

## A daily photo challenge ...

by Malcolm McElvaney

On July 25<sup>th</sup> I began a daily photo challenge with a simple premise of taking at least one new image per day and posting an image taken the same day of the challenge. This wasn't prompted by anything in particular but beyond giving me a reason to keep my website more updated the lessons learned have proven far more valuable. The focus and drive at first was to take the next days photo, some days in I found I looked forward to that brief moment between task to explore and capture what I came across. The majority of the images come from Odessa, TX where I live and work, I had already started to do do some photography locally between trips out of town to go and explore other areas yet I had a set point of view.

*No place like home* - We all have a home town but should I go to someone else's home town I get inspired to take my photographs, maybe the simplest reason is the change of scenery and it being less familiar. Odessa, Tx is my home town and what little of it I had explored was the ordinary to be taken for granted with the exception of a park called Comanche Trail Park. It is a natural area by I-20 that I explore often and can feel like visiting some other place. A daily photo challenge required I explore Odessa and focus on it as it is the place I am daily, the known soon become used for a days challenge needing a new place to explore the next day. I had to be more open to what subjects I shot so it is at places like shopping centers, plazas, parks, and even industrial areas I sought out as an exercise to force me to observe and find something to capture. The photographer is on duty always as I drive around, I see images to be taken or at least that lead me to something in its vicinity noting street names to be potentially explored at a random time some other day. The mental map being created will be more valuable in the long run than the images I take daily.

*Rules dictate the critic* - The rule of posting an image taken the day of the challenge has an interesting problem to solve. If I only get one shot then I make it work as that is what I can choose from, even with more images the selection is limited. Would I normally post that image if not for the rule in place? This is a question of how critical we are of own work and can we learn to be less critical of it as a result of the rule in place. Taking the best image possible as it maybe the only one taken is more important with a limited selection, so what about the images taken when no rules are self imposed and shouldn't that be the goal anyway. There is also the option of branching out and experimenting in which case the criteria may shift to what was learned and improved as a new skill is explored. We share our best with the public but everyone progresses at different rates as the art form is learned so sharing these experimental attempts is equally as valid. Depends on the image you're trying to present for yourself I suppose.

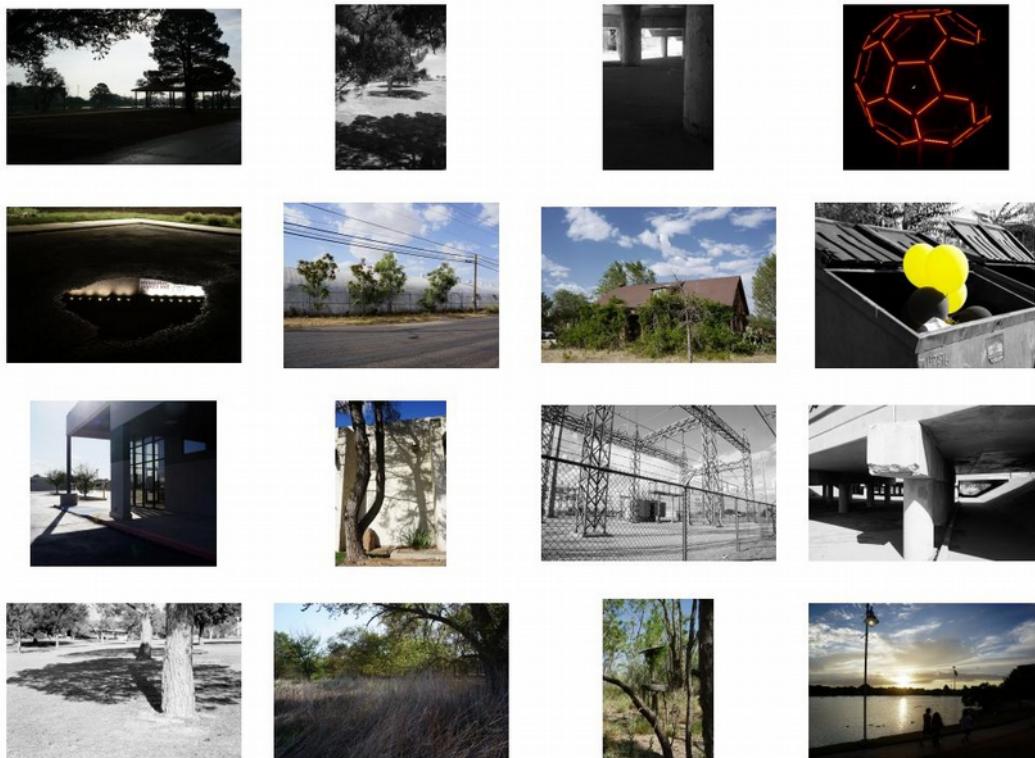
*Location, time of day, and where you end up at* – Planned or unplanned I have found I'm exploring more random and unlikely places under less than ideal light but not everything is blue hour or golden hour. In my scouting around I have noted where the lights are so I can practice existing light or night photography as an option, on a more practical side it does give me some flexibility to complete a days challenge should all else fails or high noon occurs to often. As I mentioned before about how we see our own work consider these opportunities, not quite in our control, as practice and sharing the best attempt as a way to help others realize photography isn't always about the perfected final result but learning and showing the work put into that result shared. The rule dictates I do it, so I post it. It is in between work and going home, when I stop to visit a store, or even find a good place I can park and walk around I get to practice so I am truly random as I walk around and just explore. Sometimes it is the smartphone camera taking the pictures other times it is the DSLR taking the pictures in either case I adapt to the cameras abilities and limits and just exist in the moment for a brief period before driving off back into the real world.

