

The Open Book: Photographic Publications 1878 to the Present



Aleksandr Rodchenko
Pro Eto, 1923
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The Manfred and Hanna Heiting Library

On view from
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through
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Media Preview
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From June 17-September 4, 2005, the International Center of Photography (1133 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street) will present *The Open Book: Photographic Publications 1878 to the Present*, an exhibition of some of the most significant publications in the history of photography. Produced by the Hasselblad Center in Sweden, it demonstrates the role of books as a primary communicator of photographic images.

The Open Book chronicles the art of the photographic book in the twentieth century. This is the first museum exhibition to present these publications on their own merits, rather than as a supplement to the main attraction: the photographic print. The photographic book is a unique art form within the medium's tradition, and has been utilized as such since the invention of photography. This exhibition will include over 150 of the most significant photographic books from 1878 to the present, including works by El Lissitzky, Claude Cahun, Walker Evans, Daido Moriyama, Robert Frank, and Larry Clark.

The titles have been selected by a distinguished international team including fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld, France; professor Ute Eskildsen, Germany; book publisher Gerhard Steidl, Germany; media consultant Christoph Schifferli, Switzerland; editor Ingrid Sischy, USA; rare book dealer and publisher Andrew Roth, USA; and curator Hasse Persson from the Hasselblad Center.

After extensive meetings in Gothenburg, Essen, Biarritz, and New York, the jury chose titles representing some of the most important works in the history of photography. The selection was based on criteria such as photographic content, text, choice of paper, printing, and typography, along with the work's importance in the chronicle of the medium. Concepts such as originality, beauty, and artistic quality also played decisive roles, as did the photographer's personal contribution to the production of the book. Hence, books produced after the author's death were, with some exceptions, omitted.

The jury paid particular attention to what are known as 'artist's books,' which differ in form and content from standard photographic books. Most authors of photography books in this genre prefer to see themselves as artists rather than as photographers. Also, the pictures within may well have been taken by someone other than the author of the book. In any case—the book is the artwork. Christian Boltanski's, Hans-Peter Feldmann's, and perhaps above all Ed Ruscha's books have inspired many of today's photo-based artists who experiment with this genre. Sophie Calle, Tacita Dean, Richard Prince, and Wolfgang Tillmans are also represented in *The Open Book*.

In her essay on the history of the photography book in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, Ute Eskildsen of the Museum Folkwang in Essen puts in context some of the big names of the last century, such as Edward Curtis, Erich Salomon, Brassai, Walker Evans, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Frank, and Nan Goldin, all of whose books are now considered classics. But Eskildsen, as with the jury as a whole, has also drawn attention to some forgotten photographic masterpieces, which are now once again being brought into the spotlight. Helmar Lerski's *Köpfe des Alltags* (*Heads from Everyday Life*, 1931) is one example. Moshé Raviv-Vorobeichic's (later known as Moï Ver) *Paris* (1931) is another; Claude Cahun's *Aveux non Avenus* (*Cancelled Confessions*, 1930) a third. And as Eskildsen observes in her conclusion to the catalogue text for *The Open Book*, just as the value of photography on the art market has increased dramatically, so too has the photographic book become a collector's item.

Publication

A 450-page catalogue, with contributions by each of the organizers, will accompany the exhibition.

Sponsorship

The Open Book: A History of the Photographic Book from 1878 to the Present

A traveling exhibition produced by Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg, Sweden, in cooperation with Arctic Paper, with books selected by Karl Lagerfeld, Ute Eskildsen, Gerhard Steidl, Christoph Schifferli, Ingrid Sischy, Andrew Roth, and Hasse Persson.

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