

This packet contains three articles for those members attending the 4th Wednesday January evening workshop on the subject of:

## Photographic **Scoring, Critiquing and Judging**

SFCC Photo Building #11 - 7:00 p.m.

Wednesday, January 27, 2010

Included are:

1. **An Analysis of Judging** by the late Dr. Eddy Sethna, 9 pages
2. **Creativity in the Digital Age** by Dr. Eddy Sethna, 3 pages  
*with reference 8 x 10 photo.*
3. **Photographic Criticism** by Edmund Burke Feldman,  
(from the book Varieties of Visual Experience), 8 pages.

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**Please study these articles thoughtfully and come to the workshop prepared to ask question and express your opinions.**

We will have a panel of three critiquers:

Rodger Hartman, Jean Timmermeister and Kelly Delanty

As a group we will score and critique a number of prints.

— *for more information*  
*contact:*  
*Will Murray (509) 838-1916*

# *An Analysis of Judging*

*By Eddy Sethna FRPS AFIAP*

## **The Negative Aspects**

The importance of judging, or what some would call selecting, or evaluating, cannot be denied. Where would club photography be without competitions, exhibitions and the granting of Distinctions? And yet, judges are almost invariably the object of criticism and denigration and rarely of praise. The subject never fails to arouse great passion and controversy. Knocking of judges by lecturers and writers has become endemic, but few have tried to study the subject and improve it.

Talks and articles on judging usually amount to individuals stating how they judge, and then seeking to justify their method as the best, without making any effort to compare their own techniques with those of others, and without trying to evolve from observations credible principles of judging.

When I took up photography seriously some 17 years ago, the subject of judging fascinated me, as it bore great resemblance to some aspects of my professional work as a psychiatrist, in which I dealt with abstract subjects which are difficult to measure or quantify. You cannot, for example, measure the severity of depression by means of an instrument as you can with blood pressure. In psychiatry we have developed sophisticated ways of dealing with such abstract subjects by the use of 'scales' and statistics, and I wondered whether I could apply my training to the study of judging in photography.

I knew from the outset that as so little established literature existed on the subject that anything other than systematic observations on judging would be inappropriate. I therefore set about making my own observations on judging at all levels from club competitions to international exhibitions and salons. I did this intensively over a period of between two and three years and have continued making these observations rather less rigorously ever since. Being trained in observing people and how they function and analyzing the underlying reasons and motives for their behavior, it proved to be an interesting and rewarding exercise.

I did not publicize my project, so the judging sessions I attended were in no way affected by my presence. Whenever I had the opportunity I talked to the judges without giving them any indication of my study. I can categorically say that we have some excellent judges and I am greatly indebted to them for providing me with the opportunity to analyze their methods and thus helping me to conceptualize better methods of judging.

I have tried to categorize my observations into those which might be described as negative aspects and those which are positive; and these are considered in turn.

I have observed many negative approaches adopted within the judging process, but will restrict my comments to four of the most significant ones.

These are:

**1 : 'Overvalued ideas'.**

**2 : Failure to see the picture as a whole.**

**3 : Critical rather than constructive approach.**

**4 : Consideration given to effort in getting or making of the picture.**

## **'Overvalued Ideas'**

This term, borrowed from psychiatry, describes well a common failing which arises as a consequence of a judge having an idea which he currently wishes to promote as being very important in picture making. Invariably the idea is valid but when held with great fervor, the judge becomes so preoccupied with it that he neglects all other aspects of the picture.

The best way to illustrate this failing is to state actual examples observed during the study.

1.1 : A judge was of the opinion that obliques (i.e. diagonals) are preferable to verticals and horizontals. He spent most of his time looking for obliques to make his point instead of getting on with the task of judging. This conclusion was justified by the fact that he used the term 'oblique' over 70 times in the session.

1.2 : Importance of background was stressed by another judge who then set about spending most of the time judging the background rather than the subject matter.

1.3 : Importance of a full range of tones from pure black to white in monochrome was stressed by a judge. However good, some prints which conveyed a great deal of mood, or which reflected a misty atmosphere, were rejected for not displaying a full tonal range, even though their feeling would have been destroyed if they fulfilled these criteria.

1.4 : It was the belief of another judge that most pictures should be light at the top and dark at the bottom as that is what normally occurs in natural lighting. Any picture bright at the base was marked down, including a stunning picture of a street scene where contra-jour lighting was reflected by the footpath.

1.5 : More than one judge expressed the view that monochrome is more creative than color as the world is in colour and it would require some creativity to translate it into black and white. This implied that color pictures only depicted reality and lacked creativity. This is obviously not true as colors can be, and have been, manipulated for creativity. The judges who have held this view were in fact those who favored monochrome to colour prints and that showed in their marking and giving of awards.

1.6 : Several judges held the view that unless a picture was 'creative' it was not worth entering. In consequence only a small proportion of the total entry was fully assessed and commented upon. One of those judges gave the top award to a very gimmicky picture to the surprise of the club members. When the judge was asked for his reasons, he remarked: "I am sorry if you cannot understand such a picture."

1.7 : A couple of judges felt that pictures portraying movement by the use of slow shutter speed, should have something sharp within them. However good such pictures were, they were marked down if they did not contain this element. It would be true to say that no such rule is followed by most judges and some famous and well-known pictures of this kind do not satisfy these criteria.

1.8 : Some judges were sticklers for 'print quality' by their own individual criteria. In such cases it meant that they gave little attention to the content of the picture or what it communicates, but only judged the picture on the quality of the printing.

1.9 : Some judges emphasized the importance of presentation, particularly the mounts used for prints. At times it appeared that assessment of presentation superseded that of the picture.

1.10 : In a natural history competition a judge expressed his view that unless a picture is taken in the wild, it is not a natural history picture although no such rule was stipulated by the club. The judge spent an inordinate amount of time guessing which pictures were taken in the wild and which were not (often reaching the wrong conclusion). This concentration prevented him from properly evaluating the pictures for their merit.

1.11 : In another natural history competition the judge stated the view that mammals are neglected by natural history photographers. It was obvious from the outset that photographs of mammals would be treated favorably even though some of the pictures of birds, insects and flowers were better, and that is what happened.

1.12 : Early in a session of judging a judge said that he did not like studio portraits, and he proceeded to pass over several pictures of this kind of subject without judging them at all. Many other judges expressed dislike of a particular subject and openly admitted that it was no use putting such pictures in front of them.

As a psychiatrist I often dislike patients referred to me. It would be inconceivable for me not to deal with them or treat them as fairly as any other patient. Should not the photographic judge be professional enough to assess categories of pictures of which he/she is not fond, and at least compare such pictures with each other?

The above examples demonstrate that however valid an idea may be, if it is 'overvalued' by a judge, then inevitably the judging will be restricted to a single issue and the rest will be neglected. It can also lead to judges making their own rules which are exclusive to them and applied indiscriminately.

## **Failure to see the Whole Image**

A fundamental principle established by Gestalt theory is that "The whole is not the sum of its parts". This is best explained by a couple of examples. When one appreciates the beauty of a building, the architectural qualities it possesses are not there in the individual bricks it is made of. It is only when they are put together as a structure that the whole acquires aesthetic qualities of its own. Similarly, a tune is not just a sequence of notes. When played together they produce a tune, the quality of which is not present in the individual notes. It is invariably the case that the qualities of the whole transcend the attributes of its components.

The same principle should apply to a photograph. When seen as a whole, as an entity in itself, it has qualities which far transcend the parts of which it is made. Regrettably, in photographic judging realization of this fact is sadly lacking. It appears that some judges look upon pictures as if they are just a collection of areas of different tones or colors. From their comments they seem to dissect the picture and closely scrutinize the different areas rather than respond to the picture as a whole.

