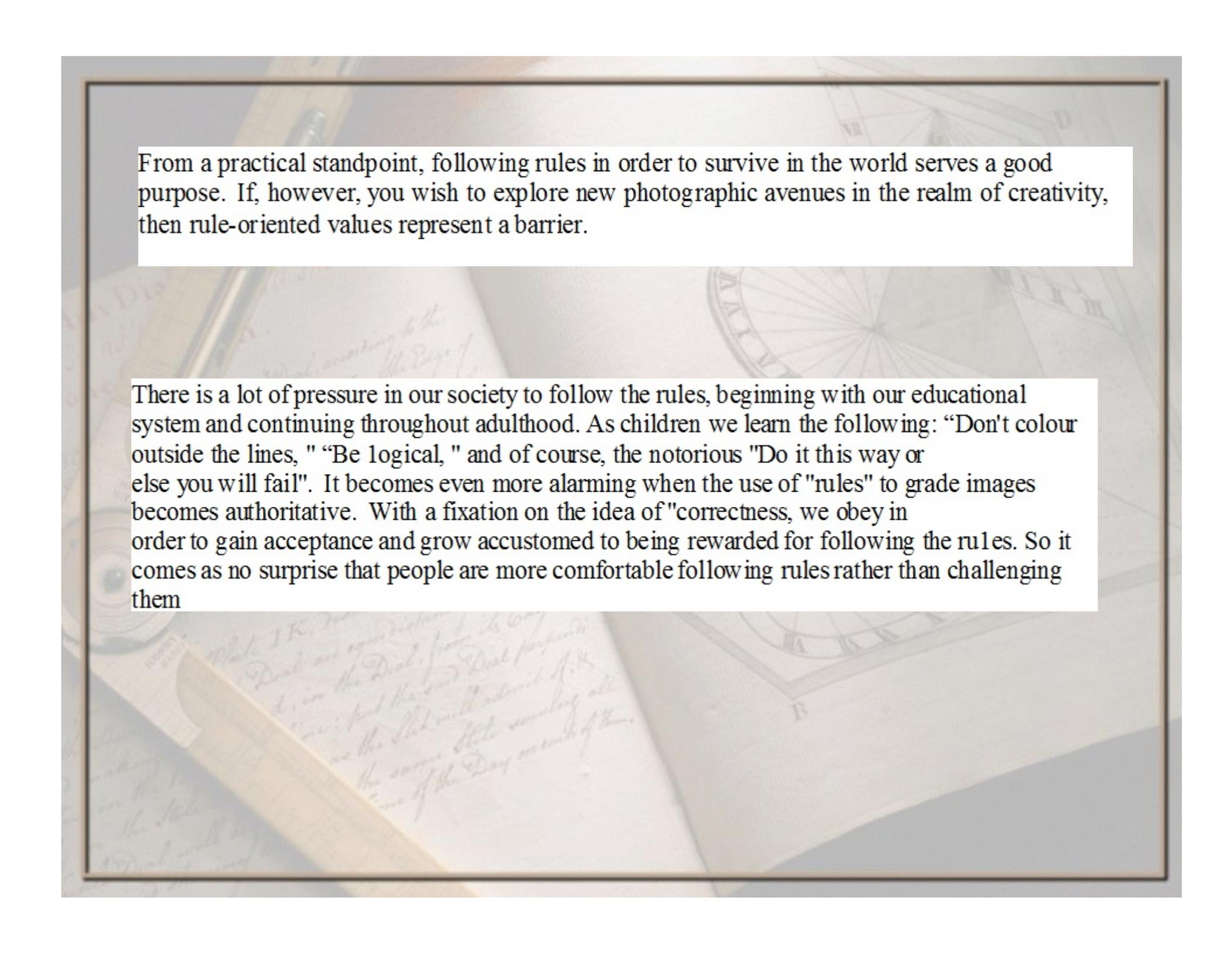




RIDICULOUS DESIGN RULES
By Richard Martin

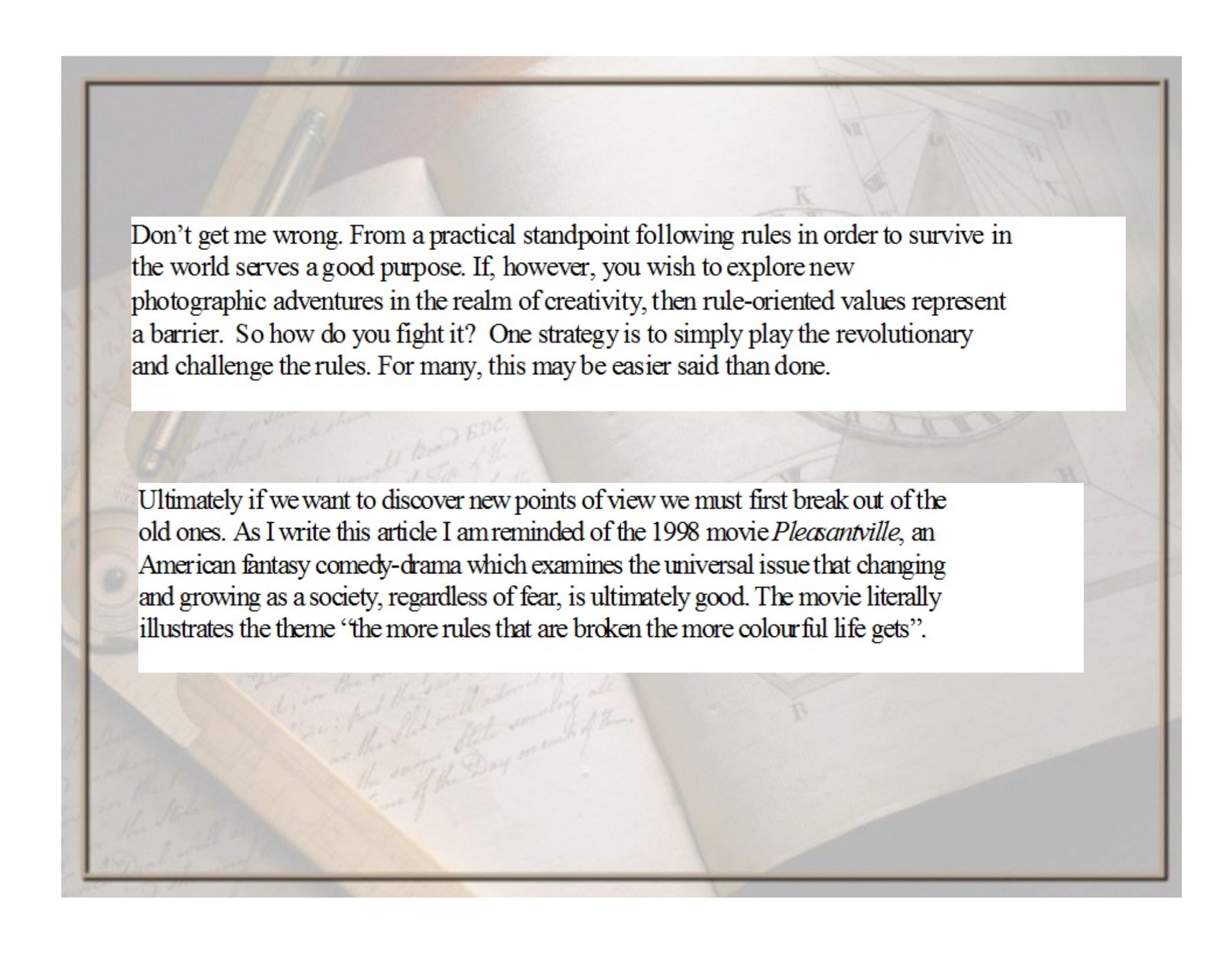
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DISCLAIMER: BREAKING THE RULES CAN LEAD TO
INNOVATIVE THINKING



