

WYNN BULLOCK...PHOTOGRAPHER

by Henry Miller

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Photography, the most popular of all the arts, is still the most mysterious medium. Accessible to all, it can be practised with little money or at great expense. An artist like Man Ray has given us some of the most amazing creations by using nothing more than a little box with a hole in it. Alfred Stieglitz, whose best work dates back almost to the beginnings of photography, remains incomparable even today. As for Edward Weston, whose fame is nation-wide, it is obvious that he had complete control of his medium and was capable of securing any effect he set out to capture. On the other hand, rank amateurs have sometimes brought forth masterpieces – by accident, we say.

Of late the Big Sur has become acquainted with the work of a photographer who has a special gift for seizing the essential beauty and dramatic splendor of this Coast. I refer to Wynn Bullock whose photographs contributed so largely towards making the first issue of the Big Sur Guide a success. Like so many other well-known men and women who preceded him, Bullock began his career in fields remote from photography. Among other things he was an opera singer and a tennis player. As is often the case, he came to photography as a means of escape from the prosaic routine of industrial life. He had no particular preparation, or even aptitude, for his new career other than an inborn love of nature and a keen curiosity about life and the ways of men.

Wynn Bullock takes hundreds of shots before he ever focuses his lens on an object or a scene. His sight is naturally no different from that of other human beings; he simply sees his picture a few minutes before the camera does. Should he and the apparatus see eye to eye the result is usually rewarding – and stimulating to those who have not yet learned to see. It might almost be said that the click of the camera corresponds to the release which takes place in his own head when image and idea finally dovetail. No man, however, could capture the marriage of time and place, of light and form, with such poetic accuracy unless he were constantly shuffling and reshuffling his subject matter in sleep as well as in his waking moments.

In general the Big Sur photos are devoid of the human figure. Rightly so, I think, since the presence of man adds nothing to the sublime or the grandiose. There are, however, some less known photos of Bullock's in which the nude, used almost like an inanimate object, or better, like a dream figure or a phantasy, has been interpolated against the background of nature with startling effectiveness. Strangely enough, it would appear that in the nude the human figure seems to swoon gracefully and effortlessly into the tapestry of nature, as much one with the earth as tree, rock or animal.

To what extent Bullock can further manifest his private vision remains to be seen. Certainly the Big Sur offers inexhaustible subject matter for the camera's eye. Thus far no element of the vulgar, the commonplace, the sordid, has crept into the picture. The photographer is at liberty to narrow his focus or expand it, with equal promise of felicitous results. He may also just sit back and stare at the landscape, without thought of taking pictures. The more he is able to do this the better will his photos be. Wynn Bullock, as I have hinted already, realizes this fully. In every photograph of this country which he has taken there is present a note of gratitude for the privilege of being alive and seeing the world, not as a machine, not as a drudge, not as a professional, but as a dreamer divinely possessed.