
In Focus: Blind Photographers Challenge Visual Expectations

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Abstract

Photographers who are blind: an oxymoron? Yes and no. Yes, because the majority of world thinks about blindness as the experience of being in blackness, devoid of any sensation of sight. No, because blindness is precisely and distinctly not about blackness. It is a little known fact that the majority of people who are categorized as blind are actually partially sighted and they can see a great deal. Yet, in general, society continues to focus on what people cannot see rather than what they can see. Blind photography, therefore, provides sojourns into the grey areas of blindness. These grey areas may be described, for example, as sight meeting sightlessness, light meeting darkness, and colours meeting blackness. Blind photography is a celebration of what people can see, which leads to provoking audiences to take part in alternate ways of thinking about the world and disability. Photographs created by blind people are made possible through contemporary technologies where people are willing to share their experiences and tell their stories of ability. In the case of photography, seeing in less traditional ways is the specific ability that is presented. This presentation explores the conceptual reality of blind photography as a means to challenging visual expectations. Three significant aspects emerge when focusing on blind photography: 1) photographers, 2) photographs and 3) audience. These aspects are entwined in a performance that results in powerful statements about sight, sightlessness and the built environment, which opens things up for people to consider and experience the world ‘in focus’.

Keywords: ability, built environment, individual experience, performance

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