far the strongest color in the photo. Notice how in the grayscale version the center of focus shifts to the high Value contrast areas of the image. The red coat becomes sort of a dull middle gray value of no interest.



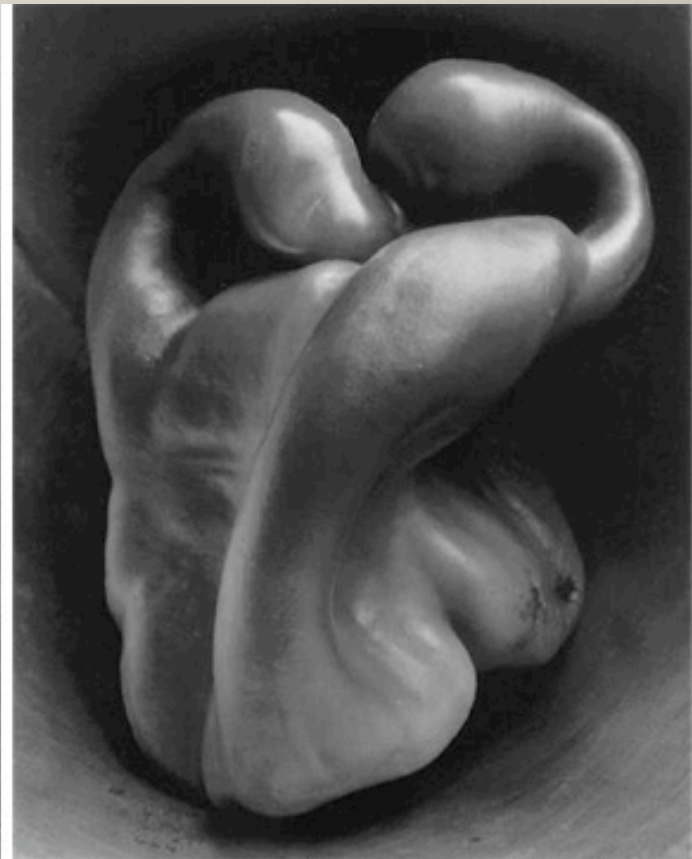
This photograph by Walker Evans also demonstrates how Color can serve as a useful design element. In the color image the orange palm is strong enough to hold our focus. We understand that this photo is about the upside down palm. In the grayscale the palm turns a middle gray which does not have enough contrast to hold our eye, so the eye ends up wandering around the page.



# Texture

- **Texture** is the easiest element to describe because it is a visual surface quality. The element texture on a two-dimensional surface is usually a simulated tactile surface, mentally interpreted as tactile.
- **Texture** is often thought of as something that is rough only, or has a structural feeling. But a smooth surface is also a texture.
- **Textures** can be created in many ways, the most common ways are by using contrasting lines or values, directional lines, shapes placed close together, or patterns. The lack of these things would be a smooth texture.
- **Contrasting Textures** can create **Emphasis**.

These wonderful grayscale photographs by Edward Weston are examples of smooth textures. Also notice the great use of **value** in these shots. They have detail in all the tonal ranges.

