

Art Essay: Max Dupain-‘eggs’

In 1930-1935, Max Dupain created a black and white photograph titled “Eggs.”

Max Dupain focuses intensely on the establishing the perfect lighting technique to create the right mood and texture that the eggs appear to possess. Using the shy but strong light source he highlights the egg’s fragility and delicacy. He has also used high contrasts of black and white to better differentiate the diverse, opposing colours and tones, generally, the blacks and the whites. Dupain positions the eggs in a way to create a patterned shadow to reveal more of the precise detail gone into the making of the artwork. With the remarkable positioning of the eggs, Dupain has also placed the eggs on harsh, abrasive wooden boards, to further place emphasis on the insubstantial texture of the eggs. As a final point, Dupain has used, in particular, the lighting, high contrast and positioning of the eggs as techniques to expose the eggs to their highest point.

With all these techniques and methods, he has taken a bunch of everyday objects like the cup and egg to give help us form a whole new perspective on it with the careful control of the image.

In the foreground of the painting steadily lays five randomly-positioned chalky white eggs. Their flawlessness and polished surface is achieved by the well-planned lighting and the contrast of the two different textures. Their shadow creates a pattern similar to that of a cloud. This effect makes the eggs appear even more small, frail and light because they appear to drifting on the ‘cloud.’ To the top left of the eggs is a small, round cup, with no handles. The opening of the cup is relatively the same size of an egg. The crisp shadow of the cup is stretched out to reach one of the eggs, suggesting a feel of connection between the egg and the cup. The eggs and cup are both placed on a series of wooden planks. The wooden boards are rough, coarse and callused, and the eggs are unblemished and brittle. These two ‘conflicting’ textures appear so contrasted next to each other, their texture is more accentuated because they both appear so varied. The diagonal planks of wood also appear as a form of leading lines, as their diagonal positioning leads to the eggs. The connection between the eggs and the wood are emphasized by the patterned shadows. Around the top two corners, the tone is very dark, and most of the area is covered by black.

The high viewpoint is quite unique to what we normally see with most artworks. This may be because they want to get the shadows and their strength in well to associate with the rest of the other objects. This high viewpoint also helps us to communicate more with the object, because he is exposing the subject more as he reveals the whole and larger image with the viewpoint. More ground is covered with that viewpoint rather than what we would see in a normal picture, with the lower, straight on viewpoint.

The tones in the artwork are very contrasted, they are all very different from one another. Because of the lighting, the tones are sharper, stronger but look atmospheric. There are a range of tones, but the main two are obvious, clearly stated within the eggs and cup and the shadows and the darkness of the table boards. The tones also help to achieve the effect of purity of the eggs, because of the distinction between the lighter and the darker tones.

There is a limited amount of colour in this photograph. They contribute to the contrast of the blacks and whites and appear organic and natural. The eggs are of a warm, china-white colour, creamy colour. The greys and browns promoted by the table have a staggering effect on the eggs. Each colour brings out the next because they are all very unlike. They do, however, blend into one another, yet strive to distinguish.

The lines in the photo are very fine and minute, particularly covering the eggs, adding to the fine, delicacy of their appearance. The lines are not as dominating as the colours are. Max Dupain has not focused as much on the accuracy and positioning of the lines as he has with the lighting, and highly contrasting colours and tones, etc.

The shapes in Dupain’s photo are curved, oval and rotund. Mainly due to the shapes of the eggs and cups and their shadows. However, the rectangular shape of the wooden planks also, again contrast

to the shapes of the eggs. There is much contrasting and differentiating with the two opposite textures, shapes, colours and tones of the eggs and the table.

The shadows formed by the eggs are patterned. The constant curved shape and bump of the egg makes the shadow appear continual and ongoing, symbolising 'eternity', perhaps.

The eggs are placed in front, closest to the viewer and the cup is directly above it, closer to the background. The light has been accurately and cleverly used and planned so that the end product really reveals its intended effect. The light source is from behind the cup and eggs, used to create the sharp shadows. The eggs and cup are proportioned to be of similar size. The perspective of the artwork is higher, from normal artworks to fit the image intended within.

This photograph has been evenly balanced. The heavy, strong dark shadows in the left hand side, particularly in the top balance out with the multiple eggs and their shadows.

The focal point of the artwork would be the eggs. The diagonal wood planks lead toward it and so does the shadow from the cup.

I think the artwork symbolises a variety of different moods and emotional issues. It is all really based on Max Dupain's strive to change the view of an everyday object into a more sophisticated and appealing image. The photograph helps to expand on its original image into a photo of simplicity and originality to create a mood of serenity and tranquillity. This photograph changes and twists everyday objects to help form our respect for them. Max Dupain also tries to bring out the effect of how eggs can also be a form of life. Suggested by how the human life starts, Dupain tries to accumulate a feel for what eggs can also mean, besides breakfast. I think the way he has really dramatically distorted our image of an egg is what is best about this photograph.

I think the artwork is surprisingly, unsuccessful. Despite my high opinions of it, I think the majority of people think of this artwork as just a bunch of eggs with a cup on a table. To me, it means much more and that much more effort and work has been done to create what the end result is. Although some might agree with me, the majority don't. Nobody would be as interested in it for the pure reason of it being tedious and pointless; my more negative and superficial opinion.

When I first saw the photograph, I had a more bland and shallow idea of it than what I think about it now. I just thought of it as a more plain and simple photograph. After analysing and studying it, it appealed to me more and I saw it as a more meaningful and original photo than I had before.

The artwork makes me feel stable, calm and pleasant. The picture is appealing and creates an effect of calmness so it is the general mood I experience. The objects within the picture seem to communicate with the viewer, all characterised by all the techniques used by Dupain.

The painting reminds me of how looks can everyday stereotypes can be deceiving and how something's whole image can be changed, with just a little focus and concentration. The eggs symbolise, to me five delicate, fragile, lives in search for its meaning.