

Preface: There are two main types of photography that exist. John Szarkowski, the past Curator of the Museum of Modern Art Photography Collection divided photography into Mirrors and Windows and wrote a book about it. Self expression exemplified by Mirrors and exploration exemplified by Windows are broadly how Szarkowski divides the practice of photography. I prefer the Window type of photography. This is the photography practiced by Eugene Atget, Walker Evans, Cartier- Bresson, Robert Frank, Diane Arbus, Garry Winogrand, Lee Friedlander, Sebastiao Salgado, William Eggleston, Robert Adams, Jan Groover, Joel Meyerowitz and Stephen Shore. I am a Window or realist type photographer and I study these master photographers.

The **seven** characteristics of **my kind of photography** are:

1. It deals with the real world. David Bailey said: “It takes a lot of imagination to be a good photographer. You need less imagination to be a painter because you can invent things. But in photography everything is so ordinary; it takes a lot of looking before you learn to see the extraordinary.” Garry Winogrand, my teacher and mentor, said: “Photography is **not** about the thing photographed. It is about **how that thing looks photographed.**”

I photograph to see what things look like photographed.” So a photograph of a person is **not about that person.** It is a photograph of **how that person looks photographed. It is an illusion.** A photograph is always a lie. There is nothing as mysterious as a fact clearly described. A photograph has form and content. That form and content are related to the machine, the tools and materials which have made it. In my case it is the film, the camera, the developer, the enlarger and the printing paper. In other words it is **true** to the medium of photography. Of course the technology is always changing. Now you can make 3D photographs, digital photographs and colour photographs. It is not painting or drawing. Still photography is a mechanical and chemical process. The **illusion of literal description** is what the tools and materials of photography do better than any other graphic medium. Again Winogrand said: “**A still photograph is the illusion of a literal description of how the camera saw a piece of time and space.** Anything is photographable. **There is no particular way a photograph should look.**” I like to see photographs as photographs **not** as drawings or

paintings. Unfortunately **“people believe that photographs are true and therefore cannot be art”**, quoted Mason Cooley. And again **“The magic of photography is metaphysical. What you see in the photograph isn’t what you saw at the time. The real skill of the photographer is organised visual lying”**, said Terence Donovan. And lastly the great Pablo Picasso said: **“An ordinary artist shows you things everybody can see. The egotistical artist shows you things only he can see. But the great artist shows you things nobody ever saw before.”**

2. It can show a variety of depths of field. It can show a narrow depth of field. I prefer to show the greatest depth of field. That is **my choice** for the dumb machine. We tend to focus on something close up when we are close to something and focus on distance when something is far away. **The camera can focus close up and at a distance simultaneously.** That is: **it can give the illusion of literal description of something that is close up, middle distance and far away in one frame at one time.** We cannot do both as humans. It can instantaneously describe a great quantity of information in a great depth of field.

3. It deals with real time. That is the photographer needs to predetermine when to release the shutter. That decision may be based on waiting for the sun to appear from behind a cloud or to be more exact waiting for the cloud to move. The sun is always there! Or it may be waiting for **the appropriate moment** in the scene such as a fat man to pass or a car to move away. It may be a matter of catching what Henri Cartier-Bresson called the **“decisive moment”**. It depends on what kind of composition you want and what you are going to capture in time.

4. It depends on the shutter speed. How many moving things are captured still or how much action is frozen is your decision. Personally I prefer all action frozen. **A photograph for me is always a still life.** It is an illusion. If you want to prevent blurred bodies and limbs it is best to have a shutter speed of at least one hundred and twenty fifth of a second. When up close even faster. And of course if vehicles are involved faster still.

5. It depends on light. In fact there is no picture without light because the film is sensitive to light. I prefer everything within the

frame to be lit with as much natural light as possible. I personally do not like additional artificial light such as a strobe or flash gun. I can accept light if it is part of a scene such as a light bulb or a candle or torch but it is up to you.

6. It depends on chance. A great photograph can depend on chance, luck or even an accident. A photographic work of art is **not prescriptive** and is not simply the practice of a number of prescribed rules. **Forget rules.** It is all about **intuition** and the practice of **observing carefully.** It is a matter of your taste and selection. I prefer urbanity and all that is associated with that-**people, signs, buildings, transport, streets, and events.** For me landscape is very difficult to photograph well. Ansel Adams photographed it well. You definitely need a large format camera for his subject matter. I use a small 35mm camera because it is light and unobtrusive and I like candid photographs so I move quickly about my subjects.

7. The boundaries of my photographs are the sides of the film frame. Garry Winogrand said: **“Photography is about finding out what can happen within the frame. When you put four edges around some facts, you change those facts.”** Whether I hold the camera horizontally, vertically or at any other angle I prefer to make the photograph at the time of pressing the shutter release and I like to use the whole frame. I compose at the time of releasing the shutter. That is my discipline and my habit. I prefer not to crop a photograph and I always print full frame. I prefer the proportions of the full frame which are a golden section. The long side is one and a half times as long as the short side. I know through practice before I put the viewfinder up to my eye exactly the boundaries of the frame in the scene before me. I see the same frame as the camera records. That is how Cartier- Bresson liked to have his negatives printed.

Those are the seven characteristics of my kind of photography. I study the history of documentary and street photography. I look at the work of the masters in those fields. The patron saint, the founder of this kind of photography was Eugene Atget who was intuitive and self taught. He was followed by Walker Evans, again intuitive. Then, of course, the great Henri Cartier-Bresson used the small Leica camera. He was followed by Robert Frank and finally Garry Winogrand and Lee Friedlander followed them, all intuitive photographers. They all studied past masters. I recommend the study of those masters if you

want to make photographs as a Window photographer and explore social documentary photography.

Personally I am passionate about this kind of photography and it has become an obsession. I am compulsive about it and it is an expensive addiction. I hope you enjoy this kind of photography as much as I do and I hope you have found this description helpful in understanding one of the very many different types of photography available.

©Stuart Haden 2006