←Argh! →

Yearly Top Ten Selection Process 2018

Having just finished cleaning up my photography storage and preparing for a new year, I set about the task of selecting my top ten favorite images for 2018, and in this article I share my workflow and my thoughts of the process.

January 6, 2019

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As you may recall if you have followed my [previous workflow articles](#) on how I organize my images so that I can easily move between my laptop and desktop computers, I have a few tasks to do as a year ends, and another starts. The main task at hand is to do one last pass through my Traveler Solid State Drive, and move any remaining Final Selects to my Finals SSD.

I keep all of my current year's images on what I call my Traveller drive, and as I shoot and finalize my selections from each shoot or tour, I copy my selection of images to a second SSD called Finals. This allows me to carry all images that I've ever shot that are worth a hoot on one drive, and all of my current year's work on another.

With one thing and another, I had still not copied my Morocco work to the Finals drive, so that was my first task this morning as I started work on this. I had 154 images selected from Morocco still, and I wanted to get that down a little, so I did one last pass and removed 14 images, which tells me that my initial selection was relatively tight.

Copying Final Selects to Finals SSD

Having ensured that all of the Morocco images had at least the necessary generic keywords assigned, I selected them all in my Traveller catalog for 2018, and selected Export > Originals, ensuring that the "Include Adjustments" option was checked, then copied all of them to the 2018 folder in my Finals SSD.
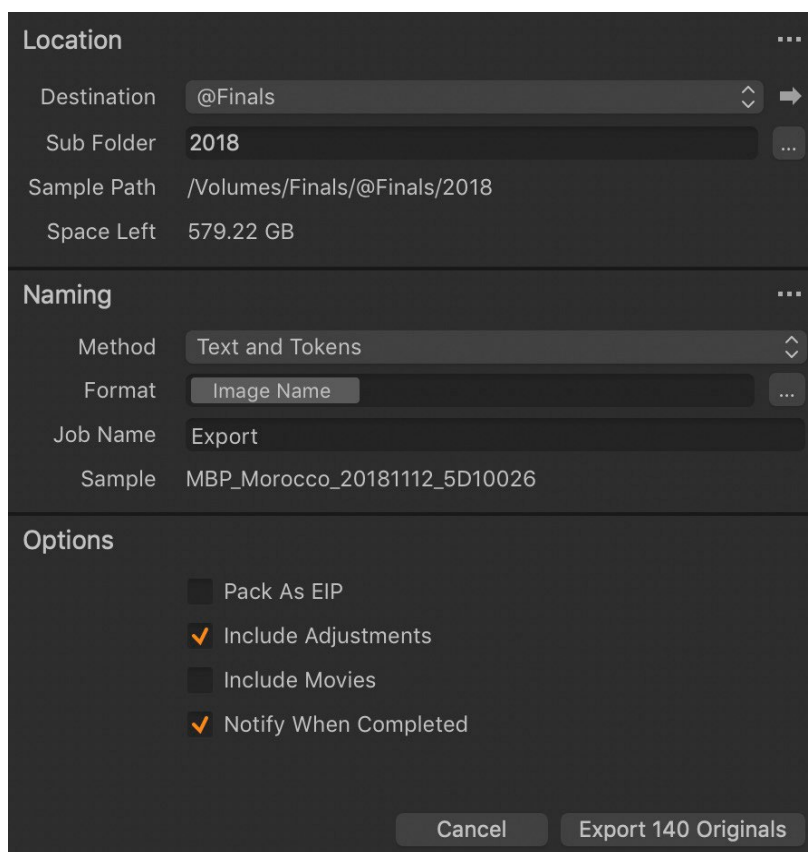
Then I opened my Finals catalog, and right-clicked the 2018 folder, and selected Synchronize from the shortcut menu, and ensured that the Show Importer option was turned on. I checked and was somewhat disappointed to find that this is still not fixed in version 12, but in

Capture One Pro, if you don't show the importer then physically select all of the images rather than just hitting Import All, the adjustments made to images are completely ignored and not imported.

Double Check Archived Backup

Back on my Traveller drive, after making my final few changes to my selection, I ran my ChronoSynch job to synchronize my 2018 folder with all of my original raw files from the year, to my 2018 folder on my Drobo, and then right-clicked the folder in both my Traveller drive and my Drobo and selected Get Info, to just check that exactly the same number of files was in each location. I also checked that the date and time of my 2018 Catalog was updated on my Drobo, signifying that it was also synchronized correctly from my Traveller SSD.

