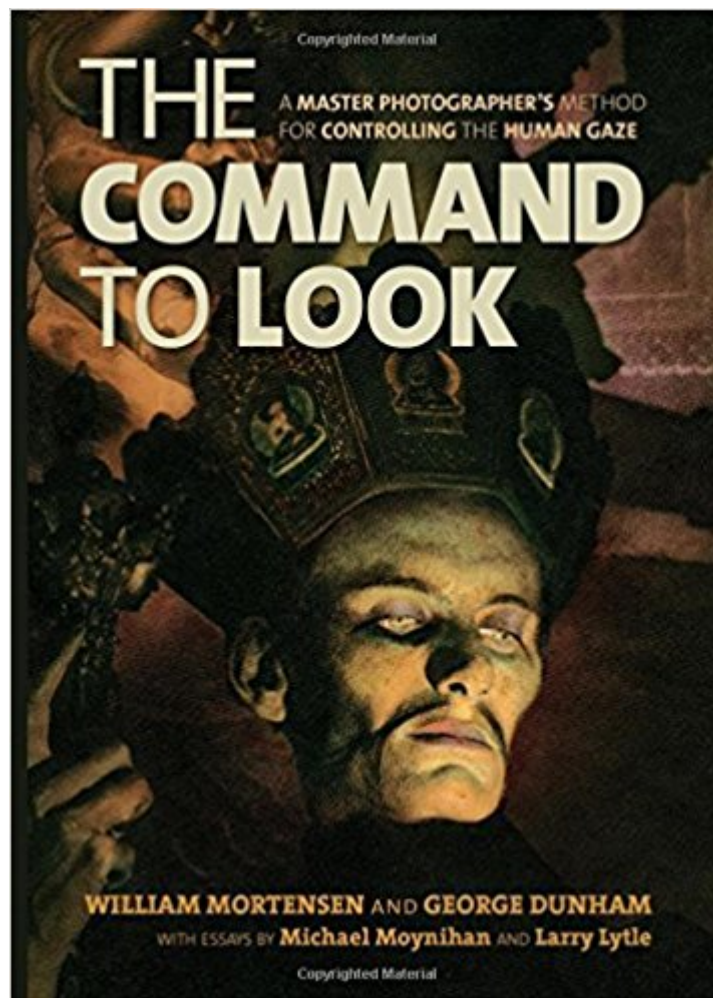




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# The Command To Look: A Master Photographer's Method For Controlling The Human Gaze



## Synopsis

The Command to Look is considered one of Mortensen's most momentous and rare books. Until now, copies on the antiquarian book circuit sold for many hundreds of dollars. It is a crucial book for understanding both Mortensen's philosophy and his use of psychology in the making of his pictures. To illustrate the text Mortensen includes an amazing gallery of his best-known and most challenging images with explanations, by him, of what makes those photographs so compelling. The reprint of The Command to Look also contains two new major essays that assess the significance and impact of the original book. An introduction by Mortensen biographer Larry Lytle explores Mortensen's use of Jungian psychology and also discusses new advances in neural psychology that confirm Mortensen's methods of controlling the viewer's eye. The second essay, by historian Michael Moynihan (author of Lords of Chaos), details a strange and unexpected reception of the book: how this small volume on photographic methods played a role in the creation of the modern Church of Satan and Anton LaVey's theories about Satanic Magic.

## Book Information

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There's a reason why Anton Szandor LaVey, founder of the Church of Satan, called upon Mortensen's artistic aesthetic and psycho-optical theories when creating LaVeyan Satanism and iconography of the Church. But you don't have to be the Black Pope to appreciate or make use of Mortensen's trademark techniques for commanding the gaze. - The Alibi Command to Look #133;

influential, especially in renegade realms. Feral House simultaneously published the exquisite compendium *American Grotesque*; • Shawn Macomber, Fangoria Mortensen was a giant, and it is time to acknowledge his stature. Buy both of these new books. But be warned: if you do, you may well find yourself haunting used bookshops and the internet to round out your collection with everything he ever wrote. • Amateur Photographer

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William Mortensen was an American artist and photographer, born in 1897 and who died in 1965. He was part of a group of photographers in the first part of the twentieth century called the Pictorialists, known for their romantic subject matter and alternative photographic processes. Mortensen didn't fit easily into that group, however. His imagery was highly manipulated and not particularly romantic; instead he created compositions exploring themes of the grotesque and the erotic. From the late 1920s until the 1940s, Mortensen was one of the best-known and most successful photographers in the United States. He had begun his artistic life as a painter and etcher and carried that training over to his photographic work, which he began in the mid 1920s. He was known for his outré subject matter that had an unusual look; it is difficult to tell, at first glance, if his images are etchings, drawings, or photographs. This work made him well regarded by many but reviled by a group of photographers called the f.64 group, also known as 'straight photographers'. This group consisted, in part, of Ansel Adams, and Edward Weston. Mortensen, together with his coauthor George Dunham, published 9 books and approximately 100 articles on his concepts and processes. His books and articles were extremely popular. For the most part these were published by Camera Craft, but he was also a regular contributor to various other major magazines of the time such as *Popular Photography*. George Dunham was born in 1896 in Riverside County, California. He went on to Harvard University to pursue graduate work in English and Music. At Harvard, Dunham attended the influential '47 Workshop class taught by George Pierce

