

## **What Kind of Photos Will Last**

## What Kind of Photos Will Last?

Dear friend,

A philosophical question I was pondering while lying in bed this morning--

*"What kind of photos will last, and what kind of photos will not?"*

---

In studying a lot of philosophers, artists, and poets of the past, it seems that the ultimate test of how good an artist-philosopher-thinker is depends on whether their work lasts or not.

Think about it-- in design, art, and life, it is difficult to know what is "good" or "bad". But generally, whatever has existed for a long time has existed for a good reason (maybe for reasons unknown to us). Nassim Taleb calls this the "Lindy Effect", **generally what is older is better**.

In photography, art, and design-- consider the "old school" stuff is usually the best.

For example, with camera design, there is a reason why the Leica M-Rangefinder design has been so "timeless" and has lasted from the 1920s until now (around 100 years!).

Another good example is the RICOH-GR series cameras. The original film Ricoh GR 1 camera came out in 1996, and now we have the digital RICOH GR-series cameras that are thriving! The ergonomics of the camera are perfect for a point and shoot camera. At least for the next few thousands of years, our hands won't change and evolve much. Thus generally things which are designed which fit well into our hands (pens, books) will continue to exist in their present form.

---

In today's world, we are drowning in a digital black sea of images. And to be honest, there are lots of really really good images out there now! But the practical question we must address is this:

*In a world with trillions of images, which few images do we decide to consume?*

It would be silly to try to consume all the images in the world. That's like trying to eat every single food item in all the fast-food restaurants around the world (Instagram). I would rather say let us take the "old school" route of studying photography books. Why? It cost photographers real money to print their photos into a book, so there is a greater likelihood that the photographs in (printed) photo books will be better images!

And also generally photographers who are dead (who are still famous now) have existed for a long time for good reasons-- either because they innovated in photography (Henri Cartier-Bresson and black and white photography, or William Eggleston and color photography), or because their work has merit and is good!

---

So far, the best (two) human artwork which has existed until now is probably Homer's Odyssey and Iliad. Generally in literature, authors are remembered for books written. For myself personally, my favorite literature books include 1984 by George Orwell, Brave New World by Aldous Huxley, and the Iliad.

For painters, generally painters are remembered for their best (single, stand-alone) paintings. For example Leonardo da Vinci and the Mona Lisa, Picasso and Guernica, or Andy Warhol and the soup cans.

For film-makers, they are remembered for their best films. For example "The Birds" by Alfred Hitchcock, "2001 Space Odyssey" by Stanley Kubrick, or 7 Samurai by Akira Kurosawa.

For photographers, they are either remembered for single images, or books. For example when it comes to photo books: "The Americans" by Robert Frank. Or "The Last Resort" or "Common Sense" by Martin Parr, "The Decisive Moment" by Henri

Cartier-Bresson, "Exiles" or "Gypsies" by Josef Koudelka, "The Suffering of Light" or "Istanbul" by Alex Webb.

Also for photographers, we can be remembered for great single images, such as any iconic single image by Steve McCurry (Afghan Girl), The Bicycle Photo or Jumping Man photo by Henri Cartier-Bresson, or Garry Winogrand's famous "Bi-racial couple" picture with the black man and white woman and the two chimpanzees.

---

### **What are my best photos?**

Okay honestly we can theorize about art, other artists, etc-- but more importantly, **we need to judge our own photos.** So the practical idea I will give you is this:

*You know what your best pictures are based on which of your photos (from very long ago) you still like!*

For example, a picture that you shot 5 years ago (that you still like) is probably more likely to be a good photo than a photo you shot 1 year ago (and still like).

So as (another) practical tip, spend some time looking back at your older pictures and re-sharing or re-uploading/experiencing them!

Also as a practical note, spend some more time re-looking at some of your favorite photo books, instead of always buying new books. Re-read some of your favorite literature from the past, and spend more time re-watching some of your favorite old-school films.

Keep it classic. ERIC