Then with my Traveller SSD unmounted from my iMac Pro, I opened the 2018 catalog from my Drobo for the first time, and of course, because the Traveller was not there to reference my images from, Capture One Pro showed an

exclamation mark against the Traveller and all of my folders, so I right-clicked the Traveller icon and selected Locate, then navigated to my Photo Originals folder on my Drobo which contains my 2018 folder, so that Capture One Pro could relink my photos, which takes about 2 or 3 minutes. Once that's done, my main 2018 archive is now located on my Drobo, so that I can go ahead and clean out my Traveller SSD ready for a new year of photos to be stored on it as I start the process again.
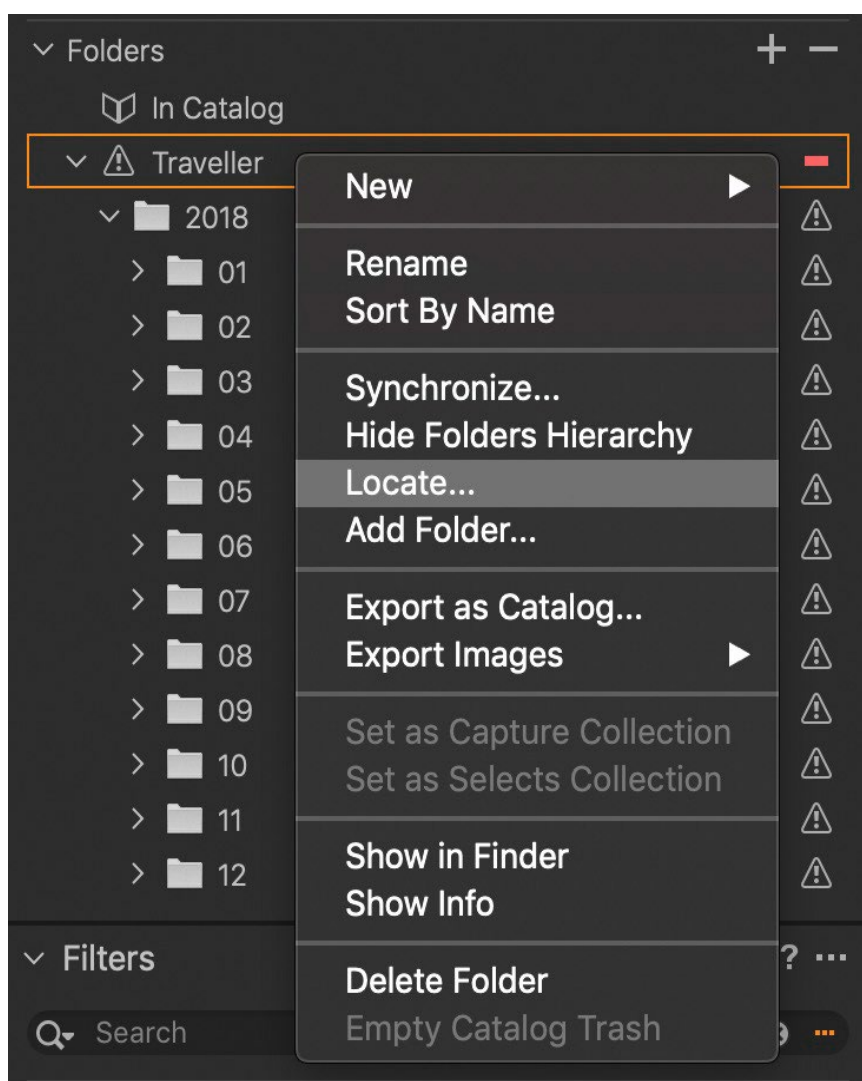
Selecting my 2018 Top Ten

Now ready to start selecting my 2018 Top Ten photographs, let's quickly recap on the reason for selecting my top ten images each year. I believe that this is an important process to help us understand how we are growing, or not growing, as creatives, by reviewing our year's work, and forcing ourselves to make some tough decisions about which images we'll include in our selection, or often more importantly, which we'll leave out.

How many images you try to select is up to you, but I would not recommend more than 12, which of course equates to one image per month for the year. I like ten, probably because of watching the top ten music charts as a kid. The important thing is to decide on the number, and then stick to it.

Honing Our Editing Skills

Part of the value in this exercise is to help us to hone our skills in the editing process, so that we get better at whittling our images down to a finite number. Whether you are a professional having to provide a selection of images for clients, or a hobbyiest, selecting images to show family or maybe at your local camera club, no-one wants to sit through hundreds of images. It makes our presentation stronger if we can present fewer, stronger images, and selecting a top ten for the year helps us get better at this process.

Whether I'm editing a selection for a client, or selecting my top ten for the year, I start by creating a Collection called First Pass, and make that my Selects folder, so that I can just hit the Q key on my keyboard to add the image I have selected to this Selection. The Q key is just the key that I've assigned the function to in my Capture One Pro Keyboard Shortcuts.

Get into the Editing Mindset

Then, I start to go through the entire year of images in my Finals catalog, hitting the Q key whenever I see a photograph that I want to consider for my Top Ten. This is actually another great benefit of having my Final Selects in a separate Catalog, because I don't have to look for my final selects out of all of my raw files. If you don't do this, I'd recommend at least ensuring that you star rate your images so that you can filter out your better shots to avoid looking at your lesser images.

The editing mindset has to be engaged right from this first pass. Keeping in mind that every image I'm looking at has already been selected out of all of my raw files, it's important to not simply hit the Q key on every photo. I know that I have just ten slots to assign, so we have to be as ruthless as possible right from this first pass.

