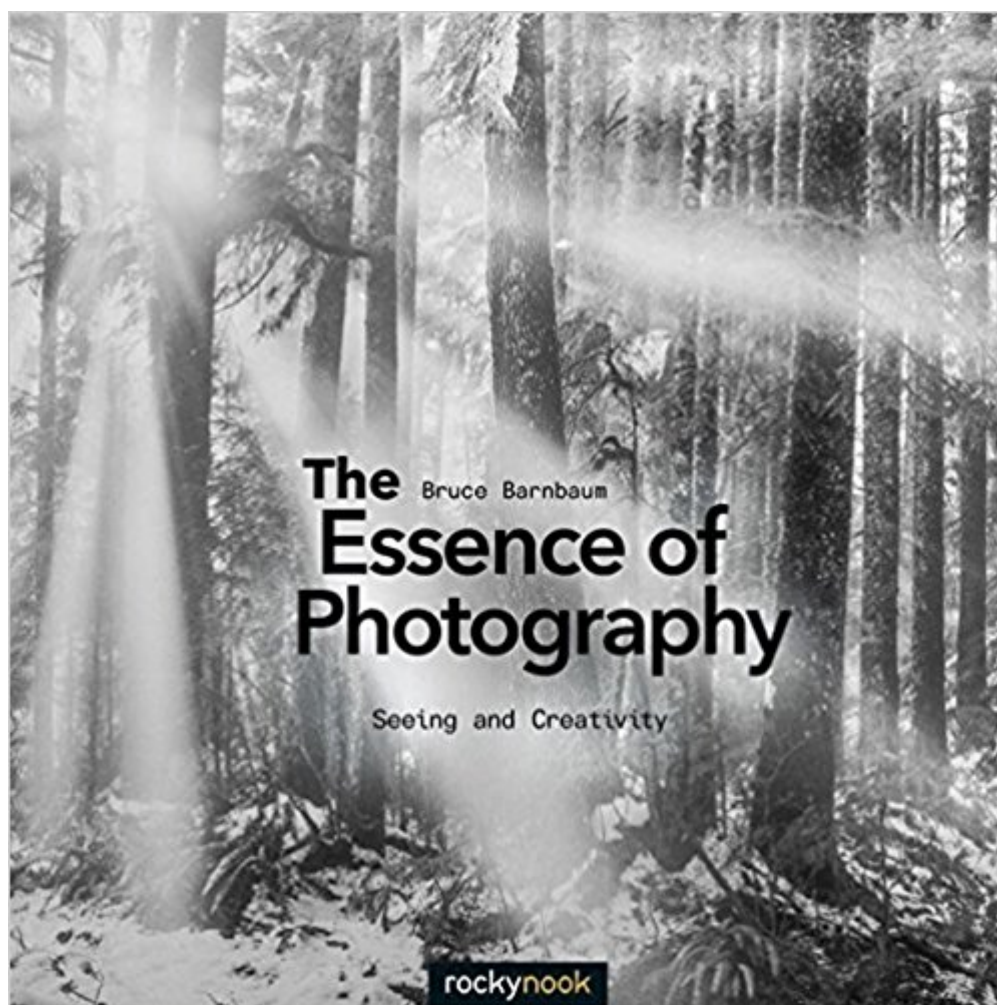


The book was found

# 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“The awesome granite walls and summits were what drew me to the high mountains for hiking and backpacking. Photography began as a pleasant hobby; nevertheless, it was important and meaningful.” - Bruce Barnbaum [View larger](#)

[View larger](#) [View larger](#) [View larger](#) [View larger](#) By placing my 45 camera on the ground in the meadow, I was able to create a gauzy, dreamlike feel in this photograph of the delicate Indian Paintbrush that dotted the meadow. It was a revelation that I could use the camera in an unorthodox manner. A dramatic photograph, and a popular one always my best-selling image but critically derided until things changed and it was critically applauded. Throughout the criticism and acclaim, I showed it, and I still do, because the image means a lot to me. I feel that intuition and imagination go hand in hand, and both are prerequisites for creativity. But they don't come out of thin air. Behind them is a vast amount of deep interest, observation, knowledge, and involvement with the subject.

