



Photographs not taken: A collection of photographers' essays

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Photographs Not Taken is a collection of photographers' essays about failed attempts to make a picture. Editor Will Steacy asked each photographer to abandon the conventional tools needed to make a photograph—camera, lens, film—and instead make a photograph using words, to capture the image (and its attendant memories) that never made it through the lens. In each essay, the photograph has been stripped down to its barest and most primitive form: the idea behind it. This collection provides a unique and original interpretation of the experience of photographing, and allows the reader into a world rarely seen: the image making process itself. Photographs Not Taken features contributions by: Peter Van Agtmael, Dave Anderson, Timothy Archibald, Roger Ballen, Thomas Bangsted, Juliana Beasley, Nina Berman, Elinor Carucci, Kelli Connell, Paul D'Amato, Tim Davis, KayLynn Deveney, Doug Dubois, Rian Dundon, Amy Elkins, Jim Goldberg, Emmet Gowin, Gregory Halpern, Tim Hetherington, Todd Hido, Rob Hornstra, Eirik Johnson, Chris Jordan, Nadav Kander, Ed Kashi, Misty Keasler, Lisa Kereszi, Erika Larsen, Shane Lavalette, Deana Lawson, Joshua Lutz, David Maisel, Mary Ellen Mark, Laura McPhee, Michael Meads, Andrew Moore, Richard Mosse, Zwelethu Mthethwa, Laurel Nakadate, Ed Panar, Christian Patterson, Andrew Phelps, Sylvia Plachy, Mark Power, Peter Riesett, Simon Roberts, Joseph Rodriguez, Stefan Ruiz, Matt Salacuse, Alessandra Sanguinetti, Aaron Schuman, Jamel Shabazz, Alec Soth, Amy Stein, and others.

Photographs not taken: A collection of photographers' essays Details

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Becky Taylor says

This is a wonderful collection of very different stories. There are a huge number of reasons why someone could or would never photograph an image that ended up staying in their mind forever. I was amazed by the range of reasons, from practical physical limitations to ethical questions about why you would photograph someone in pain. I would like to look up sample work by each of the photographers who contributed.

I highly recommend this book, if you can find it.

Jason McClain says

So far this is proving to be an interesting collection of essays about photographs that photographers did not take. Some of the essays could have done with a bit of editing work them selves so they carried a better emotional weight, but so far I am finding this very inspirational as it pertains to the work of other photographers.

Good read, into the minds of photographehrs and what caused them to not take a shot. Some part could have down with some editing, but its is listed as a collection of essays.

Melis Bagatir says

The book is all about "a collection of essays by photographers about moments that never became a picture".

I am confused about this book. Although there are many great stories that makes you want to read on some more, where some of them make you wonder why the hell you are still reading this book.

In my opinion the reason behind it that its a "collection of essays" from different photographers, and it seems that this book was not properly edited. The essays of the photographers were put in directly into the book. Don't really know if its a good thing or not. Maybe. Maybe not.

Brian Page says

PHOTOGRAPHS NOT TAKEN is a collection of 62 essays by noted photographers about images they did not or could not make. The first story, by Dave Anderson is a tear-jerker. Others are too. The writers include many notables such as Nina Berman, Emmet Gowin, Tim Hetherington, Ed Kashi, Mary Ellen Mark, Hiroshi Watanabe, and Alex Webb. Big names. This is heavy stuff. Reading about images not made may seem a little mundane, but this collection actually gives the reader a lot of insight into how these photographers approach life, their subjects, and morality. Consider this thought by Laurel Nakadate: "Looking is an act of courage. It's terrifying. It's possible to see too much, to witness things that we cannot hold. I wasn't brave that night. To record is to carry a burden, to surrender to beauty. I will never be powerful enough to save

everyone. And I have to be okay with that.”

Of course, reading these essays will invariably cause serious photographers to recall their own Photographs Not Taken. For me, this happened on a walk from Inverness to Fort William, quite some time ago. I walked a trail winding through a very aromatic copse of Douglas fir trees, padding along on a thickly carpeted path of the fine pine needles. This was special in itself. But then I popped out of the woods just a few steps from a small white-washed stone cottage with an honest to goodness thatched roof, with smoke curling up from a chimney. The air was cool. I confess that my first thought was to reach for my camera. I had an F3 and plenty of Kodachrome; and the composition was perfect, with the tree line shading diagonally toward the cottage and the white-washed siding contrasting nicely with the trees on the far side of the yard. But the moment was just too poignant. A picture would be just a picture. It couldn't begin to convey the coolness of the air, the quiet of a pine forest, the pleasant smell of a wood fire mixed with the Douglas fir scent, and the knowledge that my ancestors likely walked away from such a place to pursue a dream in the new world. It was just too beautiful to capture in a photograph.

Mike says

This was an interesting read on different photographers and the different reasons they didn't take a photograph but the image has stuck in their mind. And, while some photographers suffer from the need to see practically everything photographed, Aaron Schuman in the book explains very clearly how sometimes the most important moments do not end up as a photograph: "... sometimes we find ourselves faced ... a moment that is 'too' something - too dangerous, too intimate, too immediate, too complex, too intense, too terrifying, too fleeting, too painful, too private, too invasive, too embarrassing, too exiting, too schmaltzy, too cliched, too ecstatic, too imagined, or simply too impossible - to 'take.'" I know photographers aren't really known for their words but I think that passage is beautiful and so true.