At the same time, you need to give yourself options and the opportunity to compare similar images, so you will likely finish the first pass with a relatively large number of photos selected. After going through 1,452 images from 2018, after my first pass I had 120 images in my Collection (see next page).
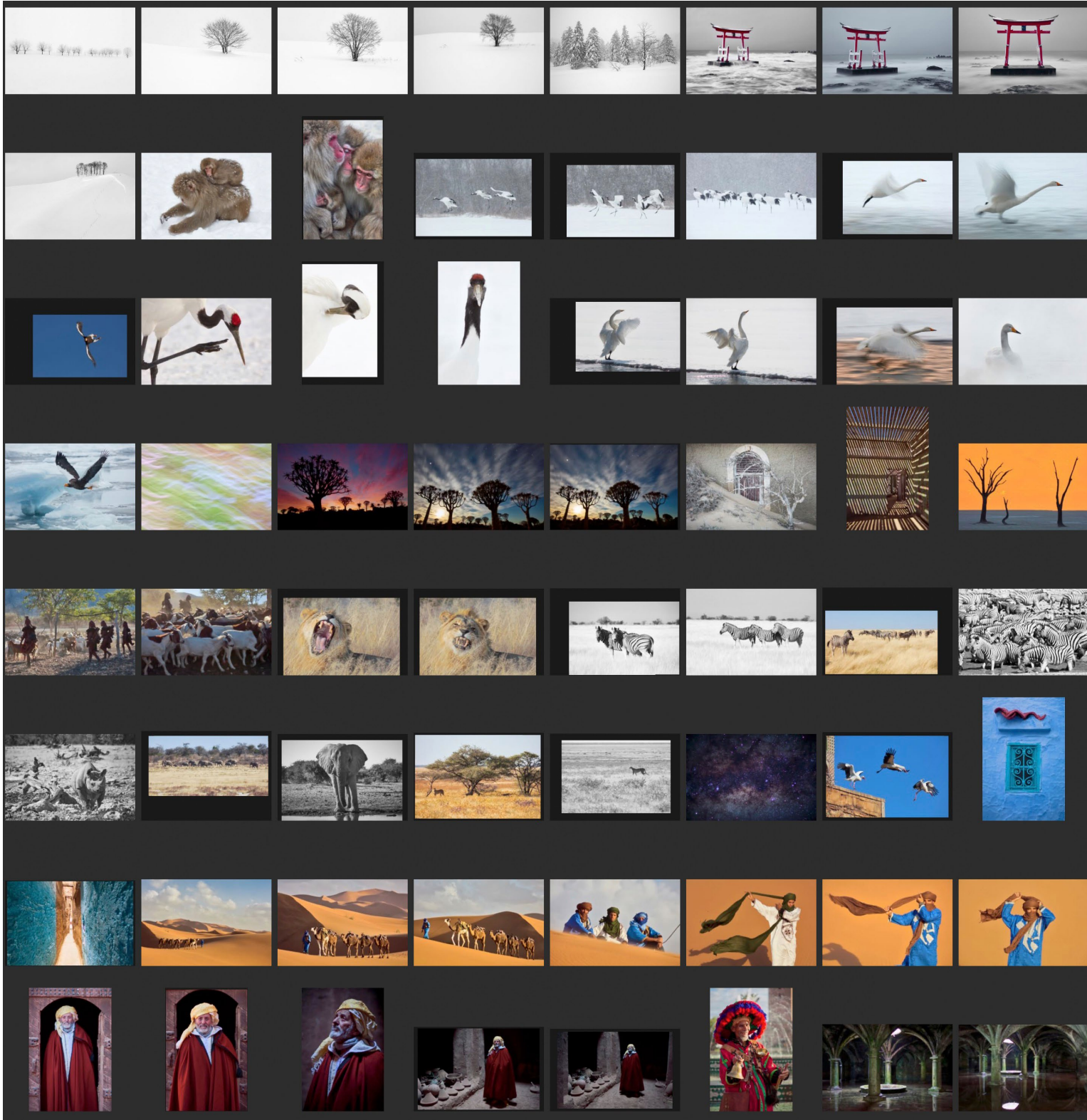
To start to whittle this down, I created a second Collection called, you guessed it, Second Pass, and chose to initially simply copy all of the images from my first pass to this new collection. From this point on, I'm removing images, not adding, so

