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Photobooks

by Sebastian Hau

foam magazine # 35 lust



Vera Brandner
Picturing Others

Fotohof, an Austrian centre for photography based in Salzburg, has produced remarkable shows and books for over thirty years. Among its recent publications, *Picturing Others* is particularly interesting as a photobook – the way in which form and content have been designed to work together presents a few surprises. Vera Brandner works with community-based photo projects, visiting countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and by passing on cameras to workshop participants she aims to enable intercultural exchange and appreciation. The main section of the book is made up of a collection of portraits in black-and-white, often of young women, in rural settings and with villages as a backdrop. They feel natural – it's as if the dialogue that preceded the moment of the photograph or indeed the photographer's interest in dialogue with her subjects injects life into the images, which makes them more interesting than the standard reportage photography from the poorer countries on this planet.

The Swiss binding permits a better viewing of the double pages, and a second booklet with an index, text and a second choice of accompanying photographs is hidden in the back flap. The text gives insight into the workings of Ipsum, the agency with which Vera Brandner works, and the photographs in the booklet come from the participants in the workshops. Paper stock, printing and design are sober and elegant; the book enables a joyful discovery of the work.

Fotohof
ISBN 9783902675576



Alyse Embur
Prison Landscapes

In a long-running project, initiated through contact with a family member in prison, American artist Alyse Embur has contacted long-term prisoners to share with her their self-portraits. These are mostly generic images, taken in recreation rooms and intended to be sent back to the prisoners' families, charged with emotion and hope but often taken in the most casual or conventional way. Although the book has a colourful cover, it resists showing us stereotypes or freaks. Its academic appearance asks the reader to read its text to gain greater access to a shut-off world. The book resists showing simple typologies; in that sense too it has a somewhat academic appearance, mixing text and images, and it does not directly sell itself as an artist book. But the experience of looking at these photographs of prisoners is at once satisfying and troubling. The quality of the editing and research becomes apparent with repeated viewing.

Four Corners Books
ISBN 9780956192868



Louis Porter
Conflict Resolution

Australian artist Louis Porter has used his digital camera to document signs in the urban landscape that report struggle, such as Nazi graffiti, emergency assembly points and 'crap paint jobs' – and after self-publishing parts of the work through fanzines he has now combined them into a surprising self-published book, designed by Pierre Hourquet of booksonline.fr. The photographs in each series are printed on colored paper stock, the discarded art on a shiny blue background, the paper airplanes on orange. This approach may not be to everyone's taste, but it works fine for this reviewer. It enhances the offbeat humour of deadpan photographs and the subversiveness of the book has something in common with a company report of an ailing business.

Twenty Shelves Books
ISBN 9780646588186



Vicente Paredes
Furtivos

Published by Mexican RM and Spanish Fiesta, created by Ricardo Cases of *Paloma al Aire*-fame, this little book speaks of the newfound confidence and abilities of a circle of Spanish photographers loosely linked to Julian Baron of the Escuela de Blank Paper, an independent photo school in Madrid. The work *Furtivos* involves portraits and scenes taken in small gardens outside Bilbao, where the laid-off have created patches of self-reliance at a time of nationwide crisis. The colourful photographs, taken with a strong flash that picks out unpleasant and funny details, often estrange the portrayed from the natural setting of the garden work, clearly poking fun at our love and admiration for apartamento-like stories of healthy living and back-to-nature schemes. But, as in Ricardo Cases' work, the photographer never distances himself too much from the people he works with – reminding us of Martin Parr's early work, where irony and sardonic detail are set in a comprehensive world view that ultimately loves its inhabitants.

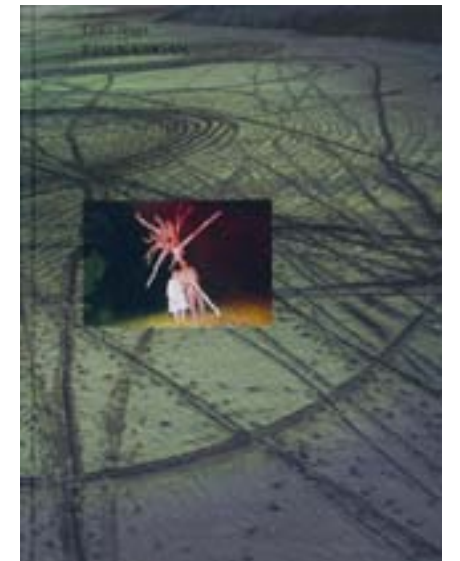
Fiesta Ediciones/RM
ISBN 9788461606832



Stéphane Duroy
Guardian of Time

Berlin-based publisher Roland Angst has undertaken a great and laudable effort to make known beyond France the work of one of its more interesting photographers, Stéphane Duroy. Familiar to a small international circle of fans for his poetical and significant books (mostly published by Filigranes in Paris) about immigration and European history since the Second World War, Duroy has accumulated an astonishing archive over thirty years. The new book by Only Photography sorts the images into *Streets*, *Children* and *Travel*. The choice of images is impeccable. Some of his colour images from the lives of the working class in the UK in the 1980s are as powerful as the best of Chris Killip or Graham Smith. The de luxe edition and production will do much to introduce Duroy's rich work to a larger audience.

