

Street Photography Breakdown: Part 5

What's poppin, people? It's Dante.

Today we're going to be doing another *Street Photography Breakdown*, part 5.

With these videos, the goal is to break down the photographs not only compositionally but also philosophically—how I approach the streets—and give you the advice, tips, little secrets, and the behind the scenes of how these photographs were made so that you can apply some of these thoughts and ideas to your own practice.

Example 1: The Baptism in Zambia

I spent about a year in the village of Impanta in Luapula province, Sampia district, alongside Lake Benguelu. I was a member of the Bemba tribe—a surrogate member for a brief period of time.

I was a **Peace Corps volunteer** working with fish farmers, spending time with my host family in the village. What I realized, which was *so beautiful and impactful* about Zambian life, is this **emphasis on tribe**.

In the center of the community, there's a **church**—everyone comes together to make a sacrifice and remind themselves of the archetype of Jesus.

"Everybody within the tribe has a role, and the church is the foundation of the community that holds it all together."

I spent two weeks sleeping under thatched roofs with tarps and poles during the Seventh Day Adventist Church camp. I jumped into the water, chest-deep in Lake Benguelu, making photographs during the baptisms.

And honestly?

Photography has nothing to do with the compositional elements.

It's about how you *engage with life*—your presence will reflect in your photographs. I learned the language, spoke *Ichibemba*, and connected with people intimately.

"Life is a visual puzzle. Photography is how I solve it."

Compositional Breakdown:

- Dropped to a **low angle** to separate subjects from the blue sky.
- Repetitive gesture: preacher lifting his hand to dunk men.
- Center subject: man being baptized, arms crossed, eyes closed.
- Foreground left: man just baptized, intense gaze.
- Foreground right: church member wiping faces.
- Tiny detail: a **fly** on the shoulder.
- Water dripping from the man's face. Texture. Emotion.

"Photography is physical. My intuition told me to drop low—and that's how I solved the visual puzzle."

Example 2: Zambian Boy in Boat

I loved the lake. I swam in it.

My host mom told me, "Don't swim there, there's crocodiles."

I still went.

The lake was always busy—people traveling, fishing.

I saw a boy in a boat waiting to leave, and the *gesture* and *gaze* were everything.

Visual Strategy:

- Dropped low again to separate the subject from background.
- Ducks in the foreground created this dramatic, *almost heart-like* shape.
- Blue boat + blue sky = color harmony.
- Small detail: family circled in blue on the left-hand side.

"You gotta make those relationships—foreground to background. And physically move to get it."

Example 3: Bikers in Philadelphia

Summertime in Philly—the bikers come out showing off their rides. I noticed the *mirror reflections* and that's where the complexity started.

"You can't just go, 'reflection cool, let me take a photo.' Nah. You've gotta move your body and work the scene."

Layers:

- Peculiarly-shaped mirror added depth.
- Face of seated subject in reflection = *main element*.
- Foreground biker fills $\frac{1}{3}$ of the frame, looking back.
- Background: buildings, bystanders, lines drawing the eye in.
- **Bonus detail:** the diamond shape on helmet matched the mirror.

"I didn't stop until the man got off his bike. I milked the scene."

Example 4: Chinese New Year Dragon Dance

Man leaping in front of the dragons—*decisive moment*.

I pushed through the barricade (wasn't really supposed to...) and got real close. At these festivals, you see *repeated gestures*—firecrackers, dances, and more.

"I waited, I timed it, I watched. I knew when he was going to leap."

What Makes It:

- Foreground: man leaping, mask in hand.
- Background: dragons, smoke, people in windows.
- Neon sign, Chinese text, atmospheric firework smoke.
- Dramatic and energetic.

"It's about human behavior—watching how people move, how they repeat."



Example 5: Boat Ride in Mumbai

Spontaneous ride with some local photographers.
Golden hour, amazing light.

I sat down, saw this scene immediately. Intimate due to *proximity*.

Compositional Notes:

- LCD screen used from a low vantage point.
- Foreground filled with people gazing, gesturing.
- Middle ground: hands stretched holding the roof of the boat.
- Background: man adjusting glasses.
- Eyes and gestures lead the story.

"Closer you get, the better your chances of making an impactful photo."

This photograph was made by **embracing the adventure**. Just hopping on the boat and *seeing what the day gives you*.

Final Thoughts

If you enjoyed this breakdown and *learned something*, check out [my website](#).
I'll be making *way more* of these and getting better each time, giving you advice I wish I had when I started street photography.

- Visit the **Start Here** page to download my free contact sheets PDF.
- Check out my **YouTube playlist** for behind-the-scenes POV street photography in Mumbai.
- Full **settings guide for the Ricoh GR** also available on my site.

Thanks for watching.

Peace.

—Dante