

A Study on the impact of the Minimalism Art Movement on the work of Hiroshi Sugimoto, Andreas Gursky and Michael Kenna

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Abstract:

According to studies on the Minimalism Art Movement, photography instructors must recognise that students must comprehend Minimalism in photography and how it affects a sequence of photographs, leaving the audience burden-free in delight. As a result, minimalist photography has gained appeal and attracted a large number of photographers. After they understand the distinction, students will be able to create images with tremendous aesthetic appeal on a regular basis. However, there has been very little research in this field. The author will observe the impact of the 'Minimalism Art Movement' on the works of eminent photographers created over their professional photography careers. In this study paper, the author will explore the methodology, philosophy, and interpretation of photographers such as Hiroshi Sugimoto, Andreas Gursky, and Michael Kenna. The author is also a photographer with over 20 years of experience in commercial photography and education. The author will interpret the data by studying and referencing the masters' photography works. This is a completely exploratory study. According to the findings of this study, the minimalism movement had a significant impact on the world of photography, inspiring a large number of photographers to explore the power of simplicity, abstraction, and minimalism in their work.

Keywords: Photography, Minimalism, visual philosophy, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Andreas Gursky, Michael Kenna, Frank Stella, Mark Rothko, Art Movements.

Introduction:

“Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.” -Leonardo da Vinci, 1452. (BECKER)[2]

A Style of Minimalism a sculpture and painting trend that emerged in the 1950s and was distinguished by the use of simple, huge forms. Abstract and minimalism are two independent but related art trends that have made important contributions to the field of photography. These trends value simplicity, minimalism, and abstraction over realism and complexity, focusing on form, color, and texture to create compelling and evocative images.

The history of Minimalism as an artistic trend originated in the 1960s in New York. It was founded by artists who saw the need to break away from the abstract expressionism that had been fashionable just after WWII. Painters like Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella, and Kenneth Noland began creating works of art to investigate what is required to transmit one's intent

when creating art. (sothebys.com, 2023)[6]Minimalism originated as a rebellion on abstract expressionism. Minimalism has also been referred to as ABC art, object art, fundamental structures, and cool art, but the word minimalism has remained.(Watson, 2017)[8]Minimalism is an abstract art movement that rose to prominence in America in the 1960s and 1970s. Minimalist painters abandoned Abstract Expressionism's heroic themes in favor of pared-down, essentially self-referential geometric forms.(sothebys.com, 2023)[6]

The best thing about minimalism is that it teaches us to focus on the small, insignificant, and overlooked. It's like viewing a planet outside of a world. Minimalism is, by definition, highly subjective, but it is also intuitive and expressive. The visuals in today's world are overwhelming since hundreds of images, pictures, and photos pass in front of our eyes every day via various social media platforms, print media, and platforms, etc. The work is empty, a sense of space and emptiness, and you begin to understand your location and where you stand. Minimalism is less of an escape and more of a Zen moment in time, in which you become acutely aware that you are the observer. (sothebys.com, 2023)[6]

Minimalist images are always a possibility as long as you have a minimal look towards your surroundings, photographer" -Milad Safabakhsh, Founder of Minimalist Photography Awards.Although this photography technique is taken from the early 1950s art movement."As a photographic approach, minimalism or minimalism photography can be used by photographers of all genres, whether they are portrait, architecture, landscape, or other." Minimalist photography frequently focuses on a single topic in its composition, with nature serving as the backdrop. Geometric patterns, lines, and textures, such as an apple, a mountain, or a bridge, are examples of representational subject themes. (Gavan, 2010)[4]

What is Minimalism?

Characteristics and Style of Minimalism

Famous artist Frank Stella once observed, "What you see is what you see." This literal-ism is embraced by minimalism, which emphasizes the physical features of the art object - its scale, weight, placement, and materialist - over symbolic or emotional meaning. Minimalism posed a fundamental challenge to old notions about how art should be regarded and experienced. The Minimalist influence went beyond the visual arts to architecture, interior design, music, dance, fashion, and food; it remains an important trend in many parts of contemporary culture.

There were also several notable Minimalist painters. Frank Stella, who's Black Paintings (1958-1960) are widely regarded as the movement's early examples, championed formal concerns above the Romanticism of Abstract Expressionism. Other Minimalist painters include Agnes Martin, Ellsworth Kelly, and Robert Ryman. (sothebys.com, 2023)[6]



Figure 1: Arundel Castle, "The Marriage of Reason and Squalor, 2"1959.

