

NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY

* Every photograph that is made, whether by one who considers himself a professional or by the tourist who points his Instamatic and pushes a button, is a response to the exterior world, to something perceived outside himself by the person who operates the camera. And whatever is perceived and is translated into a photograph is perceived visually. Without the visual experience there can be no photograph. Auditory and tactile sensations, singly or in combination, are not sufficient to be expressed photographically. This is not to say that other sensations than the visual cannot have an influence on the resulting photograph, and that they may not have a very significant influence. They may determine the interpretation of the visual experience of an exterior object, situation or phenomenon, but they must have something to work on that is connected with seeing. A scene may have musical or tactile connotations to a sensitive person; he may say there is music in these trees, these hills, this shore, as Thoreau exclaimed about nature, "What is the music I hear?" He may say he can physically feel a place; that its mood is depressing and repellent or elevating and joyous, but there is always the scene itself without which these sensations would not be aroused. Some photographers say they are inspired by inner revelations and insights that have no exterior reality,

but these influences too work through the eyes on how the exterior world is appreciated.

No doubt there are those who will confuse matters by raising the question of the meaning of reality. I propose to circumvent this philosophical confusion by announcing the premise, for what I have to say, that a world independent of the illusions and hallucinations of the human mind does have concrete existence, and that general agreement on its physical attributes is found in the numerous categories of its contents - in physical, chemical, biological, geological and astronomical classifications. To the esoteric rejoinder that all knowledge is part of a grand illusion of universal mind, I say such a hypothesis is untestable and is therefore meaningless, like the question, "What existed before the beginning?" One must live and work on the premise of objective reality which is the bedrock of the accepted world.

It matters not what theme, what emotional commitments, or even what financial considerations motivate the photographer, he responds to the same kind of stimulus - to what he sees. He may find his inspiration in the social scene, in the lives of people, their joys and sorrows, their accomplishments and tribulations, their exaltations and sufferings, and in the way they meet the vicissitudes of life. Or he may be concerned with the natural scene in all its complexity,

variability and flow of dynamic interactions. And, thirdly, his interests might be purely episodic - portraiture to reveal individual character and personality, or studies of nature to demonstrate factual relationships and structure. The boundaries between these categories is infinitely fluid with much overlapping of departments.

Which point of view is predominant in any one person is determined very largely by the influences in his early life that preconditioned his outlook. The urban child will most likely be concerned more with the human condition than with abstract pristine nature, which to him is probably chaotic, incomprehensible, and frightening. [Nature lacks the simple order of human society where even the most blatant injustice is more acceptable, because it can be judged in terms of moral precepts, than are the harsh realities of interspecific relationships.] If he has been brought up in an intellectual atmosphere his removal from the natural world is more artificial, but simultaneously, by virtue of greater rationality, more accommodatable to it. Joseph Wood Krutch illustrates the adaptability of the city intellectual and scholar who took up rural life to become a defender of untrammelled nature.

The less educated and sophisticated regard nature with suspicion and fear, as a brooding force to be subdued and tamed, or more uncompromisingly to be conquered. To conquer means to harness, to domesticate, to convert the forces of nature to useful purposes, by which is meant to the enrichment of people. Resources unused are considered wasted, not by the unsophisticated