



# The Art of Photography: An Approach to Personal Expression

*Bruce Barnbaum*

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## **The Art of Photography: An Approach to Personal Expression** Bruce Barnbaum

This is a newly revised edition of the classic book *The Art of Photography* (first published in 1994), which has often been described as the most readable, understandable, and comprehensive textbook on photography. In his accessible style, Barnbaum presents how-to techniques for both traditional and digital approaches. Yet he goes well beyond the technical as he delves deeply into the philosophical, expressive, and creative aspects of photography. This book is geared toward every level of photographer who seeks to make a personal statement through their chosen medium.

Bruce Barnbaum is recognized as one of the world's finest photographers as well as an elite instructor. This newest incarnation of his book, which has evolved over the past 35 years, will prove to be an invaluable photographic reference for years to come. This is truly the resource of choice for the thinking photographer.

Filled with over 100 beautiful photographs, as well as numerous charts, graphs, and tables.

## **The Art of Photography: An Approach to Personal Expression Details**

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Author : Bruce Barnbaum

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# From Reader Review The Art of Photography: An Approach to Personal Expression for online ebook

## Skyler says

A must-read for anyone interested in photography.

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## Ben Field says

Superb, very informative, very good examples, not pretentious but does elaborate around the art and not doing it by the book. Gave me lots of insights into how I can improve. Would recommend to new and experienced photographers. Will continue to use it as a reference guide too.

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## Michael Scott says

I don't really know where to start this review. Bruce Barnbaum's The Art of Photography is a book about art, design, self-expression, and creativity. It's also about photography, from the technical aspects (both film and digital) to a discussion about photography myths. Overall, I learned much and found this book wonderful! Must-read if you are starting to dabble in creative processes and/or are interested in photography. (For the former aspect, I will recommend it to all Ph.D. students under my guidance.)

In eighteen chapters, the book covers much ground. It first discusses photography as communication (Chapter 1); followed by the elements of composition (increasingly technical, from the general discussion about composition in Chapter 2, to the presentation of light and color in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively). Then, the book explains the core of photographic technique, with filters and the zone system (exposure) explained carefully in Chapters 7 through 9; Chapter 9, on the extended zone system, explains how to work in a high dynamic range with visible results and dispels the myth of only 10 zones being available to the film photographer. Chapter 10 presents the printing process; it's rather technical. Chapter 11 introduces digital photography as a complement to its film counterpart. Chapter 12 closes the circle of technical aspects of photography---after visualization, exposure, development, and printing---, with presentation (dry mounting and correcting mistakes in the mounted picture). After a summary of the most common faults of thinking about photography (Chapter 13), Chapters 14 through 18 present a debate about artistic integrity, meaning and limitations of photography as an art, and creativity and personal philosophy.

I enjoyed very much the analysis of many things creative and technical regarding (film) photography. Having started from digital, I can finally understand some of the things that differentiate the two approaches, and also some of the unifying themes (like the zone system vs channel histograms).

The discussion about art was, for me, exquisite. The formulation of a vision for each photograph is a concept that is novel for me, but following various fields of artistic interest and merging visualization with perfect execution are ideas that resonate with me. The explanations and discussions about these matters were cogent and delightful, even when I did not agree with the tone or even the argument.

I was very impressed with the discussion about the professional limit imposed on creativity by obtuse

editors, curators, and reviewers. Simply, these categories of professionals may severely limit the art (and published expression) of artists to "what sells" or to what each artist has come to be known for. To alleviate this problem, Bruce suggests a broadening of the portfolio, either from the start, or whenever allowed by the publisher's wishes; this approach could match the natural expressive and technical development of the artist.

I found the part on creativity refreshing, if a bit trivial. It's perseverance and a few related traits that, in the view of Bruce Barnbaum, enable creativity. No recipe (that's normal), but luck and hard work and knowing what one wants (this also contradicts with Chapter 17's take on intuition).

There is a wealth of relevant references, especially in what concerns great photographers---I picked the names of Ansel Adams, Diane Arbus, Eugene Atget, Bill Brandt, Alvarez Bravo, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Imogen Cunningham, Walker Evans, Ernst Haas, Yousuf Karsh, Andre Kertesz, Josef Koudelka, Mary Ellen Mark, Sebastiano Salgado, Joseph Sudek, Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, Brett Weston, Edward Weston, and Minor White.