I just hit the Delete key as I go through and make comparisons and gradually reduce my selection. Of course, inside a Collection, the Delete key only removes the images from the Collection. It doesn't actually delete them from the hard drive, or even the catalog.
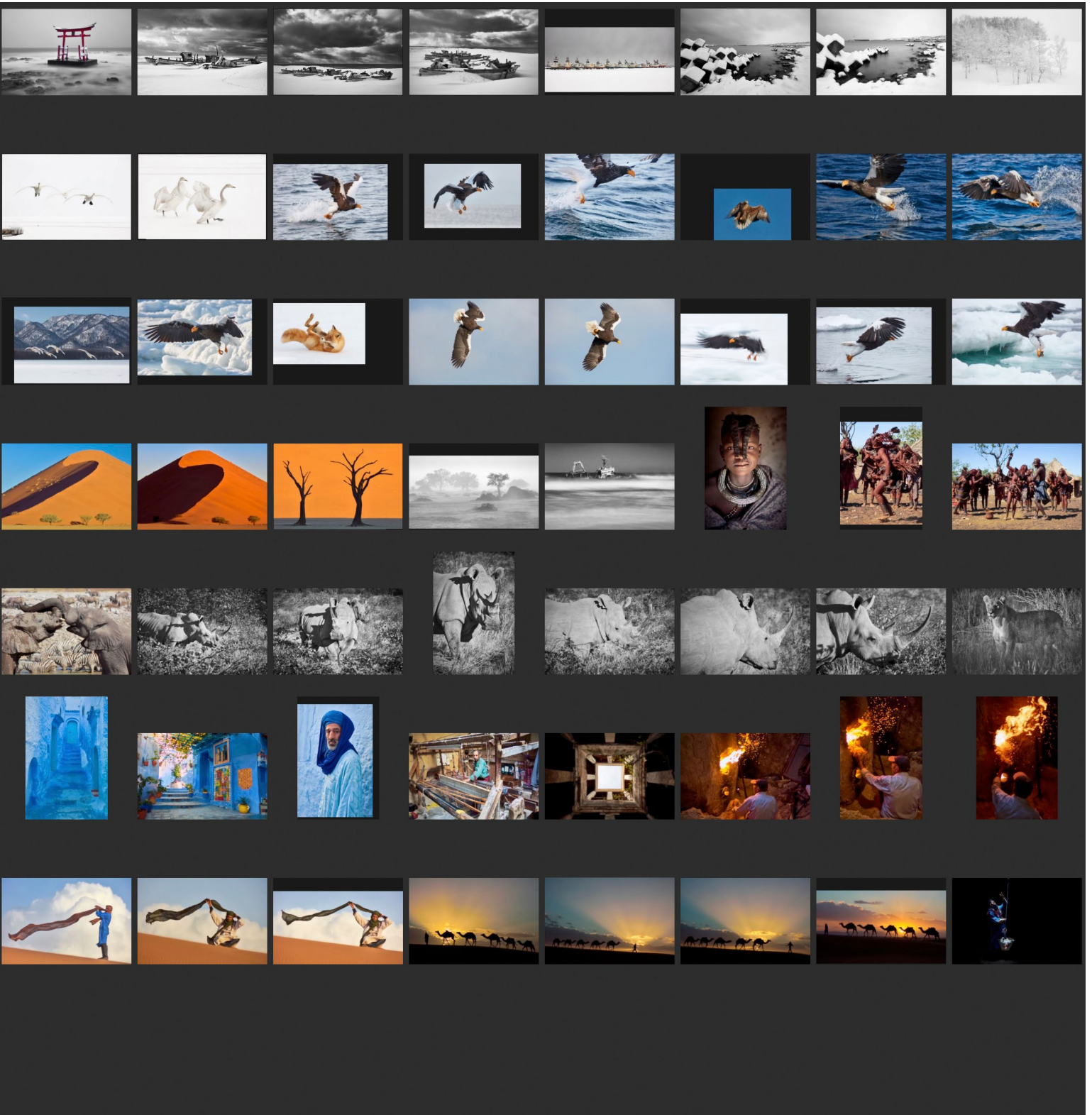
Attack the Packs

