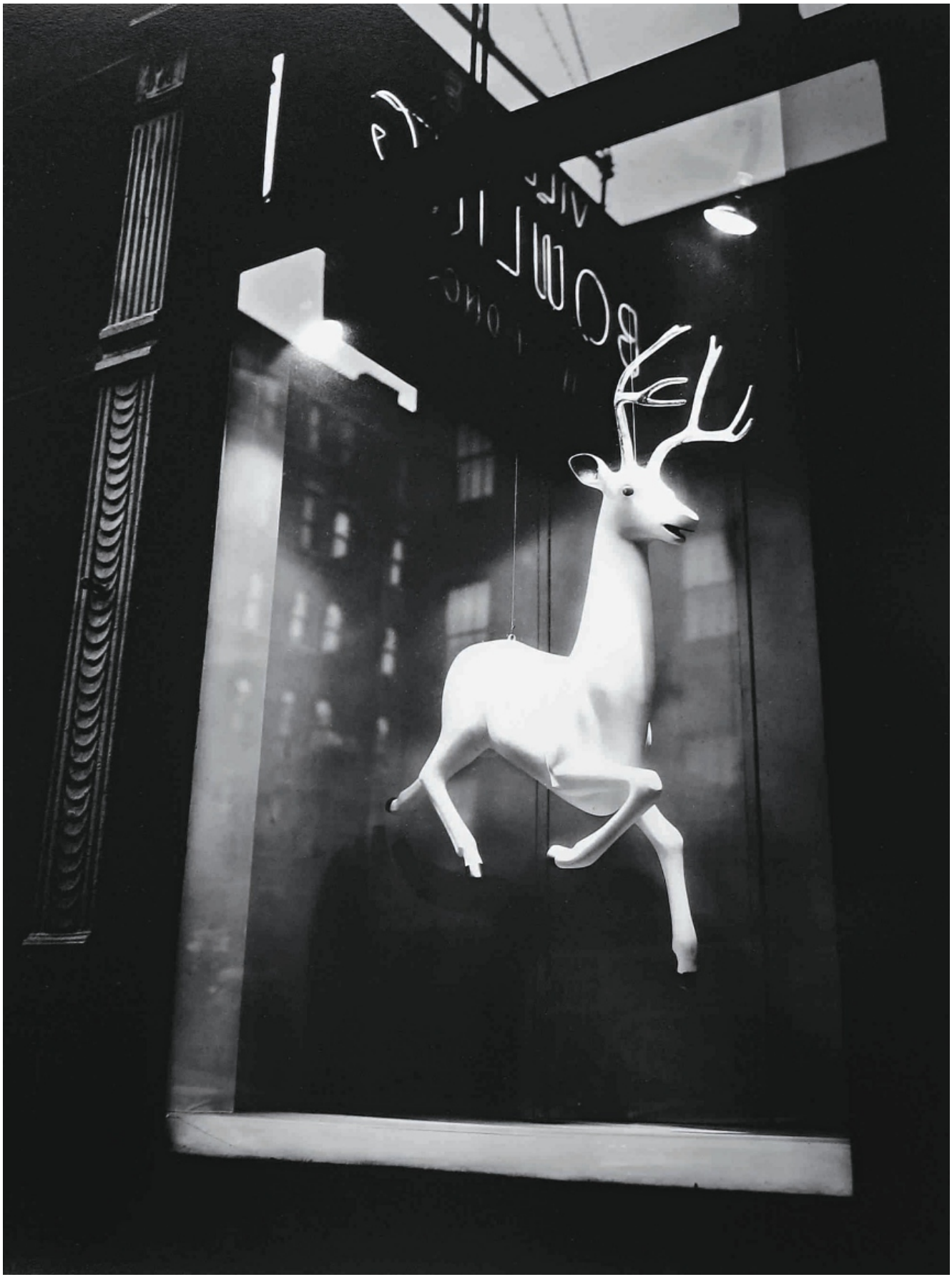
# BERENICE (BERNICE) ABBOTT

**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*

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

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

HOBOKEN FERRY TERMINAL, BARCLAY STREET, NEW YORK, 1931

*When Abbott took this photograph she was obsessed with the idea of creating a photographic record of New York, which was changing at a rapid pace. As a result of her financial circumstances she roamed the streets of New York with her 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.*

