



EXPRESSING YOUR VISION
PART TWO: IMAGINATIVE SPACES
ASSIGNMENT TWO: COLLECTING

INTRODUCTION

When I moved to the United Arab Emirates, I had no real understanding of the region. I didn't know what to expect from anything; the people, the culture or indeed the landscape.

So I started to explore. I clearly remember my first road trip—I was quite shocked at the stark contrast to the lush countryside that I had taken for granted on my Great British doorstep.

The landscape I found here was bare, I likened it to the moon. Devoid of life in all but the smallest pockets and often of human influence. Everything was beige, or a shade of, either naturally or by way of an unwelcome covering of sand.

However, the more I explored, the more I found the artistry in the surrounding landscapes. The very thing I was initially hostile to, turned out to be the very thing that won me over; the naked landscape.

The geology captured in some of the following imagery, tells an incredible visual story of the formation of the land through stratigraphy and structure. The ever-changing surface of the planet is echoed in the delicate patterns of the sand. Connections should be drawn between the two most basic of materials, erosion turning one into the other.

This collection of images serves as a closer look at earth's beauty, through the patterns and shapes created by the interconnection of mother nature and time.

THE NAKED LANDSCAPE

IMAGE ONE

This shot of a cliff face from the view point on the water, successfully captures the intricate surface of the facade. The entire cliff face looks like it is a series of individual rocks, piled on top of each other, giving the impression they are ready to dismantle with the next strong gust of wind.

I purposefully didn't shoot 'upwards', which would have given the cliff face a feeling of grandeur, showcasing height and domination. This image is intended to make the viewer look more closely at the form of the facade, rather than its scale. The primary subject matter is in the foreground, commanding the majority of the frame with just enough landscape visible around it to give context by way of size and relationship with the ocean.

The inclusion of the background within frame, speaks to the coastline stretching far into the distance. The surfaces, although similar in make up, look completely different, because of the distance; what is white and black in the foreground, is diminished to mid tones of grey in the background, which intentionally keeps your focus on, or returns it to the foreground.

The natural daylight, coming from the left, creates shadows which both define and highlight the bizarre rock face.

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FOCAL LENGTH: 70mm
APERTURE: f/8
SHUTTER SPEED: 1/500
ISO: 100

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IMAGE TWO

Ghaf trees are indigenous to this region and are a fantastic example of life flourishing in such harsh conditions. The trunk of the Ghaf tree can often grow in twists and turns, as shown here.

The collection of trees balance nicely, without being too perfectly centred. The tree trunks and the bird are the darkest things in the image, which helps draw the eye to them. The bird is moving towards the centre of the image, rather than outwards which is visually more appealing, and there is space around it for movement. The horizon is formed by the natural curve of the sand dune as it rolls across the image creating an interesting shape. The sky in this image forms an uninterrupted gradient, blending from dark to light without any flaws giving a really effective backdrop for the tree crowns and the bird.

Unlike many of the other images in the series, this image speaks to the life forms that inhabit the landscape. The trees are sporadic and the bird is a lone hunter, 'abundance' is not synonymous with life in the desert. Its incredible that anything can survive such harsh conditions.

I had inadvertently cropped off a branch of the tree at the top of this image in my haste to capture the bird in flight, so I have retouched the image to keep the entire tree within frame.

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FOCAL LENGTH: 20mm
APERTURE: f/8
SHUTTER SPEED: 1/200
ISO: 100

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IMAGE THREE

This is an island off the northerly most tip of the Musandam called Red Island. It is about as remote as you can get in this region and subsequently it sees very few visitors. It is completely devoid of life, no animal can reach this island, and there is next to no plant life growing on it.

This shot is the very embodiment of the naked landscape of this region. Red Island sits quietly in what is otherwise the middle of nowhere, with such beautiful rock formations proudly on display that few people will ever be witness to.

Without a cover of vegetation as disguise, Red Island bears scars from its formation 'battle'. The edges of its rocks silhouetted against the sky create a wonderful serrated line.