As I start my second pass, the first thing I do is look for groups of similar images. It's highly unlikely that I will include more than one of the same or similar subject unless the photos are both very special, so I can be pretty ruthless as I look through images of, for example, winter trees, Red-Crowned Cranes, Sea Eagles, and Camels in dunes etc.
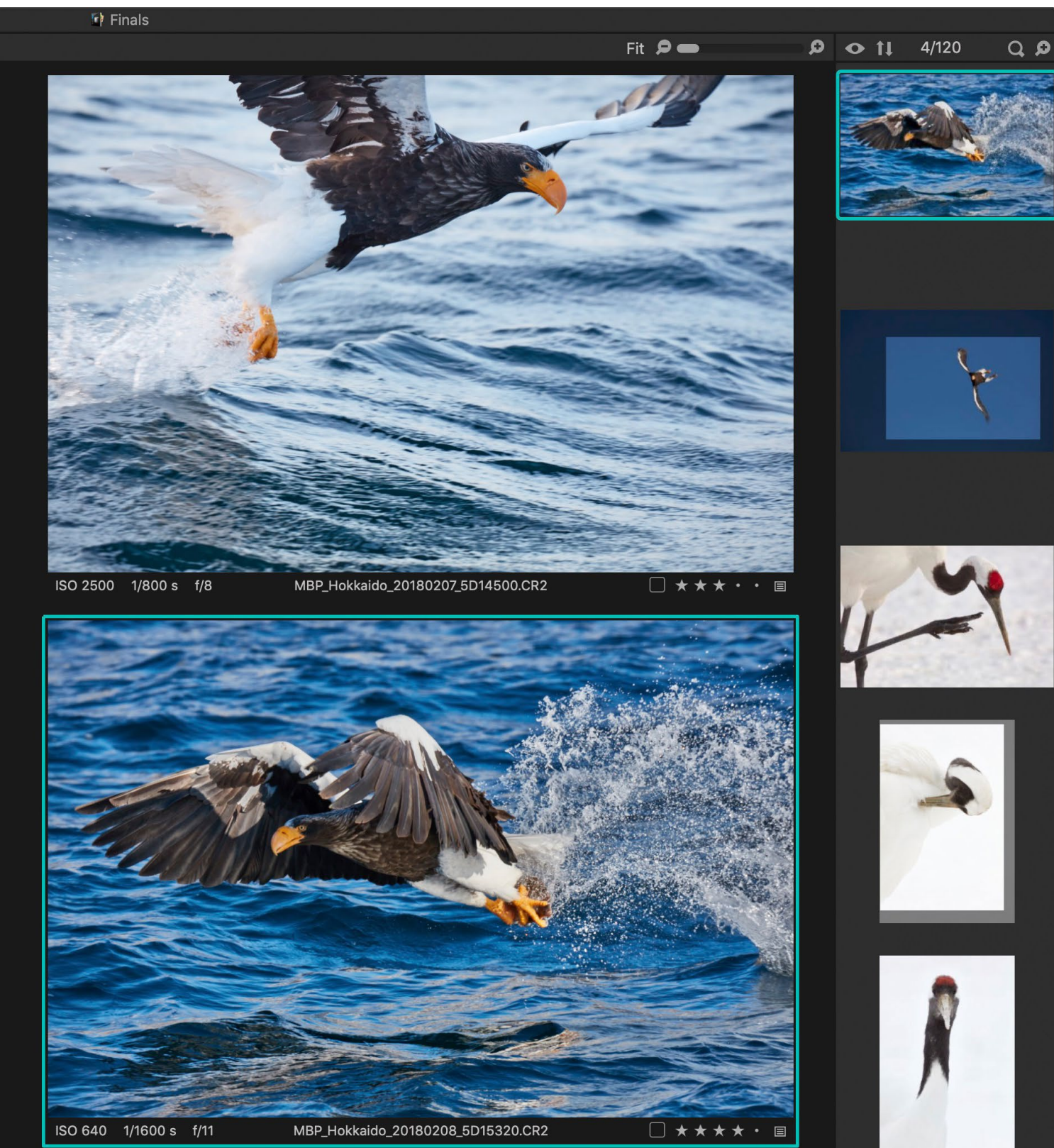
Multi-View

When the images are dispersed I hold down the Command key and select each of them, then ensuring I'm in Multi-View