THE POETIC IMAGE

Estéfani Bouza: e.bouza-arnoso@uwtsd.ac.uk/ September 2026

SESSION OVERVIEW

Introduction to content on Moodle.

Assignment brief with your three tasks for this semester.

Evaluation.

Schedule.

Introduction to the poetic image.

This module introduces you to the key developments in photographic art practice over the past century. Projects will be introduced with contextualising lectures and subsequent teaching delivered through lectures, seminars, critiques and group and individual tutorials. You will respond to concepts introduced in these lectures, exercises in research methods, critical interaction and shared practice with other students. You will be expected to demonstrate technical skills introduced in accompanying workshops. Group and individual tutorials and critiques will allow a constant flow of discussion and feedback to assist you in the evaluation of your progress.

AIMS

To establish confidence and competence in the use of cameras, equipment and processes.

1. To introduce students to the theories and practices of photography in a fine art context.

2. To enable students to develop abilities when generating ideas and concepts and translating them into photographic images.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Generate ideas and concepts in response to given projects.

2. Evaluate the progress of your own work in relation to the requirements of prescribed briefs and self-initiated projects.

3. Exhibit an understanding of the contemporary dialogue between photographic art and documentary practice.

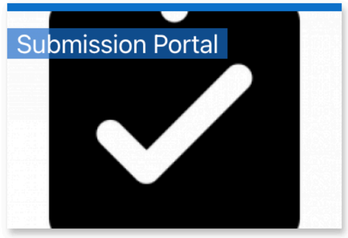
Announcements











ASSIGNMENT SPECIFICATION FORM

LEVEL 4 ASSESSMENT SPECIFICATION

Student name:		**Student ID number:**	
Programme:	**BA Photography in the Arts**		
Module:	**Photographic Art Practice**		
Module code:	**ADAA4011**	**Contribution to Overall Module Assessment (%):**	**100%**
Lecturer:	**Estéfani Bouza**	**Internal Verifier:**	**Paul Duerinckx**
Assignment Title:	**The Poetic Image, The Narrative Image, The Mischievous Image** **Portfolio and a 700–1,000-word evaluation**	**Word count (or equivalent):**	**Portfolio and 700–1000-word evaluation**
Submission deadline:	**5th January 2027 by 5pm**	**Return date of provisional marks & written feedback:**	**2nd February 2027 by 5pm** (20 working days from submission)

ASSIGNMENT SPECIFICATION FORM

Module Learning Outcomes (from module syllabus)
1. Articulate and develop critical and analytical viewpoints in seminar/tutorial discussion through interpreting visual material. 2. Produce and evaluate photographic work from an informed knowledge base of contemporary practice.

TASK DESCRIPTION

This module introduces you to the key developments in photographic art practice and contemporary documentary practice. Projects will be introduced with contextualising lectures and subsequent teaching delivered through lectures, seminars, critiques and group and individual tutorials. You will respond to concepts introduced in these lectures, exercises in research methods, critical interaction and shared practice with other students. You will be expected to demonstrate technical skills learnt and apply them to develop your ideas. Group and individual tutorials and critiques will allow a constant flow of discussion and feedback to assist you in the evaluation of their progress.

TASKS

Task One: The Poetic Image (3 – 5 Images)

Task Two: The Narrative Image (3-5 Images)

Task Three: The Mischievous Image (3-5 Images)

FINAL SUBMISSION

Students are to submit:

1. All three tasks as a digital portfolio on 5th January 2027 by 5pm via Moodle.
2. A 700–1000-word evaluation (using the provided template).

AIM OF SESSION

-To introduce the poetic image for learners to use in their own practice and provide examples from practitioners.

LEARNING OUTCOMES SESSION

-Find out a working definition of the poetic image.

-Discuss with your peers what visual strategies from the ones demonstrated in class you might incorporate in your practice.

RECAP FROM PREVIOUS SESSION

Photographic Art Practice (ADAA4011)

Course | Settings | Participants | Grades | Reports | More

Task One: The Poetic Image

Task One

The Poetic Image

We live in the age of information. Unlike the literal image, which anchors meaning, the poetic image is instead open to multiple interpretations. This task encourages you not to seek answers, but instead to allow the meaning of your images to become porous. Think how you might use symbolism or metaphor and remember not to illustrate.