There are very few things I did not like in this book. Perhaps, at least in the beginning, the tone---Bruce talks disparagingly of beginners, people adhering to rules of composition, technically adept people, pretty much everyone who does not take what Bruce considers to be a pure approach; yet, in Chapter 17, Bruce becomes human and admits than lack of control over the visualization of the image can be useful. Another slightly negative aspect was the treatment of digital photography, rather limited and in general considered less good; again, the view expressed in this book varies, depending on the subject to photograph, so perhaps digital is not so bad. Last, but not least, the conviction of the author that great photography is always the result of respectful, caring, and in general feelings about the subject of the photograph was unsubstantiated; simplistically, I believe a good, artsy photography could be produced not only by luck by an amateur, especially with the great advances of technology.

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### **CURTIS NUGENT says**

Reading this book is not a small task. I feel many "modern" (read "digital") photographers would get bored with a large portion of this book. A large part of this book is dedicated to the Zone System and different methods of development to include compensating development. Some of these methods will be unknown to digital-only photographers. Luckily, for me, I still shoot a lot of film and was able to follow much of the explanations. However, this book is not for beginners.

The last chapters discuss how to find your own personal style of photography. These chapters are worth the price of the book. Barnbaum dispenses wise thoughts to his photographic disciples here.

There were a few times that Barnbaum stepped up on his political soapbox to expound on his environmental views. While very brief, I found them out of place in a book on photography. Overall, a good read for serious photographers, perhaps too complex for amateurs.

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### **Nicholas Doyle says**

A painfully dry and boring textbook on photography. I read as much as I could and had to give up.

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## **Tonino Filipovic says**

By far the best book on photography as an art, that I came across so far. Readable and understandable, with some priceless advises to photographers of any skill level (although technical proficiency will certainly facilitate fulfilling your potential as an artist).

While I don't necessarily agree with certain Bruce's views (e.g. his very firm stance against the composition rules, while he obviously uses "rules", or better said "good composition practices" in majority of his photographs), it doesn't take anything away from the fact that this is an amazing book that will help make almost anyone who reads it a better photographer.

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## **Kirill Nikolenko says**

### **Recommended**

One of the best books on photography I've ever read. Chapters about zone system/negative development/printing are pure brilliant. Highly recommend to anyone, no matter are you using film or not.

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## **Gowrishankar Subramanian says**

I thought of writing review for this book when I finish the initial chapters on "art side" of photography. I decided then to wait till my initial gush of excitement cool off.

Now that I have almost finished all the chapters relevant to me, it's only apt to say that this one is a classic! Bruce's advice on "photographic seeing" is the most valuable one any budding amateur can get. Chapters on composition, tones, contrast and color are worth a reread.

Had to skip lot of content on developing and printing techniques.

Highly recommended for serious aspirants. Good luck with your shots.

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## **Deigh says**

This is not the type of book that I think one can sit down and read through. It is almost like a text or a reference that you would keep on your shelf and turn to from time to time for technical guidance and perhaps some inspiration. There is a big section on film and darkroom techniques that I skipped over. Worth having for sure.

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## **Kathleen Messmer says**

This is probably one of the best books I've read on Photography. His insights into individual creative

expression are unlike any I've ever heard - even in grad school! Read it. You won't be able to put it down.

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### **Kate Cornfoot says**

Holy moley. What a book! This is the best book on the art of photography I've read. Ever. It was originally published in 1994 - so the book is largely oriented around film photography - but it is completely relevant for digital photography. Perhaps even more than modern books that are devoted entirely to digital. I feel like I learned more, and of a much higher quality, in reading this book than I've learned in countless other books/classes/articles.

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### **Justin Price says**

Shifts your thinking when it coming to photography. Some aspects of the book are hard to grasp, but worth re-reading. Help me understand technically why I like some photos and not others.

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### **Gleb says**

This book invokes Martin Luther King Jr at least twice in different chapters to make a point about playing to one's strengths.

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### **Mike says**

It's a bit up and down this book. I'd give it 6 stars (if I could) for the first 100 and last 50 pages, and two for everything inbetween. Excellent insightful writing on the "why" of photography in the good bits, especially the parts on capturing your emotional response to a scene rather than a realistic picture of the scene. Now I know why I just can't take decent photos of some things, I'm just not interested in them enough to have any emotional response.

The middle chapters are conceredned entirely with the Zone System, film delveloping and printing, and framing techniques. Other than as an historical aside, I found them of little use as a solely digital photographer. I skimmed over 150 pages before getting back to the creative stuff. I'd already read through Ansel Adams' "The Negative" and "The Print", so I felt no need to go through another lesson in picking developing fluids.

I also found a lot of his photos were not to my tastes at all, especailly the abstracts, but that's not really the point of the book.

I'm still going to give it 5 stars because it's one of the best photography books I've ever read on the artistic side of photography. If you actually shoot and develop film, it would be perfect!

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**Hari says**

Nice book

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