WOMEN PHOTOGRAPHERS

BORIS FRIEDEWALD

WOMEN PHOTOGRAPHERS

From Anna Atkins to Newsha Tavakolian

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

Contents

006 | Introduction

008 | **Berenice Abbott**
012 | **Diane Arbus**
016 | **Eve Arnold**
020 | **Anna Atkins**
024 | **Ellen Auerbach**
028 | **Jessica Backhaus**
032 | **Tina Barney**
036 | **Lillian Bassman**
040 | **Sibylle Bergemann**
044 | **Margaret Bourke-White**
048 | **Claude Cahun**
052 | **Julia Margaret Cameron**
056 | **Imogen Cunningham**
060 | **Rineke Dijkstra**
062 | **Trude Fleischmann**
066 | **Martine Franck**
070 | **Gisèle Freund**
072 | **Nan Goldin**
076 | **Jitka Hanzlová**
080 | **Lady Clementina Hawarden**
084 | **Florence Henri**
088 | **Candida Höfer**
092 | **Evelyn Hofer**
096 | **Graciela Iturbide**
100 | **Lotte Jacobi**
104 | **Gertrude Käsebier**
108 | **Miho Kajioka**
112 | **Rinko Kawauchi**
116 | **Annette Kelm**
120 | **Herlinde Koelbl**
126 | **Germaine Krull**
130 | **Dorothea Lange**
134 | **An-My Lê**
138 | **Helen Levitt**
142 | **Vera Lutter**
146 | **Vivian Maier**
150 | **Sally Mann**
154 | **Hellen van Meene**
158 | **Susan Meiselas**
162 | **Lee Miller**
166 | **Lisette Model**
170 | **Tina Modotti**
174 | **Sarah Moon**
178 | **Inge Morath**
182 | **Zanele Muholi**
186 | **Madame d'Ora**
190 | **Bettina Rheims**
194 | **Viviane Sassen**
198 | **Shirana Shahbazi**
202 | **Cindy Sherman**
206 | **Dayanita Singh**
210 | **Ming Smith**
214 | **Rosalind Solomon**
218 | **Grete Stern**
222 | **Newsha Tavakolian**
226 | **Ellen von Unwerth**
230 | **JoAnn Verburg**
234 | **Carrie Mae Weems**
238 | **Francesca Woodman**
242 | **Madame Yevonde**

230 | List of Images
236 | Selected Literature

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 rising 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 begin to 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 Shahbazi and Annette Kelm, 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 individuals for whom the term "woman photographer" is often not precise enough—for highly individual reasons. Zanele Muholi, for example, who has come out as non-binary, sees themself as a visual activist rather than a photographer. Claude Cahun also saw herself as being someone beyond femininity, masculinity, or androgyny. And Eve Arnold believed that the description "woman photographer" restricted 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." And Diane Arbus stressed, "I'm a *photographer*, not a woman photographer."

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 those who took—and take—photographs; their life stories, their way of looking at things, and their pictures 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 photographers 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 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."

