

ANOTHER KIND



PHOTOGRAPHY ON THE MARGINS

OF LIFE







ANOTHER KIND OF LIFE

PHOTOGRAPHY ON THE MARGINS

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FOREWORD

Another Kind of Life: Photography on the Margins looks at the continuing fascination of artists with the margins of society through the photographic medium. Indeed many of the most compelling photographic images of the twentieth century have been the result of a determined and often prolonged engagement with communities seemingly at odds with or on the fringes of the mainstream. While the world has changed dramatically over the last sixty years, we are still living in an uncertain world where individual rights are being contested from East to West and those on the fringes feel ever more marginalised from mainstream political and social narratives. *Another Kind of Life* explores photography's relationship with this compelling subject through the work of twenty exceptional image-makers.

As part of the Barbican's 2018 season Art of Change, which reflects on the dialogue between art, society and politics, *Another Kind of Life* directly – and at times poetically – addresses difficult questions about what it means to exist in the margins, the role artists have played in portraying subcultures and the complex intermingling between artistic and mainstream depictions of the outsider.

A rich tradition of American and European social documentary work dominated in the pre-Second World War period, with image-makers from Lewis Hine to Walker Evans preoccupied with documenting the poor and disenfranchised, both urban and rural. More often than not these images – commissioned by organisations such as the National Child Labor Committee or Farm Security Administration, who harnessed the power of photography as a tool for social reform – were by photographers who, while indicting society for its inequities, belonged resolutely to the establishment. The idealistic vision of humanity presented in the legendary *The Family of Man* exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1955 was the apotheosis of a desire to elevate and empower individuals as a new reality dawned in the post-war era. It was not until the late

1950s that photography in the United States, Europe and to a certain extent Japan underwent a major realignment. The publication of Robert Frank's seminal work *The Americans* in 1959 heralded an era of questioning and self-doubt – particularly in American photography – in which subject matter, composition and style were turned upside down. By the early 1960s, from Tokyo to New York, a much darker and alienating side of society was emerging through the era's race riots and anti-war protests, while gay rights, civil rights and women's liberation movements were simultaneously on the rise. A new generation of photographers emerged ready to respond to the turbulent society of the 1960s and '70s. *Another Kind of Life* charts this exciting chapter in post-war photographic history.

Driven by motivations both personal and political, many of the photographers in the exhibition have sought to provide an authentic representation of disenfranchised communities, often conspiring with them to construct their own identity through the camera lens. Featuring communities of sexual experimenters, romantic rebels, outlaws, survivalists, the economically dispossessed and those who openly flout social convention, the works in the exhibition present the outsider as an agent of change. The non-conventional subject is here a prism through which to view the world afresh. Employing a diverse set of aesthetic strategies, from portraiture to social documentary and from vernacular to street photography, the artists in the exhibition approach their subject with a humanity and empathy that is both empowering and inclusive.

Reflecting a diverse, complex and authentic view of the world, the exhibition touches on themes of gender and sexuality, countercultures, subcultures and minorities of all kinds, and includes bodies of work from Japan, the US, Chile and Nigeria, among other places. By recording and documenting life on the margins, the images in *Another Kind of Life* bear witness to how social attitudes

change across time and space, charting how visual representation has helped shape current discourse in relation to marginalised or alternative communities.

Photography has an unparalleled capacity to reflect and communicate ideas, visually and directly, about the world in which we live. In the hands of great artists, that observation moves far beyond simple description. Our aim has been to seek out those artists and present their work regardless of the tradition from which it has arisen. *Another Kind of Life* not only continues the Barbican's commitment to presenting those artists and photographers but also demonstrates our desire to address issues that stretch beyond art and help us to understand the world from new perspectives.

Rich in thought-provoking material, this book, which is compiled chronologically, includes illuminating texts that shed new light on each artist by some of the most insightful writers and critics working in the field of photography today. The list of authors is expansive, comprising Oriana Baddeley, David Company, Tim Clark, Lucy Davies, Duncan Forbes, Juliane Fürst, Sophie Hackett, Max Houghton, Sean O'Hagan, Alistair O'Neill, Leo Rubinien, Aaron Schuman, Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa and Francesco Zanut. Suffice to say they each entered fully into the spirit of the project and contributed texts that deepen our understanding of every body of work included here, for which we are truly grateful. The book is further enriched by facsimiles of original magazine photo-essays that testify to the considerable influence of the illustrated press. The circulation and dissemination of the work of eminent photographers such as Bruce Davidson and Mary Ellen Mark, to name but two, was instrumental in fostering greater understanding and awareness of the complexity of our world.