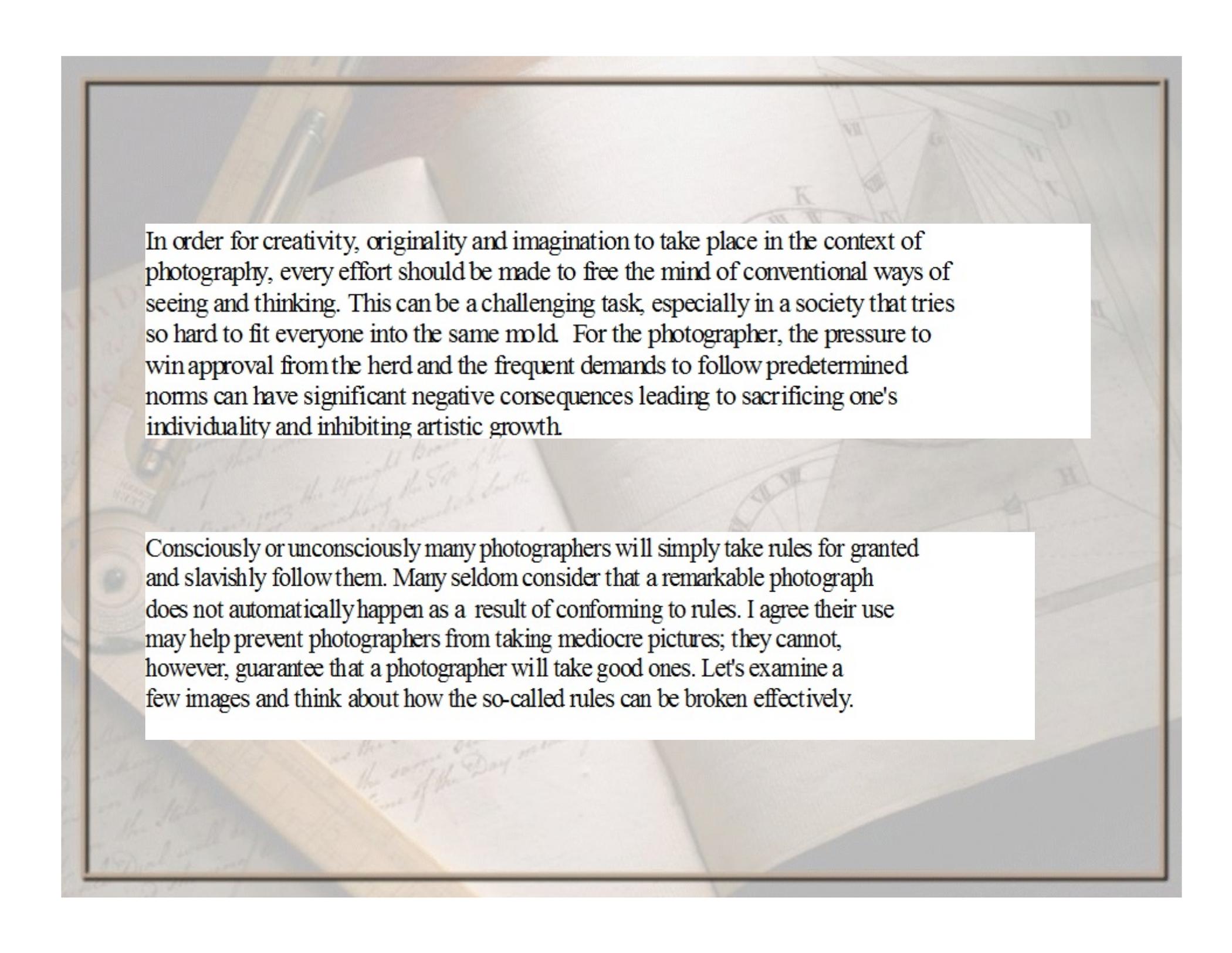
From a practical standpoint, following rules in order to survive in the world serves a good purpose. If, however, you wish to explore new photographic avenues in the realm of creativity, then rule-oriented values represent a barrier.

