



## *Broken Dreams*

by Ray Carofano



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### Commentary

For beginning photographers, the development of one's own *style* is ubiquitous goal. I remember many a conversation during workshop critiques hearing photographers discuss the search for their own style, a unique "look" that would define them. I guess the theory is that whenever the public sees such an image, that photographer is supposed to come to mind. In modern parlance, developing one's style is a sort of branding strategy.

Perhaps there was a time when all of this made sense, but I think photography has evolved far beyond such simplistic thinking. In particular, digital photography allows us to so easily change the look of our images that today's photographers need to be artistic chameleons. It's no longer sufficient to have a style that defines one's photography; we now need to develop an appropriate style *for every project* we do. In fact, one of the most biting criticisms one can hear in today's world is that all your work looks the same.

How does one develop a project style? Ray [Carofano](#) demonstrates the way with this project, *Broken Dreams*. The subject is, not surprisingly, about loss, about failure, about defeat. He echoes that emotional theme with his dark, moody, images, using extreme contrast and soft focus. He heavily vignettes each image which enhances the dream. Perhaps more importantly, he frequently uses a composition that emphasizes upward mobility that ends in frustration. Broken dreams, indeed.

For example, in this image there is the literal interpretation of the stairs that seem to climb up. Of course, in real life, stairs also allow us to descend, but by using a low camera angle these stairs appear almost one directional.

Notice, too, that the stairs not only end without going anywhere, but their rise terminates at a point lower than the halfway mark of the composition. We have a feeling that we can rise, a bit, but not too far, and certainly not far enough for psychological success or a spiritual ascension into the clouds. We may try to go up the stairs, but we are destined to remain earthbound. Broken dreams, indeed.

But there is more: Notice even the clouds are earthbound, more like fog or mist rather than celestial things. And finally, there are the cement blocks to the left and right of the stairs, appearing as though they to have tumbled back to earth after a failed attempt at height.

The combination of all of this, enhanced by the dark and moody style, speak to the theme of broken dreams in every minute detail. Carofano has created a magnificent project that demonstrates extraordinary artistic sensitivity made manifest through a visual style.