Implementation of minimalism in photography

In minimalism photography, the elements should be carefully chosen because their quantity should be limited to a minimum while also reflecting something appealing and beautiful. Consider this when creating the composition, and try not to include items that may distract the audience from your main topic. That subject will be your main point of attention as well as the essence of your image, so take your time in making the proper choices. Keeping things simple in photography is not always an easy undertaking. After you've decided on the elements for your shot, imagine your main subject in a simple and basic fashion, and experiment with different methods to frame it.(Gavan, 2010)[4]

The Philosophy of Minimalism

Photographing in a Minimalist Style Photographer Steve Johnson claims Minimalist photography is more than just photographing less. Minimalism is about distilling something to its core. It is, by definition, a reductive process—one that begins with a non-minimalist viewpoint and progresses to what is important by removing what is not important. (Ford)[3]

The Minimalist movement

The Minimalist movement had a significant impact on the later evolution of modernism: it gave a new way of not only creating works of art, but also showing and experiencing them. However, the movement's impact did not end there. The minimalist concept, with its adoration of simple things, the bare minimum, and the true essence, has been transferred into music, interior design, graphic design, and even a way of life. The Minimalist style is being investigated and re-interpreted in a variety of sectors, most notably architecture and design. The idea is to reduce the subject to its essence, to its function. The Minimalist style is also explored through drawings and photography, which is currently quite popular.

Review of Literature

Hiroshi Sugimoto:23 February 1948, [Taito City, Tokyo, Japan](#)

Hiroshi Sugimoto, a Japanese artist noted for his breathtaking black-and-white images of architecture and landscapes, is one of the most recognized photographers linked with these movements. Sugimoto's work is distinguished by its stark simplicity and minimalism, with many of his images having huge, empty areas and simple geometric forms.

Sugimoto's art is heavily influenced by the principles of Zen Buddhism, which emphasize the importance of simplicity, clarity, and emptiness. He has defined his approach to photography as a form of meditation in which he strives to capture the essence of his subjects by removing any unnecessary features and focusing on their vital elements. (www.sugimotohiroshi.com, 2023)[10]Sugimoto's work is difficult to categorize because it goes far beyond the boundaries of photography to include objects, architecture, and forms of expression, such as the photograph, that he uses to highlight and expand the perception of such abstract qualities as time, light, space, movement, spirit, and even the nature of reality itself. His snapshot serves as a blank canvas for the observer to project his or her impressions and wants. He is convinced that, rather than using photography to record details or circumstances, he has used it to investigate the essence of reality itself.(Worth, 2006)[9]



FIGURE 2: UNTITLED (BLACK ON GREY) IS AN ACRYLIC ON CANVAS PAINTING BY MARK ROTHKO, FEATURING A BLACK RECTANGLE AND A GREY RECTANGLE, 1970.



FIGURE 3: HIROSHI SUGIMOTO WORKS INSPIRED BY MARK ROTHKO, BLACK SEA.

Andreas Gursky :15 January 1955, [Leipzig, Germany](#)

Andreas Gursky, who was born in Leipzig, East Germany in 1955, is another photographer who has been heavily affected by the abstract and minimalism movements. By the end of 1957, his family had relocated to West Germany, first to Essen and later to Düsseldorf. He studied visual communication at the Universität Gesamthochschule Essen from 1978 to 1981, under the direction of photographers Otto Steinert and Michael Schmidt. A German photographer noted for his large-scale images of modern landscapes and urban environments. Gursky's work is distinguished by its use of repetition, symmetry, and abstraction to produce pictures that are both beautiful and disturbing. Gursky, like Sugimoto, is fascinated by the ability of photography to capture the essence of a scene, and his work frequently examines the link between individuals and their surroundings. His shots of large-scale industrial and commercial places, for example, illustrate how humans have changed the natural world, and his images of packed public spaces draw attention to the complicated social dynamics of modern urban life.(andreasgursky, 2023)[1]

Many of Gursky's images are composed from an elevated vantage point. This stance allows the spectator to see scenes that are normally out of reach, including both the center and the periphery. This broad perspective has been connected to involvement in globalization. Gursky is visually drawn to enormous, faceless, man-made spaces—nighttime high-rise facades, office lobbies, stock exchanges, and the interiors of big box merchants. The artist's work was defined as "a sophisticated art of unembellished observation" at a 2001 retrospective at New York's Museum of Modern Art. The pieces have little to no explanation or manipulation. His photography is straightforward.