I composed this image avoiding having to crop any of the land mass – I wanted to relay the fact that this is an island. I included distant landforms within the frame to help balance out the lack of foreground elements.

As this has been shot from a distance, using a 70mm lens, the light appears flatter, with less in the way of contrast of the rocks.

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FOCAL LENGTH: 70mm
APERTURE: f/8
SHUTTER SPEED: 1/200
ISO: 100

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IMAGE FOUR

The sand in this image has a different character to it than in my other images, it's neither trodden or dirty, nor is it shaped into rippled patterns by the wind – it looks more akin to a muddy substance rather than sand. It appears to have undergone a landslide, which introduces an element of danger to the scene. The other images of sand dunes in this series are very inviting however, this is less so.

This image has a two-dimensional feel to it, which lends a slightly abstract quality. This is partly created by the height of the dunes at the horizon; nothing is visible behind them. There is no real sense of foreground or background.

The sun is high in the sky here, which creates a very different type of shadow, not stretching out across the land at all, they literally fall right below the subject. This lighting also adds to the abstract feel.

The duo of mature trees offer much needed scale to the image, as well as introducing a hint of life. Their strength of colour is a nice contrast to the greys of sand. The sky has kept a light tone of grey rather than bleaching out to white, so the image feels complete.

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FOCAL LENGTH: 70mm
APERTURE: f/14
SHUTTER SPEED: 1/250
ISO: 100

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IMAGE FIVE

The strongest shot of the assignment, this image epitomises the style of imagery I was aiming to produce. The detailing in the foreground evokes a feeling of standing right in the shot. The image is sharp from the foreground through to the distance, and the pattern on the surface of the sand is almost hypnotic. This was only possible to achieve by being in the desert as soon as the sun began to rise, and positioning my view point side on to the sunlight. This turned the otherwise insignificant patterns on the sand into a means of harnessing the light, creating as long a shadow as possible of any point during the day.

The dunes are completely untouched by any living being, so their patterns are perfectly unspoiled. The direction of the sun light has also enabled shadows on a grander scale, created by the body of the dunes. This adds further depth to the shot. The foreground is the undoubtedly the hero of the image.

A negative factor of this image is that the sky appears to darken on the left hand side. I would have preferred the sky to either remain completely white, to draw attention back to the land, or to have a balanced gradient like some of the other images. Alternatively, another option may have been to omit the sky completely, framing only the dunes in the shot. I could have increased the foreground within the frame, thus maximising the incredible patterns.

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FOCAL LENGTH: 20mm
APERTURE: f/8
SHUTTER SPEED: 1/250
ISO: 100

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IMAGE SIX

This image was taken from on-board a dhow, early in the morning as the sun was beginning to rise. I wanted to capture a wide shot of the beautiful seascape showcasing the remoteness of the area.

The rock formation on the right hand side is obscuring the direct light from the sun, which has in turn created a wonderful vignette effect across the sky. The light area where the sky is at its brightest, really accentuates the rugged edge of the rocks. This is reflected on the ocean surface as light and dark tones.

The rock formations, although visible, are less prominent than in other images which allows the surface patterns of the sea to be more noticeable. For this reason, I have placed the horizon higher up in the image, rather than a more classic one-third from the bottom.

The tenancy is to appreciate the whole vista when looking at this image, rather than the individual elements. I wanted to convey the serenity and space found in this part of the world, and this image achieves that.

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FOCAL LENGTH: 20mm
APERTURE: f/8
SHUTTER SPEED: 1/1250
ISO: 100

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IMAGE SEVEN

This is a wonderful example of the formations found in abundance along the Musandam coastline. The visible folds make the rock appear malleable, as it twists and turns on itself.

It is almost impossible to know the scale of this particular section, if not for the ripples on the surface of the water. I chose a close crop for this very reason. The water reflects the light and dark shades from the rocks just above.

