

A new edition of this essential overview of the most exciting, dynamic form of photography

The Street Photographer's Manual

David Gibson • Foreword by Matt Stuart

Illustrated throughout

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192pp

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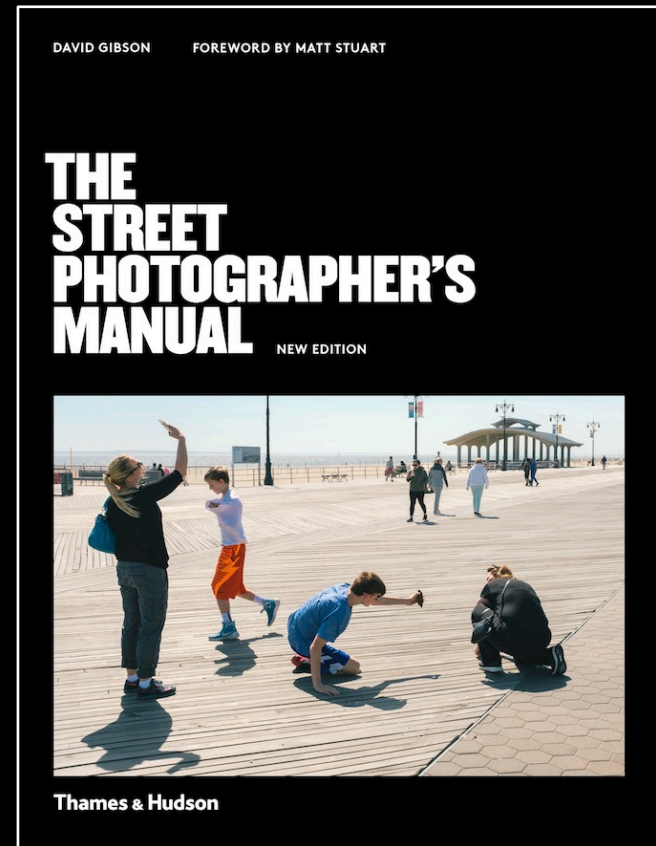
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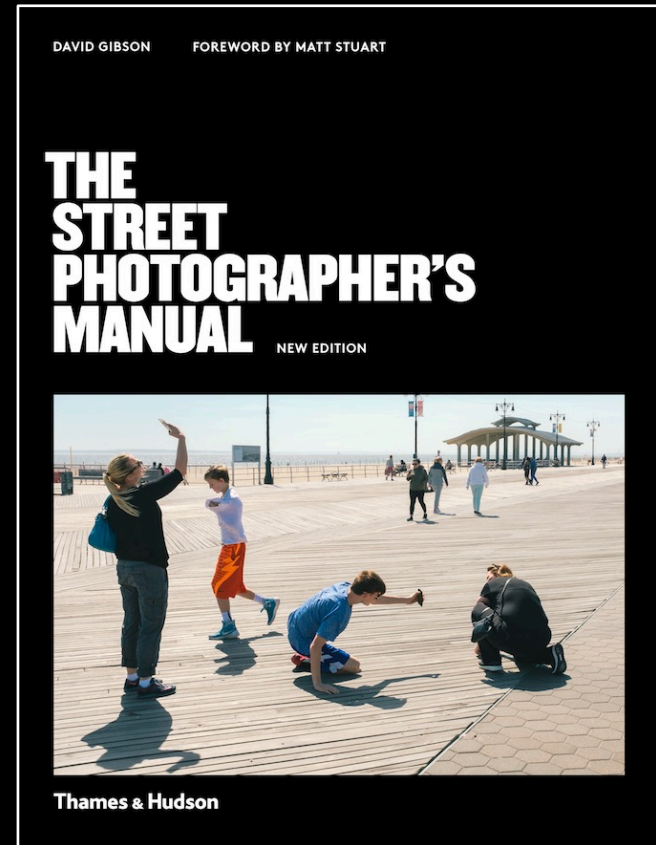
Praise for *The Street Photographer's Manual* (ISBN 978 0 500 291306)

'Excellent'

