

## Does Size Matter?

Written by Pedro Meyer

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Have you ever opened your e-mail to find in your inbox several e-mails with the subject: "Does

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Size Matter?" I think you might have. I read somewhere that around 250 billion of such spam e-mails have been sent all over the world.

In the prestigious Journal of Photographic Arts, CAMERAWORK published in San Francisco, Vol # 30, this past winter, I came across an interesting article by Geoffrey Batchen, under the title "Does Size Matter?" making reference to the intimacy between the viewer and the size of the photograph questioning through the size of the image presented the photographic experience. The title of the article I perceived as essentially being a teaser, however, it never got to humor me through out the entire article. I wondered how can someone who I assume receives email and is part of modern society, not have been the recipient of at least two dozen penis enlargement offerings claiming that "Size does Matter" and thus made the connection between the title of that piece and the spam mail which has inundated all mailboxes from Argentina to Zambia and all the countries in between in the alphabet soup, by the billions, literally.

As I read the article in further detail, I soon discovered why the author probably never made such a deliberate connection and the title simply wasn't even an intentional pun. It turns out that in his rather well documented article the existence of the Internet as a source for viewing photographs is totally ignored. It would seem according to the examples presented by the author, that the only public places one has the option to look at pictures is in the context of either museums or gallery spaces.

Strangely enough, even one of the photographers Mr. Batchen makes reference to, Seydou Keita from Mali, in relation to the various sizes of how his images were exhibited in the recent past, is a photographer we have featured in ZoneZero (here on the internet) for the past six years, yet the author seems not to be cognizant of this fact anymore than he is of the internet in general. I am sure that if he had included the existence of the pictures on the computer screen in his considerations of image size, his analysis would have benefited greatly.

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Geoffrey states, "Of course putting a big photograph on a wall doesn't in itself preclude the viewer from a potentially intimate experience of it. But it doesn't help either. Photography places all its subjects firmly in the past [\[\\*\]](#) and this temporal distancing is repeated by larger photographs in spatial terms, literally pushing us back from the print as well as from those subjects. But going miniature is not necessarily the answer either, for intimacy is not quite the same as physical closeness (you can have sex with someone and not be intimate with them). The problem here is that intimacy remains a hard thing to define. You know it when you feel it - that sense of personal, private involvement with another person or thing, of a shared emotional investment in that relationship - but it remains a nebulous, not-quite-describable kind of experience often measured at the level of the body (in the gut) rather than the intelligence."

If one considers that alone in ZoneZero we have over two million page views being seen per month (mostly with one image per page ) the number of images that are being reviewed in this manner is a high enough number that a serious writer simply can not ignore such new viewing habits. So when the author of "Does Size Matter" uses such a title without so much as a colluding wink one gains the impression that he probably doesn't "get it" when it comes to experiences outside the realm of his spaces of reference. The reasonable statement about intimacy mentioned above is most certainly shared by an ever increasing number of people who are populating the internet, otherwise the exponential growth we have experienced would have never taken place.

If the issue is the dissemination of images, no museum or gallery can compete with what is available to be seen on the internet, not even remotely. As such, the Internet is already the largest museum in history. And according to my friend Chip Simone, the internet, is probably the best thing that has happened to museums and galleries since the di Medici family.

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Interestingly enough when alluding to large scale prints, Batchen's only references are images presented in museum or gallery spaces, such as those by Andreas Gursky, Richard Avedon, Thomas Ruff, Cindy Sherman, yet somehow the large scale pictures delivered via Bill Board advertisements ( Times Square or Sunset Strip, Picadilly Circus, Ginza, for instance) or those that appear on the large screen of Cinema Houses simply become ignored as does the world of the internet, as if the influence of photographic culture coming from these corners of the world did not play into the decision making process of the size of the print.

Interestingly enough no mention is made in this article that the size of the prints has increased because of a very simple fact: Because today we can print larger with the same relative ease that we used to print an 11 x 14 print. In the past I could not even dream of printing to the sizes I can print today, my darkroom simply did not have the size to accomplish such a task, neither the height of the room for the enlarger, nor the size of the trays, for prints that would go, for instance, to 44 inches wide. For most of my life as a photographer, I never printed larger than 11x 14, because the papers were all too expensive and we simply did not have the facilities to make larger prints, like are so readily available today through digital technology. By the way, the cause we are mostly doing color today is essentially an extension of the same reasons. We were limited in the past by the technical complications all of which have been superseded in the digital age. With the ink jet printers available today, you can accomplish what ever your imagination leads you to do. There simply never was the possibility for me to do color with the same relative ease of black and white, much as I tried.

What I find so amusing today is that collectors are all of a sudden jumping on the bandwagon of buying up "vintage" silver based prints, discovering all of a sudden that the prints we did in the past which were always put down as not being an artistic and unique product, were indeed what we had sustained all along. Prints which could have been bought for a few hundred dollars are today getting between ten and twenty thousand, because in fact there were never printed more than just a few of them with all the scarcity of materials and the limited time to print them. I had always maintained we had a built constraint in our potential to produce large number of prints but then the idea did not take hold.

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In conclusion, I really don't know if size matters, but I do know that facts do, and I am constantly reminded how these are being ignored very often either by those who write about photography or those who collect images, and they do so to their own detriment.

As I was writing these last sentences, my inbox rang and I [received an email](#), with information that to some degree I had been expecting for a long time, Kodak was announcing that they had stopped selling traditional film based cameras, I suppose the impact of such news will have serious repercussions all over the photographic world as people will inevitably have to come to terms now with the facts we have been discussing here in ZoneZero for years.

*Pedro Meyer*  
January 2004

\* [ I would take exception to this affirmation that photography places all its subjects firmly in the past. In the early part of the 20th century, Albert Einstein saw through nature's Newtonian facade and revealed that the passage of time depends on circumstance and environment. He showed that the wristwatches worn by two individuals moving relative to one another, or experiencing different gravitational fields, tick off time at different rates. The passage of time, according to Einstein, is in the eye of the beholder. I thus wonder the photograph of which watch would be in the future relative to the other one? ] [\(back\)](#)

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<http://www.zonezero.com/zz/6/Pedro-Meyer-s-Blog/does-size-matter.html>