

Museo Reina Sofía, Nouvel Building, Library and Documentation Centre, Space D
Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

MOZON CUNNINGHAM'S PHOTOGRAPH

OLD NEWS: RECONSTRUCTION CITY
JILL FREEDMAN

Eudora Welty
One Time,
One Place

ELSA'S HOUSEBOOK
A WOMAN'S PHOTOJOURNAL
BY ELSA DORFMAN

JAJLA

THE UNRETOUCHED
WOMAN EVE ARYOLD

SIGNS OF LIFE
Photographs by Olaf Tondt

EYE TO EYE
PORTRAITS OF LESBIANS
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEB

Nüchtern Alltag
Photographs by JEB

la casa en la tierra
mariana yampolsky
elena poniatowska

A PHOTOGRAPHER
IN OLD PEKING
David Laundy

蘭嶋・再見
王德勝攝集

Growing up
female
a personal photo-
journal by
Abigail Hyman

PORONA
HOUSES

AMAZONIA

THE UNRETOUCHED
WOMAN EVE ARYOLD

AMA
ZONTA

Land sehen
Markus Bach

God Cried
Tony Clayton
Catherine Leroy

THE DECORATIVE ARTS
OF AFRICA
Leslie K. Lefkowitz

PASSPORT
MARY ELLEN MARK

SISTEMA NERVIOSO

CARNIVAL STRIPPERS

THE ETERNAL BODY
Ruth Beckman

THE DECORATIVE ARTS
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Leslie K. Lefkowitz

ANNETTE MESSEAGER
collection mesager

LES TORTURES VOLONTAIRES
DEN PRIVILEGE TORTURE

Circus Days

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YOKOSUKA
STORY
絶唱・横須賀ストーリー
石内都写真集

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LET'S TAKE BACK OUR SPACE

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What They Saw: Historical Photobooks by Women, 1843–1999 (New York, 10×10 Photobooks, 2021), image cover. Graphic design by Ayumi Higuchi. Photograph by Jeff Gutterman

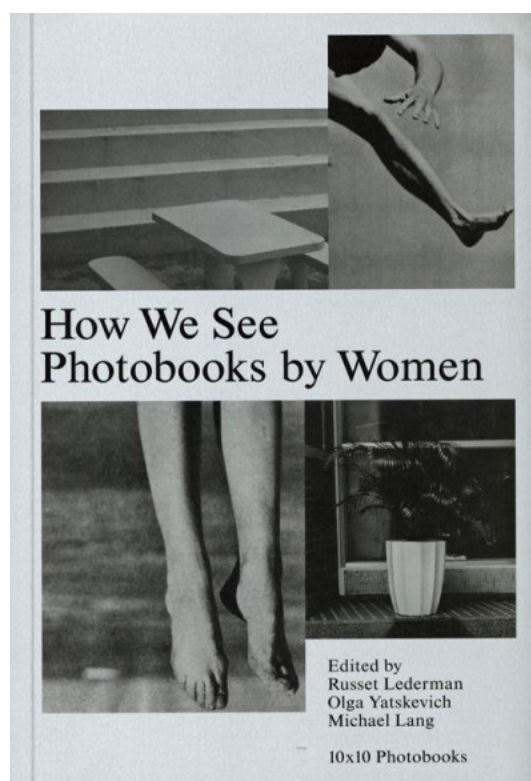
Photobook history is a relatively recent area of study, with one of the first “book-on-books” anthologies published in 1999 with the release of *Fotografía Pública / Photography in Print 1919–1939*, a catalogue associated with an exhibition of the same title at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía. Over the past two decades, a virtual cottage industry of books-on-photobooks has emerged, documenting photographically illustrated books based on geography or around a theme. Photobooks by women are in short supply in most of these anthologies, which is why 10×10 Photobooks launched the *How We See: Photobooks by Women* touring reading room and associated publication in 2018. Focusing on contemporary photobooks by women from 2000 to 2018, the project was the first step in 10×10 Photobooks’ ongoing interest in reassessing photobook history as it relates to women. Although only twenty-five years old, photobook history has been written primarily by men and has focused on publications authored by men. Very few books by women photographers appear in past photobook anthologies, and those included are already quite well known.

As a nonprofit organization with a mission to share photobooks globally and encourage their appreciation and understanding, the 10×10 Photobooks team frequently discusses how photobook history was—and continues to be—written from a skewed perspective and that a “new” history needs to emerge. Early in our discussions, we recognized photobook history as needing to be “rewritten,” but this implied we accepted the partial history already in existence, which we did not. Instead, we concluded that photobook history needs to be “unwritten,” as the existing history is riddled with omissions. What is left out is not by mistake—it indicates bias and incomplete research by the current gatekeepers. To present a more inclusive and diverse vision, we must collectively address these omissions.