mode I can view the candidates together to see which are the stronger images. To me, out of this four it was easy to see that the bottom right image stood out from the group, so I removed the other three.
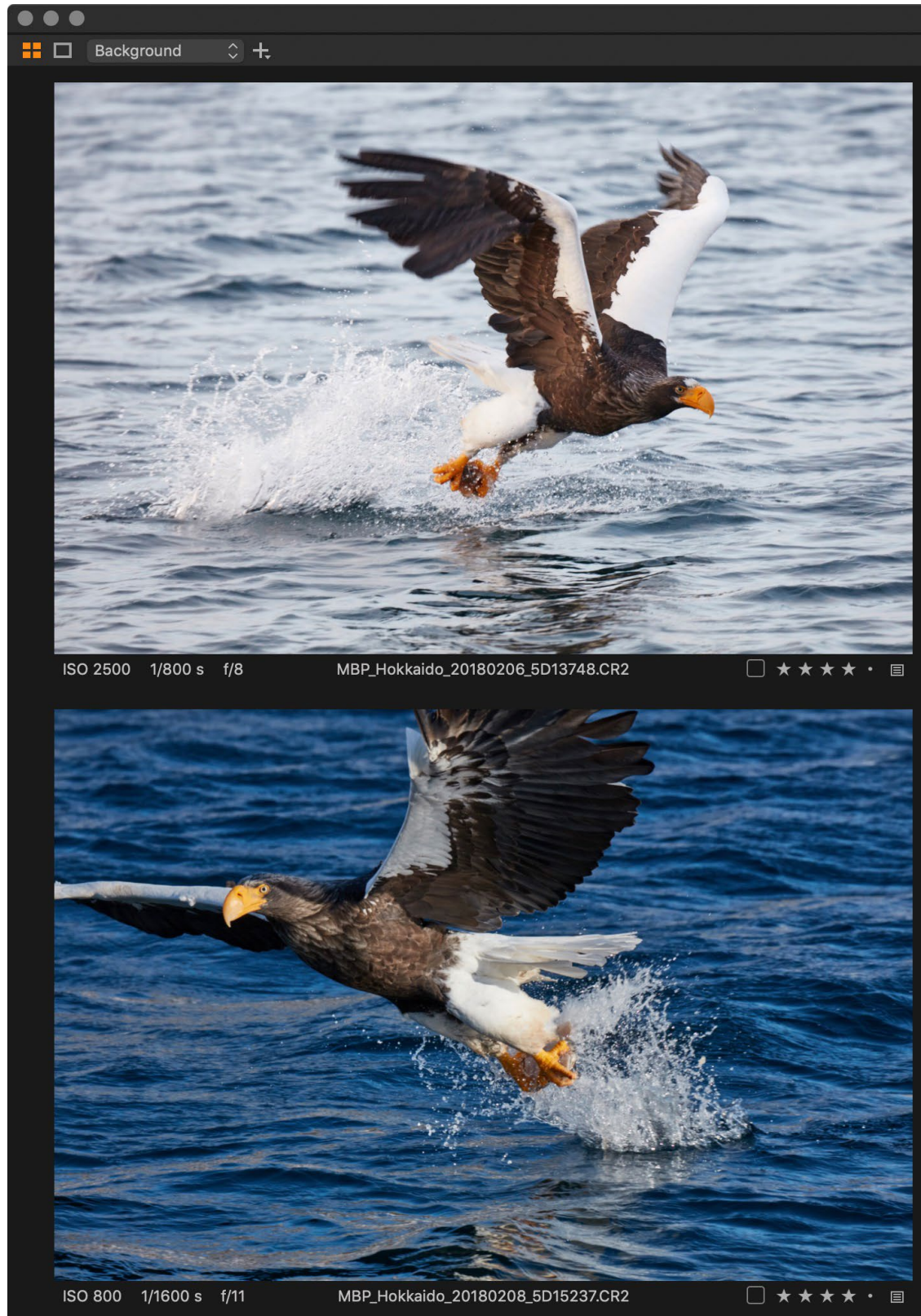
I finished my second pass having reduced the set of 120 images to just 44, almost one-third of my original selection, but to be honest, this is a pretty easy process, until this point, although it starts to get really difficult now that the list is condensed down this much.

