

## The Power of the Photograph



Photography is a process of image-making that is less than 200 years old, yet at the time of its invention, no one could have imagined the impact it would have on the global population, becoming a form of communication that could rival the English Language for its universality. What is it that obsesses us about recording a version of what we have seen, and showing it to someone else? And what compels us to appreciate these images in a completely different way to how we would appreciate the subject of the image if we were seeing it in person (and not taking a photograph of it ourselves)? There is a transformation that occurs when something becomes something photographed which can tell a powerful story in a universal language. How does this happen?

The first subtle yet important aspect of this transformation is that there is a before and an after to every image, and there is also always a photographer who was responsible for choosing exactly which point along the timeline we are seeing. Not only this, the photographer is also responsible for what we see and what we don't see. Everything the camera wasn't pointed at was also present at that point in time. So, interestingly, the Unseen is as important as the Seen. Another part of the transformation is that a photograph can be aesthetically evaluated. We like some photographs more than others. Content is one thing but we all have an idea of what makes a photograph Beautiful or what makes one photograph more Beautiful than another. We like pleasing composition and although most people would find it difficult to explain what good composition is and what bad composition is, there is generally a consensus on what is good and bad. It is as though a Harmonic Proportion exists within all of us by which we evaluate images.

We also like light. Light, of course, is how photographs are made and how we see. But we would not see light were it not for shadows, reflection and refraction. Pure light will blind us. Thankfully, our atmosphere reflects, refracts and ultimately reduces the power of the sun to a level by which we can see. Shadows allow us to see details, the relationship between light areas and dark areas, the density and substance of surfaces. We can only see with both light and shadow and photography is an expression and a reminder of this universal principle. Photographic images can be said to stimulate our ideas of some Archetypes. Harmony and Proportion can be appreciated in composition. Beauty and Art can be appreciated in contemplating the choices made by the photographer in taking the picture. We are also able to view our world in an elevated state of detachment when viewing it through a photograph. We can see more and be in more places as it transports us around the world, in and out of other



people's lives and situations. This is the essential transformation of photography – that it has the ability to transform us.