



Japanese Bath

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Commentary

Controlled by the laws of physics, cameras make pictures of *things*—objects, places, people. But far too often photographers become seduced into thinking that objects, places, or people are the subject of their photographs. They can be, but the true subject of a photograph or an entire project can also be an *emotion*, a *feeling*, or a *mood*—things that cannot be photographed directly, but must be intimated through the things that are photographed

This project is not really about the Japanese bath, that luxurious, indulgent, joyous end-of-day experience that is so common in Japanese life. Instead, the true subject of the project is the emotion, the feeling, the mood that is the result of those few peaceful moments spent unwinding in a hot soak.

How does one photograph a mood? The tools we have at our disposal are things like a gesture, a facial expression, an environment, and even more importantly, the relationship between the person in the photograph and the environment in which we find them. In the top photograph, we see a moment of tea drinking. This isn't a portrait, and isn't even about the individual. It's a moment, an aroma, a sense of light, a quiet room. The feeling is generated by the silhouette (which signifies this is not a portrait of an individual), by the round door or window (which is the shape of harmony), and the diffusing *shoji* screen which isolates this individual from the hectic world. The sharp outline of the silhouette tells us that we are *inside* this darkened room along with

the tea drinker, not looking in through a round window from the outside. We are, through the photographer's eye, inside that dark calm with them. The mood surround us, too.

In the bottom photograph, the mood is expressed through her facial expression. I suppose it's possible that the photographer just captured her in the middle of a blink, or a momentary closing of her eyes. However, we know that is not the case because of the folded towel balanced on her head. There is a sense of calm, a sense that this is not a instant but rather a moment that lasts for some minutes.

The low camera angle adds another element that add to the sense of mood. Is there any question that the photographer was in the water while he was making this photograph? And if so, the same soothing soak that creates her calm expression surrounds the photographer with that relaxing, steamy water. Vicariously, we find ourselves in the Japanese bath, too. Ahhhhh!!!

Such ethereal things as an emotional state of mind or mood may not be directly captured by the camera, but that does not mean they can't be in a photograph—in fact, the reason the photograph exists. All this requires is a skilled photographer.