Only Photography
ISBN 9783981253764

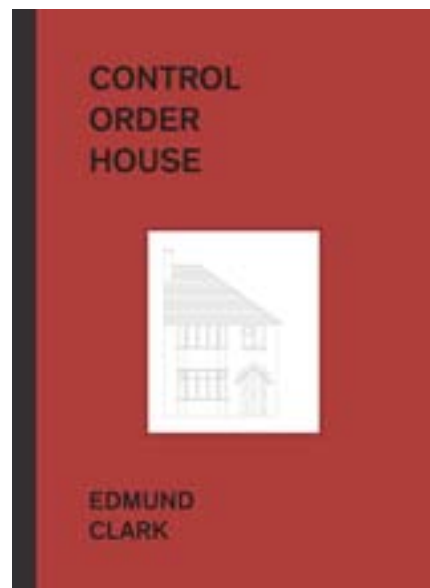


Lieko Shiga
Rasen Kaigan

Shiga's work has already been described in Japanese blogs as the most relevant and beautiful work in Japan today. The publication by AKAACA of this oversized book does justice to the quality of Lieko Shiga's new work. Produced in a coastal village in northern Japan, before and after the tsunami two years ago, the troubling images are experiments with ceremonies and stories derived from the oral history of the villagers in heavily staged and reworked photographs of local residents. The images often transmit a strong effect through multiple layers of creation (technical, narrative, constructed, chemical). The book achieves a strong emotional effect with its complex structure like TONK's *Great Unreal* in which images recur in varying states of production. *Rasen Kaigan* is an important statement by a young artist. It is an artist book of consequence that provides an overwhelming experience for its readers.

AKAACA Art Publishing
ISBN 9784903545929

photobooks



Edmund Clark Control Order House

A few years ago Edmund Clark published a book about Guantanamo resulting from a ten-day stay with permission to photograph in the cells. The images of architecture do not use steel and concrete as metaphors; the living conditions of the prisoners, whose portraits he was not allowed to take, were evoked by the quiet and neutral images. In his ongoing project on government strategies against terrorism, Clark has obtained permission to photograph in a house somewhere in the UK where a man suspected of involvement in terrorism was kept under a control order. Together with British independent publisher Here, founded by Harry Hardie and Ben Weave, Clark has produced a sober book, very much resembling an agency file, where the little information the authorities are willing to share is reproduced. The photographer tries to show as much of the living conditions of the held man as he can, using the documentary approach of a police photographer at a crime scene. As we allow the photographs and information to sink in, our imagination can become overwhelmed, but the book quickly brings us back to a political reality enforced in our name.

Here Press
ISBN 9780957472402



Grégoire Eloy A Black Matter

Grégoire Eloy has produced a surprising and diverse work while an artist-in-residence at a French science hub. Concentrating on astronomical research about dark matter, Eloy has organized his book into five chapters, varying his style and approach with each subject. There are black-and-white photographs that have a smoky and obscure feel, colour photographs that look as if they were taken through tinted glass, ultra-sharp images of galaxies (posters scientists pin up in their offices) and ambivalent scenes from the laboratories. The artist is not making fun of his surroundings; his seriousness and close involvement can be felt throughout the book. The various ways of seeing things correspond with the position of the artist on dark matter and allow for deep readings of this intense book.

Journal/F93
ISBN 9789198040517



Martin Usborne The Silence of Dogs in Cars

This series is made up of images that look like an inspired fusion of William Wegman's photographs of his favourite Weimeraner dogs, crossed with the perfect lightning and suspense of Gregory Crewdson. But this superbly produced book, financed by a kickstarter campaign on the Internet, works on many more levels. Imagine a portrait of a dog in a VW van on a beach at dawn as an illustration of the painting-like feel to some of the photographs. The quality of the work lies in the troubling sense (be it illusion or empathy) evoked by the dogs. Their expressions and composure evoke an understanding of the closeness of all beings on earth that goes beyond our knowledge of evolution. This sort of Hitchcockian suspense, based on an understanding of just how exposed the human being is, is offset by a baroque humour that makes looking at this series a very enjoyable experience.