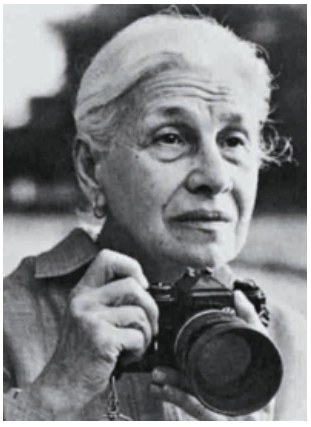
MAGNETISM AND ELECTRICITY I, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, 1958–61

*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.*

# EVE ARNOLD

**Born on April 21, 1912 in Philadelphia, USA**
**Died on January 4, 2012 in London, UK**

Eve Cohen was the daughter of Jewish immigrants from Russia. During the daytime she worked as a bookkeeper in the office of a real estate agent, and in the evening studied medicine with the aim of becoming a doctor. But this was not what would actually happen. In 1946 she read an advertisement in *The New York Times* seeking an "amateur photographer"—and promptly changed her life plan. She applied because she was secretly addicted, as she later admitted. Shortly before, a friend had given her a Rolleicord camera, the somewhat less expensive version of the Rolleiflex, and photography immediately became her drug of choice. Eve got the job in a photographic print and retouching firm and moved to New York. In 1948 she registered for a six-week photo workshop at the New School for Social Research under Alexey Brodovitch, the legendary art director of the fashion magazine *Harper's Bazaar*. It was to be the only photography course she ever attended, although she saw herself as continuing to learn throughout her entire life. Shortly after that she attended fashion shows by African-American women in Harlem—and discovered life behind the catwalk with her camera. It became her first reportage. The pictures were taken with an attitude that from now on would characterize Eve Arnold's work as a photographer: an inexhaustible curiosity with regard to life, combined with an unusual social interest and commitment revealing tremendous courage and sympathy. In 1951 she sent her reportage from Harlem, together with a new documentation about opera audiences, to the Magnum photo agency—and became one of the first woman photographers to be allowed to join. Many years later, Isabella Rossellini, who was a friend, wrote: "Eve treated men as if she were a man herself."



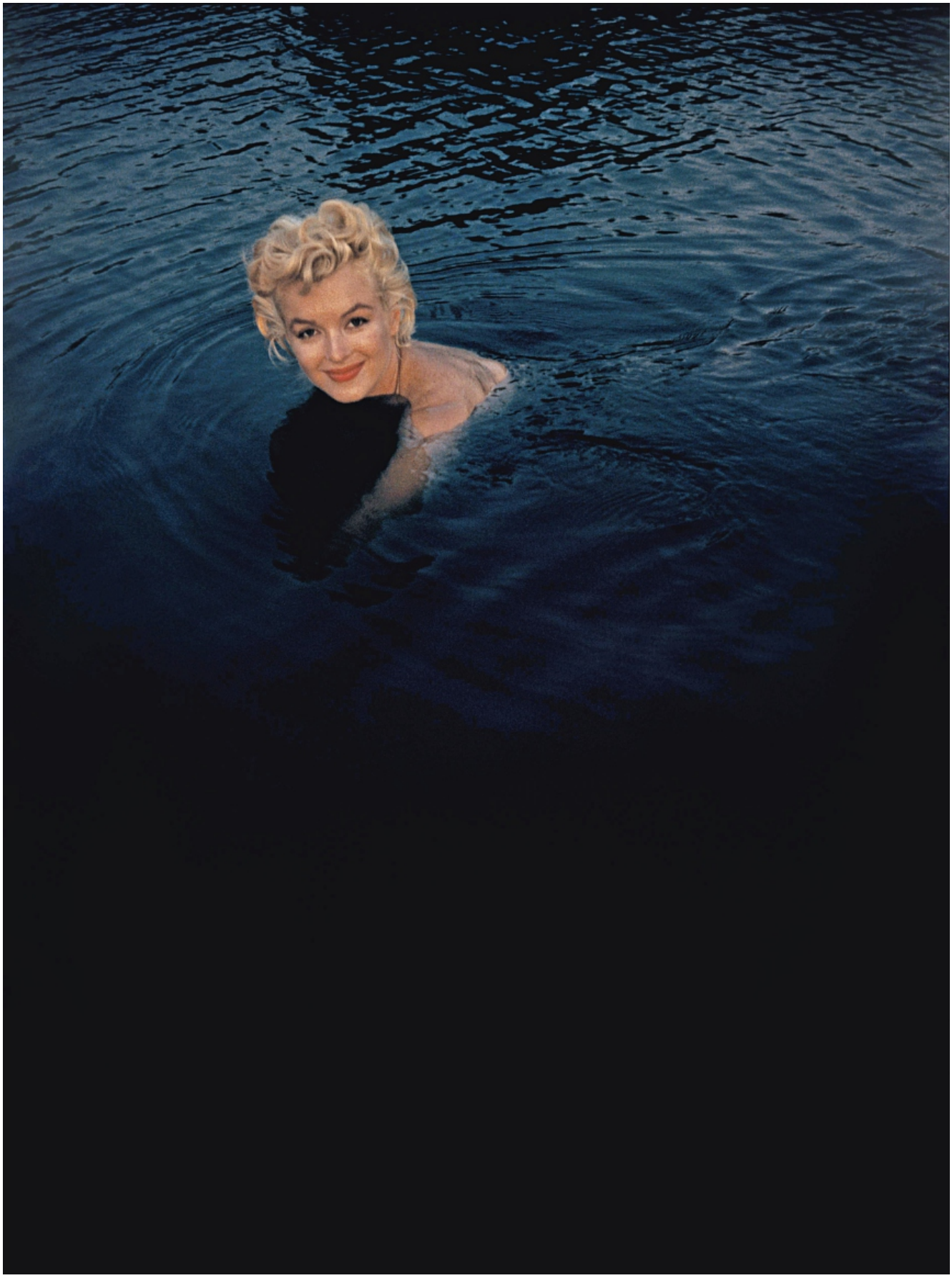
By now the young woman had two families: her husband, the industrial designer Arnold Arnold, and their son, Frank, and the photo agency, which Eve Arnold also called her family and about whom she said: "You love them all but you don't necessarily like them all." Before long Arnold was getting up at the 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 blacks who lived there, and accompanied Indira Gandhi on her election campaign through India. Arnold traveled to the USSR, where she also took photos in mental hospitals; she discovered humanity in Communist China and saw the USA with fresh eyes. She died in London at the age of ninety-nine. Eve Arnold left more than 750,000 photos. Of her role as a woman photographer she once said: "I didn't want to be a 'woman photographer.' That would limit me. I wanted to be a photographer who was a woman, with all the world open to my camera."