*Quantity vs need to take so many pictures* – One of the changes I have observed in myself is the ability to take fewer pictures and be just as satisfied with that sessions results because there will another day to take more pictures. Perhaps as the number of opportunities to go photograph anyplace at all increases the need to maximize the more occasional sessions is lessened. What is the end goal of each picture taken anyway? The reason it exist could be to be a more tangible form of a memory that these session help produce, so am I collecting photographs or the memories and experiences associated with them. Just like trying to describe an experience to someone is never quite the same as when it happened the photograph at the very least does tell a story about it. The other aspect of photography for me is the picture taken is the beginning as I still have to sort and process the session, so fewer pictures isn't a negative in this case either. I learn more about the post-processing side as each image is refined along with my techniques I employ to create the final image. So more sessions and a more varied set of conditions shot under may be a better teacher in the end.

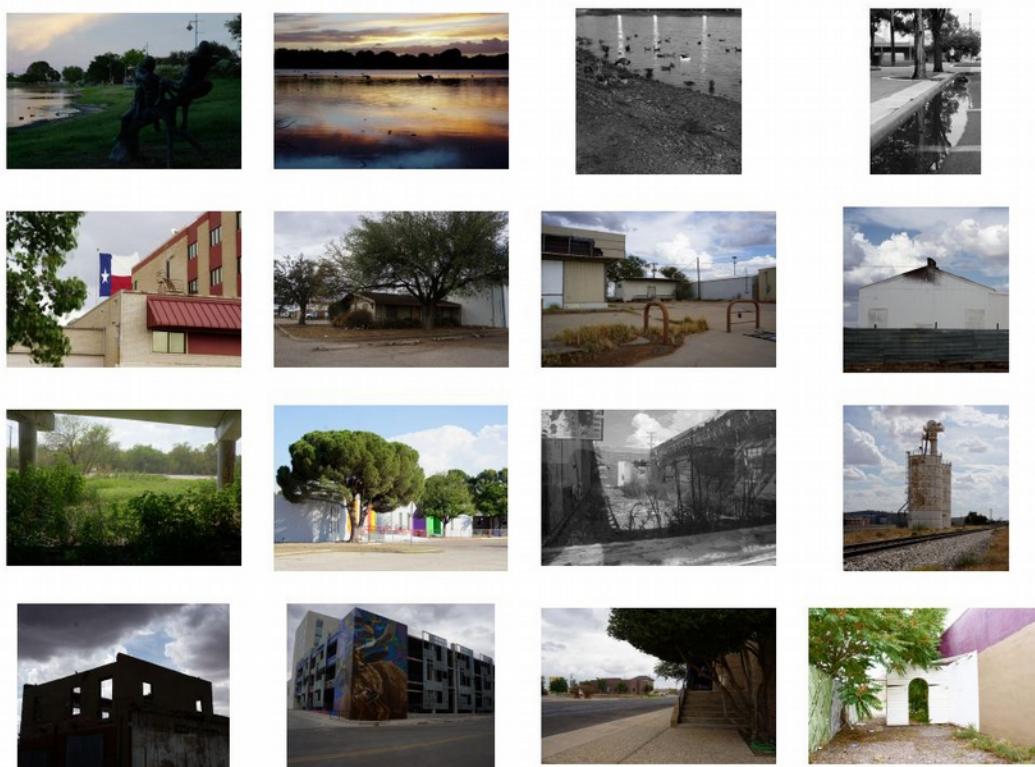
### **... and a place I've learned more about**