Assignment Specification

Respond to the text given to you in 3 – 5 digital images.

Inspirational Texts for the Poetic Image

POETIC IMAGE

-In your own words, what do you think when you hear poetic image?

POETIC IMAGE

-On a scale of 0-10 how familiar you are with the idea of the poetic image?

THE LITERAL VERSUS THE POETIC IMAGE

A literal image is one that anchors meaning. As a result it draws our attention towards a specific meaning of a photograph. Examples of literal images are press photographs with captions.



Costco is one of the best-known cash and carry wholesalers. Photograph: Nathaniel Noir/Alamy

THE LITERAL VERSUS THE POETIC IMAGE

As opposed to the literal image, the poetic image is instead open to multiple interpretations and relies on figures such as metaphor, simile, symbol, hyperbole, and implication to say more than what the image might initially seem.



Sam Taylor-Wood
Still Life 2001
Film still

WHAT IS THE POWER OF THE POETIC IMAGE?

The power of the poetic image relies in having the capacity of suggesting/hinting at something else apart from what we have immediately in front of our eyes.

In that sense it has the capacity to IMAGINE and to connect things that initially might seem far apart.

To IMAGINE also relates to IMAGE and photography ability to suggest, extend and relate to different realities, feelings and experiences. In this sense photographs open up meaning and are fluid entities rather than being fixed objects. We will elaborate on this with examples.

WHAT IS THE POWER OF THE POETIC IMAGE?

The point quite simply is that the poetic image help us to express our feelings or understanding of a situation in order to give them the power through photographs.

The beauty of the poetic image is that it opens up the photograph and creates a new way of seeing and experiencing the world. As Roland Barthes stated (2000, p.38) photographs ‘[…] made us reflect, suggested a meaning - a different meaning from the literal one. Ultimately, Photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatises, but when it is *pensive*, when it thinks’.

Barthes, R. ([1981] 2000) *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography.* London: Vintage Books.

POETRY - FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Figurative language is a kind of descriptive language that doesn’t mean what it says literally.

Here are some figurative language techniques that you might already know.
Similes describe something by comparing it to something else, using like or as.
For example: The grass was as green as an emerald.

Metaphors are words or phrases used to describe something as if it actually is something else.
For example: He was a ray of sunshine.

Personification is when we describe objects as if they act and feel like people do.
For example: The flower drooped sadly towards the soil.

Hyperbole is used to exaggerate, intensify and emphasise different ideas.
For example: I've got a million things to do today.

Watch: Figurative language in poetry

Watch this video of poet **Joseph Coelho** explaining how figurative language can be used when writing a poem.



WHAT ABOUT THE LANGUAGE OF PHOTOGRAPHY?

We have discussed aspects of the poetic image in relation mostly to figures that come from literature. But what about photographic language? What is it? What are their elements?

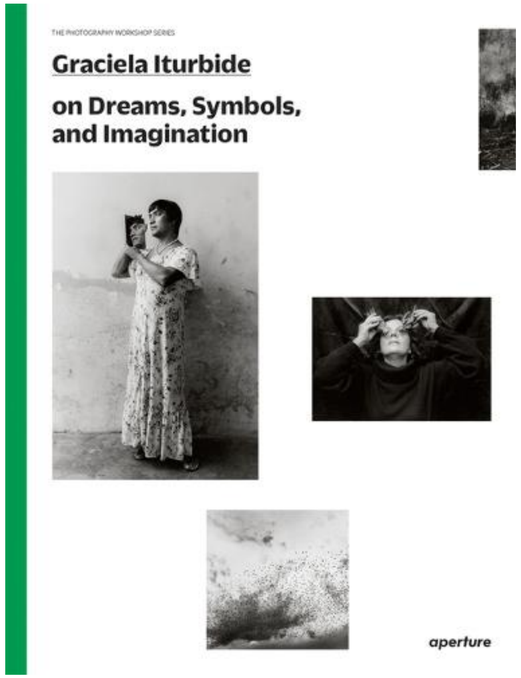
Graciela Iturbide/ *Birds of Death Dolores Hidalgo, Guanajuato, México*/ 1978

