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Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Decisive Moment



Synopsis

"Within the canon of European photography books it would be difficult to find one more famous, revered and influential as Henri Cartier-Bresson's *The Decisive Moment*," wrote Jeffrey Ladd in Time LightBox, in a feature on Steidl's new edition of this ultimate photobook classic. Originally published in 1952, this collection of Cartier-Bresson's best work from his early years was embellished with a collage cover by Henri Matisse. The book has since influenced generations of photographers, while its English title defined the notion of the famous peak in which all elements in the photographic frame accumulate to form the perfect image—not the moment of the height of the action, necessarily, but the formal, visual peak. This new publication—the first and only reprint since the original 1952 edition—is a meticulous facsimile of the original book that launched the artist to international fame, with an additional booklet on the history of *The Decisive Moment* by Centre Pompidou curator Clément Châroux. Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908–2004) was born in Chanteloup-en-Brie, France. He initially studied painting and began photographing in the 1930s. Cartier-Bresson cofounded Magnum in 1947. In the late 1960s he returned to his original passion, drawing. In 2003 Cartier-Bresson established the Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson in Paris, one year before his death.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I read these reviews lamenting the horrible print quality while waiting for me pre-ordered copy to be delivered and expected to be terribly disappointed. They were so negative I was ready to return the

book without opening it. Reviewers claim that the photos look like copies of copies and that HCB never would have let his work be presented this way. Because of these reviews, I thought the Steidl facsimile of the original must have been blundered somehow. It was only at my fiancée's insistence that I even bothered unwrapping the book to take a look at it (she knew how excited I was about the book coming out and even offered to pay for it if I didn't like the edition). I just took my copy out of the shrink wrap, and couldn't be more pleased. I am Thrilled with this book. Here is some background that may be helpful. Several months ago, when I heard this book was being reprinted, I decided to see if my university's interlibrary loan service could track down a copy of the rare, valuable, original for me to borrow, to see if I wanted to buy the Steidl edition when released. I figured it was a longshot since a book this rare and valuable is risky to lend out. But the library was able to get it for me and I can tell you that Steidl did a PERFECT job reproducing it. It is literally as though you are holding a brand new copy of the original in your hands (except better, because the photos haven't faded over 50 years and had hundreds of students' hands on the pages- they look fresh as they should). So I have to admit, I'm really baffled by the negative reviews, especially one that claims to have seen the original. If people think the photos look like copies of copies, well, that's what you would have thought of the original too.

This was unquestionably a landmark book that represented not only a retrospective of HCB's self-declared best works over 20 years but also a new era in photography books. The original Simon & Schuster edition is extremely scarce and far too expensive for most camera enthusiasts to ever even see. So I salute Herr Steidl's determination to republish this work for a new generation. It must have been quite a project. But I do wonder if Herr Steidl didn't meet this challenge with a bit too much desire for fidelity? In the 60 years since this book was first published the standards in both photography and graphic arts have changed dramatically. Complaints about the "poor image reproduction quality" fundamentally reflect this shift to the degree that tastes have changed. I recall the original book being printed in deep, rich photogravure. This intaglio-style process deposited copious amounts of ink on the paper to achieve the deep darks. Photogravure also had a characteristic tactility that no other process can match. But today photogravure is long gone. It was a very specialized process requiring equipment and craftsmanship that even Herr Steidl could not resurrect. He seemed to do his best with modern pressmanship techniques. Unfortunately while the results are sometimes convincing they are often anemic when compared to original photogravure. To today's photo enthusiasts weaned on over-sharpened, over-contrasted photos on social sites the images will look like they've been run through a washing machine. What's more, the end boards curl

outward like Shirley Temple's hair. I can literally slide the book out of its slip case and start a countdown from 30 to watch the top board curl like a flower opening towards the sun.

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