

Potential Space: A Serious Look at Child's Play

Nancy Richards Farese

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Photographer Nancy Richards Farese's *Potential Space* depicts children's play, untouched by technological and commercial bric-a-brac. Whether children are shown in single-minded focus or modeling their toys and games with pride, the book captures play's distinctive array of seriousness, ingenuity, and joy.

Farese's images have an uncanny ability to replicate feelings of spontaneity, surprise, and the heightened present just in the viewing. Her in situ portraits present a naturalistic view of children's play, from group games to solo dirt castles.

Images of objects, like the ingenious pull-toys children made from water bottles and other found trash, are staged in artful ways. While adults, the landscape, and occasional animals are present, they're more often backgrounded or in soft focus. The photographs' sharp focus on central elements—whether a child, toy, game, or play group—enable an experiential return to childhood where the immediate is eternal; while immersed in play, all other concerns recede.

The photographs suggest that unstructured play is not only fundamental to children's development, but more humane than most modern alternatives. In play, the children appear connected to themselves, others, and the world around them in ways that are essential to humans. Yet, underneath the documentary feeling, the book is underpinned by strong social advocacy goals. There's a sense that these images are dispatches from a world under threat. If creative play is an endangered species, its die out is connected to the same forces that threaten so much else on Earth.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (January / February 2022)

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