You get a real sense of the lack of moisture in the terrain, despite the presence of the ocean below it. The cliff face almost appears to have shrivelled up, displaying layers of cracks and gaps as if from dehydration.

There is a fragile feel to this section of rock face, yet it is solid as it is strong. Its unlike any land mass I have seen back home and I always appreciate the way the rocks tell their story, visually.

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FOCAL LENGTH: 70mm
APERTURE: f/8
SHUTTER SPEED: 1/125
ISO: 100

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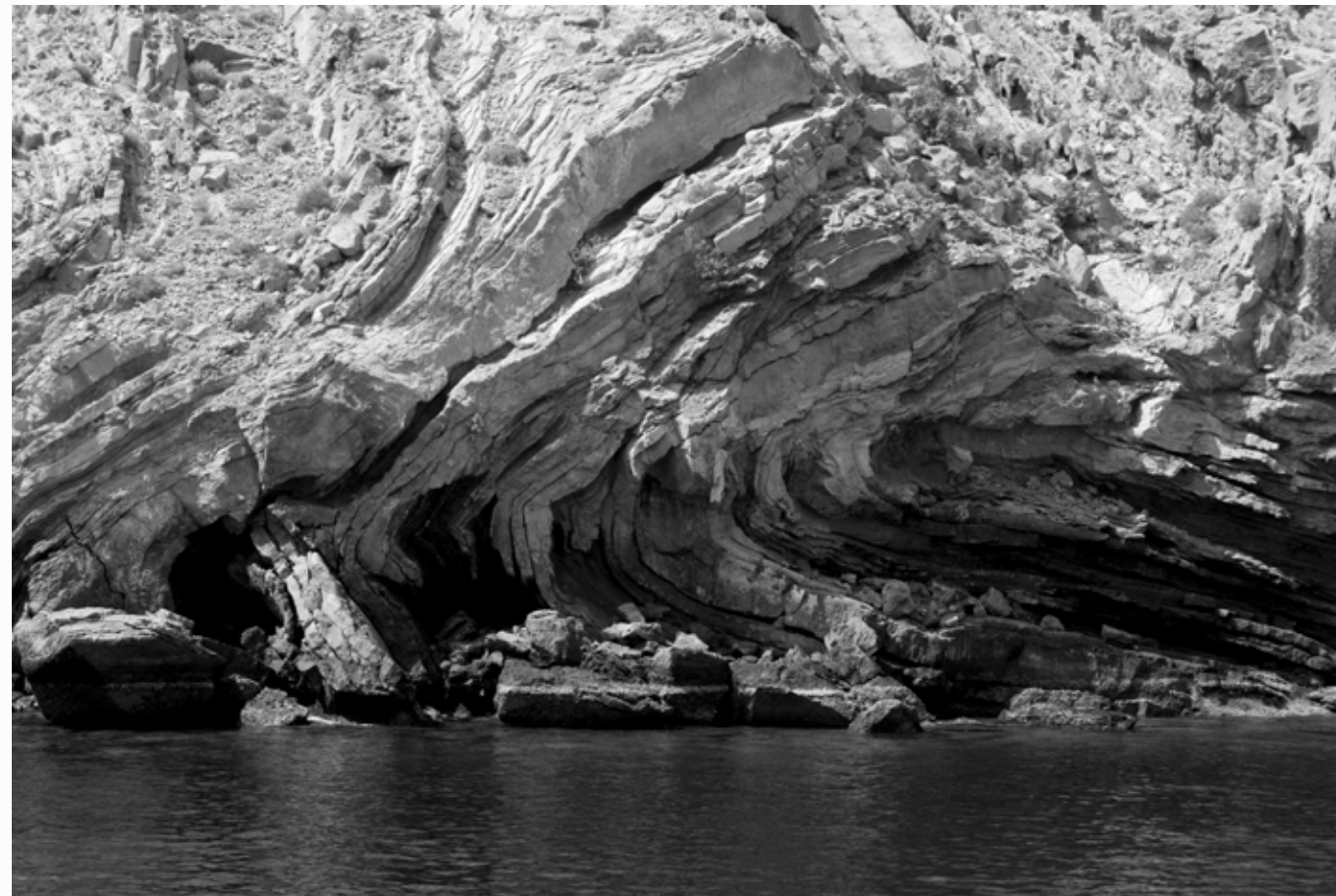