So common and widespread is this practice that we have learned to accept it as an established way of judging. How often does one not hear judges comment at great length on 'a bright area on the edge of a picture', or 'the placement of hands in a portrait' ? These comments would be quite acceptable and valid, and useful to the audience for improving their work, but they must not be the main criteria of judging! They can only be secondary comments after the judge has evaluated the picture as a whole. If a picture is an object of art, it is the creation of an artist through which he or she endeavors to communicate; and that is the main and primary thing the judge should look for. That can only be done if the judge sees the picture as a whole, as an entity in itself, and not as a collection of areas of different tones and colors.

There is another way of looking at the same issue which gives it a different slant. In all art forms, certain media are used for the production of a piece of art. In painting it is the canvas, paints and brushes; in music it is either the voice or a musical instrument; and in dance it is the use of the body and dress. But these are just the media which the artist uses to express himself. What the artist conveys could be described as 'the message'. It is obvious that the true value of an artistic work is the message and the medium is no more than the vehicle employed to convey the message.

Photographic judging seems to be too preoccupied with the medium as if a photograph is just a technical exercise rather than an artistic expression. One accepts that possibly the medium in photography is more technical than say in painting and warrants some consideration, but if the medium is wholly or largely what is judged with little attention to the artistic expression then the whole point of judging is missed.

The realization of this fact first came to me when I saw a lady judge a club competition by placing a strong emphasis on artistic expression in the picture as a whole rather than technical details, precisely as advocated above. When I complimented her on her method she was rather surprised as she had not realized that her method was different from that of the other judges.

Repeatedly I found that many good judges work intuitively and they never analyzed their method or developed a system of judging. Unfortunately, intuitive behavior is not transferable or capable of further growth by rational thought.

## Constructive or Over-critical?

The modern view of testing in education is to find out what a candidate knows rather than what he does not. If a similar approach is taken in photographic judging, it should be to find out what is good in the picture and not what is wrong. **Many judges work on the premise that judging means finding out what is wrong and the best picture is the one with the least faults.** Comments from such judges can hardly be constructive.

The most important belief in psychology is that people learn, or change their behavior, only when rewarded; and if that be the case, emphasis must be on identifying good features and on constructive advice on how to overcome shortcomings.

I have been reliably informed that judges in flower arranging all have training before they start judging and are instructed to evaluate the good that they find in the flower arrangements and not what is wrong or make harsh or nasty comments. If a constructive approach is followed there is certainly never any room for nastiness, sarcasm or rudeness.

Even on rare occasions when criticism is warranted, it could be done very politely and in a constructive manner. I am sure that many potentially good photographers have been lost to club photography because of ill-advised comments of judges. Judging should be looked upon as an agreeable exercise where the judge's sole function is appreciation of the work he is asked to evaluate.

At one club I was invited to the work was not only poor but the total entry was so small that I could have finished the session in less than half an hour. I was given permission by the club to show some of my work strictly for the purpose of illustrating the points I was going to make on their pictures and not to make a talk on my work. It proved to be a most enjoyable evening, not only for the club, but for me. The only trouble was that they asked me to do the same thing again the following year.

## Effort put into the Picture

Many judges feel that in their marking they should include the effort on the part of the photographer either in getting the picture or in the making of it. It is hard to justify this approach. If effort put in by the photographer is included in judging, then why not a host of other considerations that would affect the picture-making, such as the equipment a photographer can afford; the amount of travel he can manage; or even his height which might be an advantage to him in taking pictures. It would be best if judging were restricted to what is put in front of the judge and had nothing to do with how it was made, what effort went into it or what advantages/disadvantages the photographer had.

The more important positive aspect of judging will be dealt with in the second part of this analysis.

## THE POSITIVE ASPECTS

In good judging I found that three attributes of the pictures were taken into account:

**A: What the picture communicates - the 'message' - with a weighting of 50-60%.**

**B: The content of the picture - the 'medium' - with a weighting of 30-35%.**

**C : The technical aspects of the picture - with a weighting of 10-15%.**

## The Message of the Picture

Appreciation of all art, including a photograph, is not primarily an intellectual exercise but an emotional one, which may be pleasurable, depressing, moving or frightening. It is the feelings, emotions and mood that a picture conveys which is the core of the 'message' and should form the basis of evaluation of a picture.

Good judging is done more by the heart than the head, with the ability to feel a picture and not just visualise it. It is the buzz and tingle which one experiences on seeing a good picture which is at the heart of judging.

More often than not it is difficult to verbalise feelings and emotions that a picture conveys, and not all judges are blessed with verbal facility. A judge who finds it difficult to express feelings and emotions about a picture should not feel he is alone but rather should realize that almost all people find difficulty in this area. Like all abilities, this one increases with practice and, once acquired, adds so much value to a judge's comments that all should strive to achieve it.

It is neither essential nor important for a judge to find out what the author of the picture was trying to communicate. What matters is what feelings and thoughts it engenders in the viewer - the judge. More often than not a good picture conveys different things to different people and credit should be given to a picture that manages to do that. Ambiguity of a picture could be its greatest charm by providing an image on which viewers can project their own thoughts, feelings and imagination.

Besides the feelings, emotions and mood, there are three other things that a picture may convey. These are:

**a: A statement or a story.**

**b: An idea or inventiveness.**

**c: Interpretation of the beauty or any other quality of the subject.**

A picture may convey a statement or a story as in photojournalism or documentary photography, but again the best pictures in this field are also laden with emotion. Pictures of refugees, such as the Vietnamese boat people, would fail if they did not convey their plight and suffering and this would be true of all forms of documentary photography such as that of social upheaval, war, famine or celebration.

A picture could convey an idea or inventiveness. This would be true of much of what one would call 'creative' photography where the photographer's creative input, whether achieved at the taking stage or by subsequent manipulation, is far more important than the recorded image. This does not imply that photographs must be manipulated to be creative, but rather that they must reflect the personal input of the photographer by providing an image on to which the viewer can project his own thoughts, fantasies and imaginations aroused by the image.

Lastly, the photographer can add meaning to a picture by his ability to interpret the beauty or otherwise of the subject he chooses to photograph. The results are often referred to as pictorial or even record photography. There is a tendency at present that anything that is not considered 'creative' or 'contemporary' has no place in photography. [Reminder: this article was written in 1992, well before the start of the digital era in photography] It would be a mistake to take this extreme view. How often judges say that what is good in a photograph exists in the subject matter and that the photographer only recorded it. This is a very narrow view. Different photographers interpret the same subject differently and some better than others, and good judging requires taking that into account.

To give an analogy. If a musician plays a classical masterpiece one could not say that he only played what was composed by someone else. We give full credit to how he has interpreted the composer's work. Similarly, a good photographer interprets in his own inimitable way the favourite attributes in the subject he photographs.

## **Picture Content and Treatment**

Has the photographer the ability to see what subject lends itself to a good photograph? What appears good to the eye does not necessarily make a good photograph. Different subjects have different degrees of being photogenic. How often does one not see a really good photograph of a subject which many of us would not have dreamt of taking? Even when a subject is quite commonly selected for a photograph, like a portrait or a landscape, it is the choice of the person or the scene which the photographer makes that will determine the success or failure of a picture. Often it is the uniqueness or rarity of the subject which will make it interesting and worthy of high marking.

