

SOURCE

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC REVIEW
WINTER 2016 ISSUE 88 £6.00

PAUL GRAHAM
LAURA EL-TANTAWY
LIAM MAGEE
**THE GREATEST
PHOTOBOOKS
OF ALL TIME**
PHOTOBOOKS
IN THE REAL
WORLD



for a second series next year here's hoping that this is the beginning of a long overdue renaissance, where no camera is obscured and all types of photographs are brought into the light.

Eve Forrest

The Committed Amateur

Taking Off: Henry My Neighbor
Mariken Wessels

Mariken Wessels lives and works in Amsterdam, often using found photographs. *Taking Off* was exhibited earlier this year at the Fotomuseum, Antwerp, but is probably better known as a book that has already won a range of major prizes, including the Author Book Award at the Rencontres d'Arles, 2016. Significantly, Wessels is a former member of ABC, the Artists' Books Cooperative that was founded by Joachim Schmid in 2009 with the specific aim of encouraging print-on-demand books. She might prefer the book form, but it is no accident that her latest venture was created with Art Paper Editions, a Belgian publisher, founded in 2010, that is explicitly interested in the affinities between the pages of a book and the walls of a gallery or museum.

Taking Off could be considered a portable exhibition in a number of ways. No page numbers. No captions. No introductory essay or afterword from a prestigious critic. In fact, anyone disoriented needs to refer to the 'Epilogue' that is brief, un-credited and presumably written by Wessels. We are told that Henry made around 5,500 nude photos of his wife and muse Martha. At one point, the couple separated, and Henry then used the photos as source material for collages and clay figurines (The nude photos plus the related collages and figurines constitute the bulk of the book). Eventually, he disappeared into the woods of New Jersey, where he practiced survival techniques (Appropriately, then, the final visual

section of the book shows the wildlife traps that he made, photographed by a friend in the late 1980s).

Wessels never met Henry and Martha, but found out about them via former friends and neighbours when she was living on Long Island, close to New York City. Hence the sub-title *Henry my Neighbor*. The main title *Taking Off* refers to the categories used by Henry to classify the nudes: bust / slacks; bust / slacks / bra; bust / squeezed; laying good; standing taking off; and so on. The main title also suggests the career of an artist being launched via this book.

The phrase 'amateur art' crops up in the 'Epilogue', encouraging reflections on related terms like 'outsider art' or 'art brut'. What links these terms is an assumption that art pursued for love, rather than a livelihood, can result in extraordinary work unconstrained by professional or social conventions. Take Miroslav Tichy (1926-2011). From the 1960s to the mid-1980s he took photographs in his hometown of Kyjov (former Czechoslovakia) working with homemade equipment and specialising in surreptitious shots of local women. Like a classic outsider artist, he operated in isolation and showed no interest in the so-called art world. Although he started exhibiting when he was in his seventies, international acclaim has been posthumous.

Or consider Margret: *Chronicle of an Affair – May 1969 to December 1970*. The 'Affair' involved a German businessman and his secretary, both married. The 'Chronicle' is mainly photographs, but also includes evocative items like empty pill packets, fingernail clippings and snippets of pubic hair. The documentation of this secret liaison was recently discovered in an abandoned briefcase in Germany. Consigned to Nicole Delmes and Susanne Zander, co-directors of galleries in Berlin and Cologne, it now exists as a travelling exhibition and a book, published by Walther König in 2012.

Or the book *Nur für Privat* (literal translation, *For Private Use Only*). It was also published by Walther König, in this case to coincide with a retrospective exhibition of Hans-Peter Feldmann in 2016 at C/O, Berlin.



Collage from *Taking Off*
courtesy Mariken Wessels

Feldmann's 'archive' consists of amateur shots of women in provocative poses, originally used as introductory material for the 'swinger scene' in West Germany in the 1970s and 1980s.

Back to Henry. He is similar to Tichy with his sexual obsessions, but there are obvious differences. Tichy stalks anonymous women in public, whereas Henry engages with his wife and muse at home. *Margret* includes material generated by both parties in the secret affair, but neither has the artistic ambitions of Henry. Nevertheless, there are some close parallels between Delmes and Zander 'creating' Margret and her partner and Wessels' 'creating' Martha and Henry. Finally, Henry and Feldmann. The latter is an obsessive archivist whose themes are very diverse, ranging from 'swingers' to newspaper front pages the day after 9/11. My impression is that Henry had no interest in 'swinging' or public affairs. His only preoccupation was Martha.

