

GESTALT THEORY PRINCIPLES AND PHOTOGRAPHY

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What is Gestalt Theory

We have heard the guidelines for creating a good photo
Rule of Thirds, Golden Circle, Perspective,
ensure animal's eye has "catch lights"

Gestalt theory is a branch of psychology
relating to all aspects of art and design

This theory was developed by
a group of Germans in the 1920s
to explore how we perceive the world around us.

Acknowledgement to Jane Allan

This presentation is based on
Gestalt theory and photography
by
Jane Allan,
a professional portrait photographer
and founder of "The Lens Lounge"



you can view her complete presentation with this link

<https://thelenslounge.com/gestalt-theory-in-photography>

Why use Gestalt theory in photography

As photographers,
if we can understand how our minds work
then we can create compelling images
that draw in and hold the viewer

Gestalt theory in photography
explains why
certain rules of composition work

Gestalt theory – Understanding what we see

Our brains automatically try to find structures and patterns to simplify and organize a complex image made of many elements

The brain groups together parts of an image
instead of treating it as a series of unconnected elements.

A summary would be “the whole is other than the sum of the parts”

When you create a a well composed image,
you help the viewer to see the image as a whole.
Which makes your image easier to understand.

We do this using Gestalt principles.

Gestalt Theory – The Principles

Figure to Ground - an image has two parts, Figure and Background

Similarity - Objects that have the same colour, size, shape, etc.

Continuation - when you see a bunch of lines going in one direction

Closure - if something is incomplete, mind can read it as a whole object

Segregation - your subject must stand out from the background

Proximity - Objects close to one another create a sense of familiarity

Emergence - the image is identified before the parts of the image

Common fate - objects going the same direction are grouped together

Figure to Ground – Make Subject stand out - Brighter



Figure to Ground – Make Subject standout - Darker



Figure to Ground – Object / Subject must stand out

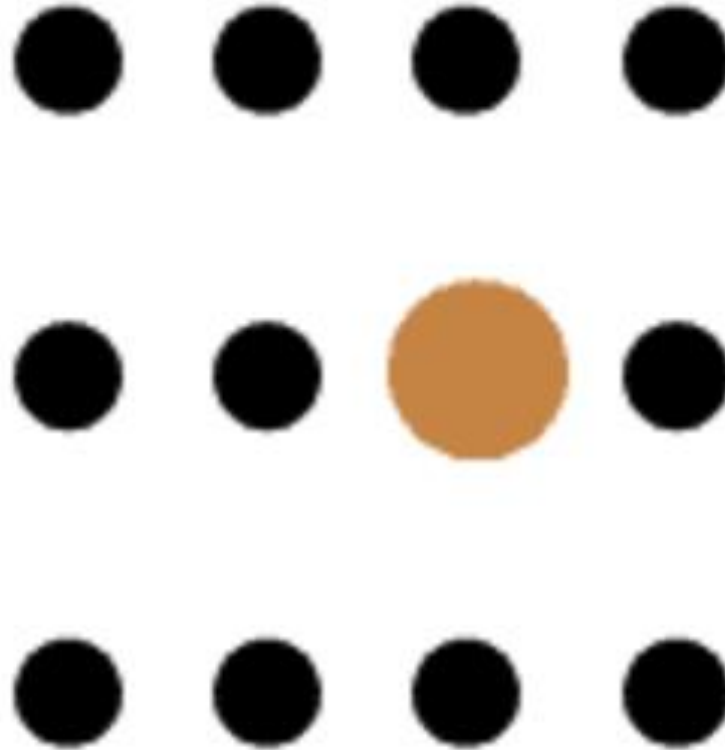
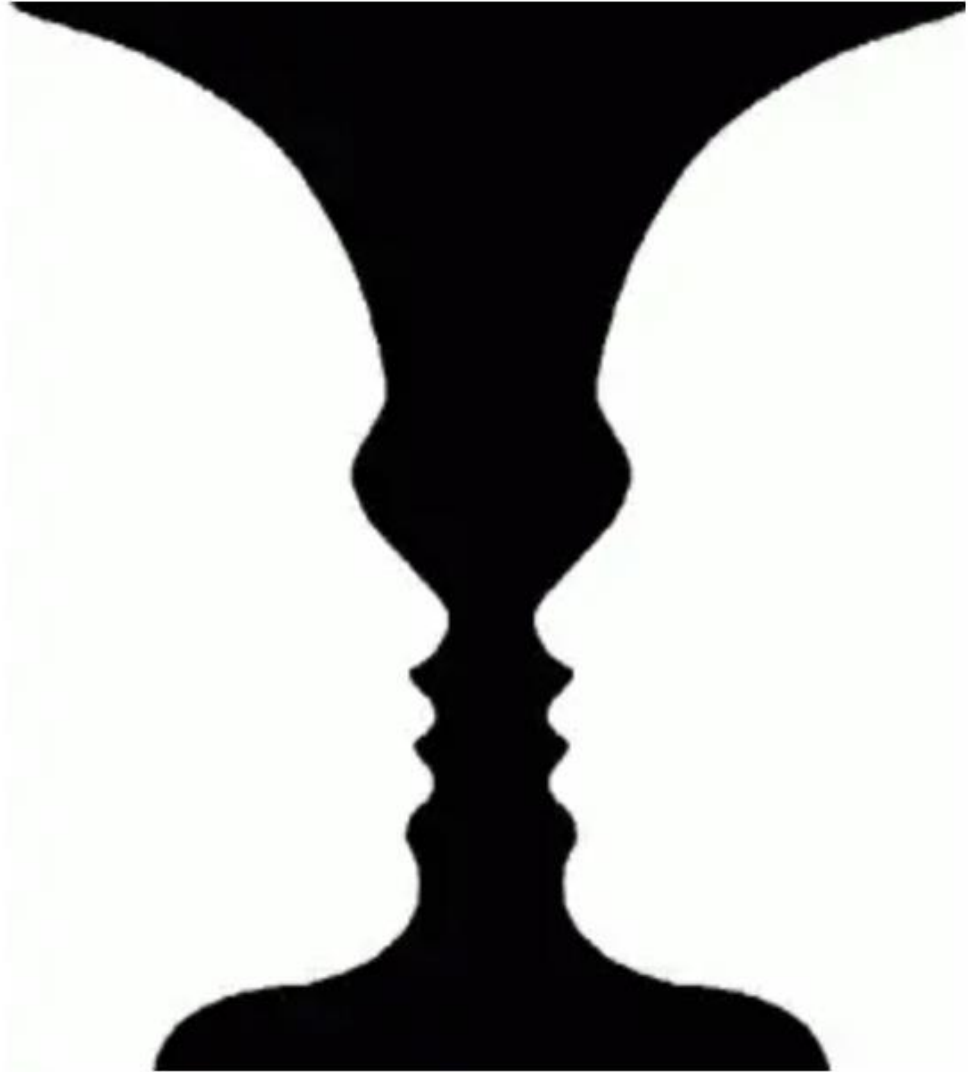