Another Kind of Life: Photography on the Margins is the product of collective effort and generosity. Our sincere gratitude goes to the lenders, who parted with works of value

or personal significance for the sake of the exhibition. They have been instrumental in supporting our vision for the project. An exhibition of this scale and complexity would not have been possible without the support of international museums, collections and galleries as well as individuals; these include: Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada; ARTIST ROOMS, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh, and Tate, London; Bruce Davidson Studio, New York; Daidō Moriyama Photo Foundation, Tokyo; Fotomuseum, Winterthur, Switzerland; Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco; Frith Street Gallery, London; Galerie Gregor Staiger, Zurich; Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich; Galerie Sultana, Paris; Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York; Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York; Jim Goldberg Studio, California; London School of Economics Library, London; Luhring Augustine, New York; Magnum Photos, London and Paris; Mary Ellen Mark Studio & Library, New York; Melanie Rio Fluency, Nantes; Michael Hoppen Gallery, London; Simon Lee Gallery, London; Sprovieri, London; Stevenson, Cape Town; Taka Ishii, Tokyo; and Zen Photo Gallery, Tokyo.

Our greatest debt, of course, is to the artists and photographers who have generously agreed to participate in this ambitious exhibition, including Philippe Chancel, Larry Clark, Bruce Davidson, Paz Errázuriz, Jim Goldberg, Katy Grannan, Pieter Hugo, Seiji Kurata, Danny Lyon, Teresa Margolles, Boris Mikhailov, Daidō Moriyama, Igor Palmin, Walter Pfeiffer, Dayanita Singh, Alec Soth and Chris Steele-Perkins. Their fervour and dedication to reflecting the complexity of the world through the lens has enriched and shaped our visual landscape beyond the realm of the imagination.

The catalogue has been designed by the immensely talented Melanie Mues of Mues Design, who weaved her innate sensibility for the subject and medium into the fabric of this book. She has brought precision and intelligence to every aspect of its creation. Thanks are also extended to Lincoln Dexter, who handled details

large and small with alacrity and good humour and was calm personified throughout.

A defining feature of exhibitions at the Barbican is the ambition of the spatial interventions. As ever, we have reinvented the architecture of the gallery in response to the energy and spirit of the works in the exhibition. We are indebted to Olaf Kneer and Marianne Mueller, ably assisted by Vicente Hernandez, of Casper Mueller Kneer Architects for their vision, sensitivity and commitment towards the exhibition design.

At the Barbican Art Gallery, we would like to thank Exhibition Assistants Charlotte Flint and Tatjana LeBoff for their sustained support of this project; their energy and enthusiasm has known no bounds. Sincere appreciation is also extended to Julie Verheye, Research Assistant, whose passion and diligence cannot be underestimated. Exhibition Organiser Ross Head expertly coordinated all of the myriad details for the exhibition with poise and humour. Production, installation and technical support has been expertly handled by Peter Sutton with support from Bruce Stracy, Margaret Liley and Angus Sanders-Dunnachie. Additional contributions from Ann Berni, Lily Booth and Bréifne Ó Conbhui in Media Relations; Phil Newby, Charlotte Kewell and Victoria Norton in Marketing; and Lynette Brooks, Camilla Lawson and Cassandra Scott in Development have all played their part in making this exhibition a reality.

We hope that visitors will be moved and enriched by their encounter with this powerful selection of work.

Jane Alison
Head of Visual Arts
Barbican

Alona Pardo
Curator
Barbican Art Gallery





THE LONELY CROWD

Alona Pardo

*It seemed funny to me that the sunset she saw from her patio and the one I saw from the back steps was the same one. Maybe the two different worlds we lived in weren't so different. We saw the same sunset.*¹

S. E. Hinton, *The Outsiders* (1967)

Set in Tulsa, Oklahoma, S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* is a coming-of-age story that chronicles the adventures of two rival gangs, the Greasers and the Socs, who hail from different sides of the socio-economic track. Published while Larry Clark was in the midst of making his genre-defying work *Tulsa*, Hinton's novel is littered with references to sex, violence, suicide, and underage smoking and drinking, and has at its heart a story about belonging, identity and the desire to foster a community – an *inside*.

Another Kind of Life: Photography on the Margins does not attempt to define 'the outsider'.² Rather it sets out to explore photography's endless fascination with those who because of their gender, sexuality, identity, politics, class, geography or simple personal inclination occupy society's hinterlands.

