

WOMEN
PHOTOGRAPHERS



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PHOTOGRAPHERS

BORIS FRIEDEWALD

From Julia Margaret Cameron
to Cindy Sherman

PRESTEL

Munich · London · New York

In a profession like this it is both an advantage and a disadvantage to be a woman ... From time to time, I have been able to take photos where my male colleagues had failed ... Not many women work as photo reporters, a profession that requires absolute health, patience, and curiosity, as well as an open approach, skill, and courage in completely unexpected situations: all qualities that women possess.

Gisèle Freund, 1977

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Introduction

A woman. A camera. An eye looking through the camera. A hand that presses the shutter at exactly the right moment. A picture is created. “It is the eye that takes the picture, not the camera,” Gisèle Freund once observed. And every picture that the eye sees is directly linked with the person who made it. What the eye sees is a synthesis of everything that makes up an individual and at the same time what she has learned, believes Graciela Iturbide. From the pioneers of photography during the nineteenth century to the shooting stars of today, the work of women photographers is as unique as their life stories—and their gaze.

It is the gaze that produces the pictures that express directly what moves people to the depths of their being, as in the case of Rosalind Solomon. Pictures that are full of intense, lively curiosity about people, as with the work of Herlinde Koelbl. Photographers who, like Jessica Backhaus, take pictures of everyday things and places that at the same time tell us much about what it means to be human, about the world and all its aspects. The gaze of women who like to identify themselves with the male gaze, like Bettina Rheims, who photographed a series of nude women that was intended to look as if it had been taken by a male amateur photographer. There are critical and political viewpoints that aim to show the truth in order to open the eyes of other people, as in the photos of Tina Modotti or Carrie Mae Weems. There is the gaze that records the spirit of things or landscapes, as in Graciela Iturbide’s works. And the gaze that spots the essential character of a personality and records it in a portrait, like Gisèle Freund. And then there are gazes that photograph the world almost unconsciously, until they suddenly discover a golden thread, a common theme in their pictures, like Rinko Kawauchi. They are eyes that are aware of their responsibility when they take a picture. As Susan Meiselas put it:

“We take pictures away and we don’t bring them back.” There are secret looks like those of Vivian Maier, who took photos that she intended no one should see.

And the attitude to photography of each of these women was different, too: for Sarah Moon, photography is a craft. For Shirana Shabazi, it is art. And when Evelyn Hofer was once asked what she thought it was, she simply answered: “I just do my work.”

They are also views of women who record with their cameras what no man could ever see: Sarah Moon says that the photos she takes of female models are different from those taken by male photographers, because during the act of photographing, an intimate dialogue arises from woman to woman. Gisèle Freund said that she sometimes succeeded in gaining permission to take photographs where her male colleagues had failed, “as in the case of Evita Perón and writers of a certain age who feared a lack of understanding on the part of the men.” Mother-of-ten Lady Clementina Hawarden always provided a familiar setting when she portrayed her daughters, who were constantly transformed before her eyes into new female figures. And Zanele Muholi photographed lesbian women in moments of tenderness in which they would never have exposed themselves to the male gaze.

All these are the viewpoints of women for whom the term “woman photographer” is often not precise enough. For highly individual reasons. Zanele Muholi, for example, sees herself as a visual activist. Claude Cahun saw herself as being beyond femininity, masculinity, or androgyny. And Eve Arnold believed that the description “woman photographer” limited her: “I didn’t want to be a ‘woman photographer.’ That would limit me. I wanted to be a photographer who was a woman, with all the world open to my camera.”