Equally important to the choice of subject is how it is dealt with and that includes:

- \* **The choice and control of lighting - one of the most important aspects of picture making.**
- \* **What is included in and excluded from the picture.**
- \* **The choice of background, setting or environment for the chosen subject.**
- \* **Sharpness or lack of it in the picture as a whole or in different parts of the picture.**
- \* **The interpretation of movement.**
- \* **The juxtaposition of tones and colours.**
- \* **Exploitation of perspective.**
- \* **The critical timing of taking the picture.**
- \* **The arrangements of the different components of the picture - the composition.**
- \* **Exploitation of pattern and texture.**
- \* **The choice of format - horizontal or vertical; and the shape and dimension of the picture.**

## **Judging Technical Aspects**

The following should be considered in assessing the technical merits of the picture:

- 1: Handling of tonal range and colour rendition.**
- 2: Correct exposure.**
- 3: Sharpness of the picture - depending on its appropriateness to the subject.**
- 4: Quality of processing.**
- 5: Retouching.**
- 6: Appropriateness of choice of black & white or colour.**
- 7: Presentation of the picture: mounts for prints, cropping of slides.**

It can be argued that technical merit of the picture should be a prerequisite to assessment of artistic qualities which has been so strongly emphasised up to this point. In a sense this is true but in reality it does not present difficulties.

Technical ability is acquired far more easily than aesthetic. In consequence it shows that those capable of great artistic expression are rarely lacking in technical ability. What is more often seen is that those lacking in technical ability are also unable to excel in artistic interpretation. It is only in exceptional cases that an outstandingly good picture artistically has to be rejected because of very poor technical execution.

A weighting of the three main areas of judging has been suggested at the beginning of this discussion; and in most cases that would be appropriate. However, good judging does require some flexibility in the weighting. If a picture reveals an exceptionally high standard in one of the three paramount features, it would be entirely appropriate to modify the weighting in recognition.

A photograph which by its very nature did not have a strong emotional message but presents a superb example of timing in taking the picture would certainly deserve an extra weighting in b) and c).

# **Conclusion**

Although I have stressed the three paramount criteria by which a picture ought to be properly judged, this by no means implies that there should be rules for what judges should like or dislike. Judging is, and always will remain, a subjective exercise. This is why we have three or more judges in major exhibitions and salons so that different tastes and interests are fully represented.

However, what is suggested is the need for agreement on what judges should take into consideration when judging and the three prime parameters described should form the basis for it.

A good example of what matters in judging exists in ice skating as we so often see on television. Judges are asked to mark on 'technical merit' and 'artistic interpretation'. If, as in photography, judges were allowed to mark on any aspect of ice skating they considered important, then it is quite possible that one judge who believed in the choice of music as the most important thing would mark wholly or largely on the music chosen. Any judge who considers the choice of dress by the skaters as most important will mark more on this entirely different issue.

Such absurdities abound in photographic judging. Marking is assessed according to rules made by the individual judge, entirely personal and exclusive to him/her, or marking is based on the judge's current fads, prejudices and overvalued ideas.

Given a consensus on what should count in marking and weighting it would help entrants to know what was expected of them and the results would be more consistent and fairer.

## **Other Issues in Judging**

There are a few remaining issues that need to be considered. These are:

### **1: How should judges decide major awards?**

A major problem can arise in major exhibitions and salons where the total entries run into thousands. If it is an open exhibition covering every kind of subject and type of photography, it would appear to be very difficult, if not impossible, to pick one image as the best of the lot.

If the judges pick a landscape, there will be a score of other landscape pictures which could be considered as equally good; and viewers might ask why choose a landscape when there are dozens of equally good pictures on other subjects.

I have found that, to overcome this dilemma, judges on occasions choose a totally 'way out' image for the top award which more often than not does not represent the total entry nor does it possess the highest artistic merit. The lame excuse made by judges tends to be that it is we, the viewers, who are incapable of understanding the image of their choice. This just will not do. In my opinion it is the most arrogant statement that one could make.

I believe that judges sometimes feel that they will be judged by the awards they give and on some occasions, to appear 'with it', they choose a 'way out' or an outrageous image for an award. However, it must be said that it is a formidable, if not impossible, task to choose one image as the best from an entry of thousands.

The solution may well be to give the top award to the most successful entrant rather than the so-called best picture. This can be done by giving an award to the entrant who has the highest total score from the customary four prints or slides entered by that person. It is more than likely that the highest total score is shared by several entrants. In that case, the judges would see each of these entrants' set of four pictures together and decide which set is the best. In practice this is much easier than picking just one image.

This will also remedy the top award going to a picture which may have been produced by chance or fluke. The principles of giving awards should be based on rewarding the most competent and artistic photographer rather than the picture.

### **1: Should print workers only be chosen as judges for prints and slide workers for slides?**

Theoretically it should make no difference as a good judge can appreciate and evaluate a good picture whether it be a print or a slide. But, having said that, photography is relatively more technical than other art forms, and it might be preferable, though not essential, to have a judge who does the type of work he is asked to judge.

Quite often judges who have never done print work make comments which show their lack of knowledge in that medium and that greatly diminishes the judge's credibility.

### **3: Should judges be practicing photographers and should they also be current exhibitors?**

If we wish to improve the standard of judging, it would be best if such conditions were stipulated. If judges who are not practicing photographers and current exhibitors continue to act as judges for years to come, they might adopt outdated ideas when photography has moved on since they were exhibitors. I would think that many judges would not agree with this view, and that has been impressed upon me on many occasions. But my observations certainly support my contentions.

### **4: How can judges be made to improve their standards?**

The only way judges will change their ways and methods would be for us to reward them for their effort and expertise. This implies some form of recognition or some other form of reward, including possibly payment, by the standard attained. If judges are to be rewarded in some way, a system of monitoring would become a necessity. The way to do that is a subject in itself!

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## **Edulji (Eddy) Sethna 1925—2006**

Dr Eddy Sethna was born on 3 December 1925 in Bombay, India. He won two scholarships which entirely funded his medical school training and he qualified with MB BS from Bombay in 1951.

In his early fifties, Eddy returned to his boyhood interest of photography as an antidote to the stresses of his job. In retirement, he became a leader and inspiration to the legions of amateur photographers taking tentative steps into the field of digital photography. He approached digital photography as he had approached medicine, studying the Adobe Photoshop computer program systematically so that he understood its ever evolving capabilities. He willingly offered one-to-one teaching sessions, wrote four books (two on paper and two on CD), was instrumental in the formation of the Royal Photographic Society's Digital Imaging Group, was founding chairman of the Eyecon Group and served as vice-president of the Royal Photographic Society. More recently the Royal Photographic Society awarded Eddy its prestigious Fenton Medal and Honorary Membership in recognition of his huge contribution to photography in the UK. He had numerous acceptances in international exhibitions and took great pride in the gold medal he was awarded shortly before his death in recognition of his creativity.



*"I started photography at the age of fifty as a form of therapy for the stresses of my occupation as a Consultant Psychiatrist. Photography has become a very important part of my life ever since.*

*Some four years ago I started digital imaging not knowing anything about computers whatsoever. I feel that with digital imaging I "make" images rather than just "take" them and I am more able to put my ideas, fantasies, emotions and feelings into my images. Of all the interests and hobbies I have had in my life, I have not enjoyed anything more than digital imaging.*

*I now exclusively use digital imaging for producing all my pictures. I prefer not to use filters as that does not illustrate my creativity. What I like to do most is to produce images which are not highly manipulated and look more like the images I used to produce before I started digital imaging."*

# *Creativity in the Digital Age*

*By Eddy Sethna FRPS AFIAP*

With the advent of digital imaging the scope for creativity in photography is without limit and a discussion on this subject is now more than appropriate. Creativity needs to be seen in its historical context. Ever since the inception of photography there has been the false assumption that photography depicts reality. This is far from the truth. For several decades only black and white photography existed, although everything photographed was in color as the world is in colour. The black and white images hardly depicted reality and the photographer had to interpret the world in colour in black, white and shades of grey.