Addressing ideas both of fitting in and standing out, in defiance of cultural conventions as well as the existing visual record, the artists featured in this book – and the exhibition it accompanies – are acutely aware of how their work embodies, performs or documents an authentic experience. While working directly and unobtrusively is paramount to many of the photographers gathered here, maintaining detachment from their subjects is never a realistic objective. By getting close to their subjects, literally and photographically, many of the photographers here have attempted to place themselves in the work, producing penetrating and incisive works that reveal 'new ways to see the world'.³ What unites all these image-makers – insiders and outsiders alike – is not only a sustained engagement over a period of months, years or even decades between photographer and subject, but more significantly a sophisticated understanding of their respective positions, alongside a genuine willingness to comprehend and share the experiences of those they were seeking to represent.

In her influential essay 'America, Seen through Photographs, Darkly' (1977), Susan Sontag argued that to take a picture is to assign importance. She recognised that this significance varies according to culture and history: while at one time it may have meant the pursuit of 'worthy' subjects, by the time Sontag published her essay it was Andy Warhol's democratic stance of 'everybody is a celebrity'⁴ that prevailed. Praising Walt Whitman for his rejection of definitions that divide the world into subjects that are either 'beautiful' or 'ugly', and affirming Alfred Stieglitz's desire to transcend difference and show humanity in the totality of its beauty, Sontag excoriated Diane Arbus as a photographic tourist intent on exploring an 'appalling underworld' whose view was always from the outside.⁵

Contrary to Sontag's treatise, which suggested that documentary photographers cannot transgress the line that divides the world into insiders and outsiders without falling into the violent trap of stealing an unidentifiable *something* from the individuals and communities they are claiming to represent, this essay argues for the necessity of artists to create images that unsettle easy truths. This exhibition and book privilege a form of photography – be it portraiture, documentary or vernacular – that causes clean lines to blur, that in effect forces the viewer to question the comfortable narratives of our world.

This essay borrows its title from David Riesman's era-defining sociological study *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (1950). In the post-war period the 'lonely crowd' became a byword for the increasing alienation of individuals in a capitalist paradigm that demanded their subservience to the status quo. Dealing primarily with the social character of the urban classes, particularly in America, Riesman argued that society could be broken down into 'inner-directed' and 'outer-directed' subjects. In pre-industrial contexts the individual is typically 'inner-directed', their personal values determined by power relations such as class, profession, caste or clan. These values are characteristically passed intact from one generation to another. When the population



is growing but has not reached the stage of crowding (western Europe in the period from the Renaissance to the early twentieth century, for example), the 'inner-directed' individual predominates. Riesman asserted that in post-industrial societies, by contrast, where the population is dense, the 'outer-directed' individual emerges. Their life is in large part shaped by peer groups of persons resembling them in age, social class and other attributes and they adjust their values to conform to those of their group, in a constant process of change.⁶

The Cold War battle between communism and capitalism that came to define the global post-war period created an atmosphere of fear and distrust of the ideological other. It allowed figures such as Joseph McCarthy to protect the status quo by defining themselves in oppositional terms – that is, as the antithesis of 'those damn Soviet commies' and anyone else who strayed from the accepted heteronormative, white, middle-class nuclear family norm. Photography was also used as a propaganda tool in this war of soft power. For instance, the 1955 exhibition *The Family of Man*, organised by Edward Steichen, the noted photographer and director of the department of photography at New York's Museum of Modern Art, presented a singular narrative of human experience as perceived predominantly through a Western perspective.⁷

Responding to this culture of conformity and oppression that had settled, almost imperceptibly, like a fine dust over the new world order that emerged from the ashes of the Second World War, photographers in the late 1950s began to explore the outsiders they found on the margins of their own societies.

This exhibition traces a sixty-year arc that charts an exceptionally vibrant period of social change, from the race riots and anti-war protests that dominated the 1960s, to the battles for gay rights and women's liberation of the 1970s, to the decline of socialist values in the post-Cold War era, through to the battleground of today's divisive world where authoritarian regimes are taking hold from India to Turkey, Russia to the United States.

The exhibition starts resolutely in the fecund period of post-war America, which by the late 1960s was marked by a fatalism and weariness – expressed by musicians such as Bob Dylan, Jefferson Airplane, and Lou Reed

and The Velvet Underground, whose searing lyrics meditated on the failed utopianism of the period. By the early 1960s, as the editorial grip on photography began to waver and its social function was replaced by personal statement, photographers working across the United States, Europe and Japan offered new views of the social landscape of their time.

