

BEHIND THE CAMERA



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CREATIVE
TECHNIQUES
OF 100 GREAT
PHOTOGRAPHERS

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People worshipping during
the first prayers at Begova
Dzamija mosque in Sarajevo,
Bosnia, after its reopening
following the civil war.

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I happened to be in Paris on the night of the terrorist attacks at the Bataclan concert hall and the Stade de France in 2015. The other guests in the restaurant received anxious text messages from faraway families and I felt obliged to nip down there to see what was going on—it's my job isn't it? The streets were weirdly deserted, and there were no cabs, so I jumped on a Vélib' hire bike and dashed across town. No battery in my phone, my only tactic was to chase fire engines, and at one point I ended up in Les Halles where the police thought the attackers were hiding. A battalion of SWAT police units—dressed like armoured insects and bristling with weapons and shields—scouted the streets. I followed behind them accompanied by at least a dozen random passers-by, all photographing with their mobile phones held in the air. For some reason, homeward-bound drunks, interested locals, and the morbidly curious had transformed themselves into CNN news crews. In front of us, the police were prepared for serious violence; behind was a shoal of lads (they were all lads) in T-shirts and jeans hoping for scraps like those tiny fish that follow behind big sharks, casually live-streaming to Facebook and Periscope. And me on a hire bike. I didn't know why any of us were there.

We were either totally wasting our time (the terrorists were elsewhere) or we were about to become sponges for absorbing stray bullets. I wondered why they thought they were suddenly pro photographers. They'd left the house that evening looking for a fun Friday night out and now here they were, writing *The First Draft of History*, an eager world awaiting their dispatch—at least that's what they thought. And was I that different? Why was I trying to be a part of this? Why does anybody take pictures? We're all doing it now, billions a day, and a small number of those are mine. For twenty-five years photography has been paying my mortgage but I still don't know why. I felt foolish and superfluous at Les Halles and I gave up and cycled home through empty streets.

The closest answer I can give to the question of why I take pictures is a metaphor. For me, taking a picture is like the ignition point in a combustion engine; ingredients (petrol vapour, air) are brought together in masterful engineering, compressed in one exquisitely timed moment, and jolted into producing brilliant sparks and power. At the genesis of a successful photograph all the preceding effort comes together in one focused moment: the

research time tracking down that specialist academic, the hard slog up that hill to get to the location before the light shifts, the clever gimmick dreamed up to make the story tell itself in a new and intriguing way, the silvery metaphor that wraps the whole idea, and then the weather plays along and you didn't forget to charge the battery on that bit of kit and, and, and. And when all of this is compressed together into the same fraction of a second and reaches its ignition point . . . well, the sense of satisfaction is overwhelming. It's. The. Best.

It happens so rarely, but when it's right I feel like it's a privilege to be allowed to do this as a job. Miraculous. Like Wordsworth wrote, "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive."

Some photographers see themselves as hunters, prowling and sniping down the streets, but that's not me, I'm a gatherer. I often think I'm not a real photographer at all because in that moment of coalescence, the pictures seem to simply fall out of the camera. All I have to do is go out and gather them up, bring them home like lost kittens. All the work is done before the picture-making moment. I imagine a theoretical mathematician feels the same when they get down to the bottom right-hand corner of the

blackboard and the final calculation produces a eureka moment when they know it works. Perhaps this is why I rarely review my old photographs, why I get so little satisfaction from being told my work is any good, why I have folders of unpublished projects, why I'd rather others designed my books or hung my shows. Or wrote forewords to books. All that afterwards stuff isn't a fraction as good as going out and making those magic sparks.

It's not all a bed of roses, of course. The successes are overwhelmed by the failures and the not-quites 999:1, and some of the things I've seen along the way have been terrifying and/or truly horrible. However, I think the reason I'm still making pictures and I'm not bored or I don't feel more bitter about the things I've seen, or why I haven't gone crazy or just given up and swapped to what my mother still calls "a proper job," is because I switch on the evening news and some lying politician is telling their lies or some pseudo expert is mouthing something stupid, some moron is being lionized and, hey presto!, I'm furious again and I'm online trying to buy a plane ticket, I'm packing a bag, making my apologies to Mrs. Norfolk, and once again thinking about how to bring it all together into sparks.

