

My Favorite Photography Books

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I collect photography books. I have a lot of them, and it is very difficult to choose which ones are my favorites. These fifteen books have all meant something special to me. Many of them, alas, are out of print. Photography books are expensive to produce and they tend to become unavailable. The list is chronological.

1. Edward Steichen and Mary Steichen Calderone, *The First Picture Book: Everyday Things for Babies* (1930)

This is one of the first children's books to be illustrated with photographs. It's charming book, with still lifes of simple objects – a teddy bear, a comb and brush, shoes and socks, a toothbrush in a glass. Steichen made it with his daughter. She wanted to interest her small children in pictures by showing them things that were part of their world.

2. Weegee, *Naked City* (1945)

Diane Arbus was a great admirer of Weegee's pictures of crime scenes and various catastrophic events. Weegee used an on-camera flash to photograph at night and in dark rooms and other places where it was impossible to rely on natural light. The flash brought out the main thing you wanted to see and also revealed moments you hadn't anticipated. Weegee was a newspaper photographer and he didn't care about the pictures being pretty.

3. Alexey Brodovitch, *Ballet* (1945)

This book is legendary. I think I held a copy in my hands only once. But it has to be on a list of the books that have influenced me. It is a collection of pictures made backstage and during dance performances, mostly by the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. The pictures were bled onto the pages. A lot of them are blurry. Brodovitch was using a medium that couldn't really capture what was

happening in front of him, but he loved the subject so much that he captured the emotion of it.

4. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* (1952)

There's no photograph on the cover of Cartier-Bresson's first book. The jacket was designed by Matisse. Cartier-Bresson selected the photographs from work he had done over the course of twenty years. I was a student when I first saw his pictures, and they made me understand what it meant to be a photographer. The camera gave you a license to go out alone into the world with a purpose.

5. Robert Frank, *The Americans* (1959)

When I was young, I fell in love with the idea of working like Robert Frank. Driving around in a car and taking pictures. Looking for stories. In retrospect, one of the photographs in *The Americans* represents the way I wanted to work—the romance of the process. It's the last photograph in the book. Frank's wife and two small children are in the front seat of their car. It's dawn. They're parked across from a truck stop in Texas. You can imagine that they've been driving all night. The picture is from one of the trips Frank took across the United States, making a record of the country as if, as he put it, he were someone who was seeing it for the first time.

6. Richard Avedon and Truman Capote, *Observations* (1959)

Alexey Brodovitch designed *Observations*. Avedon had been his student and had worked with him at *Harper's Bazaar* for many years. The book is a kind of apotheosis of Brodovitch's book designs and Avedon's photographs. It contains many of Avedon's classic portraits: Charlie Chaplin, Marian Anderson, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Louis Armstrong, Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound. Avedon seduced his subjects with conversation. He had a Rolleiflex that he would look down at and then up from. It was never in front of his face. Most of the great portrait photographers didn't have a camera in front of their faces. It was next to them while they talked.

7. Irving Penn, *Moments Preserved* (1960)

Irving Penn's first book is a selection of the work he had been doing for nearly twenty years under Alexander Liberman's direction at *Vogue*. Liberman wrote the introduction and Penn designed the eight "essays in photographs and words." The photographs include some of the great Penn portraits in gray corners. And the Quechua Indian portraits from Cuzco, Peru. The portraits Penn took on expeditions to remote places of the world are some of my favorite pictures.

8. Alexander Liberman, *The Artist in His Studio* (1960)

I saw this book before I knew who Alexander Liberman was. He was the creative director of Condé Nast, but he was also a painter and sculptor in his own right. And a photographer. In this book he photographed and wrote about the places artists lived and worked. You could see them working. Picasso, Braque, Brancusi, Giacometti. I love to see process.

9. Jaques-Henri Lartigue, *Diary of a Century* (1970)

Richard Avedon and the designer Bea Feitler put together this collection of Jacques-Henri Lartigue's photographs of his family and friends. They included pages from Lartigue's handwritten diaries, drawings, and quirky pictures of his life in France, starting in 1904. *Diary of a Century* was my favorite photography book for awhile, when I was just starting out as a photographer. When Bea told me that she and Avedon had made it up, I was disappointed, although I realize that what she meant is that they had collected Lartigue's material in a way that told a story. They had figured out a way to present it.

10. Diane Arbus: *An Aperture Monograph* (1972)

This is one of the first photography books I studied closely. The portraits are very straightforward. Very direct. Simple. I usually pull back from the subject

of a portrait and include things around them. I would try to figure out how Arbus got just the right amount of curtain, for instance, in a frame. Just a little piece of the curtain, but just the right amount for the room she was working in.

11. Helmut Newton, *White Women* (1976)

Helmut was a great portrait photographer. He had a very strong point of view. I don't necessarily like all the pictures in this book, but I admire his strong point of view. Helmut was inventive at a time when fashion photography was "safe." He and Guy Bourdin. They pushed buttons. It's always refreshing, for a photographer, to see buttons being pushed. *White Women* is a little gem. It was designed by Bea Feitler and it's the most tasteful of Helmut's books.

12. *Georgia O'Keeffe, A Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz* (1978)

Alfred Stieglitz's nude portraits of Georgia O'Keeffe are probably my favorite pictures. They're so intimate and sensual. You can tell that he is in love with her. There's a give-and-take in those sittings that occurs only between lovers. You see that kind of tenderness in Edward Weston's nudes of Charis Wilson, and in Robert Mapplethorpe's early studies of Patti Smith, and in Imogen Cunningham's nudes of her husband on their honeymoon on Mt. Rainier. This book is on the list because the Stieglitz portraits of O'Keeffe are such an important set of pictures.

13. Nan Goldin, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1986)

Nan Goldin photographed her friends. People she knew. I admired that, but, for me, the most refreshing thing about Nan's work was the way she used color. It was so relaxed. So intimate. So spontaneous looking. Most of the important photographers who came before her worked in black and white. Except Helmut, of course.

14. *The Waking Dream: Photography's First Century, selections from the Gilman Paper Company Collection* (1993)

This book has so much in it. From the beginnings of photography in the mid-nineteenth century to just before World War II. All the possibilities of what a photograph can be.

15. Michael Light, *Full Moon* (1999)

The photographer Michael Light scanned several hundred original negatives and transparencies from the Apollo missions and made new images. Then he sequenced them into a hypothetical trip to the moon and back. The photographs were taken by astronauts, but they have an anonymous quality. I keep the compact version of the book in my children's room. They love it.