There is a lot of pressure in our society to follow the rules, beginning with our educational system and continuing throughout adulthood. As children we learn the following: "Don't colour outside the lines, " "Be logical, " and of course, the notorious "Do it this way or else you will fail". It becomes even more alarming when the use of "rules" to grade images becomes authoritative. With a fixation on the idea of "correctness, we obey in order to gain acceptance and grow accustomed to being rewarded for following the rules. So it comes as no surprise that people are more comfortable following rules rather than challenging them



Don't get me wrong. From a practical standpoint following rules in order to survive in the world serves a good purpose. If, however, you wish to explore new photographic adventures in the realm of creativity, then rule-oriented values represent a barrier. So how do you fight it? One strategy is to simply play the revolutionary and challenge the rules. For many, this may be easier said than done.

Ultimately if we want to discover new points of view we must first break out of the old ones. As I write this article I am reminded of the 1998 movie *Pleasantville*, an American fantasy comedy-drama which examines the universal issue that changing and growing as a society, regardless of fear, is ultimately good. The movie literally illustrates the theme “the more rules that are broken the more colourful life gets”.

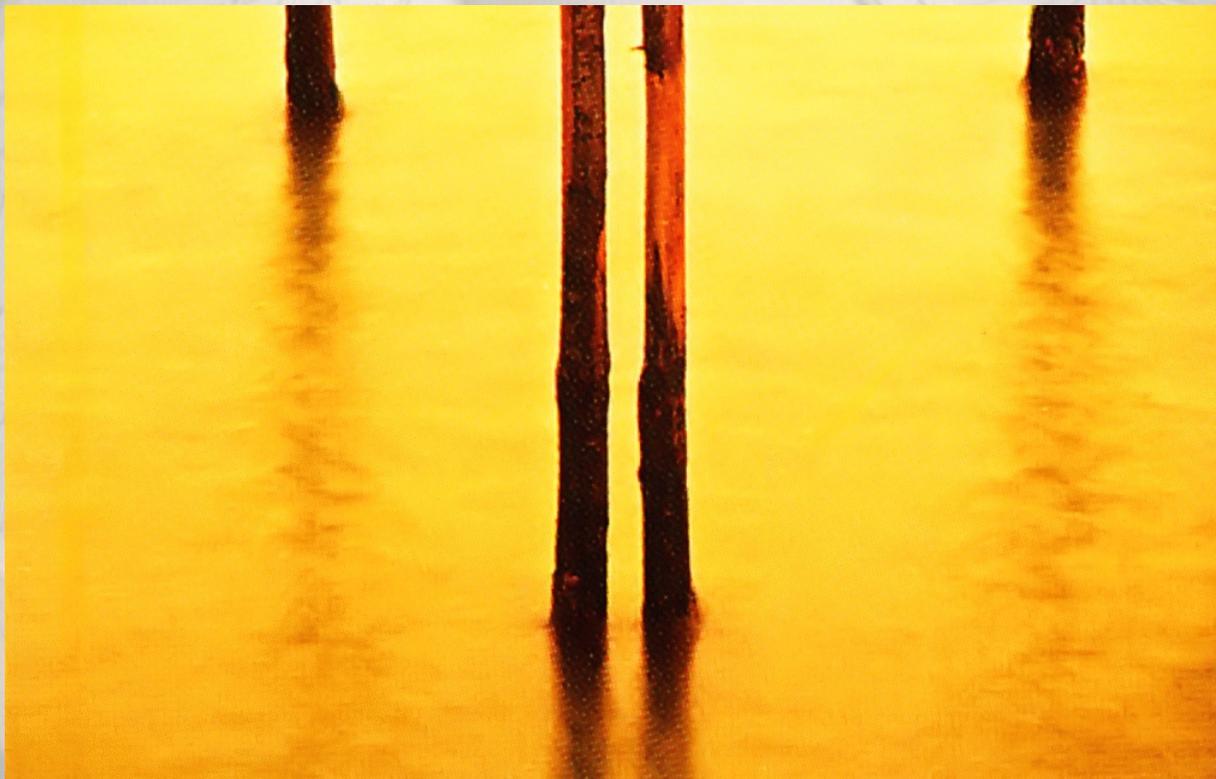
The background of the slide is a collage of artistic and technical elements. It features a camera lens on the left, a pen in the upper left, and various architectural drawings and blueprints with letters like 'G', 'K', 'D', 'H', and 'V' scattered across the scene. The overall tone is light and professional.

