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# Seizing The Light: A Social History Of Photography



## Synopsis

Seizing the Light: A Social History of Photography provides a thought-provoking, accurate, and accessible introduction to the photographic arts for all readers. With stunning images and commentary by hundreds of international artists, the text clearly and concisely provides the building blocks necessary to critically explore photographic history from the photographers' eye, an aesthetic point of view.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Seizing the Light: A History of Photography. is a wonderfully broad, contemporary, eclectic and entertaining book. Robert Hirsch has produced the most useful, readable, and practical successor to Beaumont Newhall's classic, The History of Photography, first published in 1937. Seizing the Light is written in a friendly, accessible way -- dense with information, but more hip and lively than other offerings, especially those aimed at college students. Hirsch includes the "canon" of standard western photographic history (represented by Stieglitz, Weston, Adams, White, et. al.) first set forth by Newhall and other researchers, but updates the information with special emphasis on the last five decades of photographic practice, including digital imaging. Many teachers and interested readers will greatly appreciate Hirsch's conscious effort throughout the book, to include numerous women and photographers from other cultures. (Chapter Two opens with an image of an American Indian, and includes a portrait of an African-American, affording students the realization that marginalized groups actually did appear as subjects before the camera in addition to working behind them.) Students will also appreciate Hirsch's habit of opening new chapters with a description

of cultural and political events occurring during the period under discussion: Chapter Twelve starts with a harrowing description of life for immigrants in New York City in the late Nineteenth Century during the time of Jacob Riis, and Chapter Seventeen has a helpful summary of the ending of the Vietnam War, connecting it smoothly to such diverse influences as Richard Nixon and the BeeGees!

Hirsch's new edition of his *Seizing the Light* is now properly titled, with "Social History of Photography" in the title. The addition of the word "social" creates a proper title for a book that puts so much emphasis on the social context. This is a fine book on the history of photography, no question about that. There is much to be admired in this book and it certainly does belong on the shelf of anyone who wants such a reference. It provides a wealth of information and is pleasant to read. But, unless changes were made from the earlier edition (which is the one I have and am commenting on) it is not perfect. Since most of the reviews glow with admiration, let me not trouble you with more praise, but let me comment on a couple of things that trouble me about the book. While there is much to admire about this book, my admiration for the book is tempered by two things bother me about this book: (1) the strange treatment and absences in the case of some of the icons who are no longer with us and (2) an almost clinical listing of numerous younger photographers. The latter presents us with something like a catalog listing with no basis for the decision on who to include and who to leave out, with some important contemporary figures not even mentioned. The failure to give much print or discussion to some amazingly influential and important photographers is what troubles me most about this book. For example, Brett Weston, a major figure in the history of photography, is barely mentioned and I recall no examples of his work in the book (my edition). Similarly, Margaret Mather, a gifted photographer in her own right, and indeed a photographer who greatly influenced the photographic development of Edward Weston, is also barely mentioned.

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*Seizing the Light: A Social History of Photography* 2nd (second) Edition by Hirsch, Robert published by McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages (2008)

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