

Behind the Image: Research in Photography, by Ana Fox and Natasha Caruana. AVA Press, dist. by Ingram Publisher Services, March 2012. 176 p. col. Ill. ISBN 9782940411665 (pbk.), \$34.50



Behind the Image: Research in Photography by Anna Fox and Natasha Caruana appears to fill a gap in literature for emerging, and even established, photographers in research methodology as a foundation for successful photographic projects. Chapters cover the lifecycle of research from proposal to archiving, with case studies and activities intended to engage the reader with the techniques. The book, as part of the AVA Academia *Basics* series, also emphasizes ethical practice, weaving the theme throughout the text, and featuring a brief addendum devoted to the subject of “working with ethics.” While some expectations are met, the book flounders as a cover-to-cover read, and proves itself to be aimed at a novice audience.

Suitably, selected illustrations are good and are the most informative portion of the book. The variety of photographic styles is satisfying: studio, street, documentary, and art photography. Images are reproduced in a generous size and captions are insightful. The six featured case studies serve as extended versions of the captioned photos and are revealing about formative process.

Recommended research practices presented by the authors seem at once too general as well as terribly specific. Instructions presume not only that the reader has no experience researching and subsequently executing a body of work, but little or no familiarity with visual literacy, basic photographic concepts, the photographic community, or research of any kind. The chapter “Being Informed” suggests Wikipedia for learning more about photographers. And in the chapter titled “The Internet,” is it necessary to point out that the reader could consult the internet to determine opening hours of a library? Furthermore, it seems impossible that the intended reader would require a definition of genre such as this: “A genre of photography is essentially a type, such as landscape or documentary.” Those considering organized research in preparation for a photography project would hardly need such guidance.

The downfall of the book is that the intended audience, “today’s photographers” (according to the publisher’s website), should have much of the suggested methodology already ingrained in their practice. (A late chapter, “Research and Practice,” says as much.) The book’s six suggested activities—keeping a journal, experimenting with creative writing, copying the masters, starting a blog, and mocking up an exhibition brochure—might grease the wheels of creativity for the reader who has never explored self-expression. But there is a missed opportunity here to provide guidance in deepening or formalizing research practice, especially as related to constructing an artist’s statement, use of primary sources, funding, and presentation opportunities.

Sarah Osborne Bender, Cataloguing and Technical Services Librarian, The Phillips Collection, sbender@phillipscollection.org