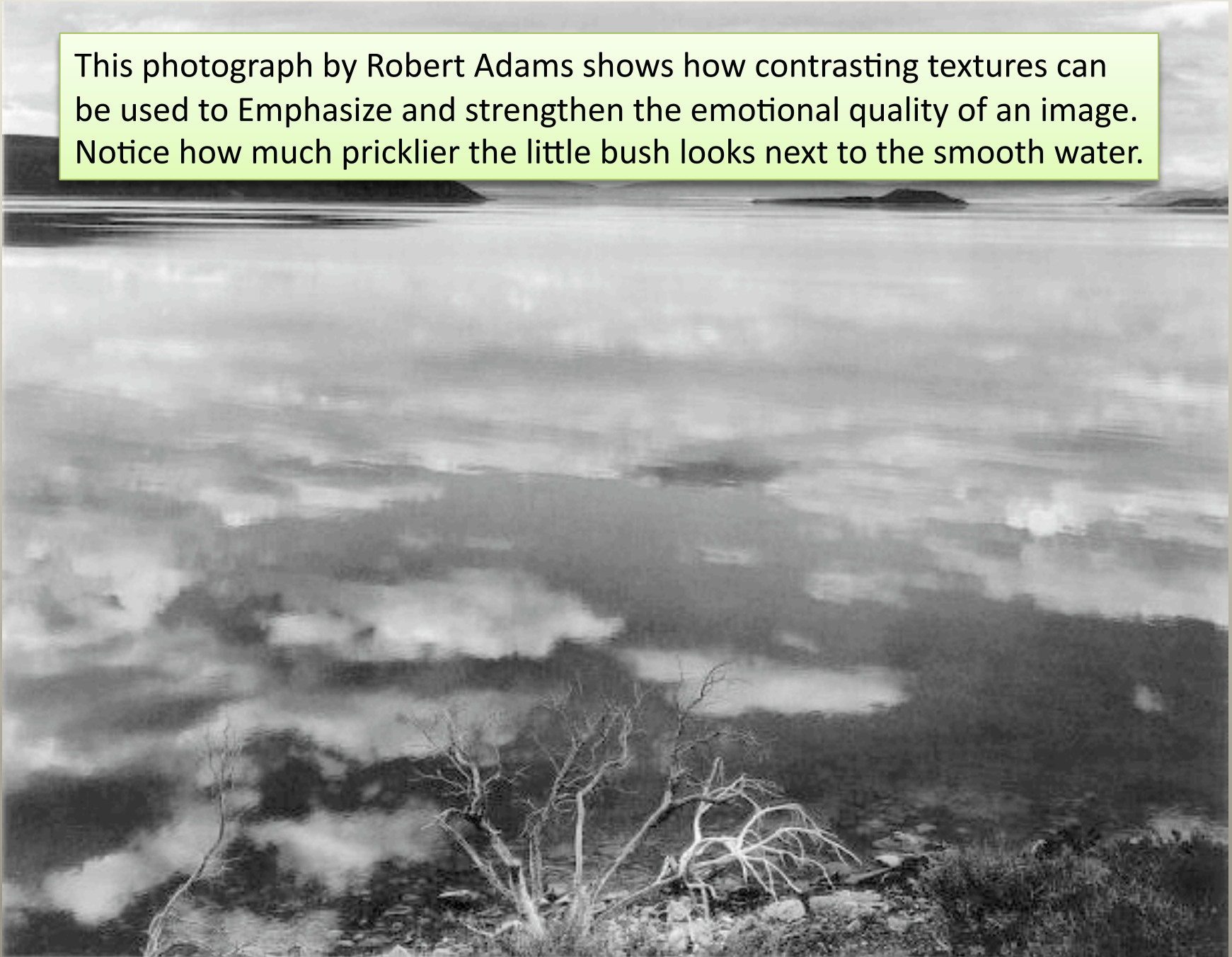


These photographs are examples of a lot of texture. The image on the left uses a contrast of texture qualities. The smoothness of the wall of the house versus the busy little fence, the lines of the plant in the middle, and the rough concrete.

The photograph on the right has an incredible amount of similar textures. There are three different types of fences plus the siding on the house plus the texture of the roof. Some of these textures are tactile textures and some are visual textures. A texture can either stimulate or calm.



This photograph by Robert Adams shows how contrasting textures can be used to Emphasize and strengthen the emotional quality of an image. Notice how much pricklier the little bush looks next to the smooth water.





# Review

- **Values** are the grayscale of an image. Contrasting Values create emphasis which directs our eyes to the subject of the photograph.
- **Color** is a design element. Only use color when color is essential to the photograph.
- **Texture** is about the visual surface of the photograph. Contrasting textures can increase the emotional feeling of a photograph.