In the modern world the color passport photograph is probably the best example of photography purporting to depict reality, but does it? Most would admit it to be the least flattering way of presenting a portrait as most facilities for taking passport photographs have the camera far too close to the face, which produces a distorted perspective with a large nose and small ears. Immigration officers hardly ever see faces at such close quarters and must need considerable skill to spot the likeness. In this day and age it is not a good example of depicting reality.

I would suggest that depicting reality in photography never existed and is a myth. If photography was meant only to depict reality it would have been so boring that club photography, the RPS, Salons and Exhibitions of Photography would not have existed. From the outset photographers have been altering and enhancing images to make them more aesthetically and artistically appealing, turning photography into an art form. To understand photography as an art form we need to look at other arts like music and literature. In my view all art forms affect us emotionally and, to a very limited extent, intellectually. This emotional reaction affects our mood and feelings, makes us happy or sad and creates in us, in modern terminology, a **high**. I often say when I have listened to good music that I have had my **fix**. Photography is no exception to this; images convey mood and feelings and, at times, complex emotions which are difficult or impossible to verbalize and which are not always pleasurable. In some instances we admire the cleverness of the photographer for incorporating, for example, symbolism in an image. Though the last two points might appear to be intellectual, it is the emotional counterpart that moves us.

We are now in a position to describe creativity. It is the act of altering an image as seen to make it aesthetically appealing or artistic. Creativity is expressed at several stages in the production of an image and starts at the taking stage by :

- a) the choice of subject matter; a whole article could be written on this topic, but by way of example the image **Post**, was taken by my friend Hugh Milsom MFIAP in the early 80's and has been highly successful in Exhibitions and Salons. But who would have thought of making an exhibition image of a rotting post? A straight print from the negative is also shown and illustrates the degree of creativity in the final image.
- b) the selection of the camera settings (aperture, shutter speed, focal length, etc.).
- c) the selection of view point.
- d) the exploitation of perspective (the relative positioning of camera and subject matter).
- e) framing (what is included or not included in the image).
- f) the choice of medium - color or black and white.

The scope for creativity is even greater at the processing stage, either in the darkroom or digitally. Although the degree of creativity possible in the dark room is considerable and in digital imaging practically limitless, creativity at the taking stage remains of fundamental importance.

If what is said above is true the so called **straight** image has never existed, and all images are creative to a greater or lesser extent. In a **straight** image the amount of creativity might be less, but it's quality could out-class a so called **creative** image.

Quite often images which most people would accept as **straight** are anything but straight. Examples of such images are shown in the work of Hugh Milsom and Peter Clark and my own image in **Cumbrian Landscape**. In the image **Road to the Cuillins** by Hugh Milsom, the patch of light on the road never existed and was created in the darkroom along with the dramatic sky. This was done in the early 80's; if done now digitally many would say it was cheating.

All of the four final images would look perfectly straight to any viewer, but when compared with the corresponding images produced directly from the negative or digital file it can be seen that they are anything but **straight** and are highly creative.

In my opinion so called **straight** images and **creative** images are equally valid and of equal worth and importance. The only difference between them is the nature and level of creativity. These two categories of images, therefore, should not be put in different classes in competitions and exhibitions.

Creativity which follows the taking stage in the darkroom or digitally has two aspects and although there is a significant difference between them there is also considerable overlap. These two aspects of creativity are best explained through illustrations, but must first be defined. They are :

- a) Alteration of the elements of the image. This means altering the structure or appearance of the component parts of the image. Examples of how this may be achieved include the use of filters, the use of fundamental techniques to alter contrast, enhance or suppress details, modify color and color saturation, in addition to the use of specialist techniques such as posterization, etc., and by the choice of paper, gloss or matt, smooth or textured on which to print the image.
- b) Alteration of the subject matter or the content of the image. This implies a composite image made up of two or more images, the combination of which creates something which in reality did not exist, but could have, or to produce an image which could never have existed in reality. Composite images may be of two types, those in which the primary image is complimented by the inclusion of a secondary image and those which are wholly made up of several images.

It cannot be said after reading this article that I believe that creative images are in any way superior to straight images. However, I find that in National and International exhibitions in this country far too few **creative** images are selected and are very rarely given top awards. This is not the case abroad in my experience. This article is not the right place to go into further details of why this is the case, but I very much hope that this article helps in redressing the situation.

### **Record Photography**

While we are on the subject of exhibitions, competitions and judging, if a work is not to be submitted for selection or competition or included in a lecture the terms **straight**, **creative**, pictorial, record etc are redundant.

As I have labored on the subject of **straight** and **creative** photography I would also like to express my views on the term **record** photography and again in the context in competitions and exhibitions. I find that judges call images **record** photographs depending upon the subject matter; for instance architecture and natural history are supposed to be record photography, but in both these categories pictures could be highly artistic and indeed would need to be if they are to succeed. Subject matter alone does not determine whether or not an image is a record photograph.

In my opinion a record photograph is one where the purpose of taking the image is either stated or implied and is solely for the purpose of recording and may or may not have artistic quality. Examples would be a passport photograph and illustrations made for a technical book. A picture of a bird taken to illustrate different types of feathers for a book on birds would be a record image, but if submitted for selection in a natural history competition or exhibition it may or may not be viewed as a record photograph, and if it is truly a record picture as described here it will not succeed.

Snaps taken on a holiday for the sole purpose of recording the sights visited are pure record photographs and may or may not have artistic quality. Few of my holiday pictures and those of other photographers are taken for the purpose of recording the sights that we saw, but with the intention of creating an artistic image. It would be wrong therefore to say that holiday pictures are record photography; it is not the subject

matter which makes the photograph a record shot, but the purpose for which the picture was taken and invariably this is not with the intention of creating a piece of art.

The following images and their captions illustrate the points made in this article.

I often spend a lot of time and effort to work out a creative image in my mind and have always wondered about the thought processes of some of the great modern artists such as Picasso or Dali. As an exercise, I made myself think like Dali and used the basic elements seen in his paintings to produce **Salvador Barbequi** without plagiarizing any of his existing paintings.

I can describe what each of these images mean to me, but I have refrained for two reasons. Firstly because this article would get inordinately long and secondly any art form should allow the viewer to project his own thoughts, ideas and imagination on a piece of art

I have been a long standing student of life after death and I often imagine what different places would be like up there. I thought of an empty plateau occupied by similar minded people; **Pilgrims** is my impression of a place inhabited by Muslim spirits.

I believe that objects or a piece of art need no explanation by the author and it is for the viewer to project their own thoughts, feeling and imagination on the artistic creation. I therefore asked my wife what she saw in the image, **Fantasy**, when I first produced it. She liked it and praised the image unlike her usual sharp, critical comments, She felt that the young woman in the picture had once lived in the house shown in the background, but had died prematurely and had returned in spirit form to play with her beloved doves. Though this picture has been very successful in various International exhibitions, when put in a club competition the only comment of the judge was that the dove in the tree was too sharp and needed to be soft like the rest of the background!

Both images are composites. The individual components have no message or artistic merit, but when put together they have strong impact. The meaning of the title **Legacy** might not be apparent. What I had in mind was that Chi Guevara is questioning the destitute as to whether he was the legacy of the several decades of communism which he co-founded with Fidel Castro. My visit to Cuba produced a lot of conflicting emotions and the images from that country are representative of that fact.

The background image for **Cemetery Pair** was taken in an old cemetery and was given a painterly treatment and the nuns were put in to add interest and to provide a focal point. The original color image was converted to black and white as it transformed the image to my liking.

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#### **Edulji (Eddy) Sethna 1925—2006**

Dr Eddy Sethna was born on 3 December 1925 in Bombay, India. He won two scholarships which entirely funded his medical school training and he qualified with MB BS from Bombay in 1951.