Kehrer Verlag
ISBN 9783868283181



Lisa Barnard Chateau Despair

One week after my Facebook timeline was drowned in jokes, articles and songs about Margaret Thatcher, I've received a nice parcel from the UK with three new publications by newly created Gost Books. Founded by photographer Clare Strand, Gordon Macdonald and Stuart Smith this year, this independent publishing enterprise has produced a timely book about the demolition of the offices where the Conservative Party met in the heyday of Margaret Thatcher. The photographs of empty offices are set against bleached images of the then prime minister. Two accompanying texts provide an architectural-cultural-political context and a smaller leaflet, bound inside, with still-life photographs of objects found in the Chateau Despair, as the Tory offices were called by its staff. At the end is a small booklet of still-life photographs of found objects, pennants, invitations and buttons against a white background. It complements the book, which save for the recurring portraits of Margaret Thatcher displays no other human portrait.

Gost Books
ISBN 9780957427204



Trevor Paglen The Last Pictures

It took Trevor Paglen and a team of independent academics four years to assemble this collection of images that is now ready to be launched into space. The book that was published to mark the occasion will have to do for us Earth people, although these wonderful images will surely deteriorate faster on paper than on the silicon disc that carries them into infinity on a geo-orbital satellite. When Paglen was working with satellite experts on one of his previous documentary projects, locating otherwise invisible spy satellites, he discovered that objects in space that orbit Earth at a distance of 35 kilometers (in what is called the 'Clarke Belt') will never be pulled back by gravity to Earth; they will orbit for ever. Paglen persuaded the Echostar satellite company to take a selection of images representing humanity's research, questions and beliefs. It's well worth reading the essays in this book that explain the process leading up to the launch. When copies of this book arrived in our bookshop we found the selection of images to be absolutely astonishing. Starting with the back of the famous Paul Klee painting, the *Angelus Novus*. They include paintings of dragons and photographs made by drones. Whether they first appeared in scientific laboratories or the media, each new image comes as a surprise. To better understand some of them, turn to the index at the back, as not every microbe is identifiable as such to the human eye, and we may not be aware of its place in history. But one of the qualities of the selection is its readability and, yes, the pleasure we take in walking through the series of images, wondering about its various levels of communication – what would an alien discovering these think? – and the relationship between what we know and what we see.

UC Press/Creative Time Books
ISBN 9780520275003



Zoé Beausire Rosette, Mauricette et Roby

Berlin-based Michael Kominek has been discovering and promoting great new talents in his bookshop for some years now, and his publishing house, founded a couple of years ago, serves as a platform where he can experiment with the works of artists as well as an exploration of the various ways of forming their work into a book. This book, featuring the portraits of three people, offers us a swift plunge into the lives of two elderly women living together and one single elderly man of about the same age. Something theatrical is playing out between the photographer and her subjects, something that goes beyond empathetic documentary photographs, with photographs that look staged and visions from daily life that raise all kinds of questions about these protagonists about whom we know so little. The book has an accordion insert, in which the women of the title, Rosette and Mauricette, reappear in a dense narrative called *Huis clos*, as in Sartre's play about two women and one man locked in a room. This insert transcends the documentary like a gripping play about emotion, desire and the body. Self-publishing has confronted us with the strangest of visions and experiments, and it can certainly be tiring to examine a great many of these publications during a fair or festival, trying to come to terms with so many singularities. But then again, given the quality of many of the books published so far this year, we're still living in a period of a decisive evolution of the book form.

Kominek Books
ISBN 9783981510515

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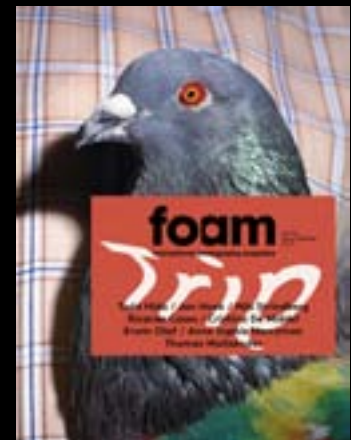
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 OliverHartung/Arthur Mole/
 Shinji Otani/Max Pinckers/
 Mahesh Shantaram/Mirte Slaats



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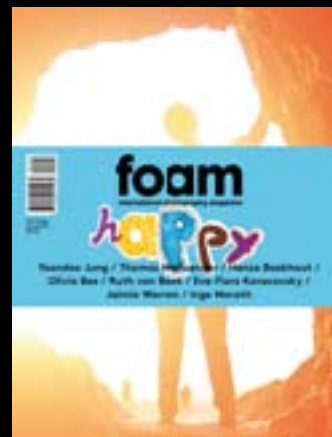
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