Ultimately, the reasons why women begin to take photographs are as individual as their gazes: mother-of-six Julia Margaret Cameron was given a camera by her eldest daughter in the early 1860s after she had spent weeks suffering from a deep depression. From then on she never went anywhere without it. Dora Kallmus, who later called herself Madame d’Ora, could not find any postcards during her holiday in the south of France, whereupon she simply bought a camera and photographed views to use as postcards herself. Then she came to the conclusion that she wanted to become a photographer. The fact that at the time, in 1900, not a single woman had been accepted to study photography in Vienna did not concern her in the slightest. She asserted herself and ultimately became the first woman to enroll at the Graphische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt (Graphic Teaching and Training Institute) in Vienna. Ellen Auerbach, on the other hand, simply had no desire to carry on fulfilling the established female role in life or her family’s traditions in the 1920s; she wanted to live differently, in a more modern way; to be independent—and she soon realized that she would only be able to achieve this as a photographer. Inge Morath started out as a journalist and then became a photo editor for Magnum. And when on one occasion there were no agency photographers available to record the atmosphere of a thunderstorm that Morath found fascinating, she simply took the photo herself. From then on she worked as a photographer and became a member of Magnum two years later. Vera Lutter had trained as a potter and had studied art before, more or less on a whim, she constructed her first camera obscura and started taking photographs using this technique. Mother-of-two and housewife Rosalind Solomon took photos during a trip to Japan and suddenly discovered that she could also learn a lot about herself at

the same time. A short while later she set up her own darkroom in a shack. And Cindy Sherman realized while studying art that she would never be able to produce what she wanted to with paintbrush and pencil. She decided to attend a photography course and then, in 1980, at the beginning of her own career with a camera, she saw that for her, photography could provide a clear distinction from painting, which was dominated by men.

This book aims to present variety and diversity. The variety and diversity of women who took—and take—photographs. Their life stories, their way of looking at things, and their pictures. Fifty-five women from the beginnings of photography to the present day. A range that unquestionably reveals a number of gaps—as any selection made from a large number inevitably must. They are women whose gaze and whose works unsettle, provoke, touch, and delight their viewers. That is what they are famous for. Some of them became famous at an early stage, some of them much later. Some of those who achieved fame at the beginning of the twentieth century were soon forgotten and it was not until the 1970s that they were rediscovered, studied, and honored in feminist circles. Others, like Vivian Maier, who made their photographs only for themselves, were discovered and became famous only after they had died. Lisette Model once made a wise observation, one that her students took to heart. And even those women who did not know Model, because they lived before or after her, share—despite their variety and diversity—the essential attitude expressed in this sentence: “Never take a picture of anything you are not passionately interested in.” And now? See for yourself!

Boris Friedewald

BERENICE (BERNICE) ABBOTT

Born on July 17, 1898 in Springfield, Ohio, USA
Died on December 9, 1991 in Monson, Maine, USA

Bernice Abbott had originally intended to study, but when some of her friends moved to New York, she abandoned her journalism degree in Ohio without further ado and went to the metropolis with them. She dreamt of becoming an author and was soon at home among the artists of Greenwich Village. After almost dying of the flu, she lost her heart to sculpture—and to the young Thelma Wood, who also wanted to be a sculptor. Djuna Barnes, Man Ray, and his friend Marcel Duchamp, who commissioned a game of chess from Abbott, were now among her artist acquaintances. Soon afterward, Man Ray and Duchamp pronounced the death of Dadaism in New York with the naked body of the Dadaist Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. At this time Freytag-Loringhoven also awakened Abbott's enthusiasm for Paris, painting her several times and later dedicating the Dadaist poem *Pastoral* to her friend. When Abbott went to Paris in 1921 she had neither money nor a job, nothing but the aim of living in this exciting capital of art. Abbott had already attended sculpture classes in New York, and in Paris she went on to study at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière under Antoine Bourdelle and in the studio of Constantin Brâncuși. In 1923 she went briefly to Berlin, where she studied at the Staatliche Kunstschule, but returned to Paris the same year. By coincidence Berenice Abbott, who from then on would use the French spelling of her first name, met Man Ray again. The latter was looking for an assistant and immediately offered the penniless Abbott a job in his darkroom. Acting as his assistant provided her with a traineeship at the same time: before long she was not only making the prints for Man Ray, but also took charge of numerous photo sessions in his studio—at the express wish of the clients, and to the growing consternation of the master. She later explained: "I didn't decide to be a photographer; I just happened to fall into it." With the help of Peggy Guggenheim and other friends Abbott opened her own