In his early fifties, Eddy returned to his boyhood interest of photography as an antidote to the stresses of his job. In retirement, he became a leader and inspiration to the legions of amateur photographers taking tentative steps into the field of digital photography. He approached digital photography as he had approached medicine, studying the Adobe Photoshop computer program systematically so that he understood its ever evolving capabilities. He willingly offered one-to-one teaching sessions, wrote four books (two on paper and two on CD), was instrumental in the formation of the Royal Photographic Society's Digital Imaging Group, was founding chairman of the Eyecon Group and served as vice-president of the Royal Photographic Society. More recently the Royal Photographic Society awarded Eddy its prestigious Fenton Medal and Honorary Membership in recognition of his huge contribution to photography in the UK. He had numerous acceptances in international exhibitions and took great pride in the gold medal he was awarded shortly before his death in recognition of his creativity.



*"I started photography at the age of fifty as a form of therapy for the stresses of my occupation as a Consultant Psychiatrist. Photography has become a very important part of my life ever since.*

*Some four years ago I started digital imaging not knowing anything about computers whatsoever. I feel that with digital imaging I "make" images rather than just "take" them and I am more able to put my ideas, fantasies, emotions and feelings into my images. Of all the interests and hobbies I have had in my life, I have not enjoyed anything more than digital imaging.*

*I now exclusively use digital imaging for producing all my pictures. I prefer not to use filters as that does not illustrate my creativity. What I like to do most is to produce images which are not highly manipulated and look more like the images I used to produce before I started digital imaging."*



Milsom Post - Original



Milsom Post - Final



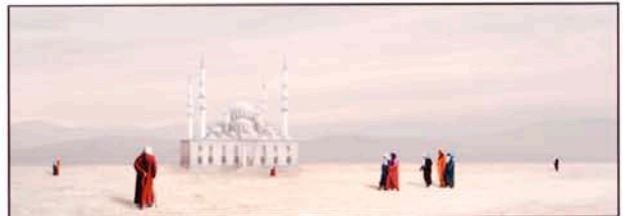
Clark - Lindisfarne -Original



Clark - Lindisfarne - Final



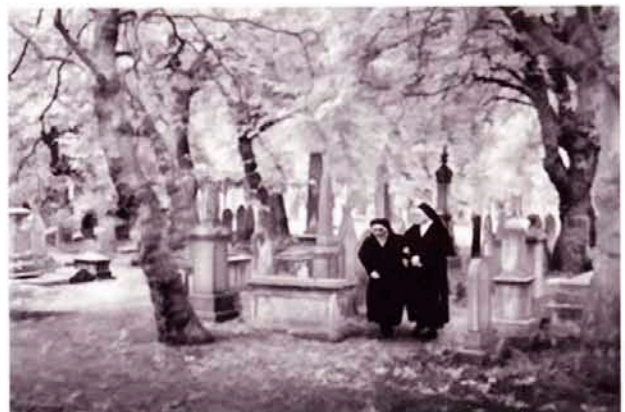
Salvador Barbequi



Pilgrims



Legacy



Cemetery Pair



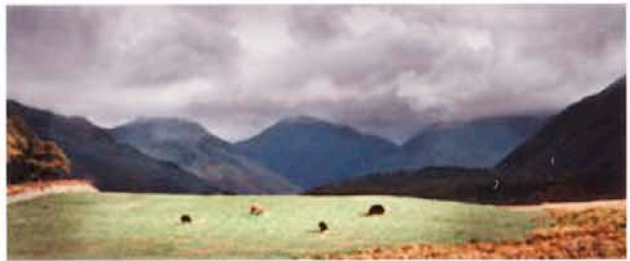
Milsom - Road to Cuillins - Original



Milsom - Road to Cuillins - Final



Cumbrian Landscape - Original



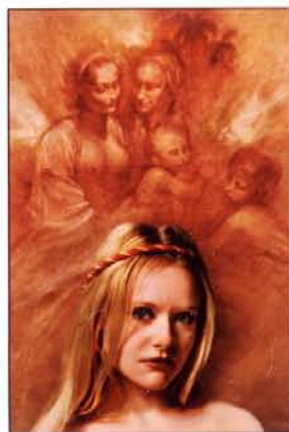
Cumbrian Landscape - Final



Fantasy



Wilderness Child



Daydreamer



Odd-Man-Out

*From the book*

## *Varieties of Visual Experience*

*by Edmund Burke Feldman*

### *Photographic Criticism*

The criticism of photography is largely undeveloped for three reasons. First, in its perfected form the medium is only about two-thirds of a century old—hardly long enough to have developed a sophisticated body of aesthetic theory. Second, most scholarly writing about photography deals either with technical questions or the history of photography, that is, the history of camera equipment and developing processes and the biographies of famous photographers. Third, in its struggle to emancipate itself from the parent art of painting, photographic criticism has tended to avoid the aesthetic theories developed in connection with the older fine arts. It should be added, too, that conventionally trained art historians and critics have not paid much attention to the evolution of photography as an art. Although they often mention the influence of photography on Courbet, or on Degas and the French Impressionists, they rarely discuss the role of photography in our visual culture as a whole; they ignore the changes photography has wrought on contemporary modes of seeing and thinking. Without addressing these questions, however, photographic criticism hardly rises above shop talk; the central problems of aesthetic value are encountered only if the critic deals with photography as it confronts the major questions of mankind and society.

The battle to recognize photography as a full-

fledged art form was fought and won years ago—by Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen, Beaumont Newhall, Minor White, Helmut Gernsheim, John Szarkowski, Aaron Scharf, Peter Pollack, Van Deren Coke, and numerous other distinguished photographers, historians and museum curators. The winning of this battle had important consequences for criticism: membership in the fine arts “club” meant that photographs could be judged, in general, like other works of visual art. The early status of photography as a bastard art form had exempted the medium from serious consideration according to the formalist, expressivist or instrumentalist grounds discussed, for example, in the chapters on art criticism in this book. Now it is clear that, as with painting or printmaking, differences of medium and technique do not create for photography a wholly new set of aesthetic expectations. And the reason is that while sources of artistic form may vary, human needs with respect to any visual presentation are remarkably similar and consistent. So the general factors that make a photograph good or important are similar to those that operate in the case of drawings, paintings and prints.

But if the criteria of greatness in the various forms of visual art are generally the same, there are nevertheless “local” factors that operate more or less uniquely in the case of photography. These grow out of the technical features of the camera, the physical character of the photographic print, and the economic factors that govern the reproduction, distribution and ownership of photographs. We should especially emphasize the small size of the photograph—its portability and accessibility as a hand-held object. Its size relates it to the medieval breviary as well as to the modern book or magazine. In any discussion of the photograph as a work of art, therefore, we should remember its graspable quality and hence its capacity to enter our experience as a tactile as well as an optical object. The photograph is a possession that can be carried everywhere because it fits into a wallet or purse. Indeed, photographs or photoreproductions have been exchanged like paper money. Like money, photographs can be counted and examined in absolute privacy. And, like books, they can be privately studied and savored. Yet the photograph can also be vastly enlarged. As large-scale images for the information and display industries, photographs are perhaps the most public of visual art forms. Among the modern media, neither cinema nor television has so wide a range of size and accessibility. Only the “stillness” of the photograph, its tendency to “freeze” rather than mimic motion, prevents it from entering the dimension of continuous time and thus playing as large a role in the shaping of popular consciousness as television and cinema.

We come, then, to the distinctively photographic criteria of excellence. What are the aesthetic qualities of a great photograph as opposed to the technical traits of a very fine photographic print? We must, of course, judge the merit of a photograph according to

its ability to meet the opportunities of the medium and to overcome the limitations presented by its technology. But it is important not to forget the above-mentioned discussion of photography as a cognitive art, an art that affords us a unique mode of knowing through a man-made way of seeing. Ideally, therefore, a theory of photographic excellence should help us discern the connections between technique and cognitive quality; that is, it should enable us to recognize quality in the interactions between medium and meaning.

