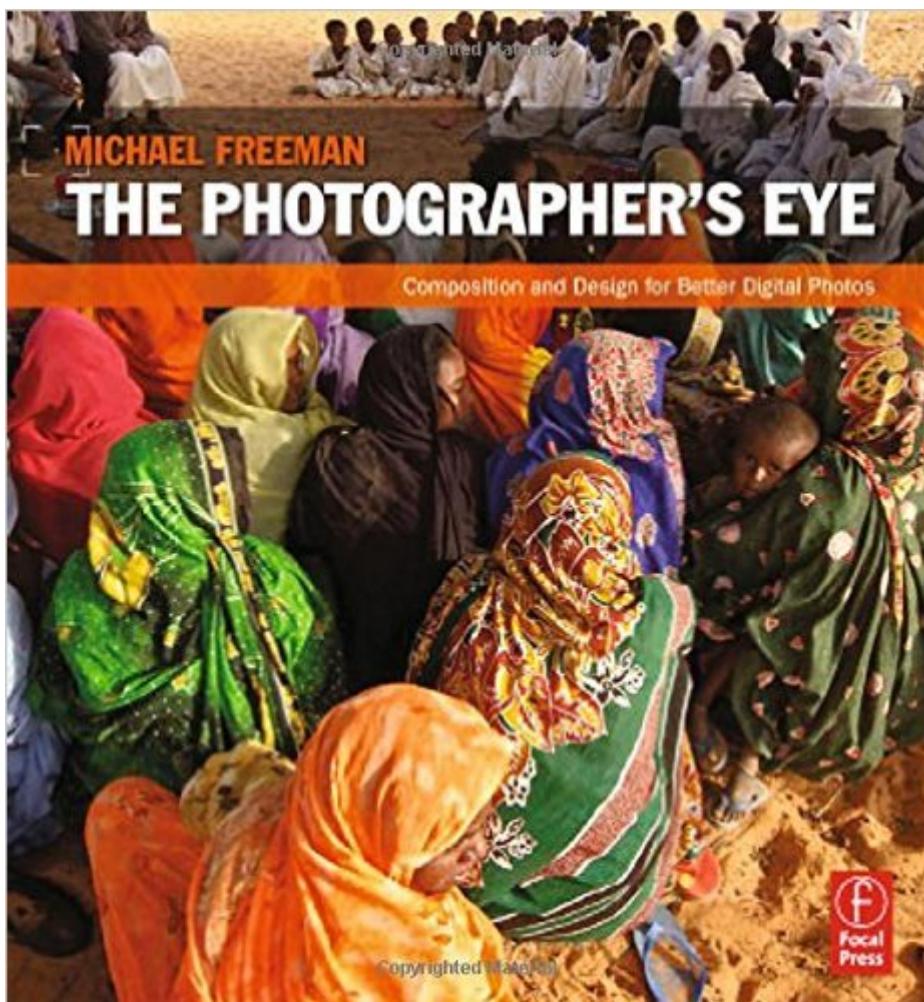


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The Photographer's Eye: Composition And Design For Better Digital Photos



Synopsis

Design is the single most important factor in creating a successful photograph. The ability to see the potential for a strong picture and then organize the graphic elements into an effective, compelling composition has always been one of the key skills in making photographs. Digital photography has brought a new, exciting aspect to design - first because the instant feedback from a digital camera allows immediate appraisal and improvement; and second because image-editing tools make it possible to alter and enhance the design after the shutter has been pressed. This has had a profound effect on the way digital photographers take pictures. Now published in sixteen languages, *The Photographer's Eye* continues to speak to photographers everywhere. Reaching 100,000 copies in print in the US alone, and 300,000+ worldwide, it shows how anyone can develop the ability to see and shoot great digital photographs. The book explores all the traditional approaches to composition and design, but crucially, it also addresses the new digital technique of shooting in the knowledge that a picture will later be edited, manipulated, or montaged to result in a final image that may be very different from the one seen in the viewfinder.