EXAMPLES



In regards to Graciela Iturbide relation to literature and particularly poetry, she has stated that: 'I actually wanted to become a writer and I wanted to study philosophy. But I come from a very conservative background, so I wasn't allowed to do that. What I essentially look for everywhere is poetry, be it in literature, be it music…'

Chobi Mela (2014) *An Interview with Graciela Iturbide.* Available at: https://chobimela.org/an-interview-with-graciela-iturbide-munem-wasif-graciela-iturbide/. Accessed: 9 October 2022.



Graciela Iturbide/ *Guanajuato, México*/ 1999

EXAMPLES



Graciela Iturbide, *Guanajuato, México,* (1999).

The literal meaning of this photograph by Graciela Iturbide (Ciudad de Mexico, Mexico,1942) is a tree and birds flying in the sky.

The poetic meaning of this image can be as follows:

Graciela Iturbide's photograph from 1999 is part of a series that the Mexican photographer made while mourning the death of her daughter. It is an arresting beautiful black and white photograph where the sky is compact, dark, heavy, dense. A tree alongside birds, those threshold creatures between sky and earth, form here a strong but ultimately fragile shape that not only is a metaphor of life, but also feels like a visceral gesture, an abstract brushstroke of sorts.

In that way the photograph becomes an extension of how Iturbide is feeling, her inner world. She finds clues in the outside world and records them through the camera. Therefore Iturbide uses photography to express herself.

Manuel Alvárez Bravo/ PRECURSOR

EXAMPLES



Manuel Alvárez Bravo, *Mujer Peinándose,* (1935).

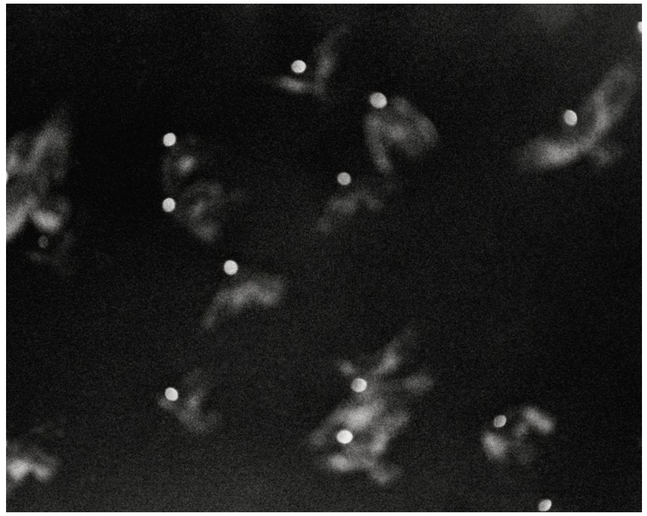


Manuel Alvárez Bravo, *El Eclipse,* (1933).

Masahisa Fukase/ *Ravens*/ 1986

EXAMPLES





Masahisa Fukase/ *Ravens*/ 1986

EXAMPLES





Masahisa Ukase (Hokkaido, Japan, 1934; d. 2012) published *Ravens*, aka *The Solitude of Ravens* in 1986.

The work was made between 1975 and 1986 in the aftermath of a divorce and was triggered by a mournful train journey to his hometown. The photobook is a dark, and impressionistic journey and has also been interpreted as an insight into the postwar Japanese psyche. *Ravens* starts at the site of the Hiroshima bomb and ends in Hokkaido, focusing in on the ominous birds, cats, girls, a solitary homeless man and, finally, his estranged wife, who had left him after 13 years of marriage.

With *Ravens*, Ukase creates an impressionistic narrative that merges the deeply personal, the sorrow and loss of his wife, with the collective trauma of postwar Japan. What we sense in these images more than anything else is Ukase personality, the obsession with his ex-wife and the identification with birds.

Sally Mann/ *Immediate Family* / 1992

EXAMPLES





Sally Mann, From the series *Immediate Family,* (1992).

Sally Mann/ *Immediate Family* / 1992

EXAMPLES





Sally Mann, From the series *Immediate Family,* (1992).