Odessa, Tx isn't that unique but it is where I live but in an abstract way I appreciate better as I see the patterns and possible locations to photograph. The person I am hasn't changed but it is through the photographer's mindset and the challenge to more thoroughly explore the place I have seemed to approach it for now. My reasons may be unique for doing so but having explored the Monahans Sandhills State Park in a very similar and thorough way perhaps I will get more acquainted with the land marks and possible places to match conditions as they occur. I started this challenge on July 25<sup>th</sup> and it is the now day 35 of the challenge as I write this article, I would like to show you day 8 (08/01/2022) through day 34 (08/27/2022) and the snap shot of Odessa from my

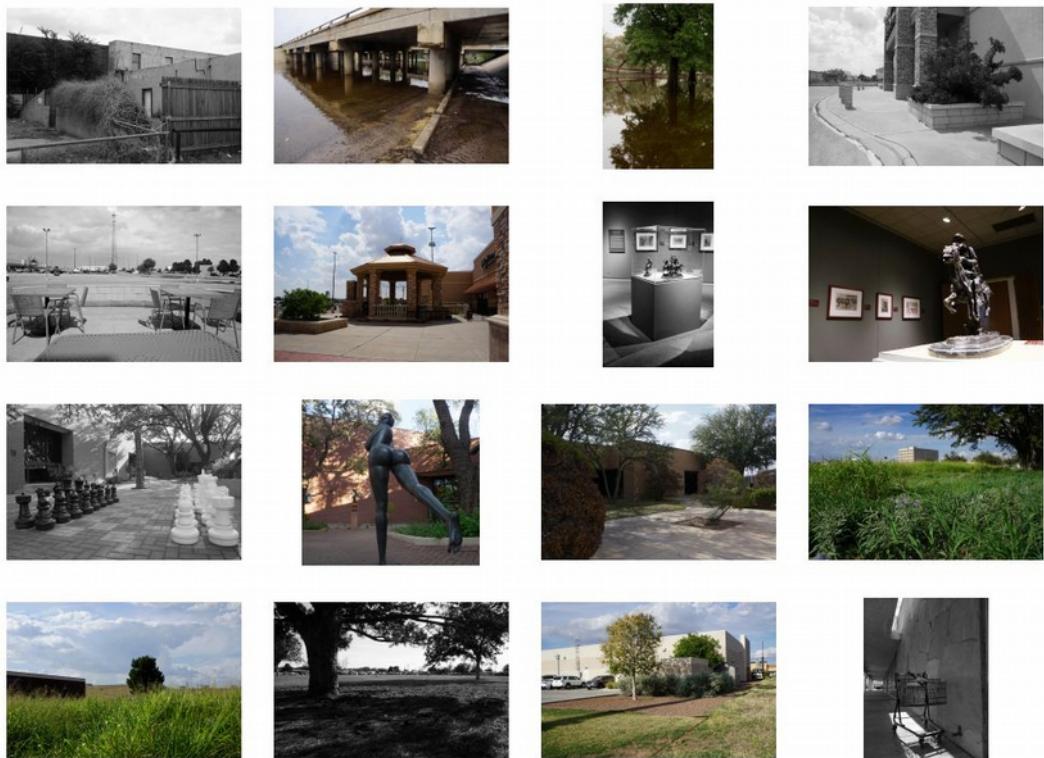
point view produced during that time frame.



