

## Elements of (Narrative) Portraiture

**Gaze:** Consider the eyes:

- Where is the subject looking? At the camera; at something else in the scene; into the distance? Does the Gaze Create interaction with another subject?

**Pose:** How is the subject positioned in relation to his/her own body and the setting?

- Standing
- Sitting
- Bent
- Contorted
- Dramatic or Calm?
- Frontal,  $\frac{3}{4}$
- Open or Compact?

**Body Language (Gesture/Expression):**

- Is the subject using the body or face for expressive purposes?
- Is body motion or facial animation evident? Is emotion evident?

**Interaction:**

- What is the story created between multiple subjects?

**Story (Narrative):**

- Portraits are most powerful when you are trying to communicate a story about that individual.
- What can we learn about a person from a single photograph?
- What do you know about his/her life that is not in the picture?
- What Mood or feeling do you get from the photograph?
  - How does that feeling describe the person?
  - Mood is typically a combination of body language, gesture, facial expression, light, and color.

**Surroundings (Background/Environment):**

- Carefully consider a location (an environment) that you feel somehow relates to or represents the person you have chosen. Consider environmental portraiture. Environmental portraiture does not mean a portrait in nature. It means the environment that is a significant part of the person's life. If you were to take a great actor's portrait, an appropriate environment might be the theater, or the place where they rehearse.

**Props: Attributes/Objects In the scene:**

- Do they suggest interests or occupation? Do they have symbolic or metaphorical meaning?

**Clothing:**

- How is the subject dressed?
- Does this reveal or hide identity? Suggest personality?
- Contribute to the emotional mood of the overall portrait? Suggest what the person does for a living?
- Should you avoid clothing with logos?

...continued on the back

**Point of View:**

- Is the camera angle from above making the subject look vulnerable, or is it from below making the subject seem powerful?

**Critical Plane of Focus & Depth of Field:**

- Is the portrait soft focus with diffused light creating a delicate look?
- Is the background de-emphasized with a shallow depth of field, or sharp and in focus?

**Proximity:**

- How close are you to the subject?
- Is the portrait a close-up detail or fragment of a face?
- Only hands or figure with face excluded?
- A full face?
- A partial figure or a full length portrait?
- A figure seen as small in a distant setting?

**Detail:**

- Details can tell a story.
- Maybe there is one subtle feature on a person that provides a story....a scar, wrinkle, holding a fist tense, etc.
- Getting shadow detail in hair, getting highlight detail even in bright sunlight, etc.

**Light:**

- Soft or harsh?
- What is illuminated, and what is hidden?
- Low contrast or high contrast?
- Color of light