Berenice Abbott, 1922.
Photo by Man Ray

studio in Paris in 1926, where she created portraits of Djuna Barnes, James Joyce, and Coco Chanel, among others. While working for Man Ray she had become familiar with the photographs of Eugène Atget, who over the course of several decades had cataloged Paris with his camera. Abbott visited the old master in 1927 and took the last portrait photographs of him before his death. She borrowed money to buy Atget's entire estate, although he was still a little-known *flâneur* at the time. She published much of it and later bequeathed it to the Museum of Modern Art in 1968. When Abbott traveled to New York in 1929 she was thrilled by the changed dynamism of the city, and decided to stay there. She soon realized that just as Atget had documented the changes taking place in the city of Paris, she, too, wanted to act as a chronicler and capture

the changes under way in New York, which was characterized by a building boom. And so she embarked on an extensive self-funded project, earning enough to support herself from 1934 on as a lecturer at the New School for Social Research, where she worked until 1958. From 1935 on the state-administered Federal Art Project (FAP) financed this major photographic project for four years, putting at her disposal an entire research team, including assistants and a driver. The results were first shown in 1939 in the legendary book *Changing New York*. After this project, Abbott began to devote the use of her camera primarily to phenomena related to natural science. With great precision and an artistic eye she photographed electric and magnetic phenomena over the course of many years, earning great acclaim in the sciences and the arts. After the death in 1965 of her companion, the art critic Elizabeth McCausland, with whom Abbott had lived for thirty years, Abbott moved from the metropolis to a small house in Maine, in which she lived until her death. She once declared: "I am so fascinated with this century it will help keep me alive. I'll be there until the last minute, fighting."





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DESIGNER'S WINDOW, BLEECKER STREET, NEW YORK, CA. 1947

When Abbott's grand photographic project of documenting New York no longer received funding she dedicated herself to scientific photography. In 1947 she began again to take photographs Greenwich Village, which was threatened with demolition, and where this photograph was taken. In a grand style she combines here the poetic and surreal-looking shop-window motif of an old-fashioned shop front with the urban silhouette of buildings and illuminated advertising reflected in the window.

HOBOKEN FERRY TERMINAL, BARCLAY STREET, NEW YORK, 1931

When Abbott took this photograph she was obsessed with the idea of creating a photographic record of New York, which was changing at a rapid pace. As a result of her financial circumstances she roamed the streets of New York with her 18x24 large-format camera on just one day a week. She was always interested in "honest" and "uncontrived" photographs that depicted reality as well as possible.



MAGNETISM AND ELECTRICITY I, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, 1958-61

Abbott was convinced that "our age is in its nature a scientific one." As a result scientific photography became her second passion, following her photographic documentation of the city of New York. Photography in particular provided an opportunity to visualize scientific phenomena for a wide public. In 1958 she was eventually even commissioned to take photographs for a physics textbook.

EVE ARNOLD

Born on April 21, 1912 in Philadelphia, USA

Died on January 4, 2012 in London, UK

Eve Cohen was the daughter of Jewish immigrants from Russia. During the daytime she worked as a bookkeeper in the office of a real estate agent, and in the evening studied medicine with the

aim of becoming a doctor. But this was not what would actually happen. In 1946 she read an advertisement in *The New York Times* seeking an “amateur photographer”—and promptly changed her life plan. She applied because she was secretly addicted, as she later admitted. Shortly before, a friend had given her a Rolleicord camera, the somewhat less expensive version of the Rolleiflex, and photography immediately became her drug of choice. Eve got the job in a photographic print and retouching firm and moved to New York. In 1948 she registered for a six-week photo workshop at the New School for Social

Research under Alexey Brodovitch, the legendary art director of the fashion magazine *Harper's Bazaar*. It was to be the only photography course she ever attended, although she saw herself as continuing to learn throughout her entire life. Shortly after that she attended fashion shows by African-American women in Harlem—and discovered life behind the catwalk with her camera. It became her first reportage. The pictures were taken with an attitude that from now on would characterize Eve Arnold's work as a photographer: an inexhaustible curiosity with regard to life, combined with an unusual social interest and commitment revealing tremendous courage and sympathy. In 1951 she sent her reportage from Harlem, together with a new documentation about opera audiences, to the Magnum photo agency—and became one of the first woman photographers to be allowed to join. Many years later, Isabella Rossellini, who was a friend, wrote: “Eve treated men as if she were a man herself.”