Amateur Photographer

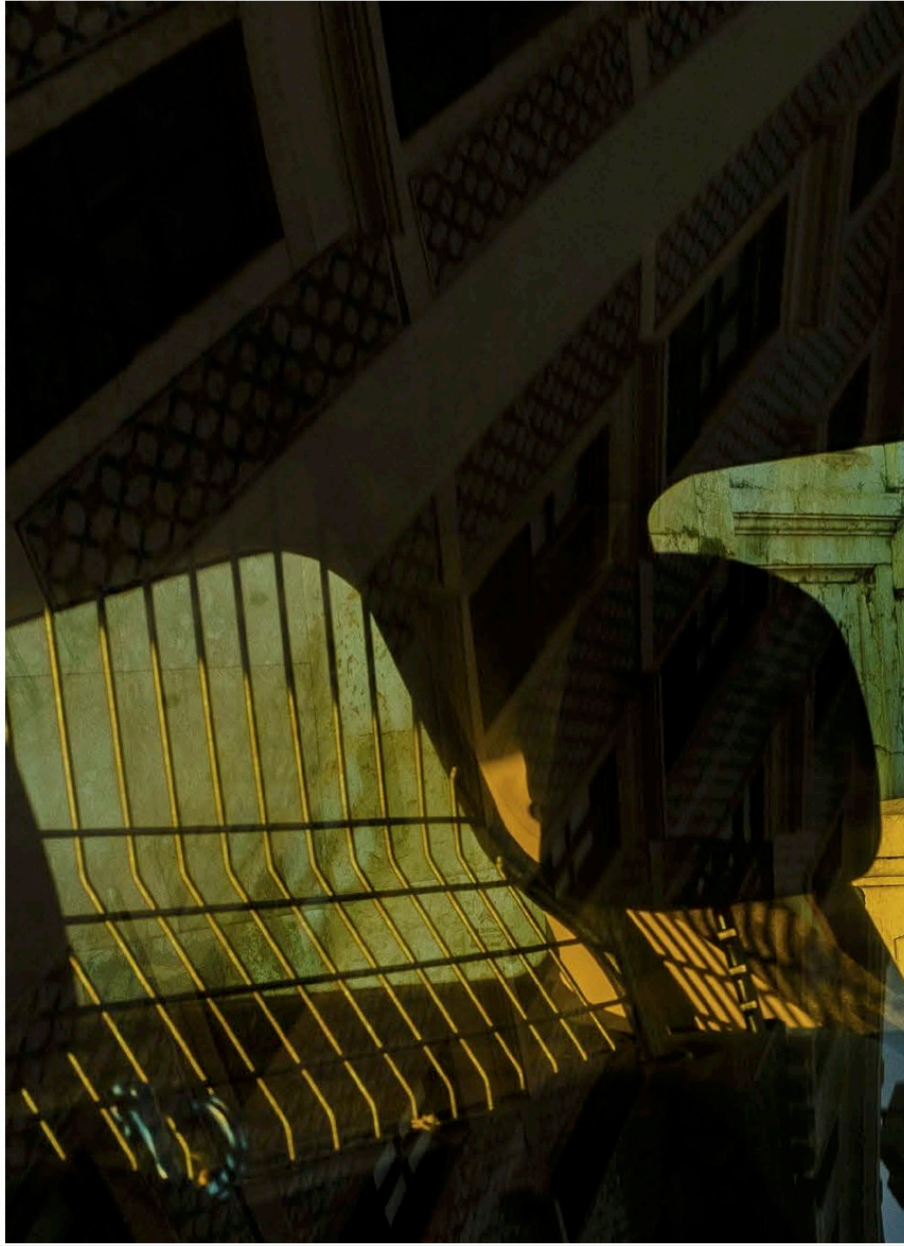
'Exceptional ... a fascinating read for any photographer. Its variety of imagery, Gibson's intelligent writing and quotes from other renowned photographers make it one of the best publications of its type I've seen'

Black and White Photography



Key Sales Points

- This new edition showcases captivating work by emerging artists on the street photography scene, and includes updated advice on Instagram and a foreword by leading street photographer Matt Stuart
- New: includes such internationally popular photographers as Troy Holden, Merel Schoneveld, Melissa Breyer, David Gaberle, Michelle Groskopf and Craig Whitehead
- Features twenty projects alongside practical advice and inspiration from twenty leading street photographers around the world





BUSY

Joel Meyerowitz views street photography as an 'optimistic sport'. We have to enjoy the energy and the challenge to hit the target.

