

Librería
Bonilla y Asociados
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Título: What Photography Is

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Precio: \$507.00

Editorial:

Año: 2011

Tema:

Edición: 1ª

Sinopsis

ISBN: 9780415995696

In *What Photography Is*, James Elkins examines the strange and alluring power of photography in the same provocative and evocative manner as he explored oil painting in his best-selling *What Painting Is*. In the course of an extended imaginary dialogue with Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, Elkins argues that photography is also about meaninglessness--its apparently endless capacity to show us things that we do not want or need to see--and also about pain, because extremely powerful images can sear permanently into our consciousness. Extensively illustrated with a surprising range of images, the book demonstrates that what makes photography uniquely powerful is its ability to express the difficulty--physical, psychological, emotional, and aesthetic--of the act of seeing.