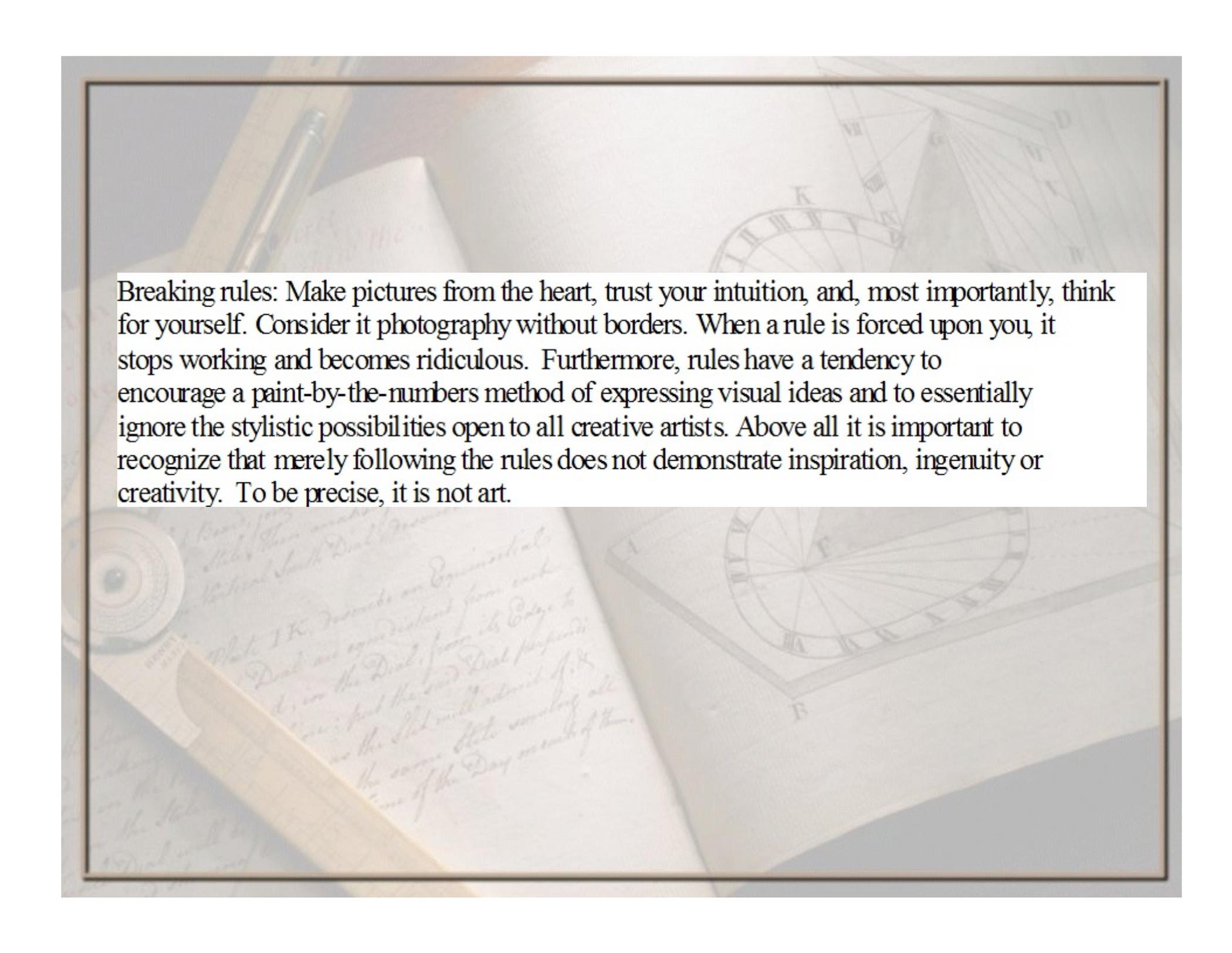
In order for creativity, originality and imagination to take place in the context of photography, every effort should be made to free the mind of conventional ways of seeing and thinking. This can be a challenging task, especially in a society that tries so hard to fit everyone into the same mold. For the photographer, the pressure to win approval from the herd and the frequent demands to follow predetermined norms can have significant negative consequences leading to sacrificing one's individuality and inhibiting artistic growth.

Consciously or unconsciously many photographers will simply take rules for granted and slavishly follow them. Many seldom consider that a remarkable photograph does not automatically happen as a result of conforming to rules. I agree their use may help prevent photographers from taking mediocre pictures; they cannot, however, guarantee that a photographer will take good ones. Let's examine a few images and think about how the so-called rules can be broken effectively.

Conventional rules:

Never place anything in the centre of the picture space and avoid an even number of elements.



The background image is a composite of several elements related to technical drawing and design. It features a wooden desk with a silver pen, a notebook with handwritten notes, and several technical drawings of a sundial. One drawing shows a sundial face with Roman numerals and a gnomon, labeled with letters like 'K', 'G', 'D', 'I', 'A', 'B', and 'F'. Another drawing shows a sundial face with Roman numerals and a gnomon, labeled with letters like 'I', 'A', 'B', and 'F'. The text in the foreground is a quote about breaking rules in art.

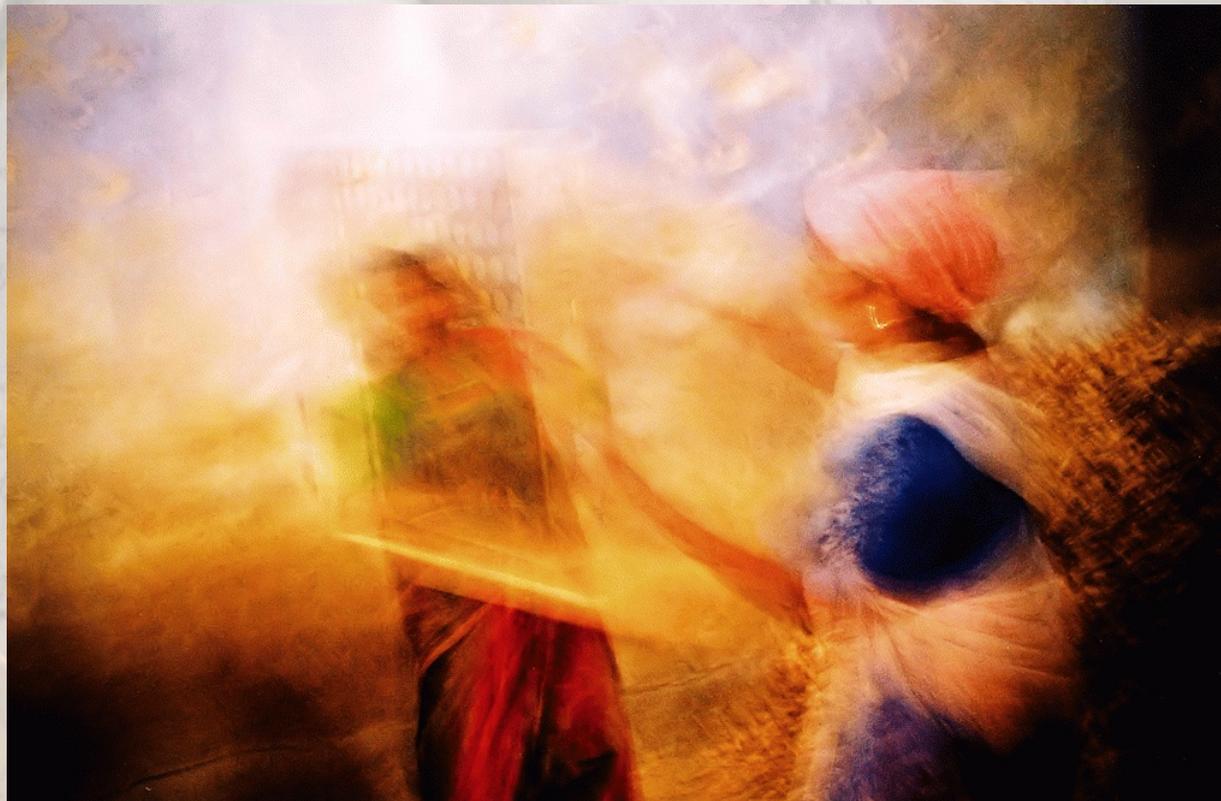
Breaking rules: Make pictures from the heart, trust your intuition, and, most importantly, think for yourself. Consider it photography without borders. When a rule is forced upon you, it stops working and becomes ridiculous. Furthermore, rules have a tendency to encourage a paint-by-the-numbers method of expressing visual ideas and to essentially ignore the stylistic possibilities open to all creative artists. Above all it is important to recognize that merely following the rules does not demonstrate inspiration, ingenuity or creativity. To be precise, it is not art.