Any examination of street photography must begin with busy spaces; to use a fishing analogy, you simply fish where most of the fish gather in the river. Given the choice on a weekend of heading into a busy market or the more empty business district of a city, most photographers would opt for the busy area.

I am often drawn to the noise of schools, and being high up in Darjeeling I was able to look down into this school playground (see opposite). I was struck by the riot of blue and had a slightly long lens but probably felt that I wanted to get closer. But you make do, and this scene became an arrangement of shapes and colours. There is a dog walking through the middle though you can hardly see it, and the girl on the bottom left with her raised arm adds balance, but everything is really a celebration of the colour blue.

There is a fascinating high-definition video by New York artist James Nares called *Street* (2011), which shows street life dramatically slowed down by a high-speed camera. For any street photographer this unscripted film is compelling because it shows the almost hidden dimension that a photographer seeks. Suddenly every subtle gesture and nuance of human movement is there to be seen more clearly.

Unfortunately that half-speed world does not truly exist for photographers – they could pick off targets at will if it did – but it is worth approaching the busy

'IF YOU CAN SMELL THE STREET BY LOOKING AT THE PHOTO, IT'S A STREET PHOTOGRAPH.'

BRUCE GILDEN

street with this possibility in mind because all these slow motion moments do exist. It is the task of the photographer – together with fortune – to glimpse these moments. Put simply, on a crowded street the camera freezes a moment that we often only half see.

There's something in the imagination, too, that makes you want to romanticise street photography in a city like New York in the mid-1960s; especially that of three kindred spirits – Joel Meyerowitz, Garry Winogrand and Tod Papageorge, who all went out shooting together. They would sometimes bump into Lee Friedlander; they knew Diane Arbus; and they met a Frenchman once on the street who continually ducked in and out of the crowd. It was Henri Cartier-Bresson in his prime. These are all legendary figures and Meyerowitz has talked about knowing Robert Frank before he became Robert Frank. This is somehow reassuring – everyone has to start somewhere.



David Gibson, Darjeeling; 2009

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6 FOLLOWING

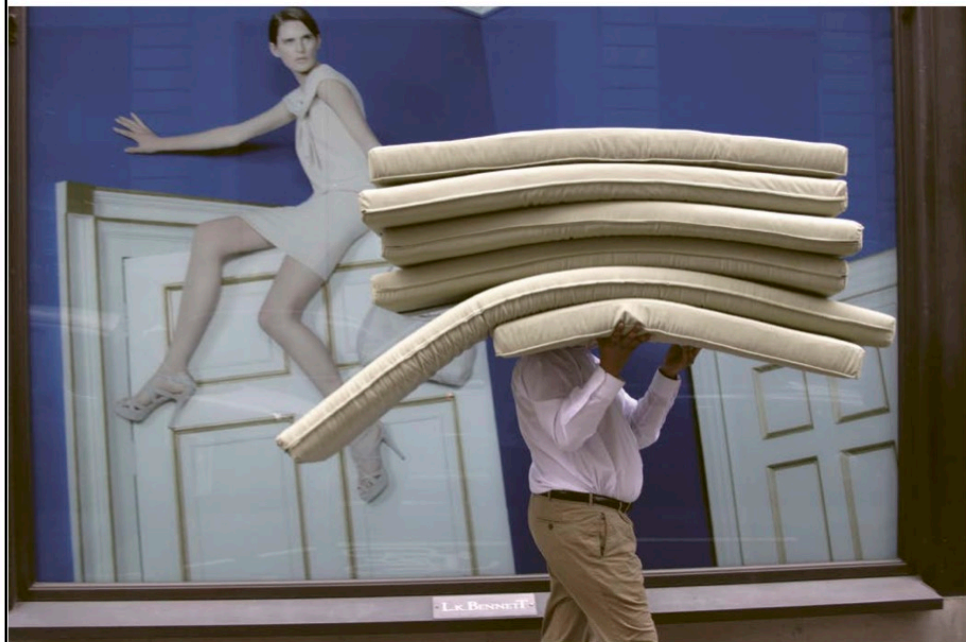
It is very natural to follow an interesting person, who might suddenly walk past the perfect background, to make a picture complete.

Taking 'waited' photographs from a fixed position can obviously be reversed; it still involves a background and a moving subject combining to make a photograph complete. The difference with the 'followed' approach is that the photographer is also likely to be moving. Everything is quicker and it is not uncommon to require a sprint to get in position.

