

BOOK REVIEW

Lukas Felzmann - Swarm

By Tim O'Brien



Swarm by Lukas Felzmann, Lars Müller Publishers, 2011.

When first opening Lukas Felzmann's *Swarm*, it's easy to sink into the black and white landscapes under subjects that feel at times almost hand drawn. The aesthetic of small black dots that form flowing patterns across the images is similar to the pointillism technique found in a Seurat painting. The images begin to form a dialog between each other as more detailed perspectives emerge. There is a wonderful building process from the individual blackbird up to a large functioning group that can fend off predators, forage for food, and create rolling shapes across the sky. This process becomes visible from the variations between landscapes and closer more intimate portraits. When Felzmann brings the viewer into the flock the individuals start to show themselves.



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The idea of there being no one leader is where these photographs become very engaging. A blackbird on its own would not be able to coordinate these formations and movements, but in a large enough group the birds make complex formations and precise split second maneuvers seem effortless. The accompanying text by Gordan H. Orians gives insight to the significance of grouping and how the single birds have to behave in order to respond to flock movements. Birds in the group make changes in their flight that must happen in an instant. This is illustrated by Felzmann's close up photographs in which many birds are shown in various stages of flight. While viewing this collection it becomes apparent that this example of order from chaos extends to many other complex systems.



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Systems outside of nature such as the stock market display the same emergence of order. The small parts of the market that are made up of resources, production, and distribution all have their own nuances that come together to make their values rise and fall. Just as the blackbirds in Swarm interact and dance around each other while foraging for food, fending off predators, and mating. Lukas Felzmann's photographs beautifully display the nuanced interacts between individual blackbirds and the dynamic forms that they create.

Review by Tim O'Brien

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