

COMD 1340

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Essay: Edward Burtynsky

THE INDUSTRIAL ARTS OF EDWARD BURTYNSKY



Saw Mill #1 Lagos Edward Burtynsky

Edward Burtynsky, born 1955, is an acclaimed Canadian photographer and artist, who specializes in landscapes that represent the impact industrialization has in nature and on the human condition. Burtynsky photos are shot primarily in arial view from a helicopter. His method is to “wait for the flickering moment of alignment that occurs when a view of the landscape shift from discordance into order”. In doing so Burtynsky seeks “to balance

aesthetics and logistics, as he waits for the subject to tell him where it is.” He achieves this goal by meditatively “dialing into its frequency of the landscape before going into a state of deep concentration”.

The image above by Edward Burtynsky, *Saw Mill #1 Lagos*, is one of the many images produce by Burtynsky, that absolutely mesmerizes me for its abstract beauty and composition. *Saw Mill # 1, Lagos*, is an actual saw mill factory that processes timber from the rainforest in Nigeria, Africa. In it you can see a section of the coast of Largos, trees bundled and floating in creamy green water and on land, canoes as well as structures of multiple metal roofed buildings.

What strikes me most about this image is the natural and organic subject matter, the framing, and the abstract beauty. When viewing this work of art, it reminds me of the hierarchical powers the Earth to control of its own design. I believe, that in photographing *Saw Mill #1 Lagos*, Burtynsky is showing that industrialization and its’ by products are incorporated into Earths’ design, and in being so, they can also emanate a sense of universal beauty when viewed in abstraction. At least, that is, for now.

I personally see this beauty to be directly related to the element of art and the principle of design, and not so much subject matter or purpose. The compositional elements used to convey the and emphasize the meaning of *Saw Mill #1 Lagos*, is framing and angle, which is ariel view. Other compositional elements include line, symmetry, value, texture, contrast, color, repetition, pattern, and unity. The most defining line in this composition is the edge of the land mass to the water. This line establishes the symmetry within the composition. The colors are basically neutral, however the dark, medium, and light textures browns of the land mass contrast effectively with the smooth creamy light green of the water.

Within the water and on the land mass, are the repeated diagonals, horizontals, and verticals, of individual logs that are bundled together in repeated triangular shapes while in the water. These triangular bundles supplement the repeated rectangular shapes on land, created

by the vertical columns of logs and the repeated rectangular shapes of the metal structures. The positioning of the logs and rectangular shapes in *Saw Mill #1 Lagos*, adds depth and unity to the composition by giving the appearance of a second layer of images hovering above the first.

Edward Burtynsky's images are about "how to describe large scale human systems that imposes themselves upon the land." He photographs industrialization in various stages, and in many different places around the globe. His focus is not the politics, the profit, or the poverty. His focus is on beauty and abstraction. He reframes and seeks out the pre-existing principles of design with the help of prior knowledge and art elements.

REFERENCES

[Edward Burtynsky's Epic Landscapes | The New Yorker](#)

[edward burtynsky - Google Search](#)