Photographers in the studio prefer to work with uncluttered backgrounds because they do not want distractions. Subjects are sometimes depicted as seemingly floating in space. On the street where everything is happenstance, backgrounds can work in tandem with the subject. The bigger ambition therefore – achieved with luck and awareness – is to get an almost unbelievable background. The man carrying mattresses on his head who suddenly came out of a store in London's Regent Street was a good start; that alone is a reasonable capture, but what lifts the photograph is the background. The woman in the shop window display seemingly balances on the end of the mattresses. The man only walked a short distance but the jigsaw fits in the middle frame (main image).

The 'pursuit' of the woman with the striped dress on page 88 lasted longer, although still only a few minutes. I saw her dress and immediately thought zebra or pedestrian crossing, because at some point, with luck, she would surely walk across one. The idea is to keep everything simple; there are only two factors in the photograph: the two sets of stripes. A vertical shot naturally worked best, while the man with the mattresses suggested a horizontal view. The shape at the centre of a scene should naturally suggest the format.

SOMEONE SUDDENLY EMERGING CLOSE BY CAN DRAW YOUR ATTENTION – THEY LOOK INTERESTING, OR THEY ARE CARRYING SOMETHING UNUSUAL, AND YOUR INSTINCT IS TO FOLLOW THEM. IT COULD BE CALLED THE JIGSAW APPROACH: YOU ARE AWARE OF WHERE A PIECE SHOULD GO AND SUDDENLY YOU HAVE THE MISSING PIECE IN YOUR SIGHT.



David Gibson, London; 2010

ABSTRACT

The abstract can be part of street photography; it offers an alternative direction within art and a welcome break from seeing conventionally.

Abstract is not a word normally associated with street photography or indeed photography generally. It is rarely accorded a separate category, possibly because the term is more firmly associated as a genre within art. Mark Rothko, for example, is clearly understood to be an abstract expressionist painter. Perhaps photography can never be completely free to achieve anything comparable because ultimately it records a reality. Photography is creative – it is an artistic tool – and it sees broadly but it cannot entirely escape its inherent function to record.

The US photographer Aaron Siskind took 'abstractlike' photographs; his peeling paint series are abstract but they are also photographs of a surface. Whatever the surface, whether it is a distressed wall or even human hair, it will still prompt most people to wonder what the photograph shows. In fact to not know what the 'subject' is, lessens the impact. This may be the attraction of abstract photography – to disguise and prompt questions – and it seems all the more clever when it creates 'art' out of something that does not function as art.

I have always had a strong affinity with abstract photography, as a means of experimentation and a much-needed escape from what I normally do. Taking