Berenice Abbott, 1922.
Photo by Man Ray

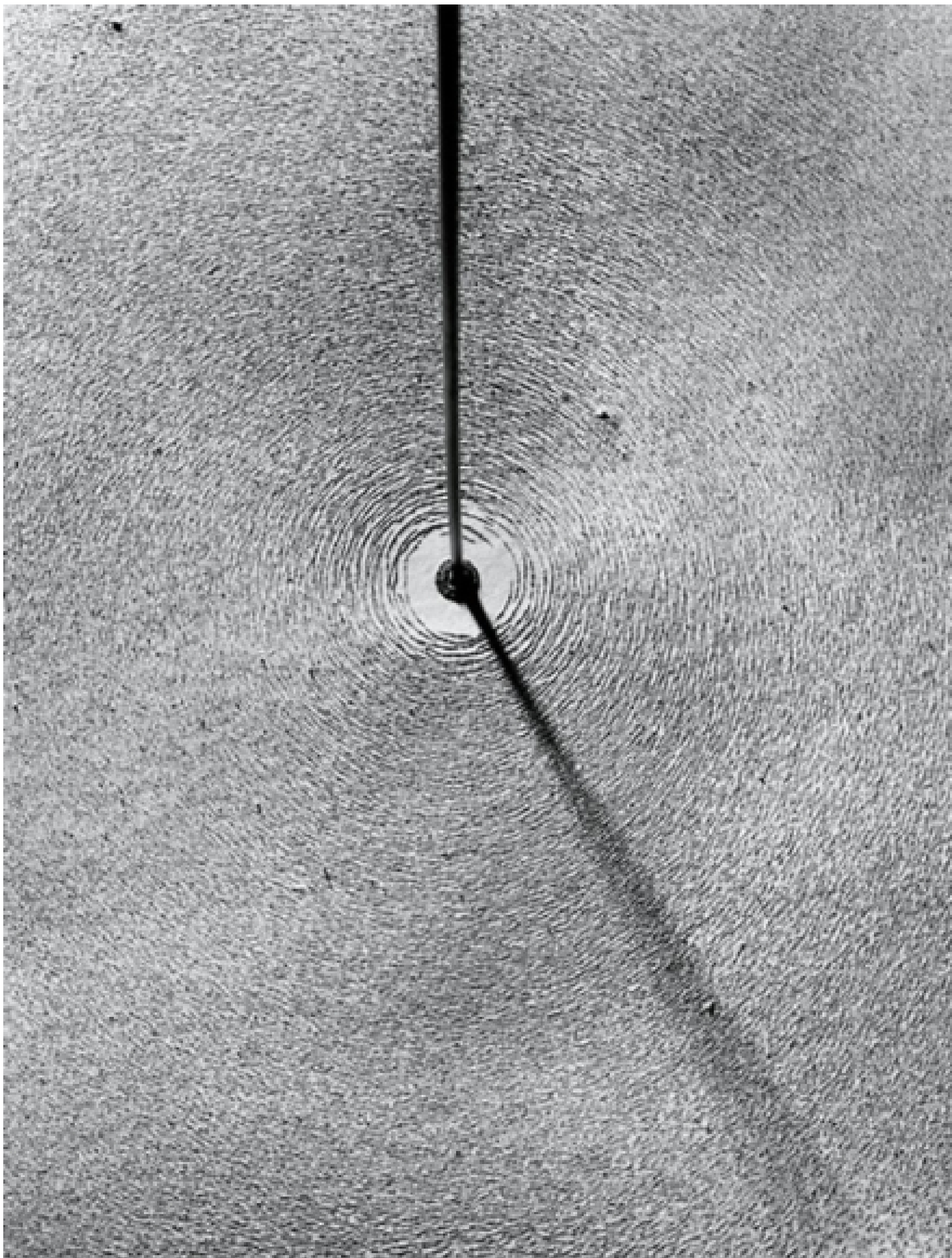
Page 009

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 18×24 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.

DIANE ARBUS

Born on March 14, 1923, in New York, New York, USA
Died on July 26, 1971, in New York, New York, USA