Figure to Ground - Unstable relationship - Rubin's vase



Perfect example of unstable relationship.

Some people see two faces

Others see the Vase

Nobody can see both at the same time

Figure to Ground- Create a stable relationship

Photographers have a few tools to help separate the subject from background and guide the viewer's eye. They include:

- Depth of field
- Contrast
- Isolation

Fig to Grd – Subject sharp – Background blurred – Depth of field



Fig to Grd – Tonal contrast – Eyes are drawn to warm, lighter areas



Fig to Grd – Subject clear – Framed by pillars – Red against blue



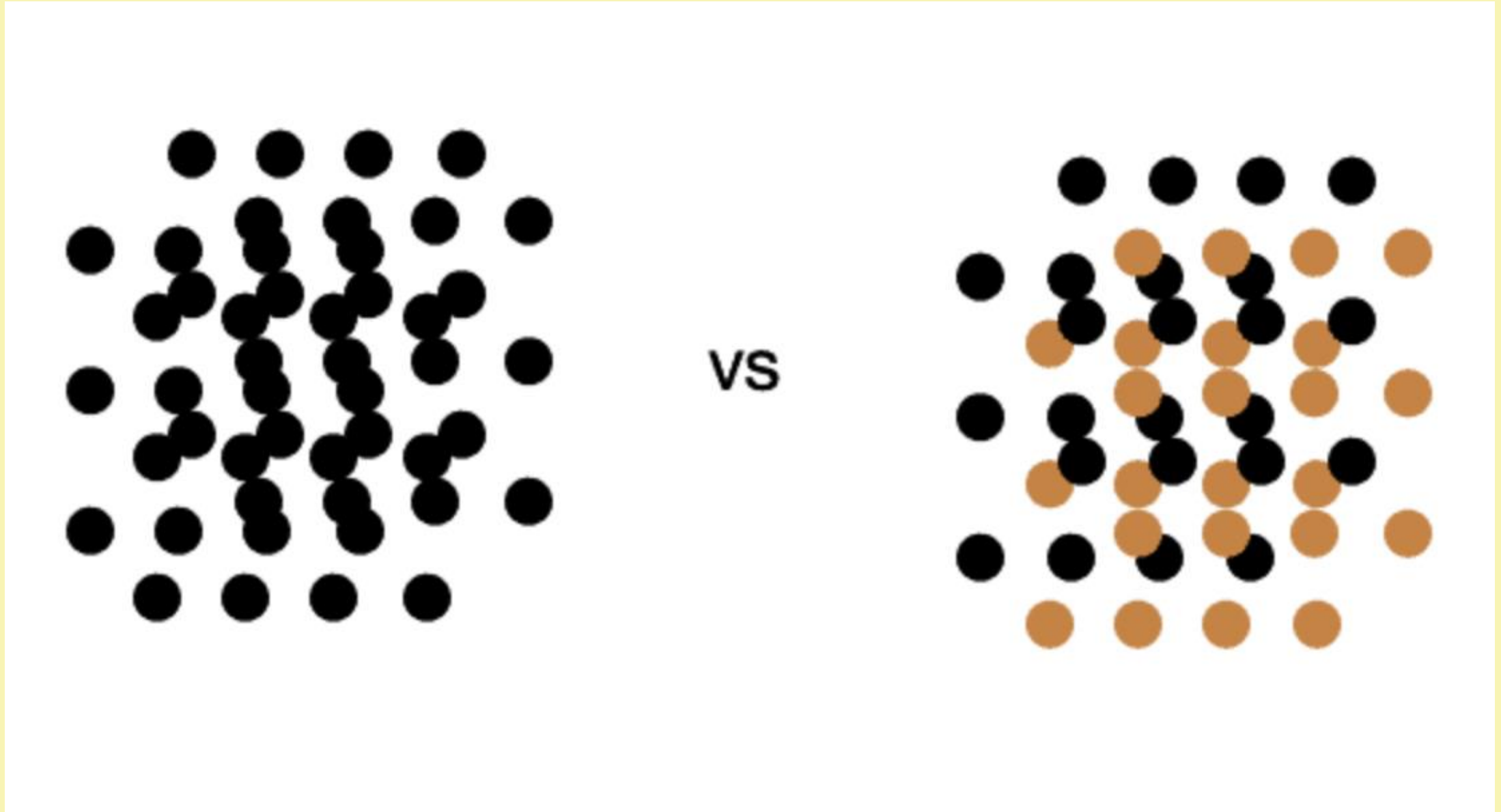
Similarity – Objects that are similar.