PROJECTS

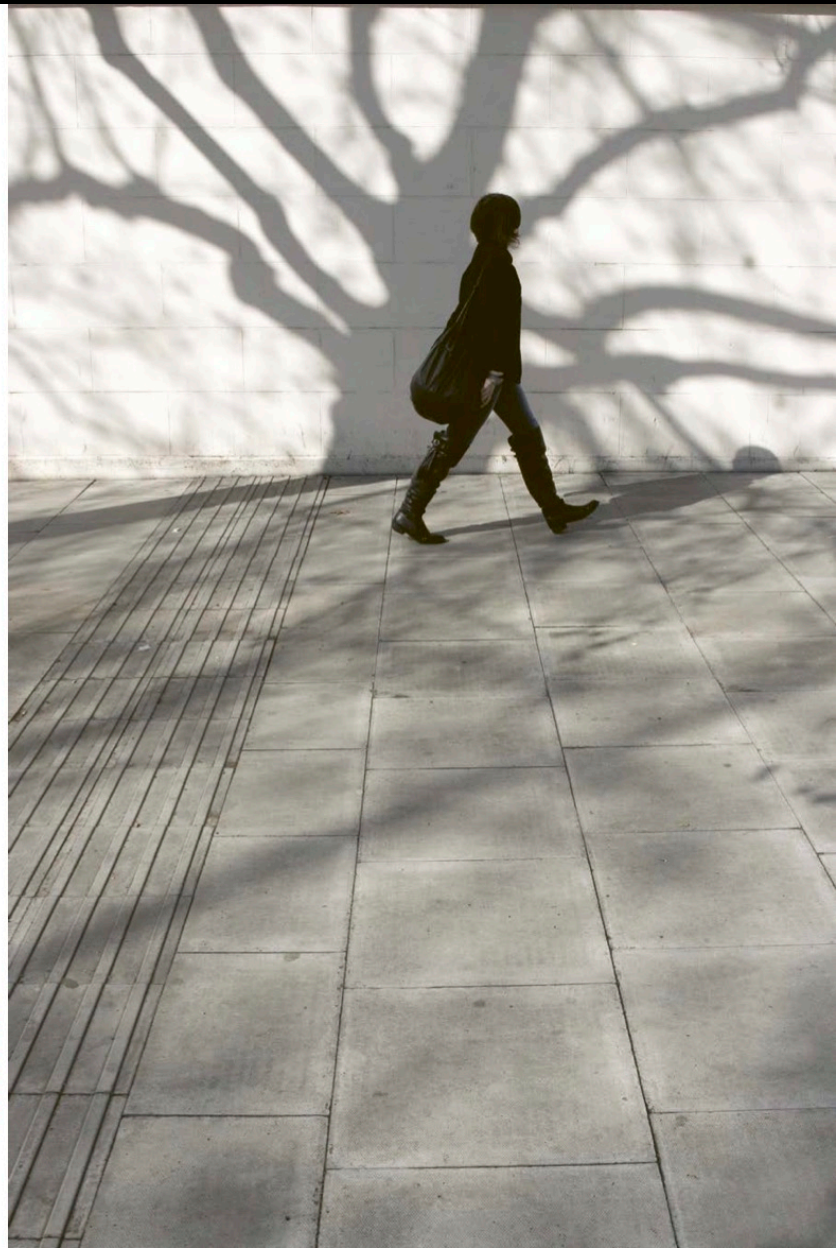
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'conventional' street photographs has never been enough, and I have sought inspiration from art almost as much as photography. It would be unusual and limiting for any photographer not to look at art. You do not need to delve too deeply into the lives of some of the so-called master photographers to discover their artistic connections.

When street photographers cite their influences, many routinely mention Henri Cartier-Bresson or Alex Webb. A better question to pose to a photographer is not who are the photographers who have influenced you the most, but who are the artists?

Some photographers have also been accomplished artists. Cartier-Bresson virtually gave up photography to return to his painting. Others, such as Saul Leiter, have kept their photography and art running simultaneously. The shared theme is creative energy, which does not always come out in one particular medium. You could argue that various creative outlets are vital and that repetition potentially dulls any artist's output.

The history of photography is littered with photographers who have tried to 'escape' the restrictions of what they have become known for. Walker Evans established his reputation during the Great Depression era of 1930s America when he documented the poverty and conditions of the time for the Farm Security Administration (FSA). In his old age, in the early 1970s, he playfully engaged with the then new Polaroid camera and his photographs are very different, both experimental and a little abstract.



David Gibson, London, 2010



David Gibson, London; 1996

CONCLUSION

In bright light or sunshine shadows accompany everything – people, buildings, objects – and they also move. They really are an important element for street photographers and should never be ignored or taken for granted. Sometimes the shadow is better than the thing or person that casts the shadow. We should celebrate shadows on the street and not just have them as incidental in the frame; they should leap out.

- Think 'sundial' because shadows move throughout the day; there might be one short opportunity to take a dramatic shadow photograph.
- In autumn, chase long shadows in late afternoon.
- Splashes of bright colour around shadows can add drama.
- Photograph your own shadow in all sorts of situations; alone but also imposed upon quiet or busy scenes.
- The shadows of a photographer is a special shape, especially when taken vertically.
- Shadows distort what people look like; photograph that.
- Consider the upside-down approach to shadows.



David Gibson, Barcelona; 2003

REFLECTIONS

Reflections on the street give back to us another view; they break up normality and have the ability to charm us.

Like shadows, reflections are a common concept in photography. The mechanics of traditional photography are based upon mirrors – in the camera and the lens – and outside on the street there are all sorts of reflective surfaces: glass in windows or even in sunglasses, water or any kind of liquid, anything glossy, such as paint or metal...the list seems endless. We take many for granted.

Reflections can confuse and delight. The complex reflection in Louis Faurer's Times Square photograph from 1960 is like a short film. A young boy looking cold or apprehensive seems to be reflected in a shop window; there is also the busy street and another reflection of a bride and groom. You keep looking and you want to understand.