The bridge, which links Whidbey Island with Fidalgo Island in the Puget Sound, was surrounded by dense fog at sunrise. Standing immediately beneath the roadway, I set up my camera to photograph the supporting structure seemingly random in many ways disappearing into the fog. Within 45 seconds of exposing the negative, the fog abruptly disappeared, and the feeling it imparted disappeared along with it.

Bruce Barnbaum, of Granite Falls, WA, began photography as a hobbyist in the 1960s, and after four decades, it is still his hobby. Photography has also been his life's work for the past 40 years. Bruce's educational background includes Bachelor's and Master's degrees in mathematics

from UCLA. After working for several years as a mathematical analyst and computer programmer for missile guidance systems, he abruptly left the field and turned to photography. Bruce is recognized as one of the finest darkroom printers on this planet, both for his exceptional black-and-white work, as well as for his color imagery. He understands light to an extent rarely found and combines this understanding with mastery of composition, applying his knowledge to an extraordinarily wide range of subject matter. Bruce has authored several books, some of which have become classics. His early publication of *The Art of Photography: An Approach to Personal Expression* (first published in 1994 and going out of print in 2002) was updated, revamped, and newly released in late 2010 by Rocky Nook. This new book became an instant bestseller and is sure to remain a classic for years to come. Bruce has been an active environmental advocate for more than three decades, both independently and through his involvement and leadership with organizations such as the Sierra Club, the National Audubon Society, the Mountain Loop Conservancy, Futurewise, and the North Cascades Conservation Council.

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. Yes, there is a section on technique and gear, as well as a discussion of printing.

Yes, again, those are put in service to making personal images not as absolutes or must haves. Much of the book is relayed through the author's personal history. At times it's a tiny bit tedious but I don't know any other way to talk about personal process than personally. Bambaum shows a lot of his own photos. They are not all his most commercially successful images, rather ones that mean something to him and illustrate his points. That means that they may not all wow you, say, the way Joe McNally does. That's part of the essence of photography, too.

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. It would be nice to get a glimmer of encouragement occasionally. The author does recognize that some of the newer cameras might be used to take a decent picture - if you do all the painstaking work and take only a small number of shots - so you don't have to "dig through all that manure assuming there is a pony in there someplace," and of course, go back to 4X5 film photography every month or so to refresh your techniques. The author makes some wonderful photographs, but his technique and equipment are still from the 1940s era of Ansel Adams, and to that he aspires. For him there seems little room for anything else. I found this book hard to read. He seems almost angry that others would consider any other form of photography. It seems less about teaching

others to make great photographs than about justifying the author's way of making them. However, if you aspire to make photographs like Ansel Adams or Bruce Barnbaum, and have the dedication to try, you should get this book, but do not expect anything but a very narrow "fine art" with large format perspective. Maybe that's the point, but...

This is a go-to book that has been an inspiration as well as informative. This book will make you think as you slowly read and comprehend its contents. Whenever I take some time out to read, I can't wait to break out the gear to put into practice what I've learned. I always keep the volume handy so I can reach for it when I have a free minute. My personal opinion is that this is one of the finest volumes written on the subject. It should be a prerequisite for any beginning course in photography.

A book that is a pleasure to read but probably not for everyone. It is more about the approach of the author that can be applied to any creative endeavor that is taken seriously enough. Certainly not in line with the rush for instant gratification that is so common in our days. The book is of course illustrated with the wonderful photographs that are Bruce Barnbaum's landmark. It is much less about how to press the button and a lot more about why you want to press it.

Bruce is a very thoughtful author not only in terms of the photography as a fine art, but most impressively about the philosophy of the creativity. No matter what is your profession and level of experience in your field, I am sure you will significantly benefit from his lifetime on the course as a creativity artist and might be scientist

Interesting and very well written. Every word written has resonated and remains with me. One of the best books on the meaning and soul of photography that I have read thus far. Just ordered his Art of Photography and I hope I enjoy it as much and learn as much as with his Essence of Photography.

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