What They Saw: Historical Photobooks by Women, 1843–1999, a touring reading room accompanied by a publication and series of public programs, is a means to ignite interest in some of the underexposed and undocumented photobooks by women made between 1843 and 1999 and to begin a process of filling in the gaps. We say “some photobooks” because we are keenly aware that much work is still required, and we have only opened the door a crack. In several cases, particularly for books done before 1900 in regions other than North America and Europe or by women of color, we heard about an artist who may have produced a photographically illustrated book or album, but we were unable to find any further documentation other than a brief mention before the trail went cold. Other impediments emerged among the cohort of women who collaborated with their husbands. Many of their collaborative books are credited only with their husbands’ names, and their contributions, if mentioned at all, are included as footnotes. In some cases, women authors marked their works with a gender-neutral signature that used only their studio name or first initial and last name. In addition, our initial research was impeded by the standard definition of a photobook: a bound volume with photographic illustrations published by the author, an independent publisher, or a trade publisher.



View of the exhibition *Fotografía pública / Photography in Print 1919–1939, 1999*. Museo Reina Sofía



Cover of *How We See: Photobooks by Women* (2018), by Laura Coombs. Photographs by Agustina Triquell, Zoë Croggon, Katrien de Blauwer and Hui-Hsin Chang

We found that we had to widen the frame to include individual albums, slim exhibition pamphlets, scrapbooks, maquettes, zines, and artists' books in order to be more inclusive. This wider frame necessitated redefining a photobook author to incorporate those who may not call themselves a photographer or artist but who nonetheless assembled a "book" composed of photographs taken by themselves or others. Funding was another limitation. Many women photographers who actively exhibited their work either lacked the personal resources to produce a book or could not find anyone willing to underwrite such a venture.

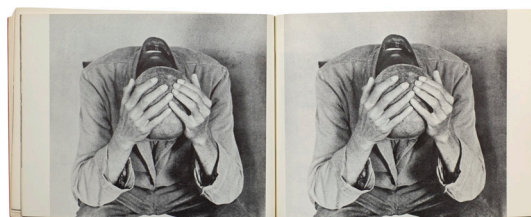
This iteration of the *What They Saw* reading room includes 60 books of the more than 250 volumes highlighted in the associated publication. Most of these publications are kept in the collection of the Museo Reina Sofia's Library and Documentation Centre. They are presented chronologically and show examples of books from around the globe. We begin with Anna Atkins, a British botanist, who was the first person ever to print and distribute a photobook. Her simple desire to share images of her algae specimens ushered in a new art form that presents photography in the book format. In the following years, women such as Isabel Agnes Cowper, the Official Museum Photographer at the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum), used photography to document museum objects, subsequently reproduced in numerous books. Until recently, her name was forgotten, as none of the South Kensington Museum publications credit her as the photographer.

In the early twentieth-century, women authors of photobooks gained some visibility. Fine-art photographer Germaine Krull published numerous books that approached photography from a creative and inventive perspective. Margaret Bourke-White emerged as a well-regarded photojournalist who traveled worldwide photographing for *Fortune* and *Life* magazines and producing countless books. In the 1930s, in Russia, Varvara Stepanova collaborated with her husband, Aleksandr Rodchenko, to create books filled with experimental photomontages. As the century progressed, women in other parts of the world also found their voices in photobooks. African American anthropologist Eslanda Cardozo Goode Robeson traveled to Uganda and South Africa and published *African Journey* in 1945, one of the earliest books written on Africa by a female scholar of color. In Mexico in 1951, Lola Álvarez Bravo contributed photographs to *Acapulco en el sueño*, a bold publication created to attract tourism to Acapulco. A few years later, Fina Gómez Revenga, a Venezuelan photographer, worked in Paris with the famed French printing house Draeger Frères to illustrate the poems of Surrealist poet Lise Deharme.

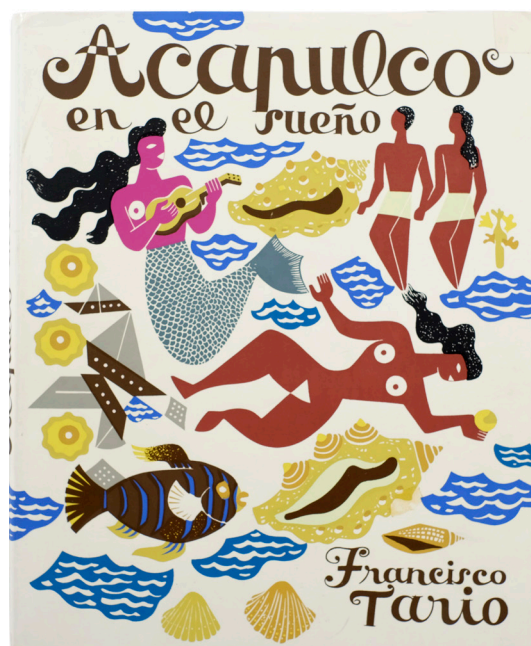
With the arrival of the 1960s, women emerged from the sidelines and began to produce widely distributed, often socially focused, photobooks. A New York City street photographer, Helen Levitt, published *A Way of Seeing* in 1965, while Carla Cerati collaborated on *Morire di classe* in 1969, a visually compelling commentary on the appalling conditions in Italian psychiatric hospitals. With the women's movement finding its full voice in the 1970s, women photographers took center stage in the last three decades of the twentieth-century, releasing