There are still groups to attack, so the next thing I do is to see if I can just remove as many Namibia wildlife shots
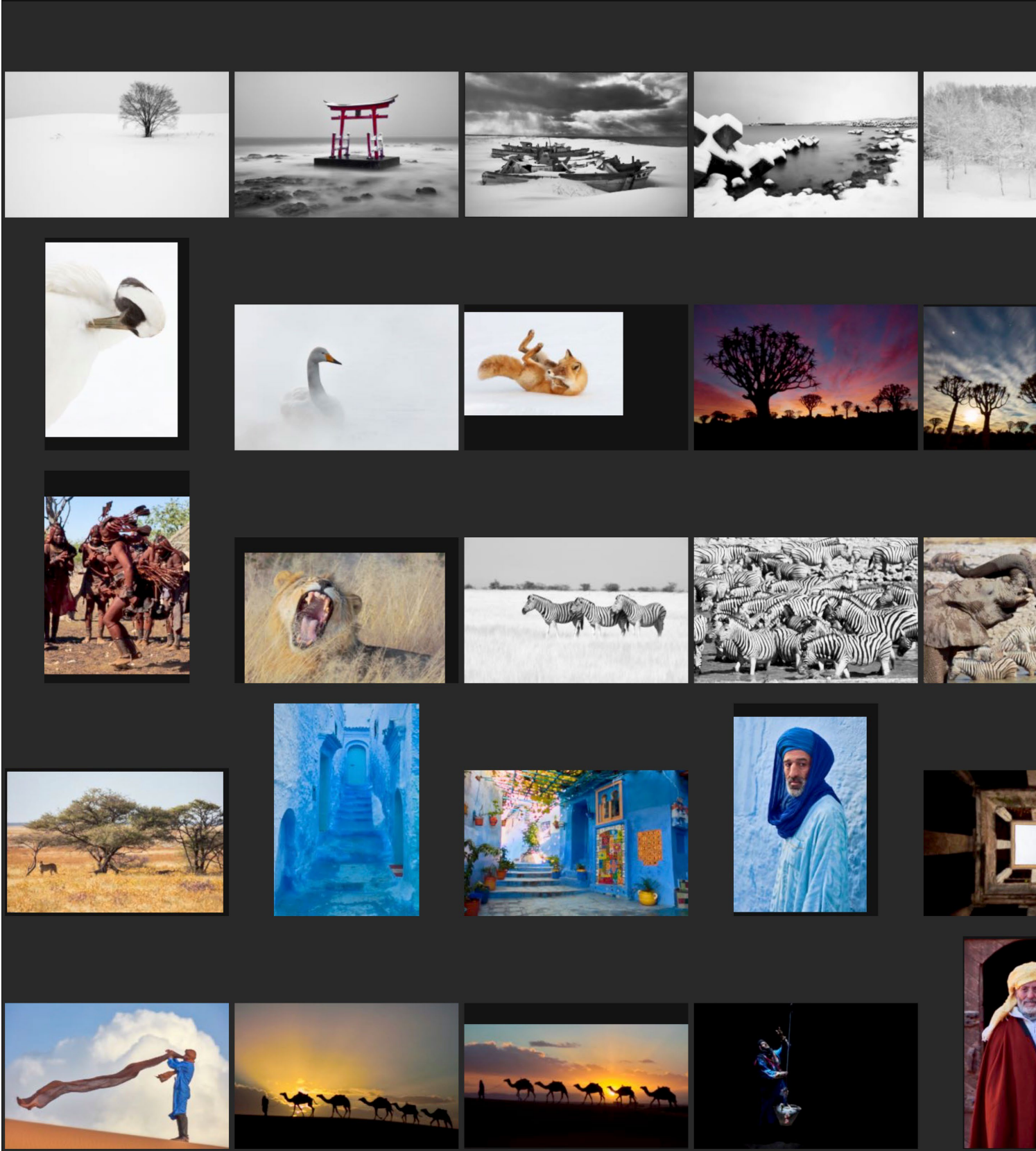
as possible, and I still have a number of images of the same subject or subject type, so these are obvious candidates, but they are still in the set because it's really hard to remove them at this point. I'm actually about to be called for dinner, so my best course of action right now is to save what I have in my third pass folder and seak the advice of my trusted critique, my wife, after we've eaten.
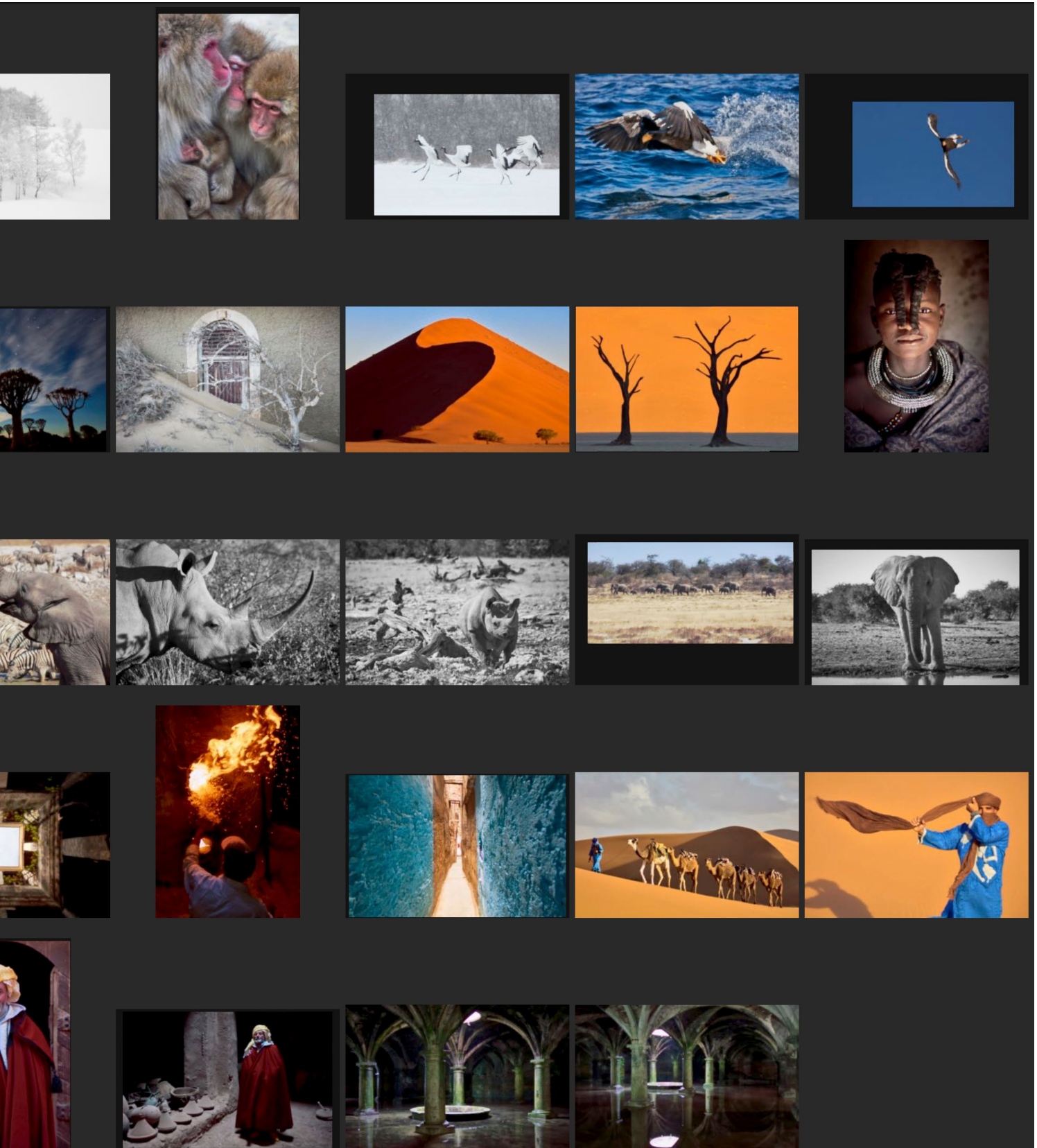
A Day Later