This shift from the social to the personal was championed early on by John Szarkowski, Steichen's successor at MoMA, who introduced the work of three relatively unknown figures – Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand – in the exhibition *New Documents* in 1967, marking this turning point in photography in its American context. In the exhibition's opening statement Szarkowski wrote: 'In the past decade a new generation of photographers has directed the documentary approach toward more personal ends. Their aim has been not to reform life, but to know it. Their work betrays a sympathy – almost an affection – for the imperfections and the frailties of society.'⁸

Working in New York through the 1960s, Diane Arbus was a trailblazer of a new photographic aesthetic, and her distinctive approach is characterised by the directness of her portraiture as well as her ability to find the familiar in the strange and discover the unusual in the ordinary. Her iconic images of transsexuals, musclemen, nudists, and circus and sideshow performers are by turns raw and unflinching, disturbing and illuminating. Born into a wealthy Jewish family, from the outset Diane and her brother, the poet Howard Nemerov, saw themselves as outsiders, with her schoolteacher going so far as to describe her as being imbued with a 'sense of separateness'.⁹ In seeking out her subjects in diaper derbies, nudist camps, circuses, asylums and nightclubs, it has been argued that Arbus – a self-confessed adventurer – was trying to break out of her own notions of propriety and normalcy.

More recently, however, the scholar Philip Charrier has highlighted Arbus's relationship to the New Journalism of the period, most commonly associated with figures such as Tom Wolfe and Norman Mailer. Mailer, in his editorial accompanying Bruce Davidson's *Brooklyn Gang* images in the June 1960 issue of *Esquire*, described his writing as being 'fortified by a message'.¹⁰ Charrier has argued that '[Arbus] should be regarded as someone who formed part of a trend of deeply researched, more "personal" journalism focused upon non-

conventional, “non-authority” subjects.¹¹ He has furthermore linked her working method to those of Bruce Davidson, Danny Lyon and Larry Clark, each of whom immersed themselves in youth subcultures.

Exhausted by the relentless need for photographic renewal in the realm of high fashion and the crippling world of photojournalism as dictated by the likes of *Life* magazine, by the late 1950s both Diane Arbus and fellow photographer Bruce Davidson dedicated themselves to creating photographs that privileged a direct relationship with the subject. In the case of Arbus, whose images depended on the ‘active participation of her subjects’, she struck up lasting relationships with gay rights figures such as Stormé DeLarverie, whom she photographed backstage, as well as other ‘singular people’, as she called them.¹² Both Arbus and Davidson recognised the importance of the hyper-subjective exchange between photographer and subject and were rewarded with the publication of extended photo-essays in *Esquire* magazine during 1960.

Describing himself as ‘an outsider on the inside’, Bruce Davidson has spent the last fifty years photographing ‘isolated, abused, abandoned, and invisible’ worlds,¹³ from his breakthrough project *Brooklyn Gang* (1959) – a portrait of post-war outsider youth culture in which he chronicled the Jokers, a gang of teenagers he spent months befriending and shooting – to his intimate and powerful portrait of Jimmy ‘Little Man’ Armstrong in his series *The Dwarf* (1958). Upon the suggestion of Sam Holmes, an amateur trapeze artist and librarian at Magnum, Davidson visited the Clyde Beatty Circus, which had set up camp at the Palisades Amusement Park in New Jersey in late 1958, where he was immediately captivated by Jimmy Armstrong, a clown who also happened to be a person of short stature.

Immersing himself into the lives of the performers, Davidson spent several weeks travelling around with them photographing the prosaic reality of circus life, paying particular attention to Armstrong. Rather than document the grand spectacle of Clyde Beatty the lion tamer or Hugo Zacchini the human cannonball, Davidson’s sombre photographs foreground the daily drudgery of circus life with its collection of outsiders whose dreams seem to be forever out of reach. Davidson’s images of Armstrong capture him dressed up, regaling children with his jokes or at rest in bed, curled up in

the corner listening to the radio as if to protect himself from the outside world; in each he seems enveloped in a cloak of solitude and isolation. In one particularly poignant image, Armstrong is seen eating a sandwich while subject to the curious stares and sniggers of his fellow diners, a marked reminder that beyond his stage persona of Little Man he is still an outsider.

A decade later in Japan, the young photographer Daidō Moriyama turned to the back streets and dark interiors of dressing rooms and small stages in the districts of Asakusa – famous for its underworld and theatrical tradition – and Shinjuku, to photograph performers and strippers. In pursuit of reality as it unfolded before his camera, his black-and-white, raw, grainy and out-of-focus images homed in on gangsters, nightclub entertainers and prostitutes to create a steamy portrait of Tokyo, a city that was witnessing unprecedented political dissent in response to the ongoing American occupation, the Vietnam War and the increasing Westernisation of Japanese culture. An urban wanderer by nature, Moriyama embraced the erotic, chaotic and dark elements of society in his photographs and was instinctively drawn to the outsiders and outlaws who prowled Tokyo’s narrow back streets.