Sally Mann/ *Southern Landscapes* / 1996

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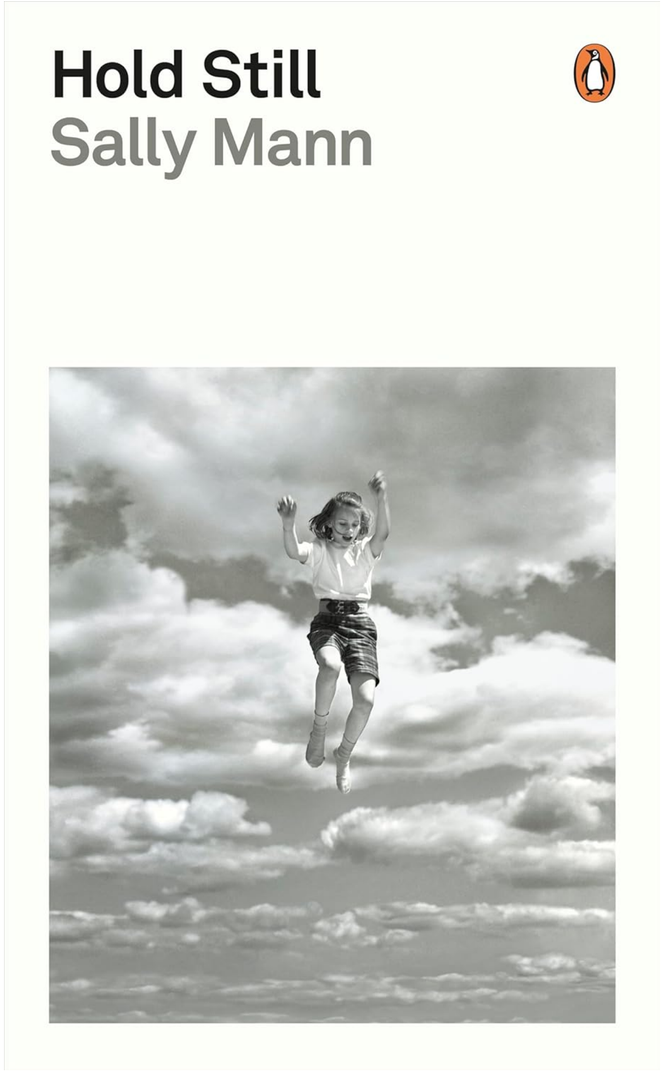
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Sally Mann, From the series *Southern Landscapes,* (1996).

