

The Museum of Modern Art

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THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S EYE by John Szarkowski. 156 pages, 172 gravure illustrations. Hardbound, \$5.95; paperbound, \$3.95. Published by The Museum of Modern Art; hardbound edition distributed to the trade by Doubleday and Company, Inc.

On December 15, The Museum of Modern Art will publish **THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S EYE**, a profusely illustrated investigation of what photographs look like and of why they look that way. John Szarkowski, Director of the Museum's Department of Photography, deals with photographic style and tradition: with the sense of possibilities that a photographer today takes to his work.

"The pictures reproduced in this book were made over almost a century and a quarter. They were made for various reasons, by men of different concerns and varying talent. They have in fact little in common except their success, and a shared vocabulary.... The vision they share belongs to no school or aesthetic theory, but to photography itself," Mr. Szarkowski observes. The book attempts to discover a critical perspective responsive to the unique nature of the creative act in photography.

THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S EYE is divided into five sections: 'The Thing Itself,' 'The Detail,' 'The Frame,' 'Time,' and 'Vantage Point.' "These issues do not define discrete categories of work; on the contrary they should be regarded as interdependent aspects of a single problem -- as section views through the body of photographic tradition."

Commenting on 'The Thing Itself,' Mr. Szarkowski notes: "The subject and the picture were not the same thing, although they would afterwards seem so. It was the photographer's problem to see not simply the reality before him but the still invisible picture, and to make his choice in terms of the latter.... The photographer's vision convinces us to the degree that the photographer hides his hand." For example, the anguish of Ezra Pound dominates Avedon's portrait of him, and an unknown photographer's Bedroom Interior is a biography of its inhabitant.

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The emphasis on the significant detail, illustrated in the next section of the book, was forced on the photographer by the limitations of the medium. Once he left his studio, it was impossible for the photographer to copy the painter's schemata. He could not stage-manage the action, or rearrange parts of his picture. "From the reality before him he could only choose that part that seemed relevant and consistent, and that would fill his plate.... Intuitively, he sought and found the significant detail. His work, incapable of narrative, turned toward symbol." Roger Fenton's lonely Valley of the Shadow of Death stands for the futility and pathos of the Crimean War; Paul Strand's Door Latch is a microcosm of a New England landscape; and Walker Evans' Interior of West Virginia Coal Miner's House is the essence of the poverty of the Depression.

To quote out of context, Mr. Szarkowski observes introducing the section entitled 'The Frame,' is the essence of the photographer's craft. "His central problem is a simple one: what shall he include, what shall he reject? The line of decision between in and out is the picture's edge." Jean Arp's sculpture bisects and echoes the shape of his face in the portrait by Arnold Newman; Yale's Oldest Living Graduate is juxtaposed against/^{the}chrome-plated splendor of a Cadillac in the photograph by Elliott Erwitt; and Paul Strand frames his Vermont church with two trees.

"There is in fact no such thing as an instantaneous photograph," comments Mr. Szarkowski in the section on 'Time.' "All photographs are time exposures, of shorter or longer duration, and each describes a discrete parcel of time. This time is always the present." Muybridge's Gull Flying is an early attempt to analyze motion; Gjon Mili and Harry Callahan have made use of the multiple image to capture the art of the juggler and the spirit of Detroit; and Robert Riger freezes the action of a pro football game.

The photographer's vantage point is often dictated by his subject. "If the photographer could not move his subject, he could move his camera. To see the subject clearly -- often to see it at all -- he had to abandon a normal vantage point,

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and shoot his picture from above or below, or from too close, or too far away, or from the back side. He discovered that his pictures could reveal not only the clarity but the obscurity of things, and that these mysterious and evasive images could also, in their own terms, seem ordered and meaningful." Coburn's The Octopus is a New York City park seen from above; an urban landscape is reflected in a car's fender in Laughlin's The Fierce-Eyed Building; and a top hat replaces the head in an unknown photographer's shot of J. P. Morgan at a Society Wedding.

John Szarkowski directed The Photographer's Eye exhibition held at the Museum in 1964 and is the author of several books published by the Museum, including The Photographs of Jacques Henri Lartigue (1963), The Photographer and the American Landscape (1963), and André Kertész: Photographer (1964).

THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S EYE is available in two editions: hardbound, \$5.95, distributed to the trade by Doubleday and Company, Inc.; and paperbound, \$3.95. Both editions are available by mail from the Museum or at the Museum bookstore.

Review copies, photos and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Patricia B. Kaplan, Assistant, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. Circle 5-8900.