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

*Eve Arnold*

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

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



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US ACTRESS MARILYN MONROE, NEVADA, USA, 1960

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

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

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

# ANNA ATKINS

**Born on March 16, 1799 in Tonbridge, UK**
**Died on June 9, 1871 in Halstead, UK**

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

*Anna Atkins, 1861*

Anna's mother had died shortly after giving birth, and Anna was therefore brought up as an only child by her father, the polymath John George Children. He taught his daughter about his wonderful worlds of minerals, plants and animals, and chemistry. Father and daughter were engaged in increasingly intensive discussions, and eventually Anna could imagine nothing more fascinating than science and research—and she became a biologist. She was a highly practical and artistic woman: at the age of twenty-three she designed over 200 illustrations of shells for a work translated by her father, *Genera of Shells* by the botanist and zoologist Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck. At this point she had no idea of the possibilities of photography. The next year, in 1825, she married the son of the lord mayor of London, John Pelly Atkins. The marriage remained childless. In February 1839 Anna Atkins met the multi-talented Henry Fox Talbot at a congress of the Royal Society. He was presenting his "photogenic drawings," drawings produced by light, as he called his cameraless photographs. Atkins and her father immediately established a friendly relationship with the inventor and Atkins began to sense the possibilities that photography might open up for science. Soon thereafter the father and daughter met the astronomer Sir John Herschel, who had also made important discoveries for photography a short while previously. His achievements included the discovery of fixing salt and cyanotype, which enabled blueprints to be made: the cameraless pictures produced using this method appear in a beautiful Prussian blue. Atkins, whose interest in botany had led her to collect seaweed for many years with a friend, was immediately filled with enthusiasm for this simple and inexpensive technique. She painted a solution of light-sensitive iron salts onto paper, pressed her seaweed onto it, exposed it in sunlight, and then washed and dried the result. Atkins gave each seaweed picture the corresponding Latin name, wrote a foreword, and bound the whole thing together to form a book she titled *British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*. She produced several copies and gave them to botanists. These were soon followed by subsequent editions.

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


Cystoseira granulata.


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CYSTOSEIRA GRANULATA, 1843/44

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

PAPAVER RHOEAS, 1845

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


PARTRIDGE, CA. 1850

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