Introduction

The photographic image, although still in its infancy compared to other forms of artistic expression, so completely permeates our lives that it is hard to imagine how the world could be described and interpreted without it. This book offers unique insights into how photographers think and feel about their practice, and how they relate it to their understanding of the physical and conceptual world. Each photographer featured within these pages has an original and personal vision, and he or she has used the formal aspects of the medium not only to describe the world, but also to explore, interpret, and ask questions about it.

The performative image

The act of photography can be regarded as a form of performance—whether it is the collaborative “dance” that takes place between photographer and subject in a portrait session, the athletic gymnastics of the street photographer, or the theatricality of the landscape photographer using a large-format view camera on a tripod and viewing the image from under a black cloth. The taking of a photograph can be likened to improvised theater, with a multitude of decisions being made in real time about how and what to photograph. This can include the formal composition of the image as the photographer moves around the subject, with minute changes in distance and space significantly impacting the final form of the image that will appear within the frame. In this way, the photograph can be regarded as a performative space. Furthermore, the performance of taking the image involves a choreography between the photographer, the subject, and the environment. On looking at the image, the audience or viewer is invited to reflect on what could have occurred in the





The relationship between the subject and the photographer is central to your photographic practice; the direct gaze of these young Somali refugees peering through the gate of a feeding center addresses the viewer directly (1992).



By improving your photographic vision and sense of composition, you can greatly enhance your personal photographs of family and friends. This quietly observed moment of the photographer's father, an artist, was shot on a camera phone during a visit to his home (2015).



moments before and after the photograph was taken, which contributes to an imaginative reading of the image. The viewer is thereby encouraged to actively participate in generating their own meaning for the image, rather than allowing the meaning to be given to them solely by its author. No matter how much the photographer attempts to predetermine or control the interpretation of an image, it is only when the viewer brings their unique personal engagement to it that the meaning is finally determined. One of the great joys of looking carefully at photographs is discovering new insight or meaning in an image you have already spent hours poring over; the potential for new interpretation can be almost endless. Spend time with the images presented in this book and really look hard at them, asking yourself how they work, how they are constructed, and how they offer up their meaning. Interrogate them for technical lessons, but also appreciate them for the diverse ways in which they use composition and form to contribute to the interpretation of their content. Use these images as inspiration for your own work. As an exercise, try to go out for a day and make photographs in the style of another photographer; reinterpreting the work of others is an excellent way of developing your own unique vision.

The photobook

Throughout the following pages, key photobooks produced by the photographer concerned are discussed. Use the photobooks described as an entry point into the work of each photographer, and then build out from them to deepen your understanding of the medium itself. Although photographs are disseminated via a range of media, including exhibitions, magazines, slideshows, and

the internet, the photobook is potentially the most effective way for the photographer to present and disseminate his or her work in a coherent and discrete format. It allows the photographer to organize and sequence his or her work in a complex narrative or structure and combine it, where appropriate, with textual information that interacts with images and adds to their meaning.

The photobook offers a haptic experience whereby the material and tactile qualities of its format can enhance the viewer's experience of the work. Its size, flexibility, and material durability also enable it to be shared and widely distributed. Many of the books mentioned here deploy structural and physical qualities that seek to engage the viewer in a more nuanced and complex way, inviting them to engage more actively with a particular photographer's ideas. A sustained engagement with a range of photobooks is one of the best ways of developing photographic vision, whether you are delving deep into a particular genre or photographer, taking a historical cross section of practice, or merely collecting a set of your favorite image-makers.

The continuity of practice

Many questions and ideas have recurred throughout the history of photography. Each photographer responds to them in his or her own personal way, adding new insights and interpretations that define the development of the medium. Throughout this book links between photographers can be traced, demonstrating how they regularly engage in conscious critical dialog with their own work, with the work of others, and with how those works operate in context. Few photographers operate entirely in isolation; most are developing and challenging concepts and ideas from others.





For this shot of Croatians celebrating their country's independence (1991), the exposure was set for the sky in the background, and then the flash was set for the same aperture. This balanced the foreground light with that of the background and retained the detail in the sunset.



