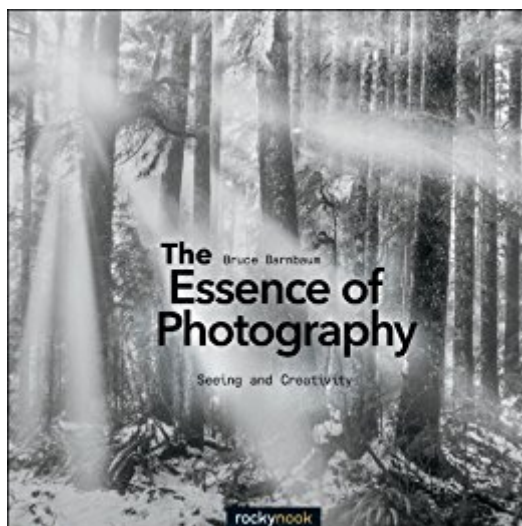


The book was found

# The Essence Of Photography: Seeing And Creativity



## Synopsis

There is a lot more to photography than simply picking up a camera, pointing it toward something, and tripping the shutter. Achieving a great photograph requires thought and preparation, an understanding of the photographic process, and a firm grasp of how light and composition affect a photo. There must be personal involvement and personal expression. There must be experimentation, with the recognition that only a small percentage of experiments end successfully. In this book, best-selling author and world-renowned photographer and teacher Bruce Barnbaum explores these seldom-discussed issues by drawing upon his personal experiences and observations from more than 40 years of photographing and teaching. In addition to photographs, Bruce also uses painting, music, and writing, as well as the sciences and even business, to provide pertinent examples of creative thinking. These examples serve as stepping-stones that will lead you to your own heightened ability to see and be creative. Creativity is a topic that is almost wholly ignored in formal education because most instructors think that it cannot be taught or learned. To the contrary, Bruce has proven that photographic seeing and creativity can be taught, learned, and improved. This book expands on the ideas that are central to Bruce's method of teaching photography, which he has used in workshops for the past 41 years. Included in the book are in-depth discussions on the following topics: Defining your own unique rhythm and approach as a photographer; How to translate the scene in front of you to the final photograph; The differences and similarities between how an amateur and a professional approach photography; The differences between realism and abstraction, and the possibilities and limitations of each; Learning to expand your own seeing and creativity through classes, workshops, and associating with other photographers; Why the rules of composition should be ignored; How to follow your passion; When to listen to the critics and when to ignore them. The book is richly illustrated with over 90 photographs taken by Bruce as well as other photographers. Seeing and creativity are difficult to teach, but not impossible. This very different, perhaps groundbreaking book is sure to inspire photographers of all skill levels—from beginners to seasoned professionals—to think deeply about the issues involved in creating successful photographs.

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## Customer Reviews

Most photo books describe how to take photos under varying conditions. Bruce Bamabum goes into making personal images, not by learning new techniques but by learning our own inclinations and, to use a currently trendy term, voice (my term - not the author's). Techniques and composition are mentioned throughout but not as ends in themselves. Rather both are put in service to personal vision and voice. As a friend of mine, Ray Ketcham says, "Anybody can learn your technique. Only you can make pictures that reflect your voice." For instance, we don't need to learn the rule of thirds to make "properly composed" images but because photos composed that way have certain impacts on the viewer. Is that what we want from a particular photo? Composition rules become composition tools in the service of how we want the image to display. Technical knowledge is always put in service to improving our craft not as an end in itself. Throughout the book Bambaum repeats the notion that photography is a skill and as with any skill practice, experimentation and making bad photos are necessary. Bad photos are not a negative, just something to learn from and if we don't make bad photos we haven't pushed out of our comfort zones. He makes the point that many of the worst photos he sees in workshops come from working pros who get into the habit of making commercially acceptable pictures not ones that reflect their vision. They forget how to experiment and take chances. Bambaum covers more than just technique, though. He emphasizes getting instruction from multiple instructors and workshops (we learn different stuff from each), getting feedback or critiques of your photos and how to take that feedback, as well as how to learn from

classes and such.

This is a hard one to review. The author is an acknowledged master of fine art photography, and if you aspire to improve your own fine art photography, there are some excellent tips in this book. In my opinion, however, it is a niche book. It details the author's story of how he got into photography, and why he prefers large format cameras (4X5 sheet film). Nothing wrong with that. He also details his preferred methods and techniques for taking/making fine art photographs, and his pictures are beyond reproach. What lets it down a bit is his obvious disdain for any other form of photography. Not everyone is going to shoot scenics or abstracts, and haul around a van full of equipment, and take the time to set up each and every photograph with care and precision that the author feels is necessary. It is excellent to be reminded to check everything with extreme care, but most of us will shoot (and should shoot) more than the 3-4 snaps a week or whatever. I began years ago trying to shoot pictures for a newspaper of football and basketball games with a 4X5 Speedgraphic. Great for fine art stuff, but horrendous for sports. We did this because the sports editor - still living in the 1930s and 1940s era, wanted large negatives for "quality." After a couple of years and LOTS of complaining by the staff, the old boy finally retired, and we got some 35 mm cameras with film drives. Our photography improved dramatically. Finally, the author seems almost angry at times because everyone does not shoot as he does. He also seems determined to try at every turn to assure the reader that "good" photography is difficult, takes years to learn, takes incredible dedication to the exclusion of almost everything else, and you probably won't make it anyway.

Immediately after I finished reading "The Essence of Photography: Seeing and Creativity", I turned to the copy of "Visual Symphony", an early book by Bruce Barnbaum that has graced my coffee table for more than thirty years, and paged through it. I was heartbroken. I had hoped that "Essence" would give me an insight into Barnbaum's creativity that would allow me to give further life to my own photography. It did not. The photographs in "Essence" are wonderful, and a careful perusal of them will give the viewer great pleasure, and hopefully extend the vision of a viewing photographer. If you don't have a book of Barnbaum's images, their inclusion here would justify purchasing this book. They are in the style of the f/64 school, which included Ansel Adams and Edward Weston, but with the author's own individual stamp. On the other hand, one may be better off just skipping the text. I blame myself. I see how many of the arts use the same techniques: focus on the subject; explicate with the details; know what you want to communicate. My error was that I thought that skill as a photographer might lead to skill as a writer. Instead what I found was a rambling memoir, not

organized to make points, and not edited tightly to avoid the extraneous. Still, there was just enough clarity to show that Barnbaum's ideas jibbed with other accomplished photographers, although in a few cases, his suggestions seemed rooted in the past. For example he suggests that the photographer should learn to work slowly, i.e., not just grab the first image encountered, but continually think about what better techniques can be applied to a situation and what adjustments to make, both technical and spatially, that will more fully reveal one's vision.

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