In my opinion, a theory of photographic criticism must begin with the classical Greek doctrine of *mimesis*. Accordingly, the goodness of a photograph would lie in the validity of its claim to be a truthful imitation of reality. That truthfulness must first be created in the person of the artist. Only then can it be carried out with the tools and in the medium of his art. Both Plato and Aristotle recognize the role of the artist as a creator rather than a mirror or recorder of reality: the artist acts intellectually upon nature and natural materials, bringing to completion what nature has not finished. This accords with our notion of the photographer as a person who interferes with reality by "taking" pictures, by stopping natural action, by isolating fragments of natural appearance, and by imposing his own vision upon reality in "framing" sets of objects and forms. While a specific image of reality does not preexist in the photographer's mind, an artistic order or form does preexist to the extent that the photographer is mentally prepared to recognize and imitate the authentic and morally effective operation of universal laws. He sees these laws in the appearance of natural processes and in the visible products of human work. In other words, the photographic image or icon does not come ready-made; it requires the agency of the artist (in this case, the photographer), a person who possesses the requisite skills and mental development to impose form on matter.

Given this definition of the photographer as artist, what can we say about good and bad photographs? I think we can identify certain qualities that photographs must possess uniquely to be judged excellent. These qualities can be designated as positions on six bipolar scales or *continua* in which the first pole stands for a deficiency or minimum of quality and the second pole represents its plenitude. Since a given photograph—even a masterpiece—is unlikely to fulfill all of our ideal expectations we have to make an estimate of its cumulative achievement on all the scales in order to form an overall judgment of the merit of a particular photographic work.

Following are the scales I propose for estimating or judging photographic excellence: (1) from surface to depth, (2) from optical to tactile, (3) from pattern to idea, (4) from part to whole, (5) from singular to typical, and (6) from copy to original. The first three scales are meant to consider technical qualities to the extent that they are seen as vehicles of formal, cogni-

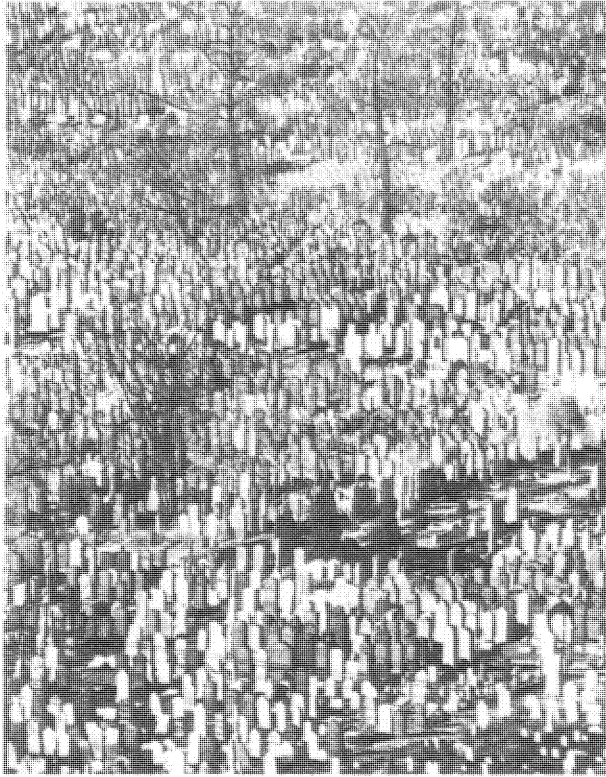
tive or expressive value. The last three scales are meant to suggest the larger, conceptual considerations which enter into the evaluation of a photograph that meets our technical requirements. A photograph that "scores high" on any one of these scales would have to be interesting; a high evaluation on several scales would testify to the possibility of a masterpiece. The discussion in Chapter Sixteen, dealing with *Kinds of Critical Judgment*, may be helpful to the reader in justifying and applying general criteria of excellence to the evaluation of outstanding work of photographic art.

#### FROM SURFACE TO DEPTH

Obviously, this does not refer to depth-of-field, a matter of the right aperture and focal length of the lens. Photographic depth can be defined as the volumetric quality of form, the lack of which is felt as thinness, flatness or lightness. Lightness should not be confused with airiness or luminosity. Here it means an unconvincing representation of the mass or specific gravity of forms—a persistent problem in all pictorial and planographic art and especially in photography. To some extent, lightness or thinness is a technical fault due to improper exposure and/or poor lighting. But it is more fundamentally the product of the photographer's failure to visualize the hidden forces, the invisible tensions and strains, that contribute to the weight and shape of an object; it results also from an inability to account photographically for the distribution of objects in space. The formal satisfactions that a good print can yield depend to a considerable extent on the capacity of the photographer to represent three-dimensional volumes with a monocular instrument. Our pleasure in the pictures of Edward Weston or Ansel Adams, for example, relies importantly on their masterful control of the gradations of light that seem to give us the physical substance and spatial location of forms.

#### FROM OPTICAL TO TACTILE

The reality of matter is most confidently recognized through the feel or tactility of forms. Yet photography is an art that must approach reality from a distance and from a wholly visual standpoint. Furthermore it employs a developing process that subtracts light. Painting has the decided advantage of being able to construct forms either by building up lights or adding shadows, or both. But the photographer is caught between a rock and a hard place: he has to rely almost exclusively on optical detail to suggest the weight and texture of reality; at the same time the chemistry of photography tends to darken his print and to eliminate detail. So the photographer is always engaged in seeking an optimal balance between chiaroscuro and the accumulation of visual facts. The connoisseur is obliged to judge his success. We know, of course, how the grain of photographic emulsions and papers is



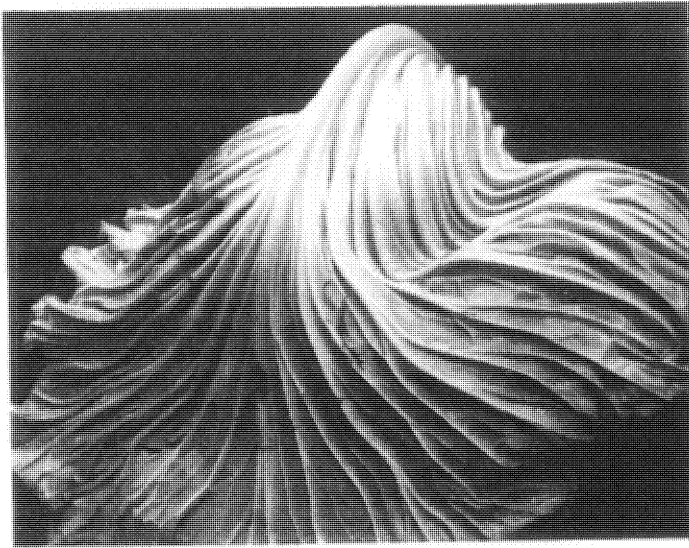
WALKER EVANS. *Graveyard in Easton, Pennsylvania*. 1936.  
Library of Congress. Farm Security Administration  
Collection, Washington, D.C.

ANDREAS FEININGER. *Cemetery in New York City*. 1948.  
*Life Magazine*. © 1948, Time, Inc.