The photographers active during this period are united by their need to delve into the darker aspects of society, and their work can be characterised by their distance from the conventionalism and sanctified rituals of the middle class. Diane Arbus, Bruce Davidson and Daidō Moriyama went on to influence a younger generation of artists – including Larry Clark, Danny Lyon and Seiji Kurata – whose work continued to explore social margins and break down the barriers that had kept such groups away from the camera.

Moriyama’s influence over young Japanese photographers in the 1970s cannot be underestimated. He demonstrated that it was possible to go out into the streets and engage anybody and anything with the camera. Inspired to take up photography as a direct result of encountering Moriyama’s work, Seiji Kurata entered the nocturnal underworld of Tokyo armed with his Pentax 6×7 and a flash. Kurata, like Weegee before him, followed the police and the world of gang fights, yakuza, motorcycle boys and death. His book *Flash Up*, published in 1980, involved a descent into the separate clans of Tokyo’s underground network. In the midst of one of the safest cities,

in a society that was viewed as one of the most conformist, Kurata introduced a cast of tattooed gangsters, leather-boys, bar-girls and an emerging queer community that countered the perception of Japan as a beacon of social precision and repression. Kurata's images exposed a side of Tokyo that was steamy, dangerous and at times brutal.¹⁴

For photographers such as Lyon and Clark, their immersion in the communities they were documenting was critical to their work's faithfulness to reality. Their privileged position as insiders not only granted them unfettered access into these private worlds but more significantly attests to the authenticity of their representation.

In 1964, Lyon joined the Chicago Outlaws motorcycle gang, a motley crew of antisocial, heavy-drinking bike riders. By joining their ranks he demonstrated that he wanted to be one of them and describe their way of life from the inside out. Taken over a period of four years, Lyon's strikingly dynamic images of biker culture served as a clarion call for a style of American liberty that was at the time subversive. Indeed, *The Bikeriders* (1963-67)

was the inspiration for Dennis Hopper's 1969 film *Easy Rider*, a landmark counterculture film that explored the societal landscape, issues and tensions of 1960s America, such as the rise of the hippie movement with its recreational drug use and communal lifestyles. Belonging to the trend of New Journalism as opposed to a photojournalistic tradition, Lyon described his encounter with the Outlaw biker gang as a subject with 'which I could indulge my fantasies and realize my dreams, and develop through my camera new ways to see the world'.¹⁵

New ways of picturing the world were also critical to the photographic vision of Larry Clark, who had learned the art of photography through his mother, a studio photographer who specialised in mother-and-baby shots. His visceral book *Tulsa*, published in 1971, marked a watershed moment in American photography. A brutally frank personal testament, it chronicled the lives and deaths of a group of high-school drug addicts – with a particular focus on two individuals, Billy Mann and David Roper. Over a period of eight years during the 1960s and '70s, Clark himself was intermittently an active member of this group in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the artist's hometown.



Sex, drugs and violence were captured in a raw, grainy monochrome that defined the untrammelled confessional style adopted later by the likes of Nan Goldin and Corinne Day.

Writing about *Tulsa* in *The Photobook: A History*, Martin Parr and Gerry Badger suggest that the 'incessant focus on the sleazy aspect of the lives portrayed, to the exclusion of almost anything else – whether photographed from the "inside" or not – raises concerns about exploitation and drawing the viewer into a prurient, voyeuristic relationship with the work'.¹⁶ Yet it is this very dynamic that imbues the images with such disturbing power.

The autobiographical nature of Lyon's and Clark's photography was accentuated by their use of text, an approach first introduced into the field of photography in the 1930s by the likes of Walker Evans and the vernacular architecture, billboards and advertising signage that populated his work for the US Farm Security Administration. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, combining words and photographs had become a genre of art photography with a wide and varied practice, ranging from simply writing on photographs to the first experiments with the digital collaging of word and image. At the same time, the photograph had long since outstripped the word as mass media's preferred descriptive system. As a consequence, artists could no longer rely on the same frames of reference for language as even Evans could in the 1930s.

Incorporating text into his multimedia projects is central to Jim Goldberg's radical style of 'documentary storytelling'. A multi-year exploration into the existence of homeless youths living on the urban fringes, *Raised by Wolves*, published in 1995, is an unflinching and at times shocking portrait of teenage runaways in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Seamlessly intertwining interviews, handwritten notes, Polaroids and photographic remnants of the protagonists' lives – from doctors' reports to doodles to psychiatric tests – the project's gritty street style directly relates the experiences of this loose-knit group of young people who have been effectively written out of mainstream social histories.