(Left) By tightly framing the infant orangutan by using a short telephoto lens, the harmony of the color palette is maintained, concentrating all of the viewer's attention on the eyes (2000).

(Right) What you leave out of the frame is as important as what you include. This photograph of a funeral during the Bosnian conflict (1992) focuses on the contrast between the rose and the soldier's uniform; the emotion of the moment is concentrated and conveyed symbolically.

(Bottom right) Shooting in low light can have unpredictable results, but the subtle qualities of the light in this Japanese bar were preserved by resisting the temptation to use flash and by holding the camera as steadily as possible (1994).



Photographers operating at the highest levels of practice are deeply aware of complications and contradictions within the medium, and consciously explore the relationship between form and content, and how it relates to the meaning of the final image. Photographers do not engage in this process in isolation, however. They interact and discuss their work with colleagues, friends, and mentors. They are often highly sensitive to the history of the medium, cross-referencing their work with that of earlier photographers and carrying on themes investigated by a previous generation. The ongoing road trip of visually describing America, for example, can be traced from Timothy H. O'Sullivan (see p.48), through Walker Evans (see p.78), Robert Frank (see p.186), Lee Friedlander (see p.194), and Robert Adams (see p.52), to William Eggleston (see p.100), and Joel Sternfeld (see p.54). Each has taken on the baton of representation in a continuing relay race in which each generation engages with how a particular set of formal concerns can be deployed to explore the changing social, political, and natural landscape. The influence of key editors and educators in this process must also be acknowledged. The inspiration of the photographer and teacher Alexey Brodovitch, for example, can be seen across a range of photographic practice, linking Tony Ray-Jones (see p.190), Lisette Model (see p.116), Garry Winogrand (see p.192), and many more. These connections and collaborations are fascinating to follow, and this book attempts to show how recurring questions of representation, themes, and ideas permeate the essence of the medium. An awareness of history helps to situate your own work in the context of others, and discovering connections between photographers creates a deeper awareness of the process of photography.

Selecting 100 photographers means excluding hundreds more, and the photographers chosen here are in no way intended to be a definitive list of the world's greatest image-makers. Instead, the intention has been to suggest a range of methodologies and approaches, a broad historical sweep that explores photography's technological and esthetic development, and a sense of the global reach of the medium. Many of those featured, such as Henri Cartier-Bresson (see p.260) or Ansel Adams (see p.50), are well known, but newer, less established names are included as well, for example Laura Pannack (see p.156) and Dougie Wallace (see p.202). The themes that structure the book are an attempt to codify a range of visual approaches to engaging with the world through the camera, offering a fresh interpretation and categorization of the traditional genres of landscape, portrait, still life, street photography, fashion, reportage, and so on. The idea of genres is useful to help classify different styles and approaches, but there is considerable overlap between them, and many photographers operate across a range of fields. Exploring the practical details of making a photograph can greatly intensify interpretation and understanding, and this book seeks to offer insight into the methods and ideas of the practitioner. It provides a starting point to follow up on the photographers featured and to explore their work in more detail, using them and the themes presented as a way into the extraordinarily rich history of the medium. Each entry includes a short biography of the photographer, an extended discussion of a specific image, and a series of tips organized around twelve areas, each identified by an icon, and covering a range of methodological and technical concepts and skills, which are explained over the next few pages.
















Photography is intimately linked to time. The layers of snow, blood, and footsteps in this image of the aftermath of an attack on civilians during the Chechen war (1994) act as a visual trace of the traumatic event, requiring the viewer to imagine the horror of what happened there.



This photograph of Sarajevo taken during the siege in 1994 was shot on a specialist panoramic camera, a 6 x 17 cm Fuji. Many digital cameras provide a panoramic mode or, alternatively, you can shoot a series of overlapping images and stitch them together in post-production.

Key to creative tips and techniques icons

Each entry in this book is accompanied by a series of technical and creative tips that are organized under the following themes: camera, color and tone, composition, digital, exposure, flash, lens, lighting, location, method, processing, and subject. Each theme is accompanied by a corresponding icon and an explanation of each of the themes follows.