Conventional rule:

A picture must be sharp or accurately focused or at least some area of sharpness contained within.

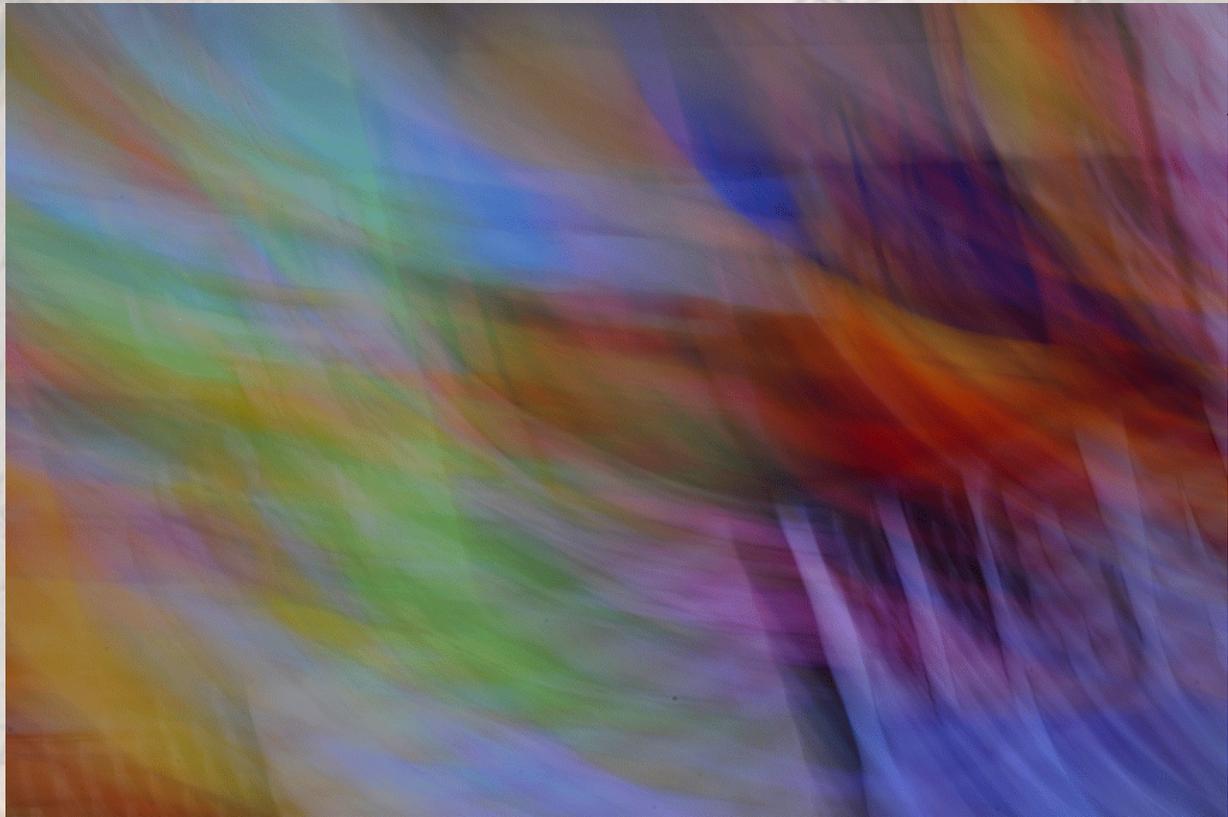


Breaking the rule:

One tack-sharp picture after another can become monotonous. Challenging the sharp-focus rule is probably the most difficult act for many photographers, since one of the great virtues of photography is its ability to portray subject matter with incredible detail. It's no surprise that this obsession with sharpness is to some extent built into the medium, taking into account all the hype and perpetual fixation with possessing the sharpest lenses to feed the passion for flawless detail.