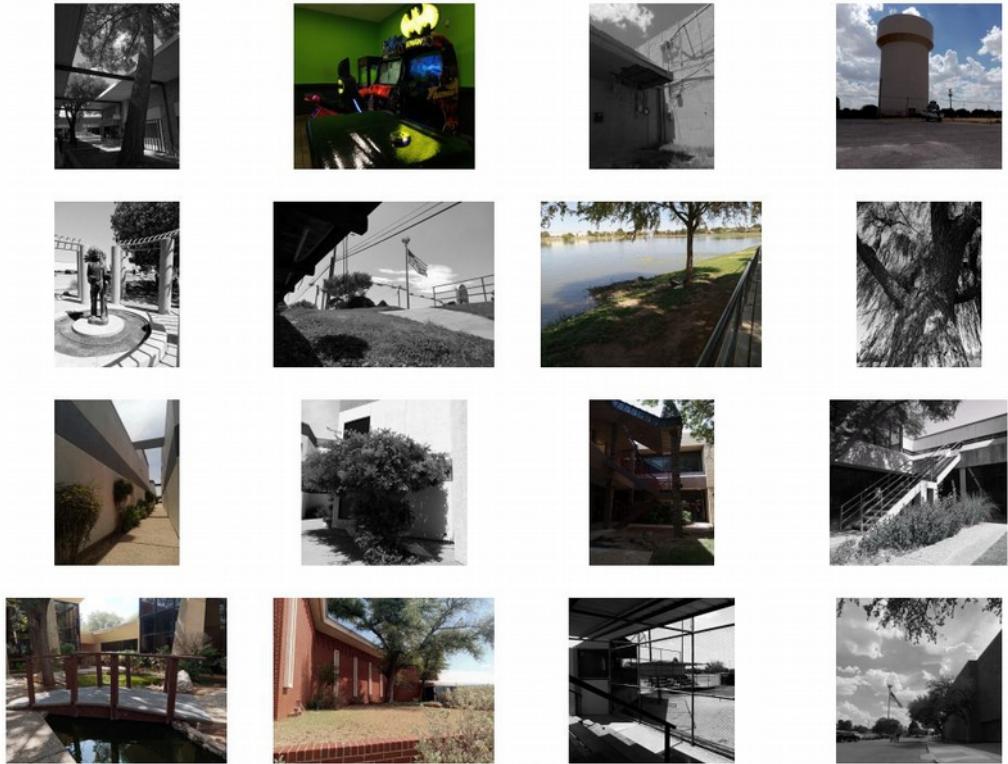
1 / 6



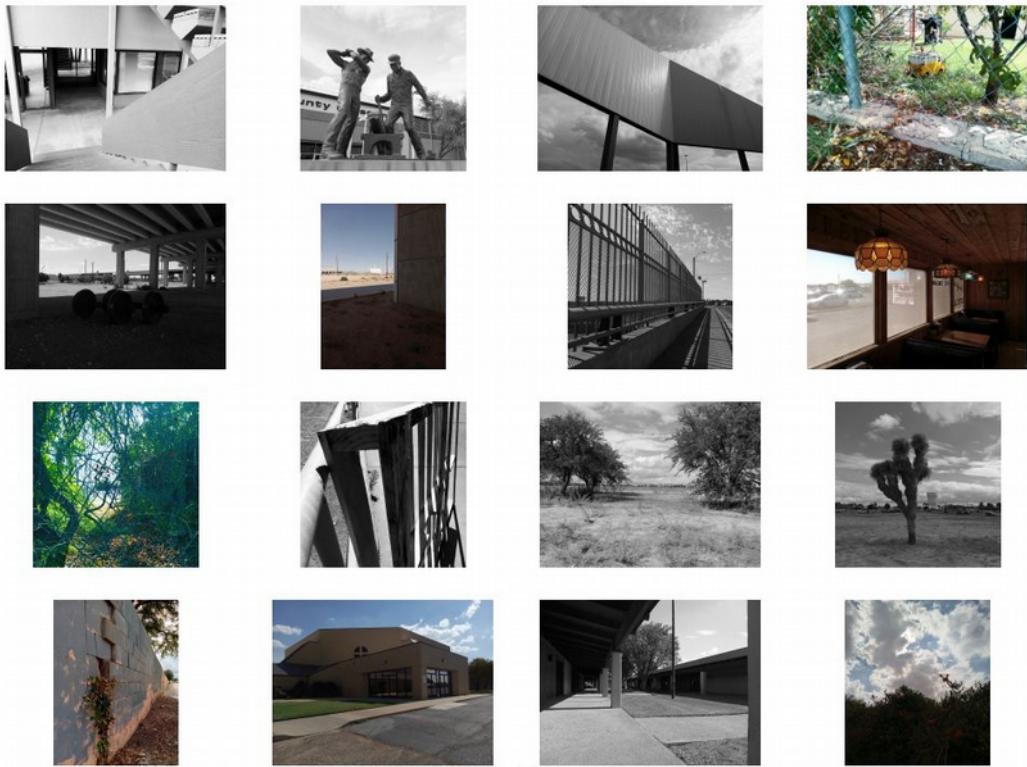
2 / 6



3 / 6



4 / 6



5 / 6



How many of these 84 images shown would be keepers or even worthy of hanging on the wall, if filtered down to just a few there are some here that fall into those categories but it is the bigger picture shown I find more interesting at a glance. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts and piece by piece I will complete this overall view. I selected three images to show in full to conclude this thought process with.