- | | |
|---|--|
|  Camera (see p.19) |  Lens (see p.30) |
|  Color/Tone (see p.21) |  Lighting (see p.32) |
|  Composition (see p.23) |  Location (see p.35) |
|  Digital (see p.24) |  Method (see p.36) |
|  Exposure (see p.26) |  Processing (see p.38) |
|  Flash (see p.28) |  Subject (see p.41) |



Camera

In one sense, all cameras, whether film or digital, are the same; they all have a lens and a light-sensitive surface on which the image is recorded. However, different formats and types of camera do have specific advantages and disadvantages that make them more or less suitable for particular genres of photography.

Single-lens reflex (SLR)

The SLR is the most flexible and adaptable of all cameras, as it can be used with a wide range of lenses, including zooms. It also delivers images of high quality. It is a great all-round camera that can be used effectively for almost every genre.

Rangefinder

Rangefinder cameras such as the Leica are excellent for street photography and for working in intimate situations, because they are small, quiet, and unobtrusive. The direct viewfinder gives a clear view and is excellent for fast-moving subjects as you can see beyond the edges of the frame to predict elements coming into

the composition. They work best with lenses in the standard to medium wide-angle range.

Medium-format cameras

Medium-format cameras are heavier and more cumbersome than SLRs, but give higher-quality images because the film or sensor is significantly larger. They are excellent for landscape, portrait, and studio work, especially when used on a tripod. The 6 x 6 or 6 x 7 cm formats give a certain sense of weight and presence to the final image.

Large-format cameras

Large-format cameras, also known as view cameras, take a huge negative in single sheets, typically either 5 x 4 or 10 x 8 inches. This gives exceptional quality; a contact print made directly from the negative onto the paper gives an extraordinary level of detail and tonal values. Large-format cameras also have the ability to move the lens in relation to the film plane, allowing for distortions to be corrected in the camera. This is particularly useful for architectural and landscape work.



Shooting against the light has created an almost monochromatic effect in this beach photograph (2005), with the late-afternoon light suffusing the shadows and the highlights with warmth. The telephoto lens has also compressed the perspective.



Color/Tone

Whether shooting in color or black and white, understanding how light affects a photograph is fundamental. Mastering a range of different types of light and using light creatively to contribute to the final photograph are key to expressing your individual vision as a photographer.

Color versus black and white

Black and white creates a more analytical and abstract feel, emphasizing forms and giving a sense of timelessness. Color tends to be more visceral, and clearly adds an extra level of pure description. Choosing the appropriate color or exposure range to match the feel of the final image's color and tone can have a significant emotional or psychological effect. Shooting in overcast light creates a soft, muted range of colors, with low saturation and a high level of detail, as all tones will be recorded, whereas working in the late afternoon gives warm, rich, saturated colors, with deep blacks and detailed highlights. In black and white, the light has a similar effect. Flash can be used to make colors pop, creating a hyperreal effect. Some photographers favor particular kinds of light, shooting mainly in high- or low-contrast situations to give images a consistent feel and color palette. However, gaining a feel for working across a range of light intensities and understanding how they change colors in a scene are vital. By shooting at different times of day or night and in different situations, indoors and outdoors, you can develop your visual memory of how color changes the atmosphere of an image.

Color of light

Different types of light, both natural and artificial, will have varying color temperatures. Midday light is desaturated and relatively blue in temperature, and can look "washed out." Many photographers avoid shooting during the middle of the day, especially if they are working in color, and instead try to get up for the dawn light or work in late afternoon, when the sun is at an angle to the earth and produces a light that, although still quite hard, is very directional, warmer in color, and more interesting. In the early morning, strong shadows cast across a scene can create dramatic effects; these shadows change completely again in the afternoon. Use these shadows as part of your composition. Indoors, the light from a single, bare light bulb will be very warm, almost orange; it will also be harsh, as it is a small light source; a table lamp can be used to light only the subject, throwing the rest of the room into darkness. Fluorescent light is generally soft, but be aware that it gives off a green light, although negative films and digital cameras cope with it quite well. Be careful, however, if you have window light and fluorescent light in the same scene, as they are very different in color and it can be difficult to balance the two.