



Abstracts by Merg Ross



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Commentary

I hope it's not giving too much away by mentioning that the actual thing photographed was a saxophone. Not being particularly familiar with saxophones, have no idea what part of a saxophone we are looking at. To me, it just looks like a big eye and a beak, connected to a long neck and some miscellaneous body parts. I've probably done more damage to Merg Ross' image by explaining *that* than I have by mentioning it's a saxophone.

It's almost impossible to look at an abstract and not project something onto it. Of course that "something" is different for every viewer in spite of the fact that there may be some statistical consistencies if one were to tally them from a significantly large sample. I'm not sure this says anything about the photograph, but it does say something about human beings. That different people might project onto an abstract different interpretations is not important; that people *will* project onto an abstract *some* interpretation is important. And, I suppose, it must be admitted that this human tendency is not limited to abstracts. I'm reminded of the story about Ansel Adams having received a letter from an admiring fan complimenting him on his wonderful photograph of the moon rising over Albuquerque. Sometimes, people see what they want to see — or perhaps what they are prepared to see.

On further consideration, I suppose that last statement is valid for photographers, too. This is a photograph of a saxophone, but I suppose it's fair to say

that this portion of the saxophone we can see is a projection of Merg Ross' vision and what he was prepared to see. Ten photographers making an abstract photograph of a saxophone would likely come up with 10 different compositions. That being the case, is there any validity in assigning to abstracts the idea that it is a "good" or "bad" abstract? Perhaps not, but I do think it's valid to consider whether or not an abstract is a good or bad *composition*. This one has a superb composition. Its self-contained, circular structure is complex enough to demand our attention while simultaneously being simple enough for us to intuitively grasp the basic shape.

That pretty much sums up my theory of abstract photography. The interpretation cannot be defined by the photographer because there is too strong a tendency in viewers to project their own. However, the integrity of the composition either encourages our eye to explore further or discourage us to the point of abandonment. Theoreticians might be tempted to dissect such an image as this with golden rectangles, Archimedes spirals, theories of balance and harmony, and the Yin and Yang of curve and line. Perhaps they are right, but it's sufficient for me to just enjoy that eye and beak and those wonderful glowing tonalities. I want to explore this image for a long time. Isn't that a high compliment?