These Objects may have the same colour, size, shape etc

Whilst this is like Proximity

In Similarity the objects don't have to be close together

Similarity – Eyes group similar elements – Not the black/brown



Continuance / Similarity – Repeating Lights and pillars



Continuance

Viewers eyes are taken beyond the subject and continue through the image

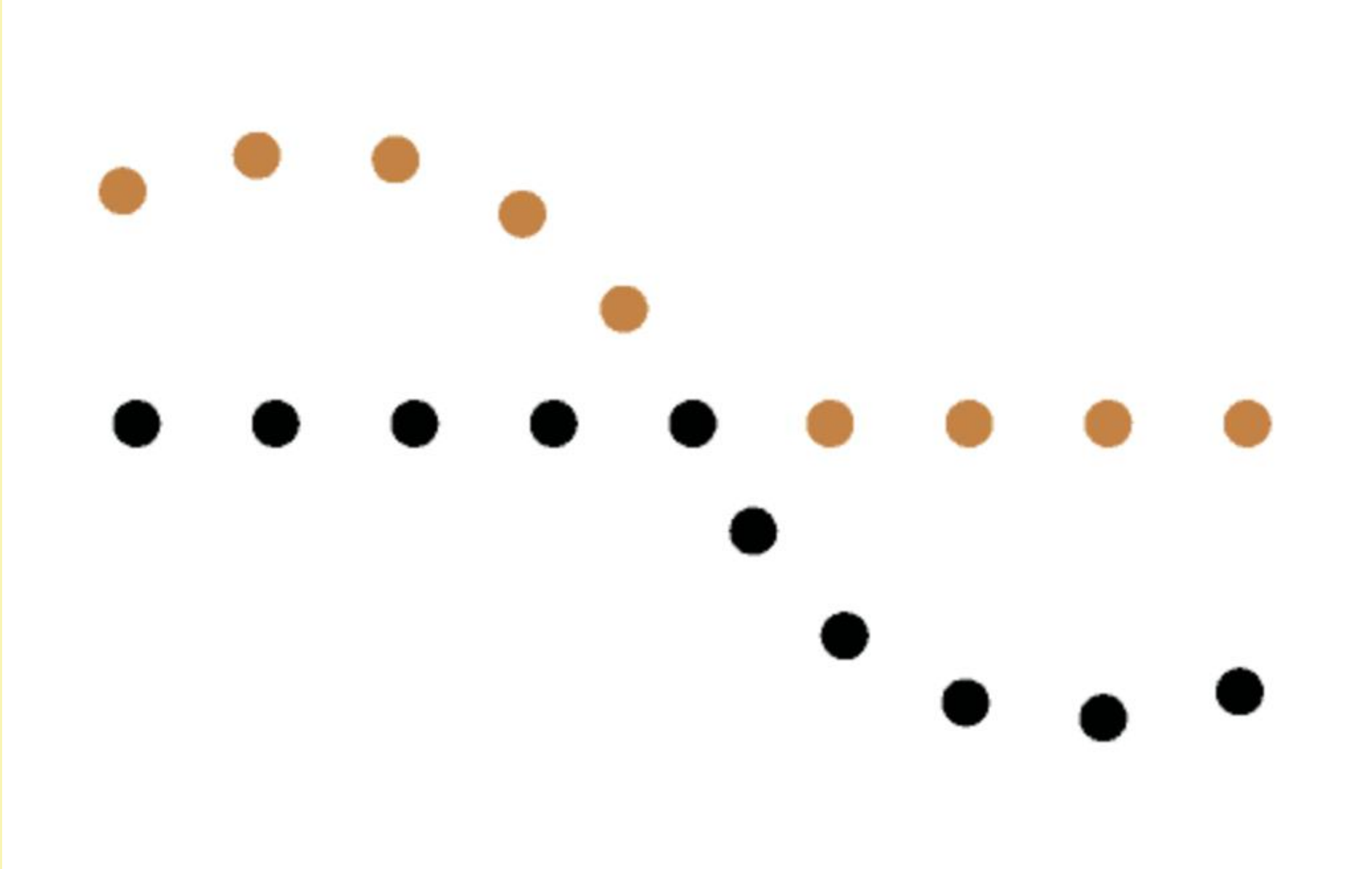
An image with lines that go to the edge of an images, like a road or row of street lights.

We know that the road doesn't just end there.

We naturally fill in the gaps in the areas of the image that we cannot see

Photographers use leading lines to take the viewer on a journey around the image.

Continuity – Eye prefers Curve or Straight line of similar objects



Continuity – We see only child, arms and leg – Brain fills in gaps



Gestalt – Closure

Closure – even if something is incomplete,

- Our brain will read it as whole object
- So we don't need to have all the information to understand an image.
- In fact, our brains like to work a little to complete the image,
- because it's more interesting that way

Closure – Our brain fill gap between her legs



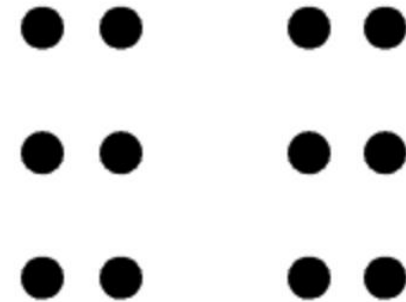
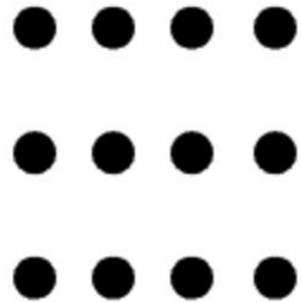
Closure – Our brain does not need all detail to see this portrait



Gestalt - Proximity

- Object near to each other perceived as belonging to each other
- Our brains wants to reduce confusion and chaos
- So they group objects close together as one unit
- The law of Proximity is so powerful it overrides the law of Similarity

Proximity – Brain prefers black groups 16 and 6 + 6



Proximity – Gaze connects daughter to family group



Gestalt - Proximity

If you intentionally position a subject separate from the group

Not only do you draw attention to them

But you add to the message of the photo.

Gestalt - Segregation

Your subject must stand out from the background

If your subject is small in frame it may add scale

but could be vulnerable in the larger landscape

you must ensure that it is separated from the background in some way.