Book Information

Paperback: 192 pages

Publisher: Focal Press; 1st edition (May 23, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0240809343

ISBN-13: 978-0240809342

Product Dimensions: 0.5 x 9.2 x 9.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.8 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (384 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #24,895 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #28 inÂ Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Visual Arts > Photography #40 inÂ Books > Arts & Photography > Photography & Video > Digital Photography #55 inÂ Books > Computers & Technology > Digital Audio, Video & Photography

Customer Reviews

Let me start by saying that even though I write photo books for a living (including *The NEW Joy of Digital Photography* (Lark Photography Book) and *Exposure Photo Workshop: Develop Your Digital Photography Talent*, I don't know Michael Freeman and have never communicated with him. That said, this is easily the best composition and design book that you'll find--and that goes for

professionals as well as hobbyists. This is the first book, in fact, that I can recall that covers these topics with such depth and clarity of thought. Freeman has long been one of my favorite photo book writers and this book continues his long streak of great reads (his other recent book, *The Complete Guide to Digital Photography* is also worth owning). I sometimes laugh at how extremely British his writing is, but it's just amusing, not distracting. The main thing that I like about *The Photographer's Eye* is that Freeman approaches the subject from a very thoughtful perspective. While the book covers the basic elements (lines, shapes, dynamic tension, balance, etc.) he also talks at length about more emotionally-related issues: chiaroscuro and key, the search for order, reactive thought, etc. These are the concepts that more experienced photographers (and artists) find themselves confronting once they have a solid feel for design elements and construction. I often find myself wondering if design is more of a thoughtful process or an instinctive one--and I think it's a combination of the two.

This is the best single volume on visual design and composition in years. Painters need a book this good. Freeman's earlier book from the 1980s, "Image," had long held the status, IMHO, of being the best single volume. His new book surpasses the older one by a significant margin. Freeman is one of very few photographers, or artists of any ilk, who can articulate their art-related thoughts in concrete, accurate, analytical ways, and not in the jargon of so much of what is written about art that lacks any actual content. Not only is he an outstandingly gifted photographer, with dozens of books to his credit, but one who has mastered the grammar of images and is one of the few who can describe how and why visual phenomena work. This is the most complete volume on this subject out there in terms of numbers of topics introduced and discussed at a reasonable length. It is also the most effective melding of the insights of current Gestalt perception theory with traditional design elements/principles in print. The first 60% of the book deals with the more concrete aspects of designing an image. The last two chapters marry the other part of composing that is harder to articulate well: the message in a image, or the photographer's intent. Only in this book has an author attempted to define major categories of intent in making an image. And then categorizes the physical and mental aspects of how a photographer goes after, constructs, or recognizes an image - the process. Throughout the discussions he introduces those aspects of digital imaging that a photographer can use to influence a picture's design.

Freeman's journey through the the principles of photographic composition is eye-opening, eloquent, and beautifully published. This is not a book on the basics of taking "better photos," so those who

seek information on exposure, cameras, lenses will not find it here. Nor is such shooting information for any photographs included. In a general book on photography, this would be a major defect, but here such information would only distract from the book's primary subject: the composition of a visual image. On the surface, photographic composition may seem to be a very subjective and idiosyncratic topic: you may like one thing, I may like something else. And if it's all subjective, merely a matter of personal preferences, tastes, and opinions, why bother writing a book about it? Most books on photography tread gently on this shaky, insecure ground, and their authors usually limit themselves to a few simple, predictable pointers: the rule of thirds, and golden section, with a particular emphasis on golden rectangle. But Freeman quite clearly believes that, although ultimately each photographer makes their own choice about what composition works best for their photograph, good choices are those that are deliberate (not accidental), and informed by being aware of ALL the possibilities that are available. The Photographer's Eye will give any intermediate or advanced photographer a better awareness and grasp of choices that are to be made. Freeman starts at the edge of the image (chapters about the frame) and moves inwards. Available formats, for example (4:3, 3:2, square, horizontal vs. vertical, etc.) are all carefully explored through numerous, and well-chosen examples.

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