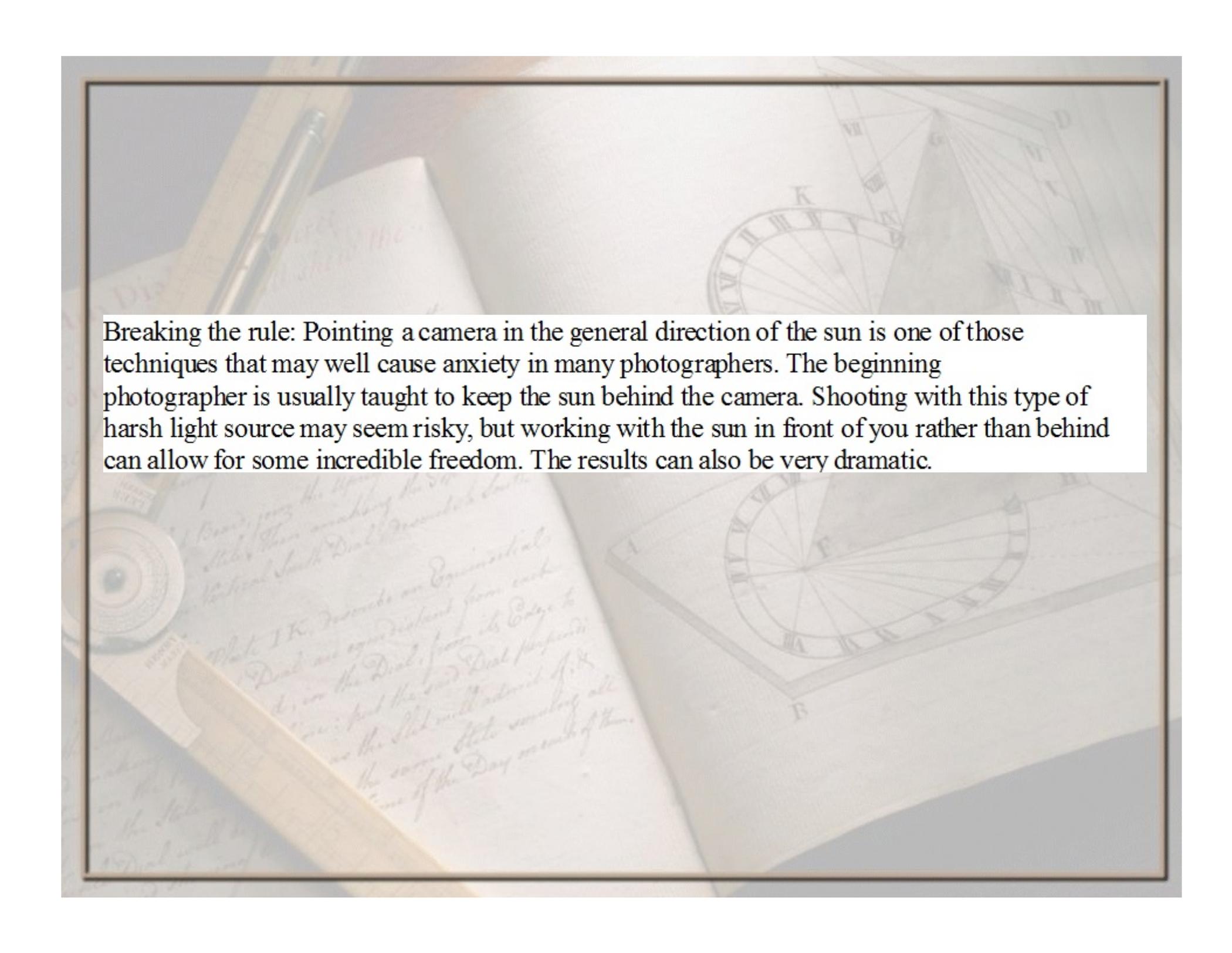
Take a break from tack-sharp and allow yourself the freedom to let go. Move beyond the literal towards the lyrical. While hand holding your camera experiment with slower shutter speeds, ranging from 1/4 sec. to several seconds. Pan both moving and stationary subjects or simply hold your camera as steady as possible and allow the subject to move, for example, with a slower shutter speed, such as one second, as shown here.





Conventional rule:
Do not shoot against the light and avoid lens flare.



The background image is a composite of several elements related to sundial design. In the upper left, there is a wooden ruler and a silver pen. Below them is a notebook with handwritten notes in red ink, including the words "Dial" and "Vertical". To the right, there are technical diagrams of sundial gnomons, showing the gnomon's shadow on a dial face with Roman numerals. The diagrams are labeled with letters like A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z. The overall scene is set on a light-colored wooden desk.