Sally Mann/ *Hold Still? 2024*

EXAMPLES

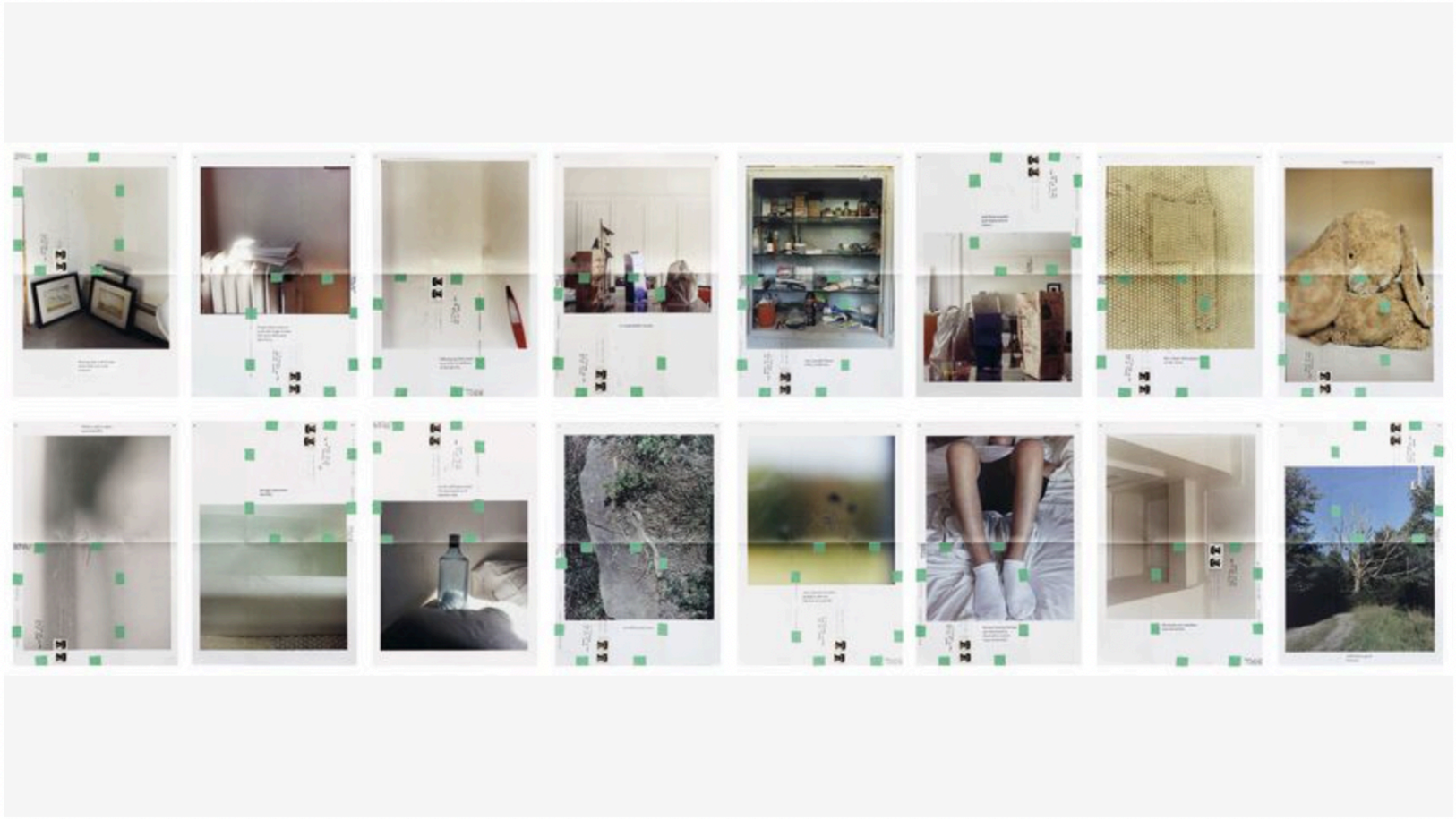




Sally Mann, *Hold Still,* Penguin Classics: London, (2024).

Moyra Davey/ *Trust Me*/ 2011

EXAMPLES



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Moyra Davey on Trust Me, 2011