By now the young woman had two families: her husband, the industrial designer Arnold Arnold, and their son, Frank, and the photo agency, which Eve Arnold also called her family and about whom she said: “You love them all but you don't neces-



sarily like them all.” Before long Arnold was getting up at the crack of dawn to photograph Marlene Dietrich in the recording studio—the diva's astrologer had determined the time. Shortly

afterward a young actress asked whether Arnold would be interested in photographing her, since the photos of Marlene had been so successful. The request came from Marilyn Monroe. Arnold photographed her over a period of ten years; the results are world-famous today. Arnold eventually became the stars' favorite photographer and at the same time produced masterly reportages about devotees of voodoo, a baby's first minutes of life, and the black civil rights campaigner Malcolm X. She saw her own biography and her image of herself as a woman as providing the prime impulse in her choice of and

attitude toward her subjects: “I have been poor and I wanted to document poverty; I had lost a child and I was obsessed with birth; I was interested in politics and I wanted to know how it affected our lives; I am a woman and I wanted to know about women.” In the early 1960s Eve Arnold and her husband separated. She registered her son in an English boarding school and settled in London. Arnold regularly took photos for the *Sunday Times*, *Newsweek*, and *Life*, choosing the subjects, which were not infrequently linked to travel to faraway places, mostly herself. She photographed veiled women in the Arab world, traveled to South Africa to produce a reportage about the life of the blacks who lived there, and accompanied Indira Gandhi on her election campaign through India. Arnold traveled to the USSR, where she also took photos in mental hospitals; she discovered humanity in Communist China and saw the USA with fresh eyes. She died in London at the age of ninety-nine. Eve Arnold left more than 750,000 photos. Of her role as a woman photographer she once said: “I didn't want to be a ‘woman photographer.’ That would limit me. I wanted to be a photographer who was a woman, with all the world open to my camera.”

