

**#90 Apr. 2024 Cameraderie
William Eggleston (1939-)**



William Eggleston, along with Stephen Shore (#89, Jan. 2024) was a leader in establishing color images into the photographic canon. Like Shore, Eggleston often focused on the momentarily-seen snatches of life around him, eschewing rules of composition. Eggleston was influenced early by Robert Frank (#23, Oct. 2017), and Henri Cartier-Bresson’s (#43, Sept. 2019) book, *The Decisive Moment*. He was among the first photographers to have color photographs exhibited by MOMA—the highest American stamp of canonical approval.

The Wikipedia article quotes the writer and photographer Eudora Welty and others as follows:

Eggleston's mature work is characterized by its ordinary subject matter. As Eudora Welty noted in her introduction to *The Democratic Forest*, an Eggleston photograph might include “old tires, Dr. Pepper machines, discarded air-conditioners, vending machines, empty and dirty Coca-Cola bottles, torn posters, power poles and power wires, street barricades, one-way signs, detour signs, No Parking signs, parking meters, and palm trees crowding the same curb.”

Eudora Welty suggests that Eggleston sees the complexity and beauty of the mundane world: “The extraordinary, compelling, honest, beautiful and unsparing photographs all have to do with the quality of our lives in the everyday world: they succeed in showing us the grain of the present, like the cross-section of a tree... They focus on the mundane world. But no subject is fuller of implications than the mundane world!” Mark Holborn, in his introduction to *Ancient and Modern*, writes about the dark undercurrent of these mundane scenes as viewed through Eggleston's lens: “[Eggleston's] subjects are, on the surface, the ordinary inhabitants and environs of suburban Memphis and Mississippi—friends, family, barbecues, back yards, a tricycle and the clutter of the mundane. The normality of these subjects is deceptive, for behind the images there is a sense of lurking danger.” American artist Edward Ruscha said of Eggleston's work, “When you see a picture he's taken, you're stepping into some kind of jagged world that seems like Eggleston World.”

Here is the Wikipedia article: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Eggleston

The Eggleston Foundation website has a fine display of nearly two dozen of Eggleston’s images: <https://www.egglestonartfoundation.org/>

The MOMA page for Eggleston has 215 of his images online: <https://www.moma.org/artists/1690>

The Eggleston page on artnet has a large number of Eggleston images, and this notable quote:

In 1976, the curator John Szarkowski mounted the exhibition “Eggleston’s Guide” at The Museum of Modern Art, a solo show of the artist’s color photographs which was famously condemned by the traditional photographer Ansel Adams [#12, March 2014]. Since his debut exhibition, Eggleston has gone on to produce a number of important photobooks, including *The Democratic Forest* (1989), which have in turn influenced a younger generation of photographers, including Martin Parr and Stephen Shore.

Here is the artnet link: <https://www.artnet.com/artists/william-eggleston/>

Here is a selection of Eggleston’s images that I liked. Please see more at the links above.

William Eggleston, *Untitled*, c. 1973 (Known as “The Red Ceiling”)



Eggleston was fascinated by deep colors. He produced this image using dye transfer printing and commented (see the Wikipedia article) that “The ultimate print was a dye transfer. ... Every photograph I subsequently printed with the process seemed fantastic and each one seemed better than the previous one.” “The Red Ceiling is so powerful, that in fact, I’ve never seen it reproduced on the page to my satisfaction. When you look at the dye it is like red blood that’s wet on the wall. A little red is usually enough, but to work with an entire red surface was a challenge.”

I don’t understand dye transfer printing, but I found this unattributed comment in an Internet search, “The dyes produce a wide range of colors and tones, and dye transfer prints are perhaps the most archivally stable.”

William Eggleston, *Untitled*, c. 1974



I don't know how Eggleston got this shot, but it's just simply clever.

William Eggleston, *Untitled*, c. 1984



Compare this image to Stephen Shore's 1975 Beverly Boulevard and La Brea Avenue image from this past January, shown here in miniature.

William Eggleston, *Untitled*, c. 1973



This is another example of the momentarily-seen snatches of life that I mentioned earlier. This image has typical Eggleston overtones of “lurking danger,” as noted in the Wikipedia article.

William Eggleston, *Untitled*, c. 1965-74



This image interests me a great deal because I think it balances between a snatched view of a moment and a careful composition.