Moyra Davey/ *Trust Me*/ 2011

EXAMPLES

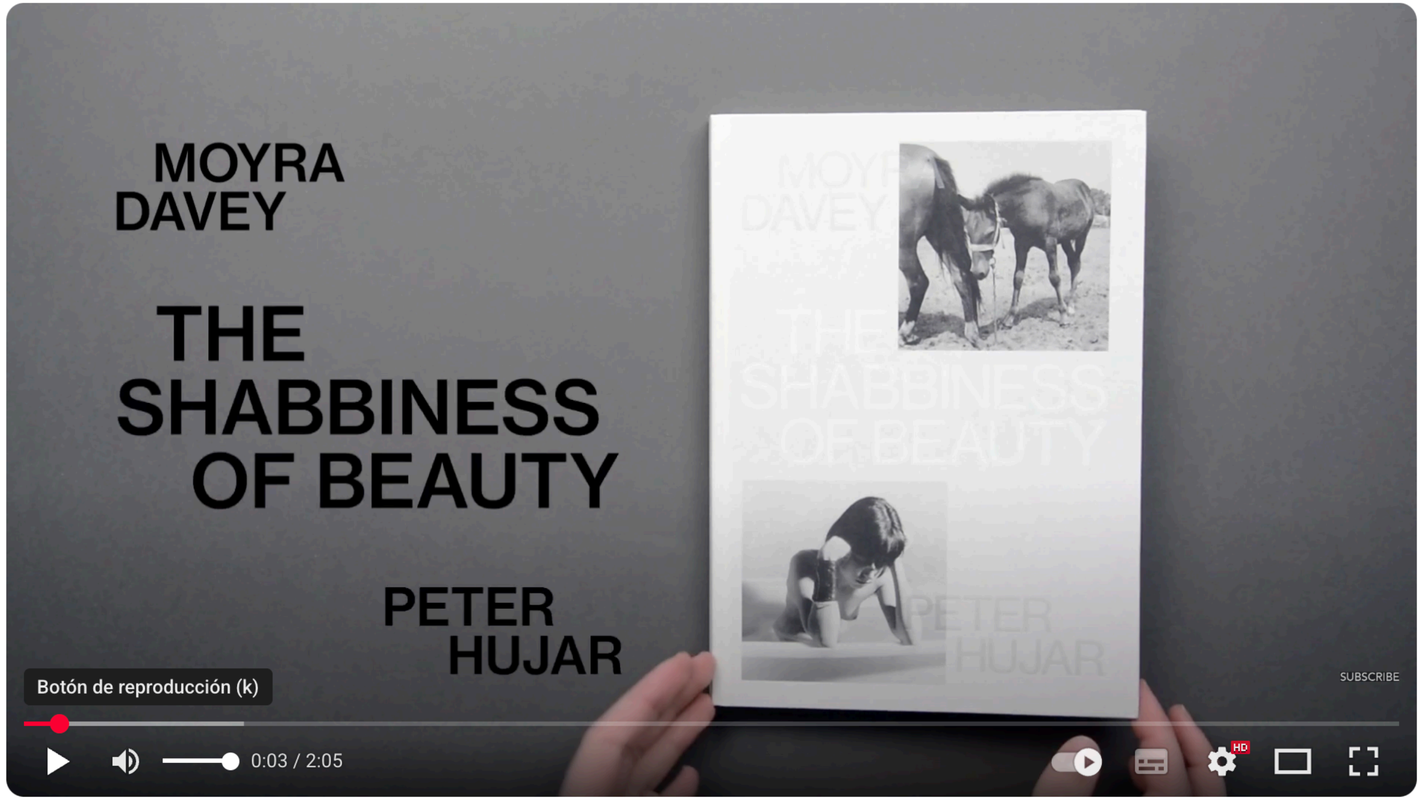




Moyra Davey, *Trust Me* (detail), 16 prints, postage stamps, painter's tape and ink (2011).