In cities at certain times on sunny days, office block windows cast a series of light abstract squares across a street. This alone is a modern phenomenon and worth a series of photographs. Somebody somewhere will have done it.

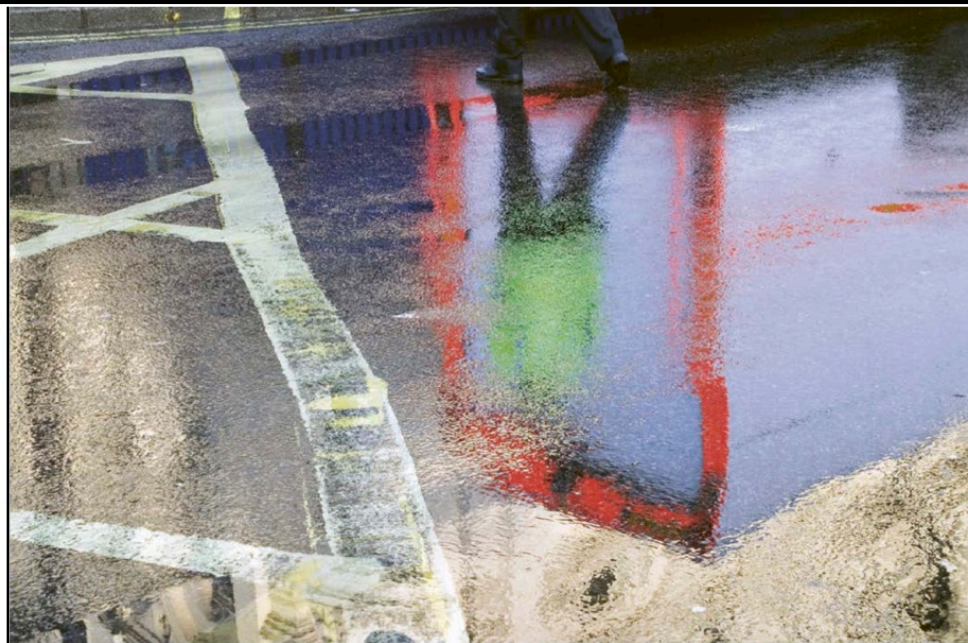
Weather is a factor; on rainy days colours on the street can become saturated and the wet surfaces almost prismatic. How many times have you seen a small oil spill on a wet road that becomes a beautiful rainbow mess of reflected colours?

My Piccadilly Circus photograph here was taken on a wet day; without the wet there would be no photograph. It is an abstract collection of colourful road markings and at the centre is a man framed in red. This was exactly what I saw, but in Photoshop I have turned the saturation and the contrast levels up a bit – not too much, just enough to lift the image.

A similar photograph was taken in Trafalgar Square in London, again on a wet day, but this time the final image has been turned upside down. The reflections of people appear the wrong way up when you see them, but turning the photograph upside down 'corrects' this. This photograph is all about the colours saturated by the rain and the shapes. People with umbrellas are a classic subject for reflections.

This is another example of a photograph moving towards the painterly where outlines are rounded and the overall effect is a little impressionistic. It is no coincidence that my interest in art surfaces in some of my work.

The pleasure of reflections – as with shadows – is that they offer virtually an alternative world for the street photographer, which, crucially, does not involve pointing the camera directly at people. This is sometimes a relief because it is easier and it gives you more time. However, that is not the main reason for considering reflections and nor should they be consigned to the realm of what the 'amateur' might do. There are nice reflections of boats on rivers, for example, but the street offers something a little grittier. It is the same technique, but far more interesting.



David Gibson, London; 2005

CONCLUSION

Reflections are not a photographic cliché because it depends entirely on what is reflected rather than the technique. The results can be both startling and original. Reflections are like shadows; we should be acutely aware of them.

- Become aware of reflections generally – in windows or puddles – anything that reflects the street.
- Photograph your own reflection in mirrors and shop windows. Vivian Maier did a whole book of reflected self-portraits.
- Consider unusual surfaces, both wet and dry. Glossy paint on boards surrounding building sites, for instance, are a potentially good source for abstract reflections.
- A mirror, such as in an antiques market, is a frame. Fill it up. Likewise, a set of mirrors presents a challenge; one or more occupied can make a photograph.
- Know that rain intensifies reflections – it saturates colours – on the street.
- Reflections, like shadows, sometimes work better flipped.