Segregation – Subject stands out because background blurred



Proximity – Similar colours - Continuity (*Lower legs hidden*)



Gestalt - Emergence

Emergence - the image is identified before the parts of the image

Difficult to achieve the element of photo is not immediately obvious

It only becomes visible after studying the image for a while

There is a dog hidden in grass – just below woman with leash

It can make the photo more interesting

Gestalt – Common Fate

Common fate - objects going the same direction are grouped together

- It's similar to the law of proximity
- But with the law of common fate
- The emphasis is on the objects moving in the same direction.

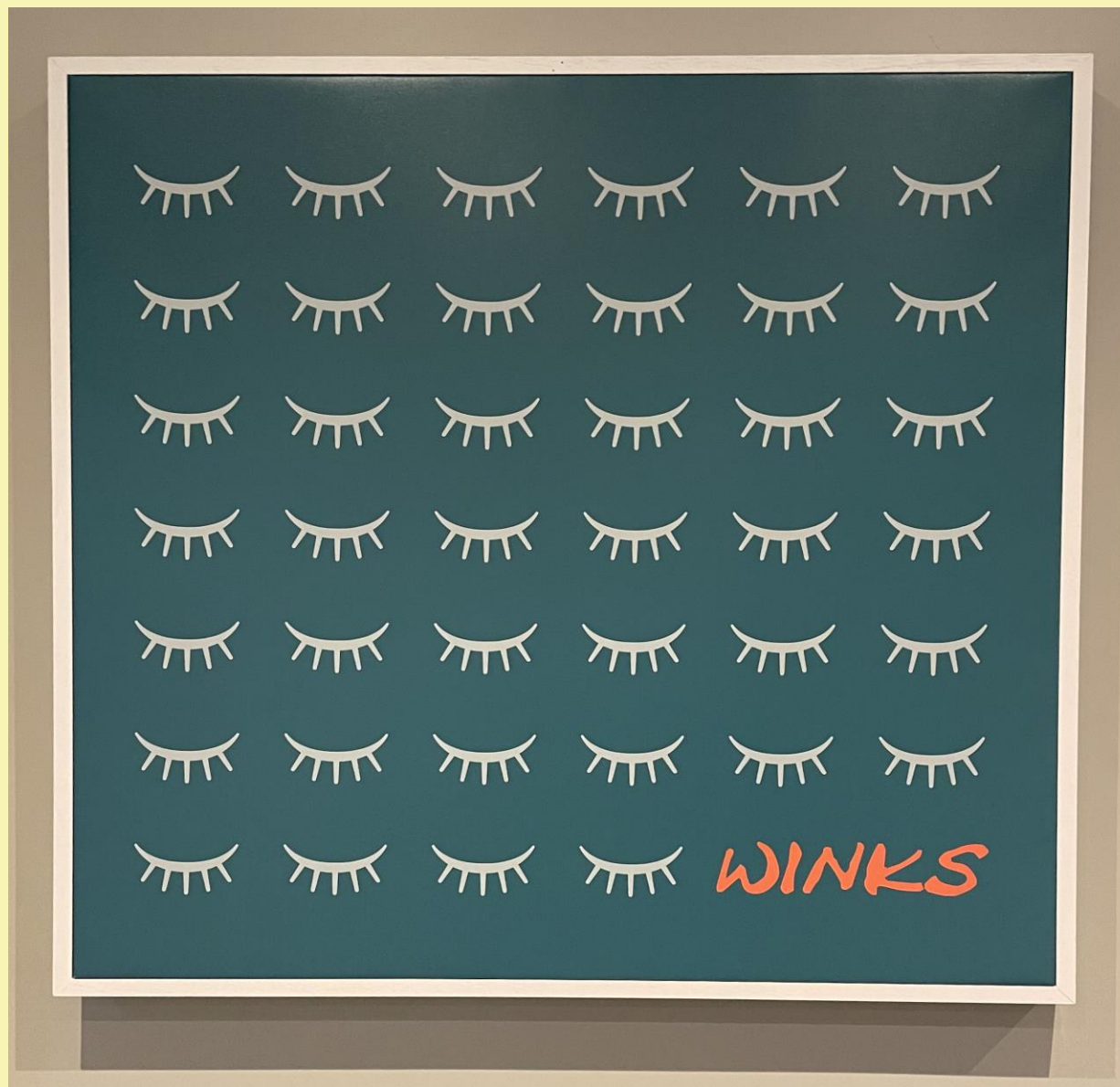
Common Fate – Going in one direction are the children grouped as one due to similarity and proximity. The Cyclist is separate