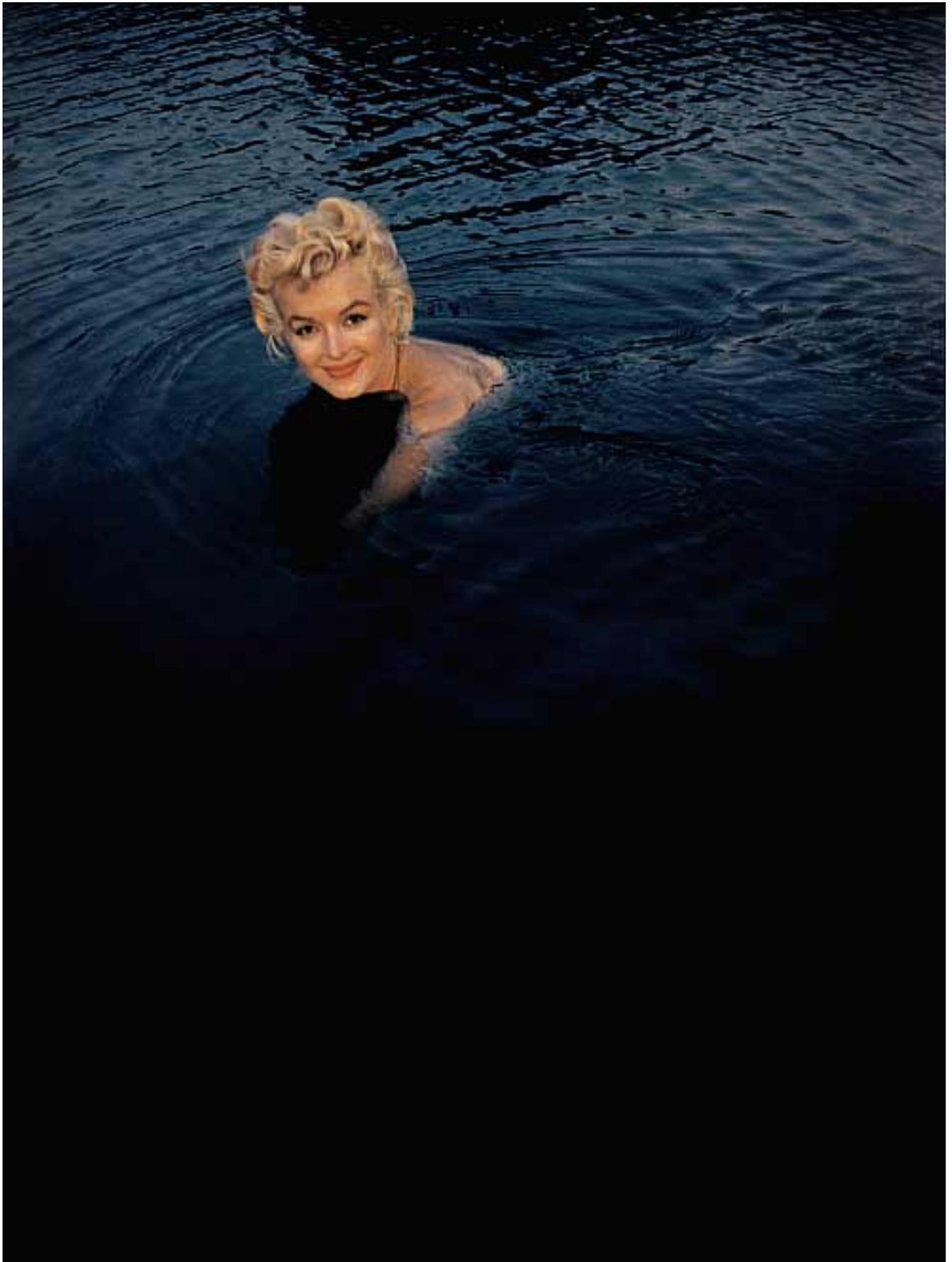
It is the photographer, not the camera, that is the instrument.

Eve Arnold



FASHION SHOW,
BEHIND THE SCENES,
ABYSSINIAN BAPTIST
CHURCH, HARLEM,
NEW YORK, USA, 1950

In 1950 strict racial segregation was still practiced in the USA. Eve Arnold went to a fashion show of African-American women, where she was the only white visitor. She repeatedly visited and photographed these events in a Baptist Church in Harlem. Yet it was not so much the show itself, but rather the lively life behind the stage that she recorded with great sensitivity over a period of about a year with the help of her \$40 Rolleicord. The result was her first photo reportage, which however was first published not in the USA but in the British magazine Picture Post.





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US ACTRESS MARILYN MONROE, NEVADA, USA, 1960

*In 1960 Eve Arnold took this photo of Marilyn Monroe during a break in the shooting of her last film, *The Misfits*, in the Nevada desert. The actress was dependent on alcohol and tablets, was in the process of changing psychiatrists, and was also about to separate from her husband, Arthur Miller. She died two years later. Arnold succeeded in producing a delightful portrait of the luminous figure Monroe and at the same time a symbolic picture of a tragic world star who increasingly saw herself facing a grim reality.*

HORSE TRAINING FOR THE MILITIA, INNER MONGOLIA, CHINA, 1979

From the early 1960s on Eve Arnold wanted to make a trip to China to take photographs, but it was not until 1979 that she succeeded in achieving something that virtually no other Western photographer had managed before her: she was granted a visa for three months and traveled through China at the age of sixty-nine. One of her main aims was to photograph different classes of people, in the cities and in the country—in color and without a tripod and flash. The photos were published in a fascinating book and presented in 1980 at the Brooklyn Museum as Arnold's first solo exhibition.