Moyra Davey and Peter Hujar/ *The Shabbiness of Beauty*/ 2021

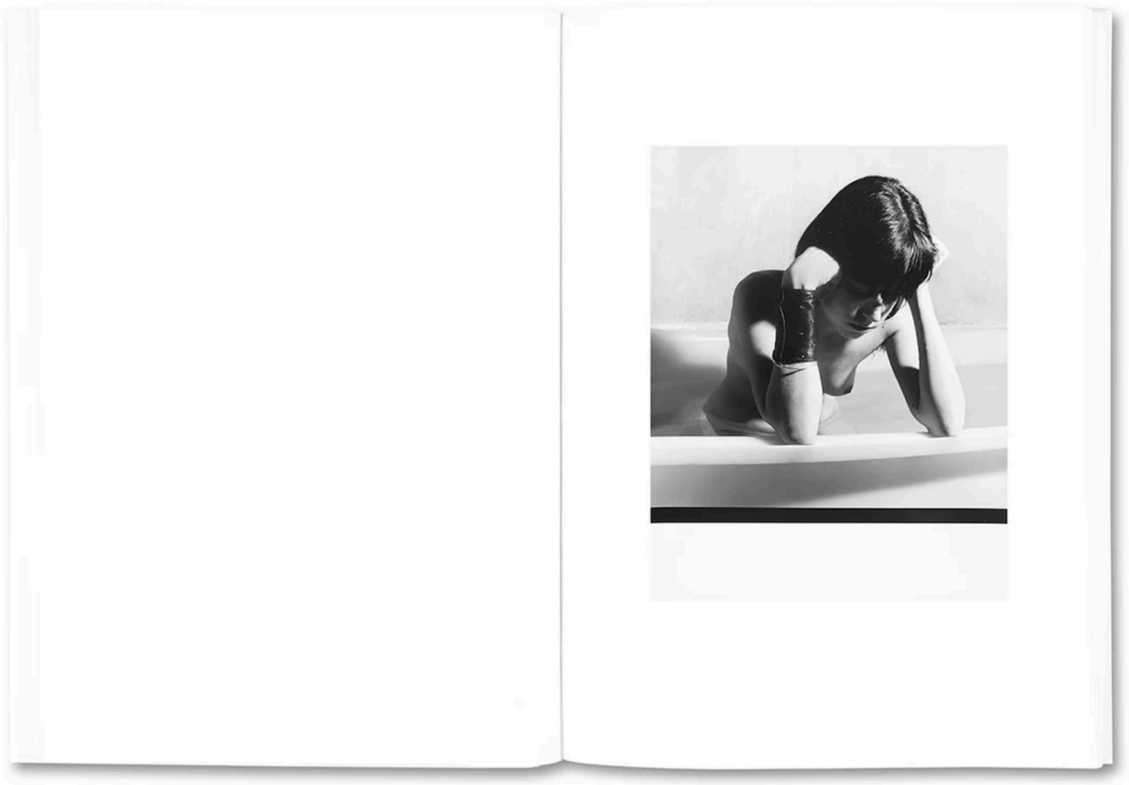
EXAMPLES



Moyra Davey and Peter Hujar, *The Shabbiness of Beauty,* Mack (2021).

Moyra Davey and Peter Hujar/ *The Shabbiness of Beauty*/ 2021

EXAMPLES





Moyra Davey and Peter Hujar, *The Shabbiness of Beauty,* Mack (2021).

Peter Hujar/ *Eyes Open in the Dark*/ Exhibition views from Raven Row, 2025

EXAMPLES



Peter Hujar, *Eyes Open in the Dark,* Exhibition views from Raven Row, 2025.

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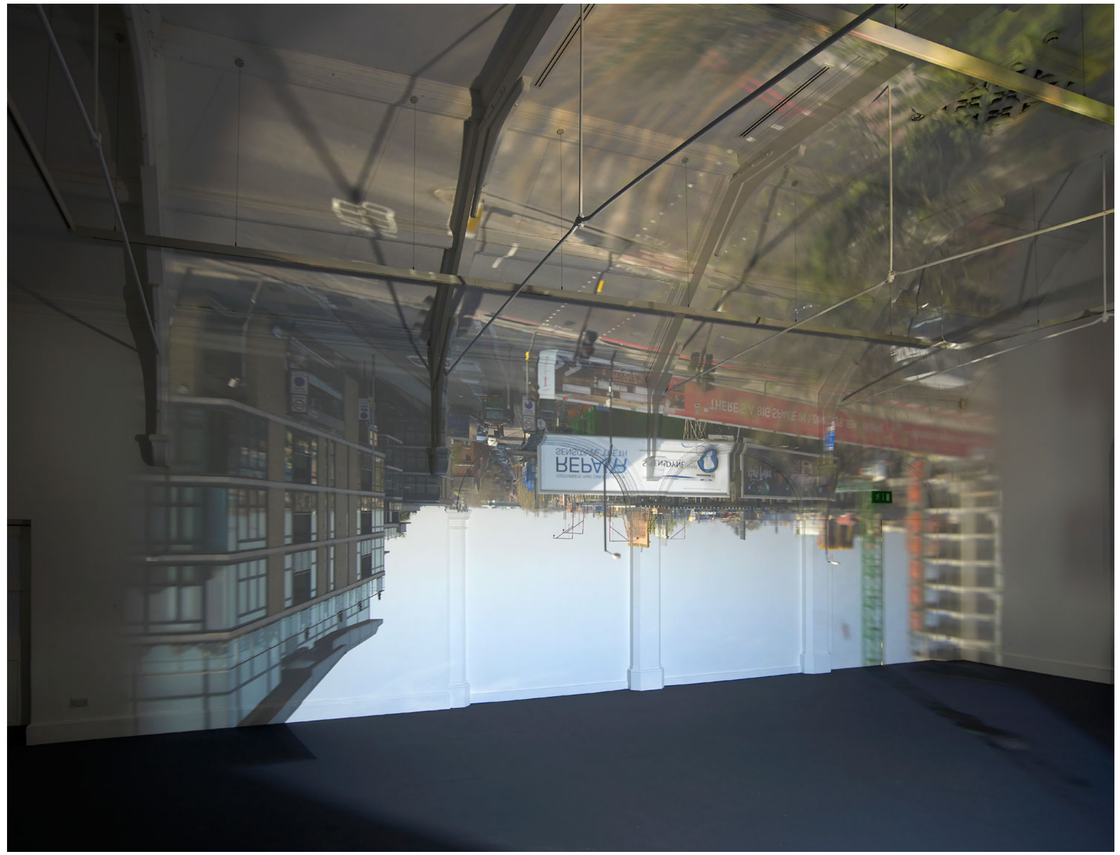