OK, so it's now a day later, and I sat with my wife after dinner last night, and went through my 44 images. I feel that having someone available to confer with, someone that you trust, but also that is able to give you honest feedback on your work is a vitally important part of this process.

My wife gets almost sadistic pleasure out of telling me that she doesn't like something when she doesn't, but when she does like something, she's equally as vocal, and I know it's coming from the right place.

Having said that, we don't agree on everything. Although her preferences are very much included in my final selection, she felt very strongly that I should

include the shot of the dancing Himba because of the dynamism, and because it's different from the work I often do. She also felt that I should remove the photos of the man in the well and the man in the adobe building from Morocco because I had these same two people in my top ten from last year.

While I completely agree with her, I really struggled with the idea of leaving the two images of the Moroccan men out, because I feel that they are strong images, and without a doubt in my mind, some of my best work from 2018. The dancing Himba image is strong too, but I feel that it's slightly more removed from my style than the other two, and when I viewed the final ten that I worked on with my

wife, I felt somewhat deflated, as though something was missing.

I'm a big believer in trusting our feelings with regards to sets of images. Whenever I'm whittling down a selection, I walk away from the computer for a while, then I watch a slideshow of my selection and literally take note of how I feel as each image appears on the screen. If it feels good to see the image, it should probably stay in, but if you detect a slight dip in your feelings, it's a good sign that it should be removed.

I also really struggled with the White Rhino shot. I wanted so badly to leave this in out of respect for the people that are protecting these wonderful animals, and in protest against the poachers and people buying that horn for reasons that should never result in the death of such a magnificent creature.

As a statement, my heart is screaming to leave it in, but artistically, and because of the restrictions I've set for myself, to get this down to a final ten images, with a heavy heart I removed the White Rhino shot as well.

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My 2018 Top Ten

And with that, we have my 2018 Top Ten photos, which I will share in a separate article next week, with a little information about each of the images.

This year's process was, I think, more difficult than usual, and I was saddened not only by removing the rhino shot but also by the fact that so many of my Japan winter tour images bit the dust. I love those tours and the images that I get on them, and I wonder if part of the reason is just that the tours are so much more distant in time, and the images from more recent tours feel more familiar. Or is it just that I have so many images from my winter tours, that the newer locations I'm visiting are just naturally winning over.

Compare To Previous Years

Another thing that I like to do, is to browse through my previous year collections, just to see how I'm doing. I have a folder in Capture One Pro with my Top Ten Collections for every year since 2007, so this is the twelfth time I've done this, and although I learn from it each year, it really does seem to be getting harder to
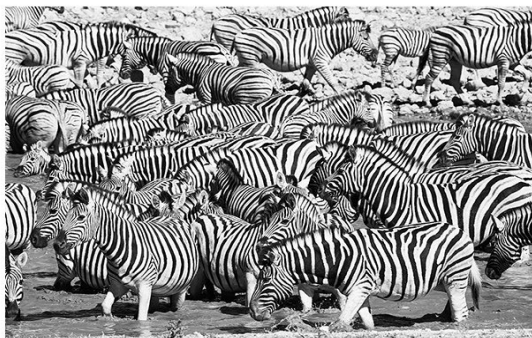
make the final choices.

I am also sitting here right now feeling incredibly fortunate and humbled as I browse through these years, and noticing how my work has changed. It has become so much more mature, as I've obviously matured as a photographer and a human being, over the last twelve years.

I doubt that anyone will be interested enough to take a look, but because all of my top ten posts are tagged with the

extra seven years will seem completely insignificant.

Of course, you don't have to have a number of previous year's selected to make this a useful exercise. When I first started it back in 2007 I had nothing to compare myself to, but in 2008, I had a benchmark, and it only grows from then on. I guess what I'm saying is that you won't have anything to look back on if you don't start doing this, and this year is as good a starting point as any.

Share Your Work!

Whether it's your first year, or your fifteenth, I'd love for you to share the results of your yearly top ten images by dropping a link into the blog post and also please do share your thoughts on the exercise, and anything that you may have learned from it.

word top ten, you can actually list all of my previous years' posts with this link. Note though that there is no post for 2010, as I didn't post it, although I did go back later and go through the selection process.

At some point, maybe when I'm so old that I find myself stuck indoors more than I'd like, if I'm lucky enough to live that long, I will go back and select a top ten for all years since 2000 when I started shooting digital. Maybe by then though I'll have so many yearly collections that those

If you haven't done your top ten yet, how about setting about the task and then share your work next week, when I share my ten images? I truly do believe that this is an important exercise for us to carry out each year, and it always helps us to learn more about ourselves as creative artists.

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