

# Jonas Bendiksen: Curiosity in Practice

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## 11. Editing



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# Editing

“I hear again and again people say, ‘Oh yeah, I love doing photography but editing, I’m not so good an editor’ or ‘I hate editing’. To me, it makes no sense because editing is actually most of the job that a photographer does. I mean, that’s the most time-consuming part. The editing is really where you shape your stories and you decide really who you are as a photographer and what this project is all about.”

Editing is a hugely important and valuable process with different stages and uses. Not to be confused with post-processing your images with programs like Lightroom or Photoshop, editing is the process of looking deeply at the photographs you are making, to interrogate them with a critical eye, to review and reject the weak images, and to find something remarkable on the contact sheet or screen.

One fundamental component of this process is giving your pictures time and attention. In doing so, you can begin to understand yourself as a photographer more deeply, while also contributing to the development of your photographic practice, learning from your mistakes, missed opportunities or outright failures, all of which are frequent occurrences in photography.

Editing is a personal and contemplative process, with no right or wrong approach; some photographers prefer to work at the computer, while others print out images. As Bendiksen explains, he employs both methods depending on the output of a project. For commercial projects he will choose to work mostly on screen, but when it comes to long-term personal projects, then printing is a necessary part of the process: you “get to know the images a little bit better when you’re handling them with your hands”.



Far From Home, for National Geographic. At the Ritz Carlton in Jumeirah. Alex, from Ghana, is the “Pool Ambassador”, serving drinks around the pool. Dubai. United Arab Emirates. 2013.

# Jonas Bendiksen's Editing Workflow

“Slogging through 10,000 pictures and ending up with 50 is hard work... it's an overwhelming number... how do you manage to actually do that? I have a very mechanical approach.”

In this lesson, Bendiksen walks us through his editing workflow. Editing is difficult and time-consuming, so Bendiksen advises that all photographers have an organized system in place which streamlines their process, from uploading the images at the end of a shoot day, through to retouching and final output. “I really try to make it as simple for myself as possible”.

Beginning at the computer, he uses software with a star rating system (his choice is Adobe Lightroom) and divides his editing approach in to three simple stages:

### **First Pass – 1 Star Rating**

In the first cull of images, Bendiksen removes any photographs he does not see potential in, keeping all images he thinks could be useful for his current work, or in the future for other projects. The purpose of this initial wide edit is to remove any mistakes or unsuccessful images so that he is left with a more manageable number of images to work with. Bendiksen will only ever do this step once and usually finds he is left with about 20% of the images that he started with.

### **Second Pass – 2 Star Rating**

This stage involves cutting down his image selection to the best 150 images. If there are duplicates of the same frame, then Bendiksen advises you only choose the best two or three of that image in order to produce a tighter edit. At this point, “the good stuff starts crystallizing and moving to the surface... and it gets easier to compare the different situations”.

### **Final Pass – 3+ Star Rating**

The last part of the process involves working in reverse. Bendiksen will select the best three to five images from his previous edit of 150, the ones that are the foundations or building blocks of his story and that he feels need to be in his final selection. Once he has chosen these key images, he will revisit his wider, 150-image edit and add images back in to flesh out the story.

# Backing Up

If you are working with digital files, the most important part of your editing workflow should always be to back up your images. As Bendiksen explains, hard drives are not built to last forever. It is therefore necessary to have a system in place where your files are regularly archived and stored safely, in case of any equipment loss or malfunction. Bendiksen finds using a combination of multiple hard drives and cloud-based storage the best option, the latter of which can be simple and inexpensive.

“You will be so sad the day your hard drive dies, because it will. Hard drives aren’t built to last. They all die. Even the good ones, the good brands, they have a limited lifetime. So it’s not a matter of if your hard drive will die, it’s a question of when. So back your material up! There are several ways to do it: you can just buy a bunch of hard drives and back up each individual drive. You can get big hard drives: I mean, it’s much cheaper to buy a 10 terabyte hard drive than a totally normal quality lens... with that, you can probably back up your entire archive and years to come of material. You back up your entire laptop, your computer, all of that and you take that back up and you store it at a friend’s house. It’s that simple. Or... there are all these cloud based systems now that just automatically uploads it all and it costs the same price as a couple of beers a month. I do all of those things.”



# Sequencing

“Everything changes with sequencing. It’s really about finding the right ebb and flow of the narrative.”

Bringing photographs together into a sequence allows the photographer to create a rhythm or “flow” in the work, and to build an overarching narrative or atmosphere into a project. There are many choices to be made when bringing images together into a series or sequence: is the story you are trying to tell best shown chronologically? Do you want to organize images into groups? Do you need to incorporate other images in-between these groupings to act as breaks? ...and so many more!

By bringing images together you can start to form connections or juxtapositions, pose questions or surprise the viewer as they move through the work. Simply placing one image alongside another could drastically influence how the viewer interprets each of them.

There are different outputs to consider; an assignment, exhibition or photobook are different propositions entirely but the whole process of editing and sequencing can be a liberating and creative experience. Start experimenting!

“You know, you’re distilling it to just a few images. And you’re sort of seeing how you’re going to guide the viewer through this experience. And I think a lot of people miss that part, in the sense that they think photography is all about being out in the field and using your camera and the rest is sort of details. No, I think the other way around... after all the planning you’ve done and all the time you’re going to spend afterwards editing... the actual taking of the photographs in the field, that’s sort of like almost a small detail of the process, which is critical, of course, but it’s really just one part of a lot of important things. So the editing, the sequencing? For me, that’s where a lot of the magic happens.”

# Looking in the Mirror

“We all know that feeling when you’re looking at these images: you’ve seen the same images again and again and again and you kind of go blind. You look at them so many times you don’t even know, ‘was this picture good in the first place? Is it brilliant or is it garbage?’. You have no idea and you get paralysed because you can’t make decisions because you’ve seen them so many times. I have the solution!”

It is, without doubt, a challenge to look objectively at your own photographs. The editing process is long: often we have seen our images many times, which clouds our judgment and leads us to feel stuck. We also attach memories or emotions to images which can inhibit a critical eye, and therefore lead to instances where we hold onto weaker images or struggle to make a decision. For this, Bendiksen shares his tried and tested technique: looking in the mirror.

When Bendiksen is finding it difficult to edit his images, he will print them out at a small size and hold them up to the mirror. Looking at the images in reverse allows him to see the photographs with fresh eyes, replicating the feeling of seeing them for the first time. Very often this simple experiment can help him to make the more difficult decisions of the editing process.

If you feel stuck, try Bendiksen’s technique and see if it helps you assess your images with a new perspective.



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