EMPTY

Street photographs that are empty of people, cars or general clutter are not necessarily empty of mood or interest.

Empty is a spurious word when applied to street photography because it suggests something lacking – an empty street is supposedly always awaiting people to furnish it. Streets are functional, they require people, but their absence can actually be the photograph. Photographing absence is a great subject, as long as you can feel the absence.

The important question is: how deliberate is the intention to photograph the absence? The Düsseldorf School of Photography in the mid 1970s espoused a 'new objectivity' towards photography by minimising the appearance of the human figure. Arguably, those bland photographs are deliberately empty; they are empty of hope. However, the meaning of street photography, even without people, is always to have at least some soul and never be completely empty.

The concern here is with the emptiness that stirs the imagination, that suggests something, and is not a lazy photograph of nothing in particular.

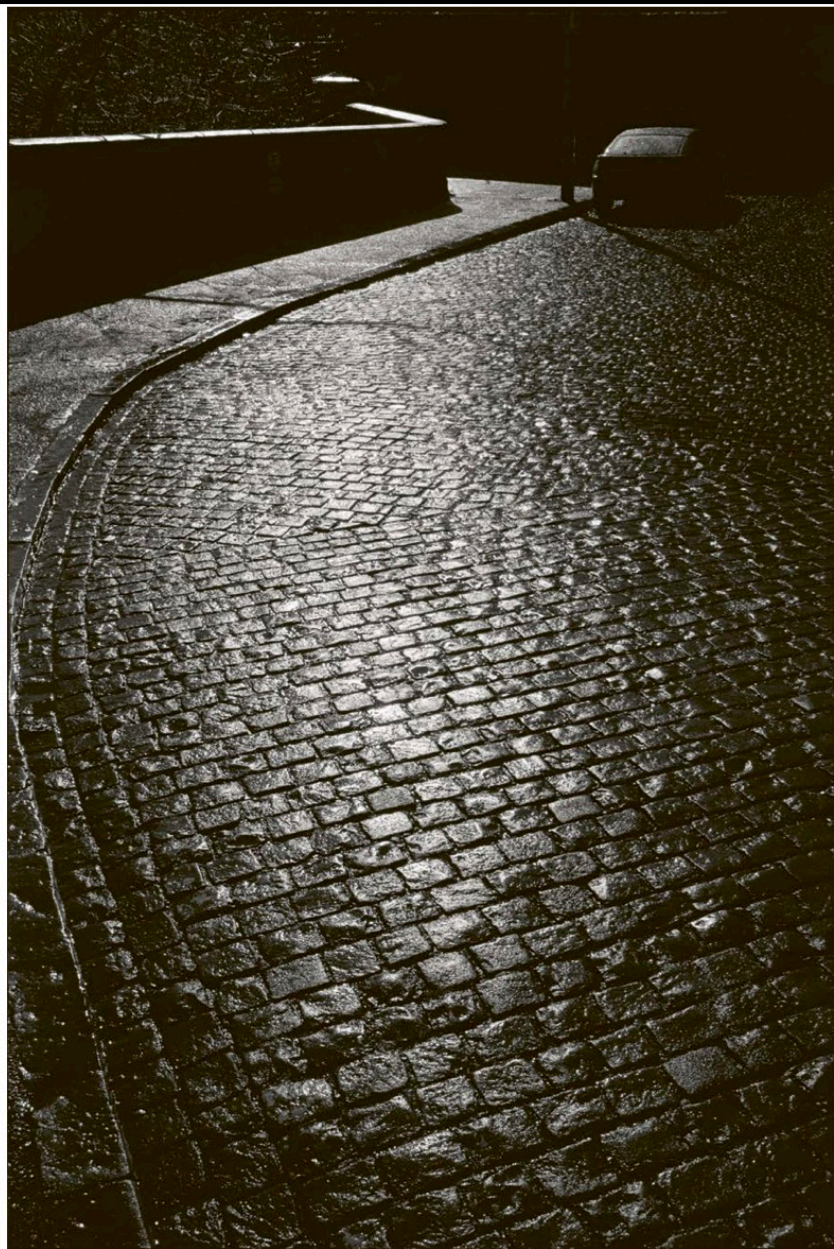
My photograph of a cobbled street in Glasgow at night is virtually empty – just one car and no people – but it is filled with reflected light and mood. To me it also strongly evokes the work of Bill Brandt because it has something of his dark, heavy style; it might even echo one of his actual photographs. Photographers have their heads full of images from other photographers and every now and then one of them unexpectedly pops out. Would the photograph be lifted by a single dark figure walking across the scene, an elegant man with a hat? Or a cat, or a pigeon in full flight? Quite possibly it would.