ANNA ATKINS

Born on March 16, 1799 in Tonbridge, UK

Died on June 9, 1871 in Halstead, UK

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the discovery of photography was in some respects just waiting to happen—with a number of men making pioneering discoveries in this field at that time. Although these pioneers were not always in agreement as to which of them had been the first to discover something, one thing is certain: 1843 saw the publication of the first book in the world in which all the illustrations had been produced with the aid of a photographic technique—and by a woman at that. Achieving fame was not, however, her main concern, which is why she published the book under the unadorned pseudonym “AA,” the initials of her first name and married name: Anna Atkins.

Anna’s mother had died shortly after giving birth, and Anna was therefore brought up as an only child by her father, the polymath John George Children. He taught his daughter about his wonderful worlds of minerals, plants and animals, and chemistry. Father and daughter were engaged in increasingly intensive discussions, and eventually Anna could imagine nothing more fascinating than science and research—and she became a biologist. She was a highly practical and artistic woman: at the age of twenty-three she designed over 200 illustrations of shells for a work translated by her father, *Genera of Shells* by the botanist and zoologist Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck. At this point she had no idea of the possibilities of photography. The next year, in 1825, she married the son of the lord mayor of London, John Pelly Atkins. The marriage remained childless. In February 1839 Anna Atkins met the multi-talented Henry Fox Talbot at a congress of the Royal Society. He was presenting his “photogenic drawings,” drawings produced by light, as he called his cameraless photographs. Atkins

and her father immediately established a friendly relationship with the inventor and Atkins began to sense the possibilities that photography might open up for science. Soon thereafter the