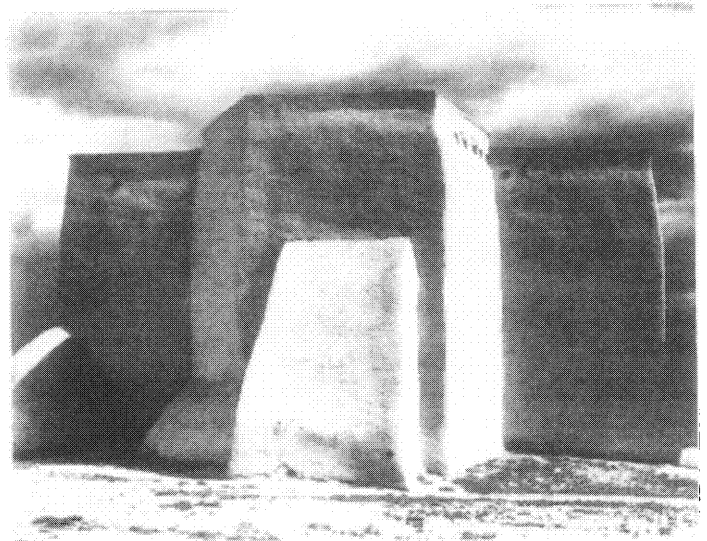
The convincing distribution of objects in deep space calls for skillful technical control of the photographic medium. But technical control, while indispensable, cannot of itself produce depth as we intend it here. The ability to capture surface changes has to be the servant of a poetic sensibility. That is, textural change and spatial differentiation must be subordinate to the cognitive and emotive requirements of the image. Evans does only an adequate job of rendering the textures of the limestone cross, the scrubby grass, the brickfront houses, and the smoke stacks. Edward Weston or Ansel Adams could have produced a better print. But Evans' point of view, and his choice of a flat light over his shoulder, has yielded a type of depth that no amount of textural detail could equal. It is his angle of vision—just next to the large cross—that gives the spacing to the other grave markers. This is what causes the rapid reduction in size relationships, especially between the cross and the brick dwellings. It even helps to compress the layers of rooftops, chimneys, and buildings near the horizon. Thus a squeezing down in the distance produces a pressure that seems to spread out the foreground objects, thrusting the graves toward us. This manipulation of depth, as much as the symbolism of the cross, creates photographic quality. The principal objects receive precisely the amount of space and light needed to define their forms and,

more importantly, to reach a significant level of human meaning. Feininger is a more "scientific" photographer; hence his approach to physical or three-dimensional depth is a model of technical control. Yet it is a poetic device that creates the aesthetic depth of the work. Feininger has to contend with the fact that his telephoto lens inevitably foreshortens space, pressing distant forms into the frontal plane. To some extent he can cope with this flattening effect by relying on an Oriental pictorial device: movement upward means movement inward. But how can Western viewers be persuaded to accept this way of seeing? Feininger eliminates the horizon as well as any enclosing or framing lines. As a result we are forced to see the photograph very much as if it were a tapestry of gravestones. Our perceptual energies are concentrated on the texture of the fabric, so to speak. Now we can see subtle changes of light and dark seeming to form an S-curve that leads the eye very gradually into the upper fifth of the picture. There the gravestones lose much of their detail; they retain only their rectangular shapes, like the crisp gray notes around the edges of a Cubist composition. This Cubist dissolution of mass, accomplished before our eyes in a gently ascending movement, suggests a lovely analogy. In the bottom of the photograph the dead have begun to exchange their identities; by the time we reach the top their souls are dancing.

FROM OPTICAL TO TACTILE

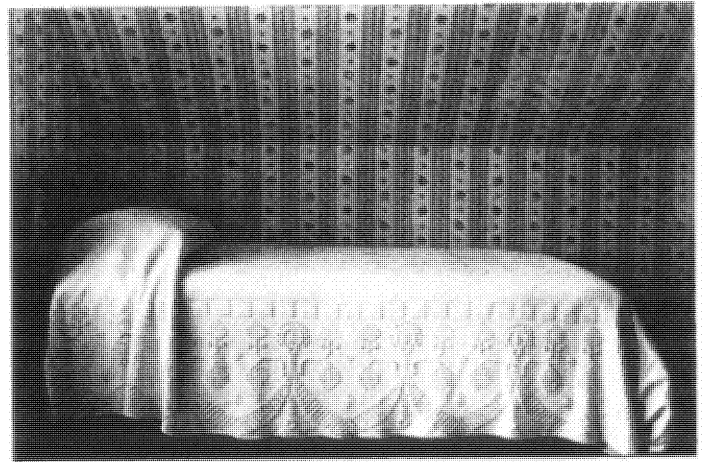


EDWARD WESTON. *Cabbage Leaf*. 1931. Courtesy Cole Weston



PAUL STRAND. *Ranchos de Taos, New Mexico*. 1931. © 1977 The Estate of Paul Strand

LILO RAYMOND. *Bed in Attic*. 1972. Courtesy the photographer



Here are three strong photographs that rely heavily on the sense of touch. Which is not to say they are merely textural studies. They do, however, demonstrate the power of the medium to create monumental effects without pictorial trickery. What we see is optical rendering carried to a peak of tactile expressiveness. Notice that the subjects are all presented frontally; the problems of composition are quite uncomplicated; and there is little or no appeal to narrative values. To be sure, Strand's *Ranchos de Taos* inevitably touches on regional and historical ideas, but it is mainly the weight and volumetric quality of the architectural forms that accounts for the impact of his image. The Weston cabbage leaf is an even purer demonstration of the power of photography to generate plastic, i.e., sculptural, values with very commonplace materials. It is significant, I believe, that Weston achieves a lyricism here which one cannot imagine in

any other visual medium. Raymond's photograph is a tactile triumph of another sort. To be sure, the soft chenille fabric receives much of its sculptural quality from the bed and pillow underneath. But Raymond has also been attentive to the active notes struck by the folds at the head and foot of the bed. Finally and most photographically, these are contrasted to the flat, quiet texture barely visible in the wallpaper pattern. We know that black-and-white photography operates within a very narrow visual range. Hence our criterion—from optical to tactile—emphasizes the control of volumes through the visual orchestration of textures. It shows that although still photography is capable of suggesting some of the qualities of the non-visual senses—sound, taste, kinesthesia, and even smell—it is through rendering tactility that photography's claim to represent reality is most powerfully supported.

employed to supplement or improve upon the visual "facts." Beyond a certain point this sort of manipulation is anti-photographic; it simulates painting or printmaking. The tactile values of a good photograph must be perceived as the product of an ocular process. A critic should know whether or not the tactile values of a print are photographic in origin.

#### FROM PATTERN TO IDEA

As mentioned above, the photograph devoted to pure pattern is a commonplace achievement for the camera; it usually represents a high level of technical mastery combined with a modest level of humanistic insight. The camera is better employed as a machine that sees in order to know, to express and to explain. So the mere recording of patterns becomes photographic

kitsch—a pretense to aesthetic profundity. To be sure, patterns can be truthful as visual reports, but they need to *signify* in order to sustain our interest. Accordingly, patterns that require labels to be understood must be judged unsuccessful as photographic art, however interesting they may be as science. For an abstract pattern to succeed aesthetically we have to *see* its name, not read it. In other words, visual or formal photographic values require a larger context—the context of mind—as an essential support. The discovery of patterns in nature or in man-made objects becomes exciting and aesthetically potent when the photographer *shows us* their connections to the unfolding processes of nature or reveals them as products of human transformative powers. Otherwise we feel we are looking at a kind of vacant ornament, easily seen and easily forgotten.



GEORGE GERSTER. *Sahara Pollution*. © 1976 Foto George Gerster. Courtesy Photo Researchers, Inc., New York

An exceptionally eloquent example of pattern employed in a cognitive, as opposed to a purely formal, context. It is the juxtaposition of beautifully patterned sand and seemingly casual deposits of trash that makes the forms work expressively. By themselves, the wave-like sand forms would look like a thousand other photographs of desert rhythms. As for the trash piles, they are curiously, almost perversely, satisfying. Perhaps that is

because the endless regularity of the sand patterns makes us hunger for signs of visual randomness. Notice, too, how the human figures on the upper left horizon provide a sense of scale for the picture as a whole. At the same time they hint at the essential idea of the picture—the painful connection between pollution and human settlement.