FIGURE 4: *RHEIN II* -IN 2011, A PRINT WAS AUCTIONED FOR \$4.3 MILLION (THEN £2.7M), MAKING IT THE MOST EXPENSIVE PHOTOGRAPH SOLD. *RHEIN II* HELD THE RECORD UNTIL 2022



FIGURE 5 *BAHRAIN I*, ANDREAS GURSKY, 2005 | TATE

Michael Kenna :20 November 1953 [Widnes, United Kingdom](#)

"You can't always see what's otherwise noticeable during the day... with long exposures, you can photograph what the human eye is incapable of seeing. Michael Kenna (Stehmann, 2023)[8]

Michael Kenna is a photographer from Widnes, England, well known for his black-and-white landscape images. He studied painting and photography at the Banbury School of Art during his early years of education. He later enrolled at the London College of Printing, where he began his career as an artist and photographer. Kenna is the fifth child of Irish-Catholic parents. Because of his Irish-Catholic heritage, he aspired to be a priest before discovering his

passion for art. In 1977, Kenna relocated to San Francisco. He once quoted that "**Black and white is immediately more mysterious because we see in color all the time. It is quieter than color.**" (Stehmann, 2023)[7]

Michael Kenna frequently shoots images at dawn or towards dusk. Kenna's art has been shown all over the world. He has also done a substantial quantity of commercial work for firms such as Audi, Rolls Royce, Volvo, Sprint, the Spanish Tourist Board, and Dom Perignon. He has garnered various honors for his artwork. Kenna has repeatedly demonstrated that his vision has no bounds. Whether working along the South Korean coast, the Great Wall of China, the snow-covered island of Hokkaido in Japan, the Rouge in Dearborn, Michigan, mines in Germany, or gardens in France, Kenna seeks places of solitude that speak volumes about humanity and the haunting beauty found in nature.



FIGURE 6 KENNA- AFTERNOON LIGHT SHIBECHA HOKKAIDO JAPAN 2004- 72



FIGURE 7 PINE TREES STUDY 2 WOLCHEONGANGWONDO SOUTH KOREA 2010

Michael Kenna stated about his method and expertise in an interview with Claire Sykes for the "Photographer's Forum Interview" - Winter 2003. "Taking pictures isn't the most important thing. The act of photographing is important to him. It's illuminating, therapeutic, and fulfilling since the process forces him to engage with the outside world. When you shoot four-hour exposures in the middle of the night, you unavoidably slow down and start to see and appreciate what's going on around you more. It's a luxury in our fast-paced, modern society to be able to watch the stars travel across the sky."(Photographyoffice, 2016)[5]

Research Method

Hiroshi Sugimoto, Andreas Gursky, and Michael Kenna were the researchers analyzing the photographs in this study. The researcher searches for minimalism in selected photographs to obtain an honest and less-biased study, and then analyses and interprets the images. This is library research in which the researcher takes a few photos from their official websites from their photography career as the major data.

Conclusion:

Overall, the abstract and minimalism movements had a significant impact on the field of photography, prompting a plethora of artists to explore the power of simplicity, abstraction, and minimalism in their work. Photographers such as Sugimoto, Gursky, and Kenna have used form, color, and texture to produce photographs that are beautiful, thought-provoking, and deeply touching, pushing the boundaries of what is possible in this powerful and endlessly interesting medium. Sugimoto's Philosophy is Rather than making photographs as a record of detail or circumstance, he has used this medium to test the nature of reality itself. It is thanks to the artfulness of Gursky's fictions that we recognize his world as our own." Gursky's style is enigmatic and expressionless.(andreasgursky, 2023)[1]Michael Kenna's distinct minimalist imagery has inspired many and garnered him a large and devoted fan

base. Michael Kenna searches for fascinating compositions and combinations in nature. He is drawn to particular times of day and night, preferring to picture in the mist, rain, and snow. He is not inspired by clear blue sky and sunshine. He only pictures his art in black and white because he believes it is more effective.(Photographyoffice, 2016)[5]"There are many characteristics associated with night photography that make it fascinating," he believes. He was accustomed to dealing with a single light source, the sun; so many lights coming from various directions can be rather bizarre and dramatic. The deep shadows cast by artificial lighting frequently add to the drama. These shadows can entice kids to speculate about what is hidden. Long exposures, for example, provide distinct areas of intriguing density in the sky, moving clouds produce unique areas of interesting density in the sky, stars and planes produce white lines, rough water converts into ice or mist, and so on. Film can collect light and record occurrences that our eyes are unable to see. The element of unpredictability inherent in night exposures can also be used to combat previsualization. It also helps him with jet lag! He employed the "empirical method" of exposure measurement at the time (i.e. trial and error), with a lot of bracketing. The results were very interesting and since then he had worked on his technique a little."(Photographyoffice, 2016)[5]Photographing in a minimalist style, the best thing about minimalism is that it teaches us to focus on the small, insignificant, and sometimes overlooked details. It's as if you've seen a World beyond a World. If you can convey this sensation to your viewers and let them understand why you observed something, your images will be memorable and well-received. Minimalism is, of course, incredibly subjective, but it is also intuitive and expressive.

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