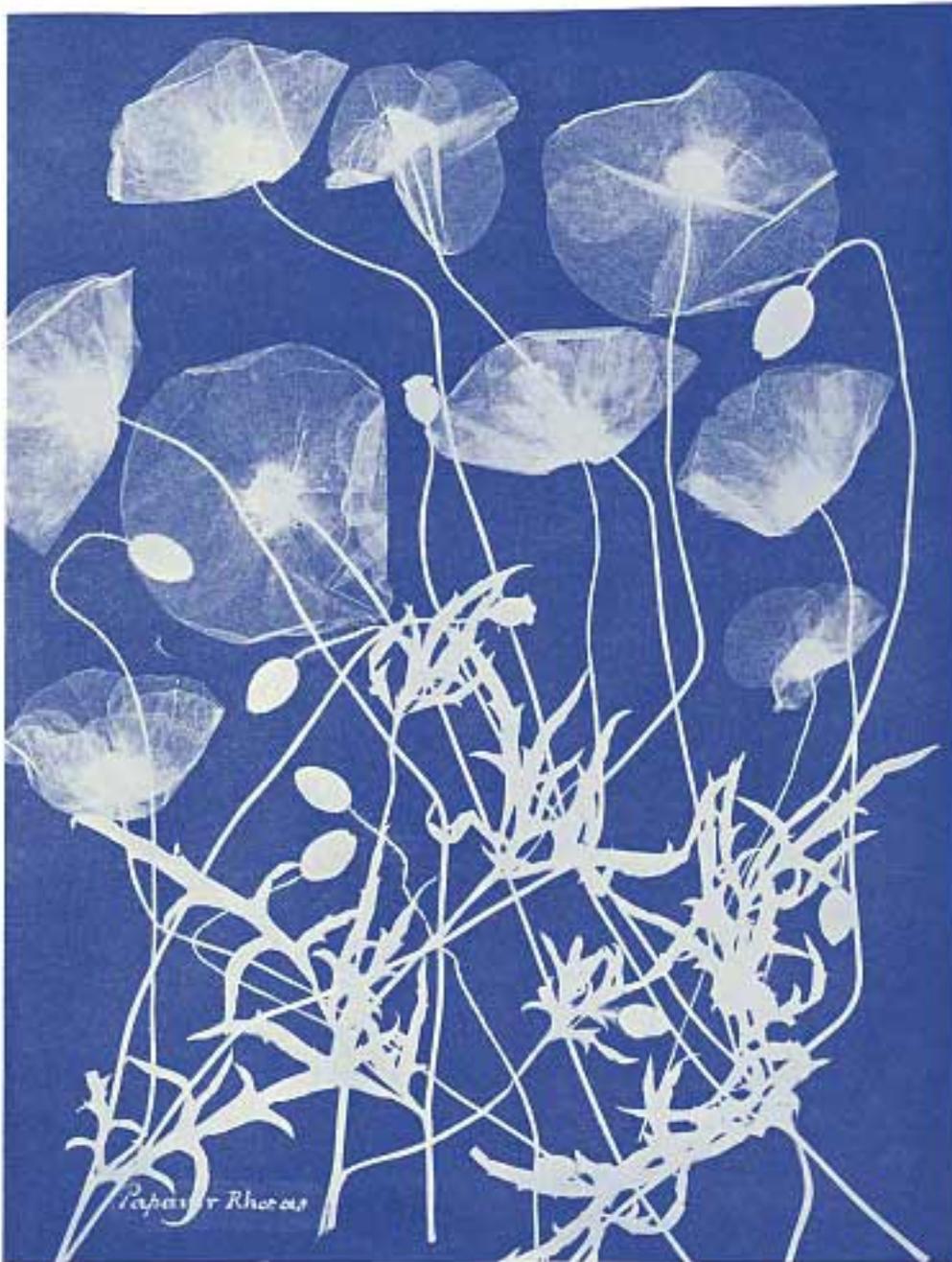
Anna Atkins, 1861

father and daughter met the astronomer Sir John Herschel, who had also made important discoveries for photography a short while previously. His achievements included the discovery of fixing salt and cyanotype, which enabled blueprints to be made: the cameraless pictures produced using this method appear in a beautiful Prussian blue. Atkins, whose interest in botany had led her to collect seaweed for many years with a friend, was immediately filled with enthusiasm for this simple and inexpensive technique. She painted a solution of light-sensitive iron salts onto paper, pressed her seaweed onto it, exposed it in sunlight, and then washed and dried the re-

sult. Atkins gave each seaweed picture the corresponding Latin name, wrote a foreword, and bound the whole thing together to form a book she titled *British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*. She produced several copies and gave them to botanists. These were soon followed by subsequent editions.

After devoting herself to algae for ten years, Atkins concentrated on ferns and other plants. She produced more cyanotypes and another book. She interrupted her work only once. After her father’s death, Atkins wrote a 300-page biography of him, scarcely mentioning herself in it. Nonetheless the several thousand cyanotypes she produced tell us a number of important things about this remarkable woman: her incredible openness and enthusiasm for all that was new; her courage, her indefatigable and modest scientific approach, and her admirable independence in an age in which science was still dominated by men.





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CYTOSEIRA GRANULATA, 1843/44

In 1843 Atkins published her first book of photographs, British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions. It contained cyanotypes of British algae, which she expanded on several occasions until 1845 with new portraits of algae seaweed, such as this genus of brown algae. She saw her book as an illustrated appendix to William Harvey's Manual of the British Algae from 1841. Today thirteen copies of Atkins's book are known to exist. One of the most extensive versions can be found in the New York Public Library.

PAPAVER RHOEAS, 1845

Many of the cyanotypes that Atkins produced show not only that she had a tremendous interest in science and botany, but also that she was an artist—as with this work, for example, which shows the corn poppy.



PARTRIDGE, CA. 1850

In order to produce a cyanotype, you must paint a solution of ferric ammonium citrate and red prussiate of potash onto paper and then dry it in a dark place. Then lay the flat object you want to copy—it need not be feathers, as on this cyanotype by Atkins—on the sheet and expose it to sunshine for a few minutes. After that, wash the sheet under running water. Nowadays you can buy specially coated cyanotype paper.