Hierarchies abound in the world of art and publishing, and a conventional distinction presents the book designer as less important than the artist, author or editor. Wessels rejects such distinctions and considers the selection of images and paper as creative problems of equal worth, for instance. Thus, the relentless grids of nude photos (plus their labels) are presented on glossy paper, contrasting with other material on matt.

The book is overwhelmingly black and white, increasing the impact of colour imagery, sparsely used. There is also an interest in inserts, folds and the like, all treated as ways of making the turning of a page an exciting experience. Clearly, Wessels benefited from her experience with ABC, even though a number of her co-members – Mishka Henner, Andreas Schmidt and Hermann Zschiegner, for example – are more interested in raiding the Internet for their source material. Overall, *Taking Off. Henry My Neighbor* exemplifies the merging of found photography and book design.

David Evans

Getting Close to Diane Arbus

Diane Arbus: Portrait of a Photographer
Arthur Lubow

In 1979 I was in my early twenties and in New York on a Fulbright American government scholarship to study painting when I saw a few of Diane Arbus's photographs displayed at the Museum of Modern Art. At that time it was rare to see photographs on the walls of an art museum. When I saw Arbus's prints a light went on in my brain. As a young woman artist in the 70s there were few models for my own practice, so when I encountered Diane Arbus's work I could suddenly see what might be possible. The people Arbus photographed ranged from children, to men and women singly, couples, families and groups. They came from the centre of New York society or from all the way out on its margins. Some had just arrived on earth whilst others were worn down by life; each appeared to occupy a personal psychic space within the image.

Through her images photography went further, encompassing much more of life, as if emerging from a previous stage of evolution. We know that Arbus carefully studied the pictures of both August Sander and Weegee, who directly documented people and society; but on her journey she took the whole medium with her to a new place. The concentration it took to achieve this is the story that Arthur Lubow tells in his *Portrait of a Photographer*.

Lubow's biography was a welcome chance to immerse myself in seven hundred pages of detail about Arbus's life and work. Over eighty-five chapters with clear descriptive titles her life is described from its privileged beginning to its untimely end by suicide in 1971. The book also contains a series of descriptions of her images, mostly in the order in which they were taken.

Each description was a chance to test my memory of my favorite pictures, those I knew less well and some I did not know at all. I was only partially aware of the children who play in the distance behind the Tarnopol family as they lie on their sun beds in *A family on their lawn one Sunday, Westchester, New York* in 1968;

the foot that pokes out of the edge of the frame in the picture of the *Mexican dwarf in his hotel room N.Y.C.* 1970 or the soft rippling surface of the tent behind the *Albino sword swallower at a carnival, Maryland* photographed in 1970. Over a hundred and forty photographs are discussed in the text. This must have been a massive task on its own; Lubow carries it out with a light touch.

Her words are quoted in a statement at the beginning of the book: 'A photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you the less you know.' Without co-operation from Arbus's protective family Lubow searched out and interviewed many of her photographic subjects and friends. Words knit the descriptions of the pictures, the condition of their making and the responses and memories of those portrayed together. Norman Mailer posed for her and commented 'giving a camera to Diane is like putting a hand grenade in the hands of a child'.

Amongst the subjects that Lubow sought out and interviewed was Colin Wood, the boy in *Child with a toy hand grenade in Central Park, N.Y.C.* 1962. Wood says of Arbus 'She saw in me the frustration, the anger at my surroundings, the kid wanting to explode but can't because he's constrained by his background.' Colin Wood was a child whose wealthy parents were in the middle of a divorce, looked after by a nanny, he drank too many sugary drinks and took his toy weapons to school.

The feeling that the images were exploitative dissipates as subjects describe their experience which, whilst intrusive, was marked by the tremendous energy Arbus expended as she searched until she found an honest interpretation of their lives. Many of those photographed describe their exhaustion from hosting her over long days when she turned up and kept on shooting until, in desperation, they gave up their privacy and submitted to her, giving her access to their authentic inner selves.

Early on in the book Lubow brings in the most powerful secret at his disposal leaving us to read the rest of the book conditioned by this one dynamite revelation. Psychiatrist