



The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography

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Photography's great success gives the impression that the major questions that have haunted the medium are now resolved. On the contrary, the most important questions about photography are just beginning to be asked. These fourteen essays, with over 200 illustrations, critically examine prevailing beliefs about the medium and suggest new ways to explain the history of photography. They are organized around the questions: What are the social consequences of aesthetic practice? How does photography construct sexual difference? How is photography used to promote class and national interests? What are the politics of photographic truth? *The Contest of Meaning* summarizes the challenges to traditional photographic history that have developed in the last decade out of a consciously political critique of photographic production. Contributions by a wide range of important American critics reexamine the complex -- and often contradictory -- roles of photography within society. Douglas Crimp, Christopher Phillips, Benjamin Buchloh, and Abigail Solomon Godeau examine the gradually developed exclusivity of art photography and describe the politics of canon formation throughout modernism. Catherine Lord, Deborah Bright, Sally Stein, and Jan Zita Grover examine the ways in which the female is configured as a subject, and explain how sexual difference is constructed across various registers of photographic representation. Carol Squiers, Esther Parada, and Richard Bolton clarify the ways in which photography serves as a form of mass communication, demonstrating in particular how photographic production is affected by the interests of the powerful patrons of communications. The three concluding essays, by Rosalind Krauss, Martha Rosler, and Allan Sekula, critically examine the concept of photographic truth by exploring the intentions informing various uses of "objective" images within society.

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The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography From The MIT Press Bibliography

- Rank: #427358 in Books
- Published on: 1992-02-25
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 10.75" h x 1.00" w x 8.25" l, 2.52 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 427 pages



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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Editor Bolton has assembled 14 essays offering an alternate approach to the popular vein of post-modernist theory that suggests the understanding of form is ahistorical, i.e., not dependent on context. The book is organized around four questions: "What Are the Social Consequences of Aesthetic Practice?"; "How Does Photography Construct Sexual Difference?"; "How Is Photography Used To Promote Class and National Interests?"; and "What Are the Politics of Photographic Truth?" Essayists such as Rosalind Krauss, Allen Sekula, and Douglas Crimp aim to "repoliticize" the history of the medium, which they feel has been "neutralized" by formalist definition. Building on the dialectical approach of Critical Theorists, "these writers develop an understanding of meaning as a contest created out of opposition and negotiation." Fascinating and very well illustrated but rather heady. Essential for academic photography collections.

- *Kathy J. Anderson, Onondaga Cty. P.L., N.Y.*

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Review

Eminently readable, the critical essays collected here interrogate our limited understanding of so called art photography, by unmasking the ideological and political realities that have shaped both its production and interpretation.

(**Anthony Aziz**, SF Camerawork)

From the Back Cover

Photography's great success gives us the impression that the major questions that have haunted the medium are now resolved. These 14 essays, with over 200 illustrations, critically examine and challenge the prevailing formalist values of late modernism that have been applied to the medium and suggest new ways to explain the history of photography.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

David Butler:

This The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography book is absolutely not ordinary book, you have it then the world is in your hands. The benefit you will get by reading this book is definitely information inside this reserve incredible fresh, you will get details which is getting deeper anyone read a lot of information you will get. This kind of The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography without we comprehend teach the one who looking at it become critical in considering and analyzing. Don't always be worry The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography can bring if you are and not make your case space or bookshelves' grow to be full because you can have it in the lovely laptop even cell phone. This The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography having fine arrangement in word in addition to layout, so you will not truly feel uninterested in reading.

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Florence Hall:

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