## FROM PART TO WHOLE

The camera necessarily shows us fragments. But photographic art has to reveal universals in details. It is not a question of dealing with large, panoramic scenes; it is rather the need to select and organize what is partial or half-done so that the viewer believes he sees what is entire and finished. Bad photographers manipulate their prints to achieve the effect of whole-

ness, usually by simulating the painter's tonalities and hierarchical organization of detail. This might be called "forced" unity. The good photographer must rely instead on (a) the selection of an intrinsically interesting subject; and (b) the presentation of that subject according to a logic that discloses its nature as an integral part of a complete universe. The viewer should be able to sense the totality of a situation through a privileged look at one of its parts.



WERNER BISCHOF. *Boy Leaving His Sick Grandfather, Korea*. Undated. Courtesy Magnum Photos, New York

The purpose of photographic composition is to make fragments of reality enter into complete relationships. Here portions of two figures have been organized into a whole which augments the expressive power of each part. The square window does more than frame the boy and concentrate our attention on his anguish: its placement initiates all the visual events within the image; it explains the darkness of the room; it dramatizes the somber texture of the wall; it contrasts the glaring outdoor illumination with the soft light barely crossing the grandfather's body. Most important, the diagonal formed by the boy's arm movement

connects the pieces of the image with its narrative: it gives the angle and destination of his gaze; it makes us attend to the direction of the old man's stare—over our right shoulder and into the distance. Finally, it opposes the weight of the boy's arm and shoulder to the weightlessness of the sick man's hands. In purely design terms it relates the window to the room; in symbolic terms it compares the vertical situation with the horizontal situation. Bischof believed, and here demonstrates, that the pictorial dynamics of a great photographic statement are inseparable from its human meaning.

## FROM SINGULAR TO TYPICAL

Compared to the other visual arts, photography can easily capture the exotic, the peculiar and the freakish. Thus it readily gratifies the human interest in weird people and violent actions. Indeed, that is what photojournalism often does in the course of carrying out its responsibility of reportage. But photography as art must go beyond the recording of shocking events or grotesque phenomena. In satisfying our curiosity it has to discover typical truths in strange forms and exceptional events. Otherwise it degenerates into a search for perversity, abnormality and varieties of

visual outrage. There is a tendency for some photographers to confuse moral or optical shock with aesthetic surprise. Here Velázquez is the right model: he knew how to show human deformity as part of the human condition. Diane Arbus is perhaps less compassionate if less squeamish as she brings us face-to-face with physical and psychological abnormalities. But her work is done objectively and without censoriousness; it helps us to realize that her people are fellow sufferers. To find universal human qualities in people who are outcast, ugly or horribly afflicted is a remarkable feat.



HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON. *Children Playing in the Ruins, Spain*. 1933. Courtesy Magnum Photos, New York

In the introduction to his book, *The Decisive Moment*, Cartier-Bresson says: "Above all, I craved to seize the whole essence, in the confines of one single photograph, of some situation that was in the process of unrolling itself before my eyes." Our criterion—from singular to typical—stresses this same objective. Cartier-Bresson's famous photograph illustrates the concept perfectly; both incident and idea are captured in a single image. Notice how Ben Shahn's *Liberation* employs the same notion of a picture; it is essentially a photographic approach: the grotesque incident frozen and transmuted into an idea. To some extent we can explain the expressive force of Cartier-Bresson's photograph in compositional terms: the children in the rubble-strewn street distributed along an S-curve which comes to an abrupt halt with the boy on crutches; the jerky rhythm created by the repeated angles of the children's bodies. But there are psychological factors at work here, too: in the tension caused by

our fear that the boy's crutches will be caught in the stones and he will fall down hard; in the cruelty of boys at play; and in the contrast between the laughing faces and the rough frame created by a shell hole. Most important is the rapid divergence of the lines forming the wall against which this drama unfolds; it propels the crippled youngster forward like a shot. These devices, and more, lie beneath the photographic surface of the work. It has taken me some time to see them and a paragraph to describe them even briefly; Cartier-Bresson caught them in an instant. Such mastery must be the product of a long apprenticeship, a quick mind, an intelligent eye. By "intelligent eye" I mean the photographer's ability to make an immediate, almost instinctive connection between what he sees in a scene, what it signifies at the moment, and what it means in depth—what it means as an idea that can occupy the mind permanently.

## FROM COPY TO ORIGINAL

The copy as replica or record tells us what we would have seen if we were "there." This sort of photograph is a convenient mechanical substitute for personal witness: it enables us to travel without leaving home, to remember without going through the trouble of summoning up mental images. Such pictures are valuable to the extent that they are reliable, that is, unsurprising. But an "original" photograph represents a discovery. That "discovery" is related to the instantaneous character of the photographic act; the "taking" of a picture involves the artist in the reality

of what he records. But it is not enough to be "there"; it is necessary to see and reject, and to distinguish the prototype from the stereotype. The artist must know how to discriminate among his feelings and ideas in the presence of objects and places and to discard those that are trite. When this is done well, the photograph represents a genuine birth—in the spectator as in the world of art. The photographic witness to life as it is born is illusory, of course; it depends on the artist's ability to encounter the world as scientist and philosopher, as historian and critic, as poet and midwife. Beyond that, the photographer must pretend to see innocently—like a child.



ROBERT WALKER. *Find Coffee House*. 1971. New York Times Pictures

Here is a work that epitomizes my distinction between a photograph that serves to copy or record an event and a photograph that makes a discovery which is aesthetically and humanly significant. Walker's photograph, in my judgment, bears comparison with the masterpieces of Pieter Bruegel, Adriaen Brouwer, and even of Rembrandt. Consider the Caravaggio-like lighting that bathes the figure upper left: it is a little masterpiece in itself. The hand and head of the woman lower right could have been taken from an interior by Vermeer. Now these comparisons are not made to establish the greatness of a photograph by demonstrating its genealogy in the history of painting. It is rather to say that the same factors which make a masterwork of a Brouwer or Vermeer operate in the present instance. Notice how the size and focal properties of the man advancing with his crutches creates a superb, tension-filled space between him and

the figures in the background. It is a space modeled in the tradition of the great Baroque canvases. At the same time, the scale relationships and perspectival effects are purely photographic. The ground plane moves up and away from us about as fast as the central figure moves toward us. The result is a powerful and dramatic pair of opposed movements, each culminating in an episode that demands our compassion in a different way. An isolated figure, almost lost in shadow (right middleground), provides precisely the right amount of interest and space modulation needed in that quadrant of the composition. The photograph satisfies our surface-to-depth requirements; it nourishes our tactile feelings through optical representation; it transcends the unusual or special character of the place and its people. And it takes up several great themes: helplessness, courage, loneliness, and love.

Some discussion points from the book:

*The Psychology of Seeing* by Herman F. Brandt

Dr. Brandt spent ten years in Ocular Photography research, investigating how people look at Art and Advertising and read copy in print. He demonstrates how levels of achievement, sex references, personality traits and guilt in crime are revealed by the human eye in motion.

**Photographic eye a myth:** Consciousness is not uniform. Its center is relative clear while the margin is indefinite and vague, and the more intensely the center of a given field is focused, the more sketchy and obscure will the outer fringe become. During intensive concentration, one group of impressions becomes exceedingly clear while others fall into obscurity. This process continues as an individual observes a picture or landscape.



*On the picture at the right, you can see the face of the old and young lady at one and the same time.*

When subjects are requested to select one of two designs, **Females as a group spend more time than males in selecting one of two designs.** This increased attention time seems to be justified, however, since a larger number of their choices agree with those of the "art experts."

**Both male and female subjects spend significantly less time on designs when their choice agrees with that of the experts.**