In 1939, at the age of sixteen, Diane Nemerov wrote an essay on Plato for her senior English literature class, which began with the following statement: "Individuals all different, all wanting different things, all knowing different things, all loving different things, all looking different. Everything that has been on earth has been different from any other thing. That is what I love: the differentness, the uniqueness of all things and the importance of life ... I see something that seems wonderful; I see the divineness in ordinary things." Nobody would have guessed at that point that many years later she would build on this view of life to revolutionize the art of photography. At the age of fourteen she had met Allan Arbus, who was working in the advertising department of her family's women's clothing store. They married in 1941. It was around then that Allan gave Diane her first camera—and she began to rediscover the world with her Graflex 6×9. When Allan returned from the war in 1946—Diane had in the meantime attended several photography courses by Berenice Abbott (see p. 8)—they opened a fashion photography studio together and were soon photographing for the magazines *Glamour* and *Vogue*. Diane conceived and styled the photographs and Allan took the pictures. In 1955 Diane Arbus attended a workshop by Alexey Brodovitch, who as art director of *Harper's Bazaar* had been instrumental in launching the careers of many photographers, including Richard Avedon. Arbus's most important teacher, however, was the photographer Lisette Model (see p. 166) with whom Arbus took courses beginning in 1956. It was Model who proposed to her that, regarding photographs, "the more specific you are, the more general it'll be." Around that time, a great deal changed in the life and art of Diane Arbus: she quit her partnership with Allan, they separated, and she began in earnest to pursue her own work. Arbus emphatically rejected the suggestion that her gender had any bearing on the nature or quality of the photographs she took. "I'm a *photographer*," she said, "not a woman photographer." In 1959 she met the artist and art director Marvin Israel. The two became lovers, lifelong friends, and major philosophical influences on one another. Her first published photographs appeared in *Esquire* in 1960 under the title "The Vertical Journey." During the next decade, while working for magazines such as *Esquire* and *Harper's Bazaar*, she published more than a hundred pictures, including portraits and photographic essays, some of which originated as personal projects, occasionally accompanied by her own writing. Starting in 1962 Arbus changed formats from 35mm to 6×6. Using a Rolleiflex and a Mamiyaflex, she produced square pictures, which came to define her mature style. In 1963 and 1966 she was awarded Guggenheim Fellowships for her project on "American Rites, Manners, and Customs." "I want to photograph the considerable ceremonies of our present," she wrote, "These are our symptoms and our monuments. I want simply to save them, for what is ceremonious and curious and commonplace will be legendary." Her subjects included couples, children, nudists, carnival performers, middle-class families, transvestites, zealots, eccentrics, and celebrities. Arbus was one of only three photographers featured in the Museum of Modern Art's groundbreaking 1967 exhibition, *New Documents*, which introduced her photographs to a broader public. Although some continue to criticize her pictures as exploitative, it is universally acknowledged that the impact of her singular vision has forever transformed the nature of the medium. Arbus, who took her own life in 1971 at the age of forty-eight, once said, "I really believe there are things nobody would see unless I photograph them." Few would deny that she was right.

Diane Arbus, New York, 1967

Giving a camera to Diane Arbus is like putting
a live grenade in the hands of a child.

Norman Mailer

Page 013

IDENTICAL TWINS, ROSELLE, N.J., 1966

One day, while visiting a Christmas gathering of twins and triplets in New Jersey, Diane Arbus produced this photo of identical twins, which has since become an icon of modern photography and a mesmerizing image of the tension between appearance and identity. As so often in Arbus's pictures, the subjects are gazing directly into the camera. The more one studies the details that seem to make these two girls similar, the more one encounters the confounding differences that ultimately make each of them unique.

WRITER SUSAN SONTAG WITH HER SON DAVID, N.Y.C.,1965

This portrait of Susan Sontag and her son, David, who was the child from her marriage with the sociologist Philip Rieff, was taken only a few months after she published her essay describing an aesthetic phenomenon, "Notes on Camp." Sontag's text was widely discussed and aroused considerable controversy, making the American writer, essayist, and director famous among a wide public. The first major Arbus retrospective in 1972 at the Museum of Modern Art inspired Sontag to conduct an intensive philosophical examination of the medium of photography. The result was a series of essays that have become legendary and which were published in book form in 1977 under the title On Photography.

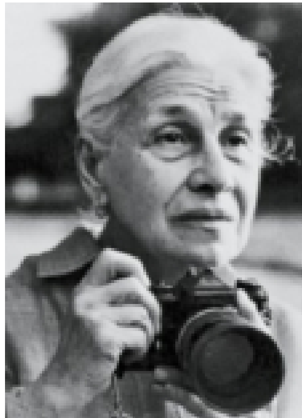
UNTITLED (7), 1970/71

In 1970 Arbus began to photograph in residences for people with developmental disabilities, producing what proved to be her last great and possibly most haunting series. She once said of the people she portrayed, “There are always two things that happen. One is recognition and the other is that it’s totally peculiar. But there’s some sense in which I always identify with them.”

EVE ARNOLD

Born on April 21, 1912, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 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."



Eve Arnold

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 necessarily 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 Black people 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.

Page 018

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 three-month visa 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.