Perhaps the true question revolves around how comfortable we are with emptiness. We expect a street at night to be empty; the emptiness would be more pronounced in daylight but ultimately the photograph is as much about lines as mood. The photograph is full of time as well; it initially seems timeless until you truly consider the car. Without the car it could be the 1930s; that's what stirs the imagination.

CONCLUSION

Empty is such a spurious concept and perhaps the real debate is what is comfortable in a photograph. How comfortable is the photographer – and the viewer – with space or blandness? It is how we understand and approach emptiness that matters – and crucially how deliberate this is. Doing things deliberately with a clear understanding of our motives always makes for stronger, or at least more interesting work.

- Landscape photography is not 'empty,' the street is the same.
- Light is a subject; on an empty street it is enough.
- Photograph the emptiness of the night.
- Take the theme of empty as a project. Photograph empty buildings, streets, boxes of any kind, shops, etc.
- Photograph minimal evidence of people on the streets.
- Remove clutter from your photographs; understand the process of boiling down your images to the absolute minimum.
- Experiment with composition – with a person or object in the corner – surrounded by space.



David Gibson, Glasgow, 1994

MICHELLE GROSKOPF

born 1975, Toronto, Canada. www.mgroskopf.com

In her book, *Sentimental* (2018), Michelle Groskopf explains how she views life up close in attempt to frame the energy and beauty of passing moments. She describes her book as:

'A MAP OF MY WHIMS. IT'S A DIARY, IN MEMORY OF ALL THE DAYS I TROTTED HALF IN LOVE DOWN THE STREET. IT'S HOW I SEE COLOURS AND HOW I HOLD FACES UP TO BE WORSHIPPED. IT'S MY LOVE LETTER TO THE INDUSTRIAL NATURE OF HANDS AND ALL THE WAYS THEY SHOW US OUR BUSYNESS AND OUR BUSTLING...'

How should we take the title *Sentimental*? Is it meant ironically or in a heartfelt way? Groskopf's photographs – a mix of street photography, portrait and, arguably, fine art – are strangely hypnotic, but are they mildly cruel or kind? As a clue, Groskopf describes her childhood warmly, reminiscing of her days growing up in the suburbs of Toronto 'surrounded by shopping carts and old ladies in headscarves'. Her childhood was comforting and once she grew up and hit she city, she began to seek these familiar memories:

'I FLED STRAIGHT FOR THE CITY... AND STARTED TAKING PHOTOS OF SHOPPING CARTS AND OLD LADIES IN HEADSCARVES, PEOPLE WANDERING AROUND STRIP MALLS. IT DIDN'T MATTER WHAT CITY I WAS IN, I'D FIND THEM, THESE PEOPLE WHO SEEMED SO FAMILIAR

TO ME. I'D GET SO CLOSE TO THEM WITH MY CAMERA THEY WOULD BE FORCED TO TALK TO ME. THEY'D ASK ME WHY AND I WOULD TELL THEM THAT I THOUGHT THEY WERE BEAUTIFUL.'

Groskopf's chosen city is Los Angeles, where she consistently catches unlikely beauty. But what influences can we discern in her work and who are the photographers that have inspired her? Asked directly, Groskopf will pointedly tell you that she doesn't believe in having photo heroes, as 'you can drown under the weight of history and never take a single shot. We're all of us out there trying to say something, that's good enough for me.'

This attitude refreshingly sets Groskopf apart. Her work is original, surprising and direct. Her focus is people – particularly parts of people – often taken from odd angles. There are hands, backs of legs, and boldly coloured or just lacking or strange hair. Clothing too may be eccentric or ironic. Groskopf delights in the overlooked – she is sympathetic, almost tender in her work.

Groskopf's original, surprising, direct and tender approach is present in these four photographs. The anonymous couple (bottom left) are ageless, out of time, beyond expected fashion but completely comfortable. And consider those hands (top left) – delicate, surprising. What will emerge from the bag?



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