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Why Art Photography?



Synopsis

Contemporary art photography is paradoxical. Anyone can look at it and form an opinion about what they see, yet it represents critical positions that only a small minority of well-informed viewers can usually access. *Why Art Photography?* provides a lively, accessible introduction to the ideas behind today's striking photographic images. Exploring key issues such as ambiguity, objectivity, staging, authenticity, the digital and photography's expanded field, the chapters offer fresh perspectives on existing debates. While the main focus is on the present, the book traces concepts and visual styles to their origins, drawing on carefully selected examples from recognized international photographers. Images, theories and histories are described in a clear, concise manner and key terms are defined along the way. This book is ideal for anyone wanting to deepen their understanding of photography as an art form.

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Customer Reviews

'While documentary photography is generally well understood, the diverse traditions of conceptual, semi-factual or entirely fictional art photography remain a mystery to many. *Why Art Photography?* is an accessible and intelligent guide, which addresses key themes like "authenticity" and "objectivity" by examining the thought-provoking work of living, often younger, artists.' - Dr Sarah Thornton, author of *Seven Days in the Art World* 'The reader joins Soutter's class to gain access to the rarefied debates encountered at the cutting edge of contemporary art photography.' - The Art Newspaper 'Soutter has accomplished her mission: to those in the know and those who want to be, she has explained not just the whys but the how-tos of contemporary art photography.' - Source

Lucy Soutter is a photographer, critic and art historian. She is a tutor in the Department of Critical and Historical Studies at the Royal College of Art. Her writings on contemporary art and photography include essays in *Girls! Girls! Girls! in Contemporary Art* (Intellect, 2011), *Appropriation* (Whitechapel Gallery, 2009) and *Role Models: Feminine Identity in Contemporary Photography* (Scala, 2008).

This is a must read for all fine art photographs, specially does doing experimental contemporary "new Photography". I have read it twice already. Gives an excellent historic perspective. I believe that photography, besides its journalistic endeavor, is finally coming of age with art photography.

Any student interested in understanding contemporary art photography should read this book. For the first time since starting my MFA I feel like I understand my field of study.

Lucy Soutter's book "Why Art Photography?" is a slender, but substantial book that every student of photography should read. Along with Geoffrey Batchen's "Each Wild Idea", it is one of the two best books I have read in the past few years. Soutter is erudite, expressing complex concepts in concise language without the conceit of an academic, though clearly, she is one. It is the only book I know of which properly contextualizes the various genres in photography and provides intellectual arguments for and against photography as art. In this regard, Soutter quotes not just the usual suspects (Benjamin, Barthes, Adorno, Foucault, Sontag etc.), but also Baudrillard, Debord, Drucker, Rancière and Nancy to substantiate her arguments. Even if you are not a fan of French post-structuralism, these authors address issues around the work of art and its relationship to the culture that produces it. In Baudrillard's model, the camera is just an extension of the eye, so the means of production of the image is not important. Today, we are exposed to images not just on film, but digitally, online, on video, in 3D animation and so forth. Soutter addresses this new digital age of images deftly and brilliantly, in the context of the spectator and the contemporary spectacle. Soutter's discussion on the digital dialogue reminds me of Merleau-Ponty's idea that a painter, while he or she is painting, practices a magical theory of vision. In this age of a society of the spectacle (made famous by Debord), Soutter succinctly advances Rancière's case for the emancipated spectator with a relationship between perception, comprehension and action. The book is meticulously referenced and the bibliography runs over 30 references per chapter. While Sontag engages in a sweeping

self-indulgent literary review, Soutter is academically and intellectually more rigorous in her critical analysis of art photography. The one major criticism I have is that despite being well illustrated, the images are of substandard quality. This book will become a classic and Routledge will do well to invest in higher quality reproductions of photographs.

Why Art Photography? is a relevant guide for thinking critically while engaging with contemporary photography. This dynamic field can often produce a sensation of ambiguous visual clutter, where Soutter empowers one to navigate crosscurrents of approaches, genres, intentions, and context in connecting with the material from a balanced view. With keen intellectual perception and refined awareness, important questions are explored that aid in personal orientation and further self-inquiry. This is further supported by adequate references and clarification of terms, trends, and theories. Photography feels unveiled with fresh optimism for the future in photographic terms, as we are provoked to allow and encourage space for new conventions arising. This book is beneficial for all viewers, practitioners, and consumers of photography.

Very important book for photography students and everyone who loves photography. It is very well written, clear and approachable. I read it twice already and I keep coming back to this book. I recommended it to all my colleagues and friends from the field. It definitely had an influence on my practice and truly changed the way I see photography.

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