IMAGE EIGHT

This type of image was not part of my initial concept, however, I almost literally stumbled upon this scene towards the end of one of my sessions and I was immediately struck by the abstract quality. These small shoots were rising up out of a body of stagnant water, at times lifting some sort of algae with it. Each little spike was creating a long shadow as well as its own reflection, which adds to the potential confusion when viewing this strange scene.

I specifically shot this from above, as if an aerial shot, I purposefully wanted to avoid any element that would give away scale to the viewer. It's not often we see something in nature, that we have never seen before, in one way or another.

This shot tells the story that when the right combination of elements comes together, life will avail.

I found it difficult to achieve an acceptable level of focus on a deep depth of field, presumably from using a longer focal length. The foreground of this image unfortunately is not sharp, neither is the top edge. I couldn't get close enough to use a shorter focal length to achieve a tack-sharp image. I debated on whether to include this shot in the assignment, but I felt it had too much visual interest to discount.

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FOCAL LENGTH: 90mm
APERTURE: f/11
SHUTTER SPEED: 1/80
ISO: 100

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IMAGE NINE

One of the things I felt quite strongly about including in this series was a close-up shot of the bark on a local Ghaf tree, also including a mangled above-ground root system within the frame. This was harder than I thought. It was difficult to find a good enough specimen which had both elements.

I was drawn to this tree because of the hole through the middle of the trunk. I shot many different angles and at various different distances. I felt this image was the best combination of composition, with just enough detail in the bark, and a root system that literally jumps out at the viewer.

My plan was to use the 20mm lens for this image to include some of the surrounding area, unfortunately the background is rather busy and quite distracting. If the bushes to the left and right of the tree were not there, there would be a much better definition to this shot, with the tree taking full command of the frame. This is potentially the weakest image of the set. The light would have worked better if the sun had been lower in the sky, shining directly onto the trunk. This would have created more of a contrast in light. As it stands, the trunk is a bit too dull and the mottled light is not strong enough.

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FOCAL LENGTH: 20mm
APERTURE: f/10
SHUTTER SPEED: 1/160
ISO: 100

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IMAGE TEN

I wanted to include a second image of the sand dunes using the 'goldilocks' composition; not too close so that the patterns become the primary factor, and not too wide in order to avoid showcasing their vastness. This image is the result. The key to this image is its simplicity.

Unlike most of the other images in this set, this shot is all about the foreground, using a focal point other than the sand patterns. I was lucky enough to find a patch of grass where the dunes behind were high enough to block out the never-ending desert view.

Thankfully, from the angle of the sun, I could capture contrast from the shade falling over the rolling dunes. Again, this is only possible when out shooting just as the sun comes up.

In the extreme distance there are two tree tops visible which somewhat spoils the horizon line.

This is another statement of the resilience of life.

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FOCAL LENGTH: 20mm
APERTURE: f/8
SHUTTER SPEED: 1/250
ISO: 100

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CONCLUSION

This assignment was a really interesting challenge for me, not least because of working with a deep depth of field. Shooting for this assignment essentially built on *Exercise 2.7* from the course work, trying to perfect the technique or at least to feel more in control and to achieve the desired effect. I am pleased with the results and I feel comfortable that have built an understanding of the methodology.

I adopted a straight photography style, akin to that of Group f.64, showcasing the elements of mother nature exactly as they are, without any artistic slant. This is evident in the view point adopted in nearly all the compositions.

This subject matter has opened my eyes to the genre of landscape photography, something I have never really been interested in before.

I particularly enjoyed the challenge of finding the right combination of subject and light, at times it felt like looking for needle in a haystack. I hope to further explore this genre whenever possible in the future.