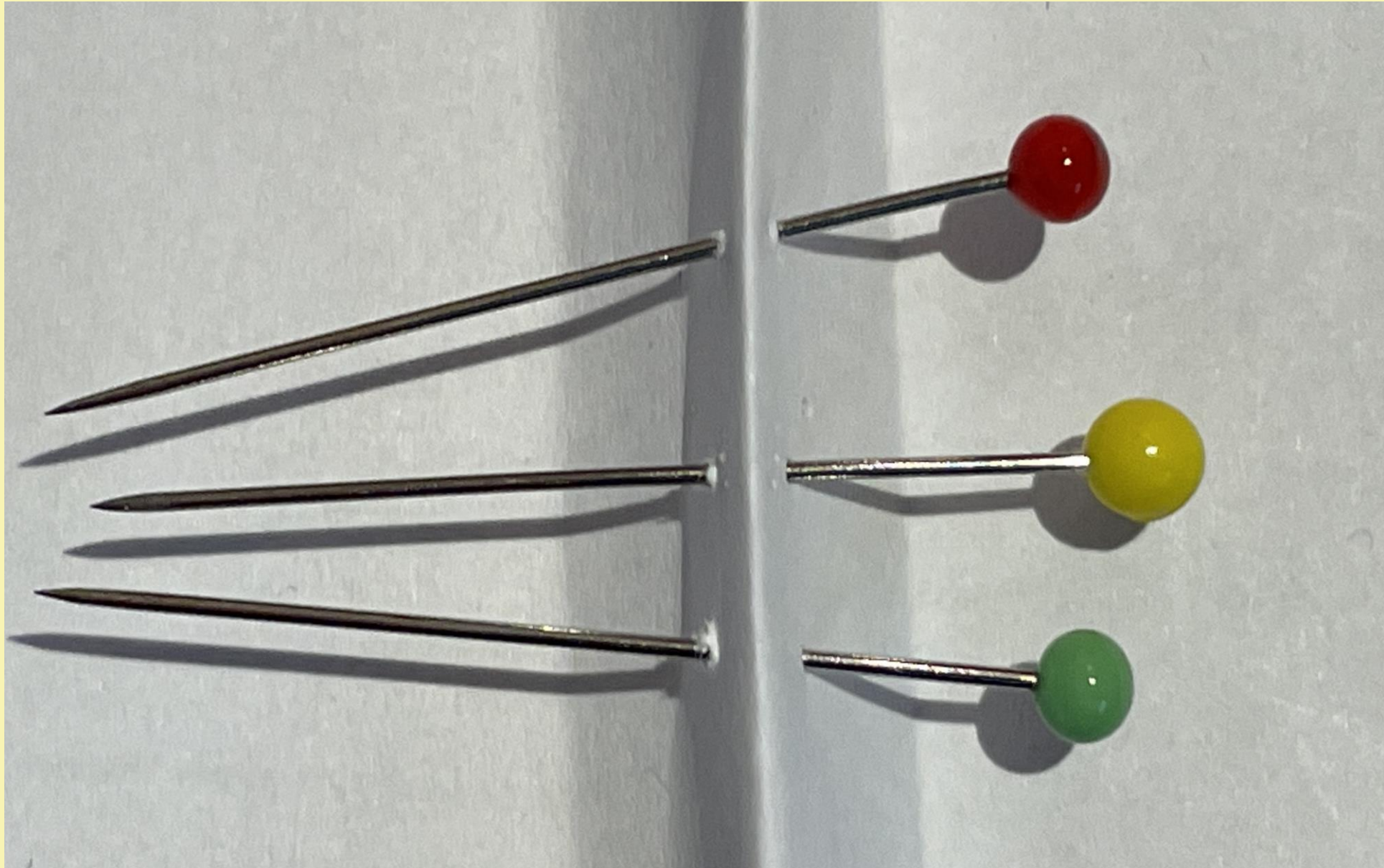
Gestalt – Three photos taken by Brian

And finally three of my photos
which I think demonstrate
some Gestalt principles

Brian - Emergence



Brian's – Pin Sharp – Figure to Ground & Similarity



Brian's – Common Fate - Proximity – Similarity – Continuance



Gestalt theory in conclusion

I have presented some of the Principles - there are more

It would be worthwhile for us to study Gestalt theory further

It may well help us to produce photos that are always interesting

I hope you enjoyed the presentation
and found it interesting
thank you for watching
and

Now YOU need to go out
and take some photographs.

The End