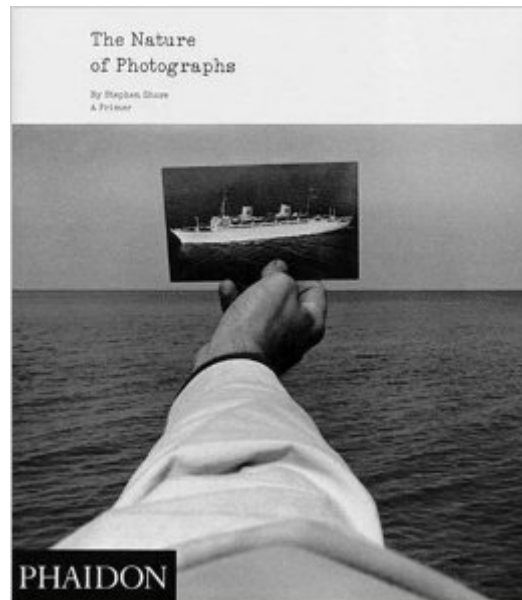


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The Nature Of Photographs: A Primer



Synopsis

An essential primer on how to look at and understand photographs, by one of the world's most influential photographers, Stephen Shore. He explores ways of understanding photographs from all periods and all types, from iconic images to found photographs, from negatives to digital files.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

There are a few books about photography that are so fundamental that every serious photographer should read them. These include books that discuss the underlying assumptions of photography that many photographers just take for granted. "The Nature of Photographs: a Primer" by Stephen Shore is such a book. The book is deceptively simple. Shore sets out to describe "the physical and formal attributes of a photographic print" (although, it seemed to me, the work applied equally to an image on a monitor) "that form the tools a photographer uses to define and interpret...content." For example he suggests that at the depictive level there are four separate ways the camera transforms the world into a photograph: flatness, frame, time and focus. Each of the discussion points is supported by great images from photographic history, taken by photographers as diverse as Timothy O'Sullivan and Paul Caponigro. The text is short, capable of being read in less than an hour. However a useful reading requires a lingering over the photographs presented. For example, in commenting upon a picture of a clear-cut hillside, Shore says that photographer Robert Adams could frame a picture so that a railroad track appearing in a corner could enhance the meaning of the image. When I first glanced at the picture, I looked for an obvious railroad right-of-way, but

closer examination showed a single railroad track just appearing in the bottom corner. One might have thought it was unavoidably included, a mere accident. But realizing that Adams was not so casual gave a whole new level of meaning to the photograph.

I've always loved Stephen Shore's work ever since I bought his 'Uncommon Places' book in 1983. It has two of my favorite Shore images: La Brea Avenue & Beverley Boulevard and El Paso Street, El Paso (both taken in 1975) this last one is in 'The Nature of Photography'. A photographer is perhaps the ideal person to tell others about the fundamentals of looking at photos and my appreciation of Shore's work was enough to make me buy this hardback in 2008. It certainly has some quite stunning photos, especially where they relate to specific text and many thought provoking points come across but I was left with the impression that there should have been more or a different way to explain what there is. The book's photos are a key element in how to understand what is going on and I would have preferred to have seen others that didn't work as obviously as the ones that do. Shore, like any creative photographer, must have taken many images that he doesn't think work as well as the final choice. Seeing some lesser alternatives to the ones in the book would have improved it no end by explaining why photo A reveals a fundamental point beautifully but photo B doesn't. I thought too many visual concepts were put across more by words than images. Shore says that he used Szarkowski's The Photographer's Eye when he started teaching and his book carries on the theme. Overall I still prefer Szarkowski's book, there are far more photos included and the presentation is much more user friendly than the hard edge Phaidon design, with its excessive amounts of empty page space and trendy use of a typewriter font for every bit of text.

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