Goldberg's work is defined by a collaborative method whereby he actively encourages his subjects to write on his images, while also combining his photographs with other media. The individuals he photographs are given a say

not only in the making of the work but also in the construction of the narrative. Recording the teens' most private moments, *Raised by Wolves* narrates the tragic story of veteran traveller, junkie and self-proclaimed rock star Tweezy Dave and recent runaway Echo. Appearing as both photographer and character in this twisted plot, the artist's nuanced role in this constructed narrative disrupts the conventional binary position – as put forward by Sontag – of the photographer as either insider or outsider. The implication here is that these contested positions are not mutually exclusive, complicating accepted photography theory and suggesting that this terrain is full of contradictions that need to be pulled apart and revisited.

In one her most personal projects to date, Dayanita Singh weaves words and images into the very fabric of her 2001 photobook *Myself Mona Ahmed*, a serial portrait of Mona Ahmed, a unique individual who belongs to one of India's many visible yet largely ignored marginal communities. Cutting across social and class boundaries and at once a chronicle and a memoir, the book is narrated through a series of letters written by Mona to the publisher that complicates the idea of authorship.

Another Kind of Life also looks back through the last sixty years to explore how photography has been used as a tool to document, advocate for and spark debate around the representation of gender nonconforming people. This seems particularly current given that, in the UK at least, 2017 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in the Sexual Offences Act. This marks a point in recent history against which we can chart historical progress, survey the present day, and potentially look to a more inclusive and diverse future.

In the early 2000s, 'a hundred loose snapshots, both colour and black and white, and three neatly preserved photo albums'¹⁷ that revealed the existence of a retreat called Casa Susanna were recovered from a New York flea market. First named Chevalier d'Eon after an eighteenth-century cross-dressing spy who lived the second half of their life as a woman, the retreat was later renamed Casa Susanna. Active through the 1950s to the end of the 1960s and run by the formidable Susanna Valenti and her wife, Marie, Casa Susanna operated as a resort in the Catskills for a burgeoning gender nonconforming community.

The resort became a safe haven where cross-dressers from all walks of life could safely shed societally prescribed clothing and behaviour and adopt their preferred identities.

Testifying to an alternative form of kinship, the casual snapshots in this collection, mostly taken by the subjects themselves, portray cross-dressers – their outfits painstakingly assembled and their hair perfectly coiffed – playing to the camera and consciously exploring female stereotypes. These unique vernacular prints, recalling the form of a family album, reveal a hidden community that nonetheless found expression through photography. Instrumental in helping the individual community members construct their own gender-fluid identities, this collection, which served both a private and a social function, attests to the pivotal role photography played in capturing and documenting this hitherto concealed history.

The desire of Casa Susanna's members to affirm their performed identities resulted in the publication of *Transvestia*, a pioneering self-published bi-monthly periodical founded in 1960 by Virginia Prince, a regular visitor to both Chevalier d'Eon and Casa Susanna. A story-driven magazine, it was published by and for the burgeoning transvestite and transgender community with the stated aim to 'serve as a means of gathering information in its chosen field and to aid, by any means available, the dissemination of knowledge'.¹⁸ Offering a safe space for individuals to narrate their own stories without societal judgement, the magazine featured images – often taken clandestinely – of cross-dressers, who found acceptance in its pages from a like-minded community. Ultimately, *Transvestia* broke important new ground in the discussion of gender and dress and played a vital role in calling for self- and public acceptance, awareness and legal protection.

Documenting one of the most obscure and difficult moments in Chile's recent political and sexual history under the brutal dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet, Paz Errázuriz's series *La manzana de Adán* (Adam's Apple) centres on the lives of Pilar, Evelyn and Mercedes, members of a community of transvestite sex workers working in the 1980s in the brothels of La Jaula and La Palmera, in the towns of Talca and Santiago respectively. Conspiring with them to create their own identities, Errázuriz's intimate colour and black-and-white images portray the protagonists of

this underground world as they go about their daily lives, be it preparing for a night's work or simply finding refuge in their domestic space. The personal struggle they demonstrate in their refusal to conform to accepted notions of gender marks them out as unlikely heroes against a political regime determined to control and regulate every aspect of society. Taken at a time when gender nonconforming people were regularly subjected to curfews, persecution and police brutality, Errázuriz's images of Pilar and Evelyn – which more often than not capture them staring directly into the camera – represented a collaborative and defiant act of political resistance for both the artist and the wider community.

The specificity of the Latin American context is further explored in Teresa Margolles's powerful series *Pista de baile* (Dance Floors; 2016), which exposes the precarious economic position of transgender sex workers in the Mexican border town of Ciudad Juárez. Standing tall and proud under the beating sun and set against a vivid blue sky, the individuals documented here have been excluded from the social order first for their gender and then for the only profession open to them, prostitution. Subject to continued violence, Margolles's figures become part of a landscape in which ruin and devastation are the main protagonists. Despite this, the sex workers show their best face, as if reaffirming their presence in the midst of violence and destruction.