Baker. Dunham returned to the seaside art colony then forming in Laguna Beach, California in 1923. In the years that followed Dunham became an actor and director of the Community Players of Laguna Beach. Dunham was also an accomplished writer, who had provided articles on theater to the local newspaper. In 1931 after leaving the Community Players, Dunham met and became friends with photographer and teacher William Mortensen. Mortensen had arrived in Laguna Beach in 1931 and opened the William Mortensen School of Photography. Dunham began posing for Mortensen in 1932, which yielded one of Mortensen's most well known photographs, *Human Relations* 1932. Dunham also became the literary voice of Mortensen from 1933 through the late 1950s writing all of the books and articles attributed to that famous photographer. There was a literary collaboration, with Mortensen outlining the ideas and thrust of the book or article and Dunham providing the words and wit. However, Dunham's contribution to Mortensen's literary success was kept a secret from all but a few in the photography world and wasn't revealed until the 3rd printing of *How to Pose the Model*. Dunham was finally recognized as coauthor of all of Mortensen's literary works. Their collaboration, but not their friendship, ended in the late 1950s with the last of the articles. Dunham died of cancer in 1976. Larry Lytle is a commercial and fine art photographer in Los Angeles, and lecturer in Art at California State University Channel Islands. His writings have appeared in *William Mortensen: A Revival* and *Original Sources: Art and Archive* at the Center for Creative Photography (both published by the CCP), *Black & White Magazine*, *Laguna Life*, *The Laguna Beach Independent*, and *The Scream*. Michael Moynihan is the co-author, with Didrik S. Jørdal, of the award-winning music and crime book *Lords of Chaos* (Feral House, 2003) and has contributed essays to various anthologies (such as *Apocalypse Culture II*) and scholarly encyclopedias. As an editor and translator has collaborated on various books and journals dealing with the netherworlds where culture, religion, and art meet.

William Mortensen's "The Command to Look" is an oft-discussed masterpiece that has, unfortunately, been out of print for ages. The new edition not only reprints the original text in a gorgeously bound form, but also adds essays about Mortensen and his work. Whether you are a photographer or any artist who wishes to explore the concepts around how to make your art as impactful as possible, "The Command to Look" is an essential addition to your library.

Do not read up on Mortensen and expect a book of tirades against Adams, et al. He does, as expected, have little good to say about technically perfect realism, but he would have had the same feeling for landscape painting. Understanding Mortensen's way leads to viewing photography (and

other art) in a new way. It's a simple, clean way of thinking about pictorial art. It's also a very practical book for a photographer trying to get his stuff seen. I don't know that Mortensen's list of fear triggers that make up "the command to look" is comprehensive, but it is obviously a valid way to express the idea. This book is obviously the product of a long process of analysis and refinement. If you want your art to be seen, to stir people, and to be remembered, you shouldn't pass up- this little book. It will open doors of appreciation you hadn't thought about. It moved me to a close study of Botticelli whose use of light makes great illustrations for a lot of what Mortensen has to say in this and in his other books.

William Mortensen teaches the most important part of a photograph; the emotional content is our perception before we even start to look at the composition, color, etc., he then goes on to show the construction of the photograph. He became my mentor to become Michigan Photographer Of The Year seven times and go on to receive my Master of Photography and Craftsman degrees from the Professional Photographers of America. Sincerely Joseph Kubek M Photog. Cr.

A fantastic look inside the thinking of William Mortensen. I'm a big fan of Mortensen, I do tend to think some of his thinking is a little outdated, there is a lot in here to digest and think through. It's a lot more about why an image works than a how to take photos book. Most of the book is examples of his images and how they fit into the ideas and archetypes he's laid out before the images in the books. I'd love to hear a bit more about the images and where they came from rather than just how they fit into the first part of the book, but it's an informative look at his vision and his success.

A fascinating little book by one of the forgotten greats of photography. The book describes some interesting approaches to composition based on four basic psychological constructs and then illustrates them with examples from the artist's own work. Reading and contemplating Mortensen's book enabled me to immediately improve the quality of my own work.

This isn't a photography household; we're artists. But there's no better book, nor more straightforward one, teaching how to compose a shot so that the viewer's eyes track the way you want them to. I'm annoyed that I didn't know about William Mortensen sooner. It's a stellar work which should be in every artist's and photographer's collection.

The book itself is fantastic, quite a work for photographers and amateur psychologists alike. The

writing style is not dumbed-down but flows well and overall provides a very clear message and system. One thing I will say is do not bother reading the second half of the foreword -- it repeats everything in the first half then goes on to give a summary of the book you are about to read. I found this very tedious and unhelpful and hoped to spare you all that.

A very unique method of achieving interesting photographs. The method is concise and easy to understand. I have yet to implement it, but it seems to me to need a bit more information on composition. If you pair this book with one on the elements of composition, it would be a great match. FYI: I worked as a photographer for thirty years; now retired.

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