Anna Atkins. Inside page of *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*, (1843) by Anna Atkins



Inside pages of *Morire di classe* (1969) by Carla Cerati

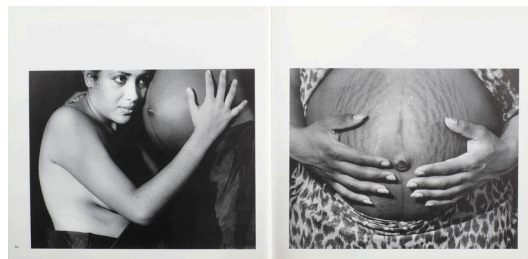


Cover of *Acapulco en el sueño* (1951), by Carlos Mérida. Texts by Francisco Tario. Photographs by Lola Álvarez Bravo.

a steady flow of photobooks. A year after her death in 1971, Aperture published Diane Arbus's monograph, a photobook that continues to influence generations of photographers. Barbara Brändli, a Swiss immigrant to Venezuela, documents the energy and rapid transformations of Caracas, while activist-photographer JEB (Joan E. Biren) toured the United States, capturing lesbian pride events. In South Africa, Lesley Lawson, a member of the Afrapix photo agency, combined interviews and her photographs to reveal the working conditions of Black women in Johannesburg. Cameroonian Angèle Etoundi Essamba shares the beauty and spirit of Black women in *Passion* (1989), while American Donna Ferrato unflinchingly explores domestic violence in *Living with the Enemy* (1991), and Nan Goldin exposes violent love and loss in her personal narrative, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1986). In books centered on cultural explorations, Wang Hsin photographs the fading traditions of Lanyu (Orchid Island) off the coast of Taiwan, Cristina García Rodero records religious festivals and rituals in her native Spain, and Ketaki Sheth documents twins and triplets in the Indian Gujarati community.

In reaching out to the far corners of the world, we uncovered numerous forgotten books, but many remain undiscovered. For example, we learned about a nineteenth-century woman in Iran who kept her husband's diary and most probably added her photographs to the volume, but no visual documentation of this diary could be found. We also discovered several books that featured the participation of women in collaboration with male photographers where the women's contributions were ambiguous. There were several "leads" of this nature, and we decided that leaving them out would be a missed opportunity. Therefore, in the associated anthology, we have included a "timeline" that presents several historically significant publishing, magazine, small press, photography, and feminist events that may or may not have produced a photobook, but have undoubtedly influenced its history. To support further exploration of these unresolved "leads," 10×10 Photobooks has launched a research grant program to encourage scholarship on underexplored topics in photobook history.

From its inception, *What They Saw* has sought to include a diverse group of photographically illustrated publications by women. For photobook history to become more inclusive, it requires everyone (men, women, nonbinary, white, Black, Asian, African, Latinx, Indigenous, Western, Eastern, etc.) to contribute. We see this reading room of women's role in the production, dissemination, and authoring of photobooks as a necessary step in the unwriting of the current photobook history and a rewriting of a photobook history that is more equitable and inclusive. We invite future researchers to take the next steps to explore further women and other marginalized people's historical impact in the realm of photobooks and to expand upon the books we present in this reading room and its associated anthology.



Inside pages of *Passion* (1989) by Angèle Etoundi Essamba

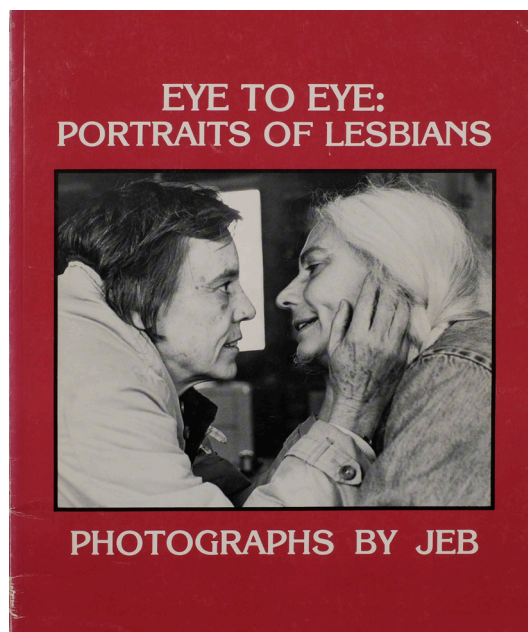


Image cover of *Eye to Eye: Portraits of Lesbians* (1979).
Photographs by JEB (Joan E. Biren)

Organized by:

Museo Reina Sofía

Curatorship:

Russet Lederman and Olga Yatskevich

Collaboration:

10×10 Photobooks