From Errázuriz's and Margolles's defiant representations of transvestite and transgender sex workers to Lyon's and Clark's intimate portrayals of distinct subcultural tribes, what connects these seemingly disparate communities is the idea of agency and consent through the act of photography. Reflecting the plurality of lives lived in fractured post-war societies across the globe, the artists gathered here have through collaboration, dialogue and personal participation turned their lens on anti-establishment, non-conventional communities of all persuasions, to present a more complex, diverse and authentic view of the world.

Taken together, the personal viewpoints presented here are at once empathetic and engaged; they inspire, threaten, shock and empower in equal measure and ultimately force us to look at ourselves and our attitudes towards those on the fringes of society, encouraging us to celebrate another kind of life.



PLATES

DIANE

ARBUS



For almost four decades the complex, profound vision of Diane Arbus (b. 1923, USA; d. 1971) has had an enormous influence on photography and a broad one beyond it, and the general fascination with her work has been accompanied by an uncommon interest in her self. Her suicide has been one, but just one, reason for the latter, yet for the most part the events of her life were not extraordinary.

Arbus's wealthy grandparents were the founders of Russeks, a Fifth Avenue department store in Manhattan. Growing up well-protected in the 1930s, Arbus had only a vague sense of the effects of the Depression, and in her generation her family had become greatly cultivated (her brother was the poet Howard Nemerov). She married Allan Arbus at age eighteen and learned her craft with him as they prospered as commercial photographers and raised two daughters, but by the mid-1950s she felt trapped in fashion and advertising. Leaving their business, she dedicated herself to her personal work, and by the decade's end she and her husband separated, though they remained married until 1969 and were close until the end of her life. Her essential interests were clear after 1956, and for the next six years she photographed assiduously with a 35mm camera, in locations that included Coney Island carnivals, Hubert's Museum and Flea Circus of 42nd Street, the dressing rooms of female impersonators, and the streets, cinemas, parks and busses of Manhattan.

Arbus studied with Lisette Model from 1956 to 1957. In 1962 her work changed dramatically when she adopted the square camera and emptied her work of elisions, digressions, evocative shadow and routes of escape. Her subjects would come to include the members of many kinds of subculture – among them nudists and transgender people – and also people with physical impairments. In her new photographs she used a bright flash and let the background go chaotic. They exhibited their subjects like specimens in jars, and forced themselves on the viewer as stubbornly as unwelcome news intrudes into the mind.

Arbus's square photographs speak the language of the 1960s in many ways – through their raw intensity and love of the strange, in asserting that the present moment is crucial, in denying one a mere observer's safe distance – but these

are all aspects of their fundamental concern with whether the subject and the viewer admit the truth. In this preoccupation, her pictures belong to the decade's overarching search for authenticity. They retain within their blackness, even now, the exhilaration of a departure upon a ship from which certainty has been flung over the side, and they also touch the decade's torment profoundly.

Arbus took abundantly from literature, movies, the news and popular myth, but if one wanted a purely photographic genealogy for her, one would have to put on one side Weegee, who loved the extreme as she did, and Lisette Model, who passed her a small legacy from the *Neue Sachlichkeit* and from whom she learned graphic drama and the importance of getting close. On the other side would go Walker Evans, in whom she must have admired the ability to look critically and untangle the contradictory things for which a subject stood, and August Sander. Sander especially seems to have underwritten Arbus's instincts. She saw his work in 1960 in the Swiss journal *Du* (and later studied it at MoMA), and she wrote of one spring day that year when Manhattan's people looked to her like his: 'everyone [on the street] ... immutable down to the last button, feather, tassel or stripe. All odd and splendid as freaks and nobody able to see himself.'¹ She would have understood from Sander how people can conceal and reveal themselves at once, but where this matter was subtle for him, Arbus put it right at the front of her art.

If we can say that their coats, hats, medals, canes and dogs give Sander's strongest subjects screens behind which to hide, almost all the principals in Arbus's finest portraits are also masked. What impressed Arbus the most powerfully, though, was less the mask per se than the discrepancy between mask and face. She seems to have been able to tell from a block away ('you see someone on the street and ... essentially what you notice ... is the flaw'²) who would be unable to keep from showing what he or she hoped to protect, and she found an elegant name for this: 'the gap between intention and effect', between 'what you want people to know about you and what you can't help people knowing'.³ The idea of the gap offers not just a guide to the route Arbus's intuition took; it is also a principle that sets her world apart from the ordinary one.