ELLEN AUERBACH

Born on May 20, 1906 in Karlsruhe, Germany

Died on July 30, 2004 in New York, USA

Everything in the young Ellen Rosenberg strove toward change and modernity. In 1927 she saw a house by Le Corbusier on the Weissenhof Estate in Stuttgart—the most radical modern architectural settlement at the time. A young woman from a Jewish family, she sensed here the incredibly new and independent mood she so longed for. Her response was to saw the legs off her bed and paint each wall of her bedroom a different color. But the revolt in her own room did not change the fact that beyond the bedroom door, tradition awaited her in the form of her parents, who wanted to marry off their daughter as quickly as possible. Ellen Rosenberg had other plans, however: her only goal was independence. She had long since recognized that the training in sculpture she had completed in Karlsruhe and Stuttgart would not lead her in that direction.

While still a student she had been given a plate camera by an uncle, but otherwise had no experience in photography. Nonetheless she came to the conclusion that it was only with a camera that she would achieve her aim—and then only in Berlin. The sole reason her parents gave their blessing to her decision to move to the big city was that she claimed she was going to continue her studies in sculpture. But even before she had been rejected by the Academy of Arts in 1929, she phoned the photographer Walter Peterhans and convinced him to take her on as a pupil. She spent only a short time as his private pupil before her teacher sold his studio equipment to another pupil, Grete Stern (see p. 206). Before long Grete asked Ellen whether she would like to open a studio with her. Grete's nickname since childhood had been Ringl, and Ellen had been called Pit as a child, so they called themselves “ringl+pit.” They took advertising photos, photographed objects, and made portraits of artists. The two women became friends and soon fell passionately in love with each other. Ellen had abandoned much of her past and now lived as a woman in a way for which there were very few role models; she was autonomous and gradually invented

a new, modern picture of what a woman should be. During the early 1930s Grete fell in love with the stage designer and Marxist Walter Auerbach; shortly afterward Ellen did the same and eventually moved into an apartment with him. The two women nonetheless continued to run their joint photo studio together as good friends.

Immediately after Hitler seized power, Walter and Ellen went to live in Palestine, where Ellen discovered open-air photography and established a photographic studio for children in Tel Aviv. In 1936 the couple moved to London, where Grete had also settled in the meantime. Once again, Ellen and Grete worked together. In 1937 Ellen married Walter and they emigrated to the United States; their marriage lasted for eight years. From 1946 until 1948 Ellen Auerbach, who now



Ellen Rosenberg with her first small-format camera

worked as a freelance photographer in New York, documented the behavior of infants on photographs and film for a research institute for psychology. She ended up teaching photography at various art schools in the United States. In her photos taken during those years she tried to convey the true essence of the object she was photographing, which she hoped would give an indication of the all-embracing reality that lay behind. At the end of the 1950s Auerbach put aside her camera and stopped taking photographs. After a brief fascination with Scientology, she began to study Zen Buddhism and was soon preoccupied by the Subud Brotherhood and its spiritual teacher, Jiddu Krishnamurti. And she was by no means too old to try something new: at the age of almost sixty she began to help children with learning problems through art therapy, which she then continued for almost twenty years. During this time Auerbach was rediscovered, especially in feminist circles, as an unusually modern woman in Germany during the 1920s, and before long her photos were being displayed in numerous exhibitions. When Ellen Auerbach looked at her photos later on, she said: “Perhaps I have been searching for the joy of living.”

In my photography I have tried to express what I aim to express in all that I do. The photo should hint at things beyond its actual content. The divine reason, as Meister Eckhardt would say. The beauty of an “ugly” face. The essence of things ... I want the dignity and the hope that lies beneath to shine through in even the most inconspicuous, the most ordinary, the most humble subjects.

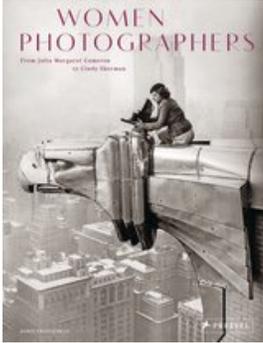
Ellen Auerbach, 1985



SEWING SILK, CA. 1930

Here, each of the rolls of sewing silk has a different sheen—presented in a masterly way by Ellen Auerbach at a time when every photo from the joint studio of Ellen Auerbach and Grete Stern in Berlin was stamped with the name of their studio: ringl+pit.

UNVERKÄUFLICHE LESEPROBE



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