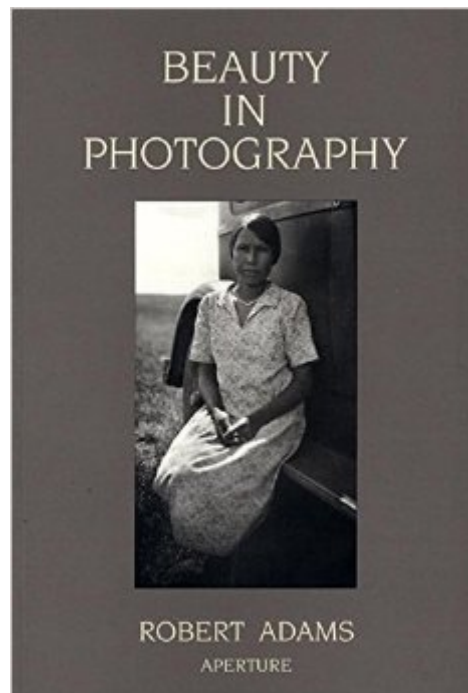


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# Robert Adams: Beauty In Photography: Essays In Defense Of Traditional Values



## Synopsis

The eight essays in *Beauty in Photography* provide a critical appreciation of photography by one of its foremost proponents. The result is a rare book of criticism, alive to the pleasure and mysteries of true exploration.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

For me, there are two key assertions in Robert Adams' "Beauty in Photography". First, that we "live in discouraging hours of society's apparent decay" (p. 88). Second, that the purpose of art is to "help us meet our worst fear, the suspicion that life may be chaos and that therefore our suffering is without meaning" (p. 25). From these two assertions Adams develops his interpretation of photography: Photography detects, extracts and emphasizes the beauty around us, and by doing so it points toward something deeper in the world, an organizing power, a coherence supporting the world and our lives. To Adams, photography is a spiritual exercise, making bearable an otherwise decaying surrounding. Art not concerned with depicting the world beautifully is, to Adams, mere "decoration". Thus, Adams tells us little interesting about most modern art, and his approach does not generalize, for instance, to music. That beauty can exist as such, that it can tell us something about ourselves even without referring to things in the world: This does not seem to be Adams' experience. In these very conservative views I disagree with Adams. Still, I recommend his essays to anyone who wants to understand why some photography is moving us while other is not. Even if Adams is not telling the whole story -probably nobody will- he is an excellent writer who talks about

art in a clear and understandable way. The only disappointment with the book was the poor reproduction quality of the images depicted. As a publisher specializing in photography books Aperture could do better.

I found that various topics Adams discussed in his book, for instance, "What is beauty?", "How do you make art new?", "Can you photograph evil?", insightful and highly relevant even though it was written in the age of film. I read his essays again and again when I want to reflect on my photography. If I had to quote, this would be one that I love most: "Most of the pictures (in mass circulation photography magazines) suggest embarrassing strain: odd angles, extreme lenses, and eccentric darkroom techniques reveal a struggle to substitute shock and technology for sight."  
-Robert Adams That is so relevant in the age of digital photography.

This is really a book-let, something of a size common in old European Schools. The views expressed are honest but conservative, and overall it's clear that the author lives in a somewhat "safe" academic environment and likes to resort to the standard referral method of using other photographers as setters of standards or at least, a base of reference. But, he does it knowingly and cracks at least one joke about it. It makes a very good read, and I worked my way through it in less than an hour. I would place it in a category perhaps of a "Zen of Photography" reading. For those photographers who are full of themselves this booklet will do no good. For those who perhaps, like to go on photographic quests, and thusly often question what they are doing, this book is a good read. The images shown are small and just act to prop up the essays, so they don't need to be supreme works of the printing art. A good buy for the student and the expert alike.

This slender volume is my favorite among the many books I have read on photography - a subject about which I have found it frustratingly hard to find good, clear writing. This is a book to be read, marked up, reread, savored. Adams cuts to the heart of not only photography, but art in general. He is an outstanding writer - clear, unambiguous, and refreshingly free of jargon. Some may understandably fault the low-end quality of the photographic reproductions, but I found them sufficient to get the points across. The interested reader can seek out better quality versions of those photographers' works; this is not a book of photographs but one about photographs.

Just because this was written in the 70s and only has B&W photos, don't discount it. Robert Adams was one of the prime shapers of American photography in the latter 20th century. His insights still

hold water and give a window into seeing beauty without a photo being pretty.

I have always thought of Adams as one of the most expressive writers on the aesthetics of photography. I actually have had this title in my library for many years but think highly enough of what Adams has to say that I bought this for a friend and photographic colleague. I hope that Adam's stand, as a photographer, on the condition of our environmental life support system adds to the up-swelling of consensus toward an actual awakening and the necessary change that will be required to affect our survival.

This is an important collection of essays for the serious photographer and for anyone interested in the art of photography. This book is destined to become a classic and will be read a hundred years from now. Adams' many excellent books of his own photography are testimony to the validity of what he writes about. I have read these essays over and over again and continue to learn. Robert Adams is one of the few photographers whose writing matches his photography.

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