Position and prestige meant far less to Arbus than the isolated person's yearning – to be glamorous, to be strong, to be fetching, to be lovable, to be female if one was male, male if female, to be, sometimes (as in *Tattooed Man at a Carnival, Md. 1970*), something so indefinable that the unanchored hysteria of pure desire is the point. Where it is conspicuous, the gap between intention and effect is actually one of the main things that distinguishes a strong from a weak Arbus picture.

For all the ardour with which she pursued it, though, the distance between what a person wants to be and is only amounted to her starting place. Her best work supports the Chekhovian idea that even an awful character, if he is worth describing, must display some genuine virtue, and the subject of any strong Arbus picture is never merely ridiculous. When her work is at its most august, Arbus sees through her subject's pretensions, her subject *sees* that she sees, and an intricate parley occurs around what the subject wants to show and wants to conceal.

One particular series of phenomena – the masked subject; the slipping of the mask; the subject's awareness that his or her pride has been exposed *and* that the photographer has seen – was the great discovery of Arbus's strongest years. The *Naked Man Being a Woman, N.Y.C. 1968* (p. 27) should have found it easy to ask Arbus to leave, but instead, like so many others, let her intrusion become, for a moment, terribly important. Each sitter allowed a miniature trial to occur, in which he or she might fend off the photographer's strenuous eye, or sag and reveal the truth. And what would it mean to be courageous? In Arbus, paradox is everywhere. For some of her subjects keeping the mask up would be nobler; for others, letting it drop. We cannot say that she *wanted* to find her people brave – she was impartial on this – but she weighed their courage as minutely as if it had been dust of the purest gold, which in fact it was.

Arbus has been called a voyeur of 'freaks', of 'damaged', 'deviant' and 'fatally flawed' 'objects of revulsion', of the 'horrible' and 'bloodcurdling'. It is often countered that her photographs express a warm compassion for the outcast, yet this is no less simplistic. The distress that her work provokes is real. Its ability to awaken fear, for example, is one of its

great strengths, and that emotion is felt by those who cherish it as well as by those who hate it. It is likewise said in her defence that deformity did not really interest her, when of course it did. What is essential to understand is that it interested her not as a blunt, obscene fact, but for how it shaped the psyche of the person who endured it, which is the meaning of her famous comment that 'freaks were born with their trauma. They've already passed their test in life. They're aristocrats.'⁴ If to get to the ultimate beauty and tenderness in Arbus's photographs one must abandon the idea that she was an artist of the horrible (as Susan Sontag crudely expressed it in *On Photography*), one cannot do so completely because it is partly true. It does no good to sanitise Arbus's work, but then, one must never fail, either, to see how it shines with wonder. There are loves more complex than that for handsome faces and figures. It was with her characteristic hilarity that Arbus wrote, 'I cannot seem to [make] a person ... look good ... the few times I've made a special effort the photograph was rotten.'⁵

Meanwhile, no other photographer makes viewers feel more strongly that they are being directly addressed, and this must have been another incitement to her opponents. All strong photographs are richly ambiguous from the start, and if anything, they grow even more complex.

How people challenge their fates is Arbus's transcending subject - if, and to what extent, they are free. In refusing to assume that they are, or can be, she expresses a vestige, perhaps, of the temper of the vanished Jews of Eastern Europe, who saw inevitability everywhere. Her 'collage wall' included an old picture of some fifty women and children of the Warsaw Ghetto, forced against a building, hands high and heads down, all choosings finished now. And then there was a Jacob Riis that she once hung in her apartment, in which a young girl stands on a box at the edge of the vast Atlantic, under a blank, ungenerous sky; she has a broom in the surf and seems to be working diligently; it is called *Sweeping Back the Ocean*.

I suspect that Susan Sontag really denounced Arbus's work for this - not the freakishness of her characters, but their fatedness. Sontag needed too much to believe that people are the authors of themselves to be able to recognise

the humour and poignancy and strange beauty that Arbus found in acquiescence, and with leaden positivism wrote that Arbus 'undercut politics',⁶ as if negotiation and protest could push back the sea. Americans have long been among the most optimistic of people, and the idea that we lead and follow blindly is among us a heresy. Arbus once said, 'I don't like to arrange things. If I stand in front of something, instead of arranging it, I arrange myself.'⁷ She was speaking here of the directing of subjects, but the echo of a philosophical position is also there in her words. To call her an all-out fatalist would be wrong, yet a not terribly American fatalism is strong in her, and it is mixed in an extraordinary way with a fully American rationality. She sets forth the obsessions of her characters, and their helplessness before them, with the elegance of a logical problem that can never be solved.

Leo Rubinfen

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