

Deconstructing Layers in Street Photography (Coney Island)

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

Today I'm deconstructing the layers in this photograph that I made on the 4th of July at Coney Island in 2025. Without further ado, let's jump right into it and look at the contact sheets behind the scenes of how I made this frame.

Making Many Photographs, Not One

When I approach a scene, I don't simply make one picture and move on. In this particular instance, I made dozens of photographs. I'm watching the scene unfold, making pictures around me, looking at the different moments that are happening — people jumping into the water, people gathering on the rocks.

I'm photographing consistently. I'm not just pressing the shutter one time. I'm photographing *through* the moment so that I can maybe find the decisive moment.

This practice requires patience and presence.

Presence, Patience, and Awareness

While I'm photographing, I'm hyper-aware of my surroundings. I'm listening to the children jumping, the way they're moving, and I'm observing all the complexities of the scene.

Once I see something start to manifest, I look at the world in front of me like a visual puzzle.

Photography becomes about understanding the relationships between things, not forcing moments.

Building Relationships Between Foreground, Middle Ground, and Background

In this scene, I started sensing the possibility of layers — the different planes of rocks, the way people were positioned throughout the frame.

As things unfolded naturally, I stayed in one place, in one position, and allowed the scene to unfold. I didn't force the moment. I responded to intuition.

Photography is a physical medium. You press the shutter with instinct and gut, but it's your *physical position* in relation to the subject and background that constructs the frame.

Dropping Low and Working the Scene

As the scene unfolded, I kept making pictures. I dropped to a low angle to separate the subjects and bring the frame to life.

I'm not shooting in burst mode, but I am pressing the shutter consistently. That way, when the decisive moment happens — when the boy turns and looks to the right — everything in the frame is already synthesized.

Why the Background Matters

One thing I want to emphasize with layering in street photography is that the background is extremely important.

I dropped to a low angle so the background could be filled with sky and clouds. The rocks became a stage, grounding the bottom half of the frame and creating planes throughout the image.

The middle ground connects the subjects on the left with the boy in the foreground. His glance becomes the *punctum* — the subtle human element that adds emotional intensity and elevates the photograph.

Don't Leave Until the Scene Leaves You

I'm not afraid to milk a scene. I don't leave until the scene leaves me.

I photograph through the chaos, through the unsettling moments, as people jump into the water and the sun begins to set. The light was fading fast, and the timing was perfect.

When you have good light and a strong scene, you need to be there. You need to be present and work it fully.

Choosing the Keeper

At the end of the day, I came home with two frames from this scene. And then you have to decide: which one do you keep, and which one do you ditch?

Light, composition, timing, gesture — all of these matter. But when comparing frames side by side, you have to ask which one feels more *interesting*.

The left frame has more formal elegance — geometry, separation, clean gestures. But the right frame, while more imperfect, has that foreground boy pulling your eye through the entire image.

That human emotion elevates the frame.

That's why I kept it.

Photography Is About Engagement

Photography has everything to do with how you engage with humanity.

Don't be afraid to work a scene. Don't be afraid to interact with people. When your presence is established, people begin to trust you — and eventually forget you're even there.

That's when you can really make photographs.

A Simple Approach to Composition

At the end of the day, this is a simple approach to composition:

Drop low.

Move left.

Move right.

Be patient.

Work the scene.

Let things unfold naturally.

Make the pictures first. Decide later — through culling, sequencing, and comparison — which frames you keep and which you let go.

That's how I think about layering and composition in my work.

Thank you for watching, and I'll see you in the next one.

Peace.