Nicole says

This book wasn't what I wanted it to be, but it was still decent. Like all books of this nature, it was hit or miss, some of the essays were immensely beautiful and moving, others left me thinking that the author was probably a better photographer than writer. David Maisel's and Laurel Nakadate's were the stand outs for me, portraying more everyday moments, rather than some of the other photographers, who tried to write about these moments of great tragedy or drama and were unable to conjure the intensity of the moment with their words.

Jackie Donnelly (Baisa) says

This book was just okay. The concept was wonderful--a collection of photographers who did NOT take certain shots, and the back story behind why they didn't get the shot--but I feel it could have been executed better.

To start, I didn't know any of the photographers in the entire book (and, as a photographer myself, it seems I would have surely stumbled upon ONE or TWO of them at some point?) but perhaps it is reader error on my part.

Secondly, either writer had such a different style (and many are, let's face it, NOT WRITERS). Also, a few "cheated" talking either about photos they DID take, but wish they hadn't, photos of places they never went, or photos of their childhood they wished they'd had a camera back then to take.

While all of these instances have merit as stories and lessons, in and of themselves, the premise of the book was, from a reader's standpoint, supposed to be about photographer's not getting "the shot" (whether not TAKING it, whether not managing to capture it correctly, or a number of things in that vein). So, half the stories did not resonate and, while they were mostly "photographs not taken," how can we write about photos from an era when we did not have cameras or were too young to know how to use them? Of course we all wish we had photos from certain periods of our lives. That's a no-brainer. I wanted something more substantial from a photographers perspective of shots that slipped through their fingers while actually ON A SHOOT. There were several stories like this (and I enjoyed those, even though, as I mentioned earlier, they aren't all very good "writers"), but at least, the book would have had a common thread, had they approached the topic in from a similar vantage point.

One thing the book DID do for me is help me remember some of my own shots that I missed, WHY I missed them, and not to regret those I did not get, as some things weren't meant to be captured, only experienced, being fully present and not behind a lens.

Sandra Scott says

This is the book I had been looking for to answer my question of why photographers take photographs, what is their motivation, which is strange considering the title. These short personal essays by so many photographers had me smiling with delight and then in shock, and in others, tears. It brought to life photographers when they had to use words to describe the scene that only their eyes saw and their memory could remember, when their finger wouldn't, couldn't take the photograph. I can't wait to read it again.

Q says

This was a fun book to read. Something good to read on the subway or if you have a busy schedule since most of the essays (I wouldn't even call them that, they're so short) are no more than a page. It's really easy to pick up and put down. The essays were kind of hit or miss, there were some very emotional and interesting ones, but there were also some that were boring and badly written. Either way I enjoyed it.

Timothy Neesam says

Unique collection of essays asking photographers, who document moments in time, to explain a moment in their life wherein they did not capture the event by taking a picture. Sometimes funny, sometimes heart-rending, I think the book is very much about recognizing the significance of individual experiences and being present in the moment. Works well reading it in bits and pieces. Highly recommended.

Ed says

This is a wonderful book for someone trying to approach photography seriously. In many short essays photographers write about pictures they wanted to take but didn't. Sometimes the subject was too sensitive, or the photographer's feelings too raw. Sometimes they simply didn't have a camera. In every case they share their thoughts and feelings about a situation. How do photographers think? This book provides one very interesting glimpse into the minds of a great selection of photographers. No pictures.

Ben Yap says

"Other times I am relieved that I didn't and that I don't have the burden of an image of that weight" - Hank Willis Thomas

Clark says

It seems appropriate to mention that there is some Marcel Duchamp quote about how he wants photography to totally fuck over painting so that nobody cares anymore, then for something else to come along and do the same thing to photography, etc, etc. Was that important? Idk. Well anyhow, obviously there are both some serious winners and some serious losers in this collection. It's still tight though. Good range from totally violent & rape-y sad as fuck shit to straight up magic moments (like that sonG). Dude did an awesome job getting a HUGE range of photographers, both in the sense of personal life experience and independent style. The "types" of stories in the collection run this crazy gamut so that even when the total snoozers fail you, you kind of get the feeling that their little bit of banality is still necessary for pulling together the book as a complete project. No matter the medium, be it film or writing or fucking whatever (blogging?!), every life will be struck with these flat out blown zone moments that cannot be captured by any human construct. There are just no physics for it. I see this acknowledged in book after book, but shit man, it never gets old.

Zach Gray says

Not sure how enjoyable this would be to anyone who isn't a photographer, but for me it was nice to be able to relate to this group of remarkable photographers.

No surprise that some couldn't write worth a darn, but most were skilled enough to convey remarkable moments. Laurel Nakadate's beautiful prose really stuck out.

My favorite stories were the simple ones with delicate scenes from everyday life, where a moment floats by with no regard for its viewer. Chris Jordan's memory of his camera being out of reach as his 3-year-old son spreads his arms out, taking in the setting sun behind a smoke-filled sky.

Dani says

I laughed, I cried, I cringed. Since this book has many contributors, the writing styles and quality vary greatly. However, each gives you something to think about. I enjoyed contemplating moments of missed photographs and ones that simply couldn't be taken. As a photographer myself, I found it comforting and interesting to hear these stories. I can relate.