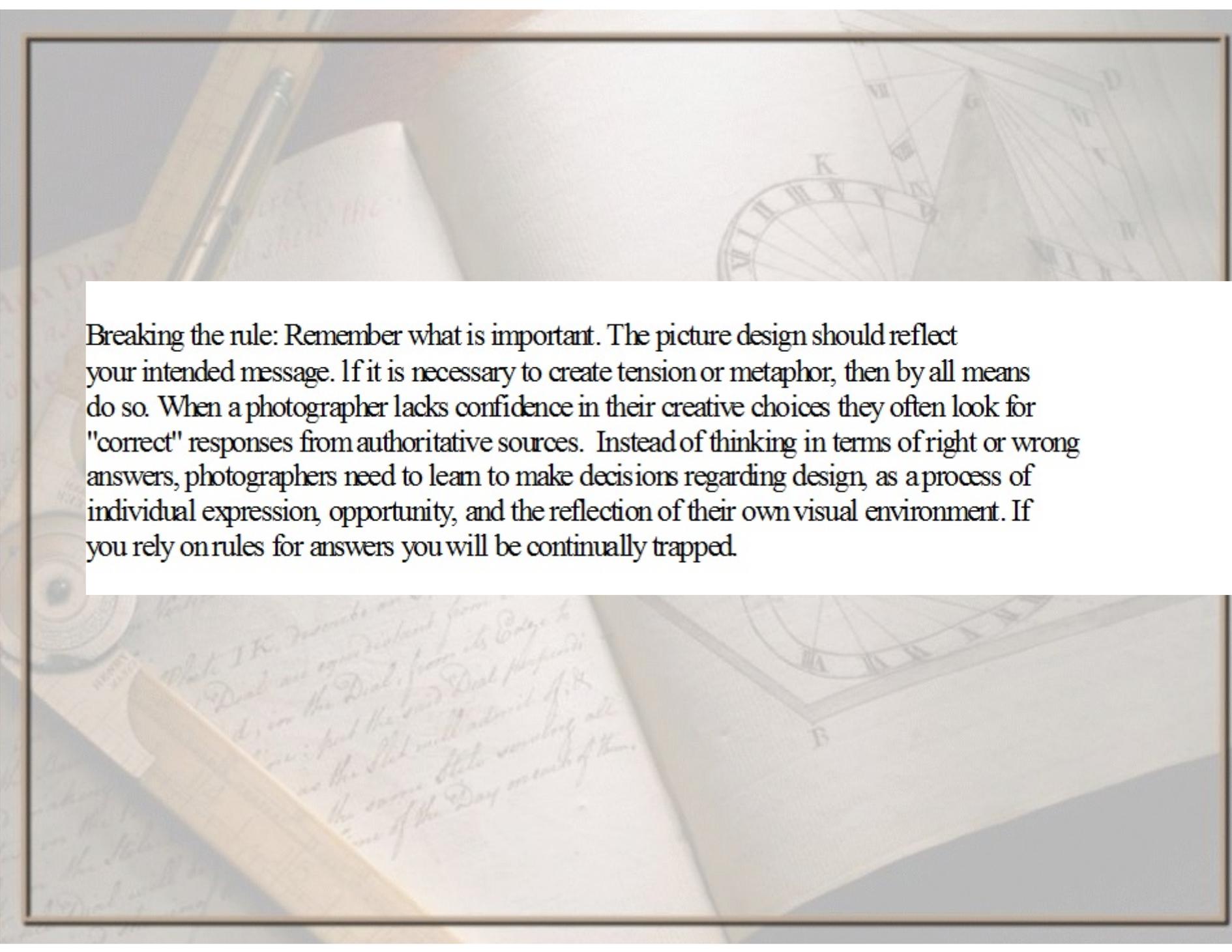
Breaking the rule: Pointing a camera in the general direction of the sun is one of those techniques that may well cause anxiety in many photographers. The beginning photographer is usually taught to keep the sun behind the camera. Shooting with this type of harsh light source may seem risky, but working with the sun in front of you rather than behind can allow for some incredible freedom. The results can also be very dramatic.





Conventional rule:
Do not have people walking out of the picture space.





Breaking the rule: Remember what is important. The picture design should reflect your intended message. If it is necessary to create tension or metaphor, then by all means do so. When a photographer lacks confidence in their creative choices they often look for "correct" responses from authoritative sources. Instead of thinking in terms of right or wrong answers, photographers need to learn to make decisions regarding design, as a process of individual expression, opportunity, and the reflection of their own visual environment. If you rely on rules for answers you will be continually trapped.

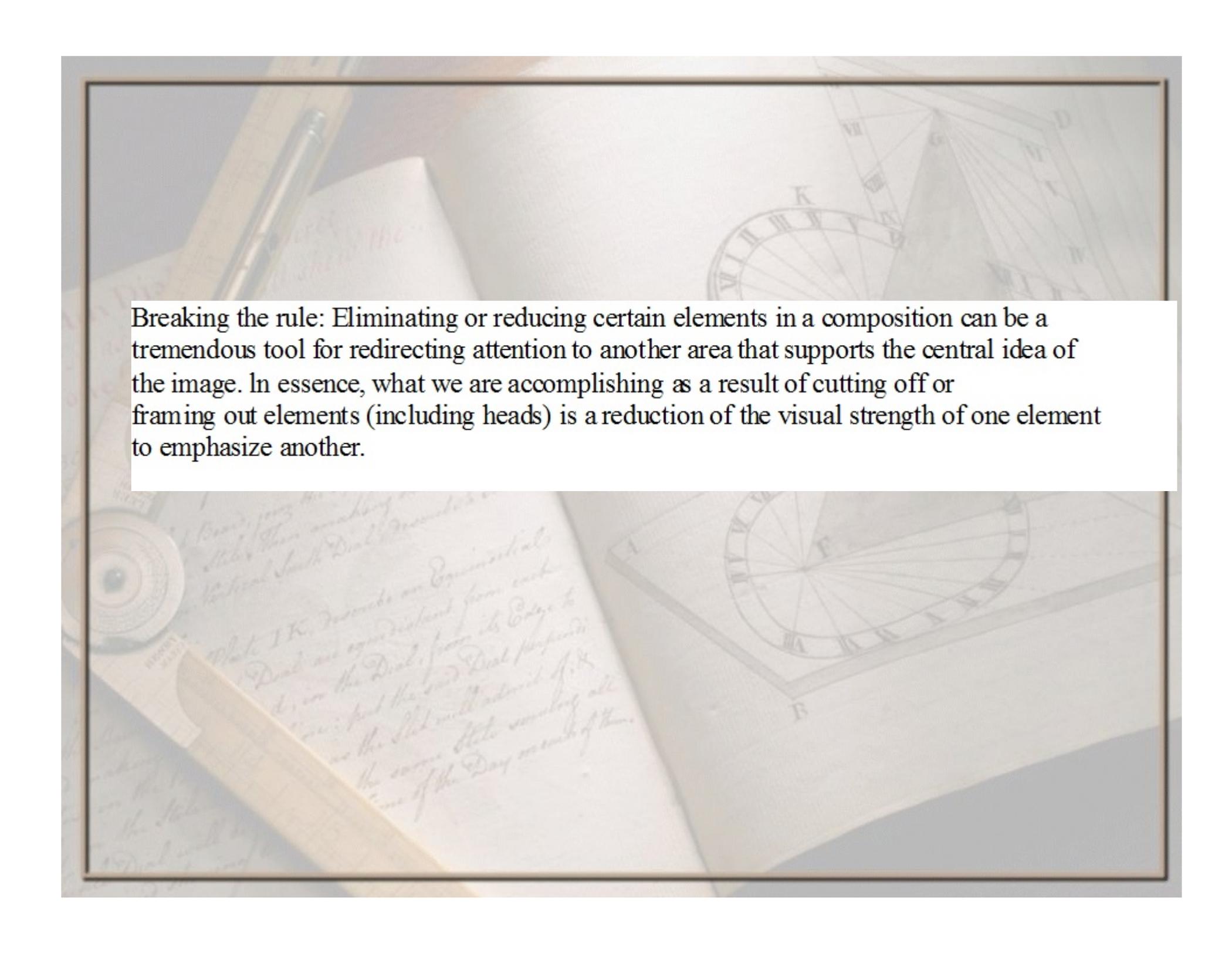




Conventional rule:

Do not allow the frame to cut off body parts such as heads or feet.



The background image shows a desk with various items. On the left, there is a wooden ruler and a silver pen. In the center, a notebook is open, showing handwritten text in cursive. To the right, there are technical drawings or diagrams, including a circular diagram with Roman numerals and a larger diagram with letters A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z. The overall scene is a workspace for technical or scientific work.

Breaking the rule: Eliminating or reducing certain elements in a composition can be a tremendous tool for redirecting attention to another area that supports the central idea of the image. In essence, what we are accomplishing as a result of cutting off or framing out elements (including heads) is a reduction of the visual strength of one element to emphasize another.

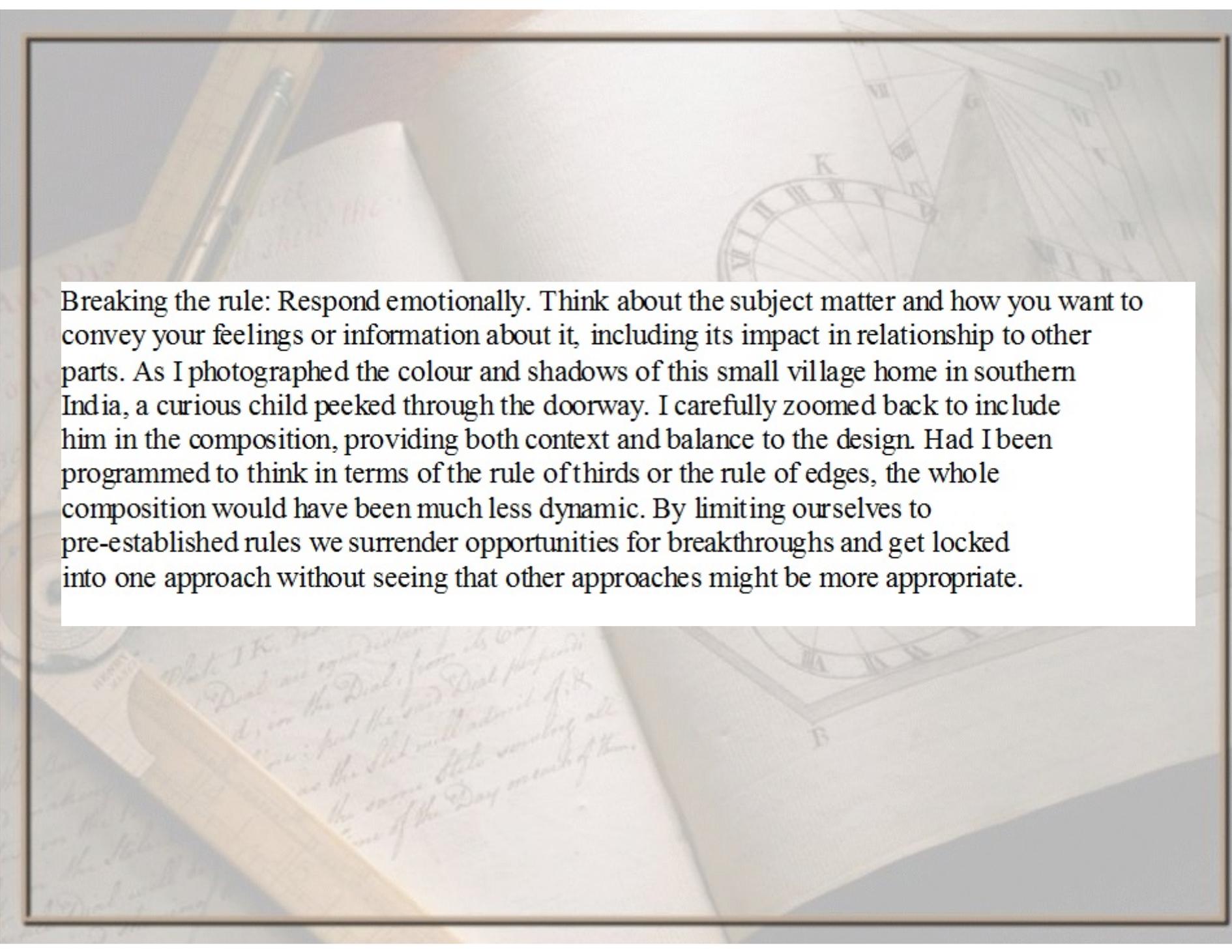




Conventional rule:

Follow the rule of thirds. Avoid placing important elements near the edge of the picture space. Get close and fill the frame with the subject.





Breaking the rule: Respond emotionally. Think about the subject matter and how you want to convey your feelings or information about it, including its impact in relationship to other parts. As I photographed the colour and shadows of this small village home in southern India, a curious child peeked through the doorway. I carefully zoomed back to include him in the composition, providing both context and balance to the design. Had I been programmed to think in terms of the rule of thirds or the rule of edges, the whole composition would have been much less dynamic. By limiting ourselves to pre-established rules we surrender opportunities for breakthroughs and get locked into one approach without seeing that other approaches might be more appropriate.



