

**STEVE MCCURRY
LESSON 4 - INFLUENCES: CARTIER
BRESON**

**STEVE SHARES SOME OF THE SIGNIFICANT
PHOTOGRAPHERS AND PHOTOGRAPHS
THAT HAVE INFLUENCED HIM
THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER**

“One of the most important learning tools in photography is looking at great photography books”

Steve talks about some of the significant artists who have influenced him in his 30 years as a photographer. He reveals that the photographs that influenced him the most, were the pictures that were taken on the street of people doing ordinary things, but pictures that told great emotional stories or really made him think. It was the work of the great photographers Robert Capa, Brassai and Elliot Erwhitt that had a big impact on Steve's career.

“Look at a lot of different kind of photographs and photography”

Steve reveals to you the photographer who has influenced him the most, the great Henri Cartier-Bresson. Enjoy Steve's own perspective on the work of the photographic master Cartier-Bresson as he analyses his book, The Decisive Moment. He shares with you the advice and the insight that Henri gave him.

STEVE MCCURRY PROJECT LESSON 4 – PRACTICE WITH COMPOSITIONS

Look at pictures as Steve recommends. Their images can be found online as well as in their books. Think about creating pictures of people doing ordinary things, but things containing emotion.

Try creating some photographs that draw on Cartier-Bresson's compositions. Photograph people doing something. Photograph people at work or on their way to work. Photograph people doing something to someone else. Make a photograph with more than four people in your frame.

Try setting up compositions that approximately echo well-known photographs or some of your own favourite photographs. This is just a starting point for you. Explore the composition further and adapt and move your viewpoint and the subject to create your own versions.

TRANSCRIPT

I think one of the most important learning tools in photography is looking at great photography books. And as I started studying photography, I was looking at the books of Henri Cartier Bresson, others, Andre Kertesz. There was people like Brasaai, his work at night in Paris, Robert Capa.

But I think some of the pictures which influenced me the most were pictures taken on the street, kind of stories about ordinary lives. People doing ordinary things. But pictures that told great emotional stories and were pictures that made us think, pictures which had some motion.

I think of Ellio Ervitt's pictures, how wonderful they are, the humor and the simplicity. And they seem so effortless. But it takes a great eye and a great craftsman to come up with those pictures.

I think of Henri Cartier Bresson's work. Again, working in his hometown of Paris, or working in France, or working in China, or Indonesia. But wherever he was working, there was this simplicity and very kind of off-handed quality to the pictures, which seemed just so casual but yet crafted so well. Very precise composition and light that told really great human stories.

And I think it's important to really have a really wide view of photography, look at a lot of different kinds of photographers and photography. You know, I think of Diane Arbus and how influential she was. You know, Araki, with all his crazy pictures from Tokyo-- interesting, wonderful. You know, the guy is kind of a photographic genius in a way.

The most influential book in my view in photography was Henri Cartier Bresson's, The Decisive Moment, made back in the 50s, early 50s. This was travels through Asia. And it was something which really influenced generations of photographers. The way he saw, the way he worked, his portraiture, the Decisive Moment approach. So I think that you can't underestimate his influence, not for myself, but for all photographers in general.

The term "decisive moment" actually was borrowed from a cardinal from another century. But in a way, it really-- that phrase, the decisive moment, really-- so apt the description of Henri's work. Where he was able to go into a situation, find the defining moment, something where the composition, and the light, and the activity, all the choreography, the sort of this ballet of human-- the dance.

Everything kind of came together in one magic moment. And he was able to capture that moment, magic moment, better than anybody else.

It was always great to take your new book or a body of work over to see and show that work to Henri at his home in Paris. It was a bit frightening because he wasn't-- you know, he would not mince words. If he didn't like the work, he would be very upfront about it.

So it was always a-- had a bit of trepidation about going into to see him. But I must say, he was always very kind and always had good things to say about what I showed him. And, you know, I had incredible respect for his work. And we had traveled in many of the same parts of the world, India, Southeast Asia, China, and Russia.

And he had such a prolific body of work and had traveled literally all over the world. And at that time, it must have been much, much more difficult to get from here to India back in the 40s. And many of these journeys had to be taken by long sea voyages. Now you can jump on a plane and be anywhere on the planet in a matter of a few hours. But he was probably, again, the most influential photographer maybe ever.

Henri's main piece of advice to me was do your commercial work in colour, but do your personal pictures in black and white. And I must say, I never followed that advice. Maybe that was a big mistake. But I always thought that, you know, for me, the world is in colour. So much of the story of certain places, certain countries, the story is the colour. And so for me, I decided to go in a different direction.

I think the main way I learned from Henri was simply by looking at his pictures. And seeing how he framed the kind of light, the kind of-- the particular moment. That was really the best learning tool for me. It wasn't really anything he had to say. It was just looking at his pictures. And that's where you can really see the essence of who he was as a photographer.

One of my favorite pictures of Henri's is the picture of this incredible composition of the staircase. And he waited for this man on a bicycle to pass through the picture, kind of completing this incredible composition. And it's a kind of a magical moment. It's sort of this wonderful composition. And there's this instant, it's this kind of decisive moment where the bicyclist kind of completes the picture. I just always thought that was incredible design, and a great moment.

I think photographers have always walked around a particular place-- could be their neighborhood or anywhere. And you'll see something, you'll observe the movement on the street. And you see how the possibility of some juxtaposition between two objects or two-- a pedestrian passing by, a poster, or whatever.

And these always make for interesting pictures. It takes some patience. It takes some pre-visualization. You see something and you imagine a picture could happen if you wait for the light, for a passer-by, for perhaps some dogs are playing on the street.

Henri has some amazing-- Henri Cartier Bresson has some incredible pictures of dogs on the street doing incredible things. It's just sometimes it's so, you know, magical that you can't believe that a human being could take such incredible picture.