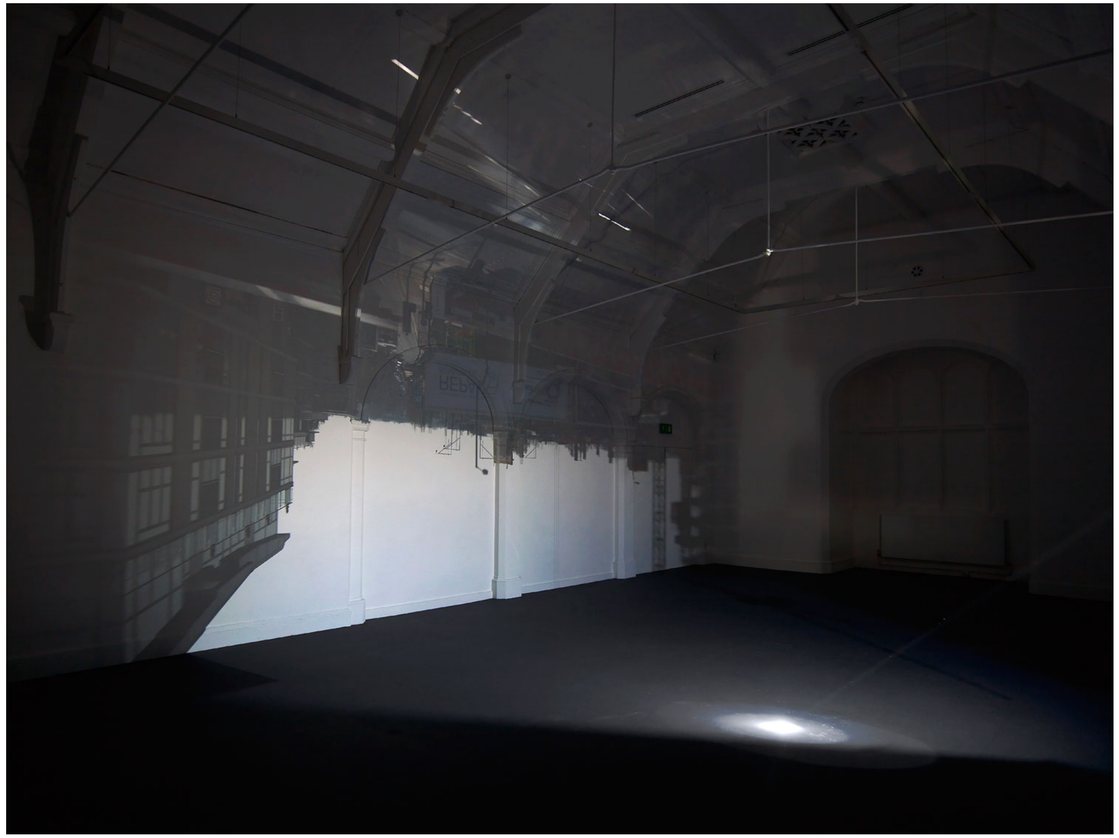
Peter Hujar, *Eyes Open in the Dark,* Exhibition views from Raven Row, 2025.

Zoe Leonard/ *Arkwright Road*/ Exhibition view at Camden Arts Center/ 2012

EXAMPLES



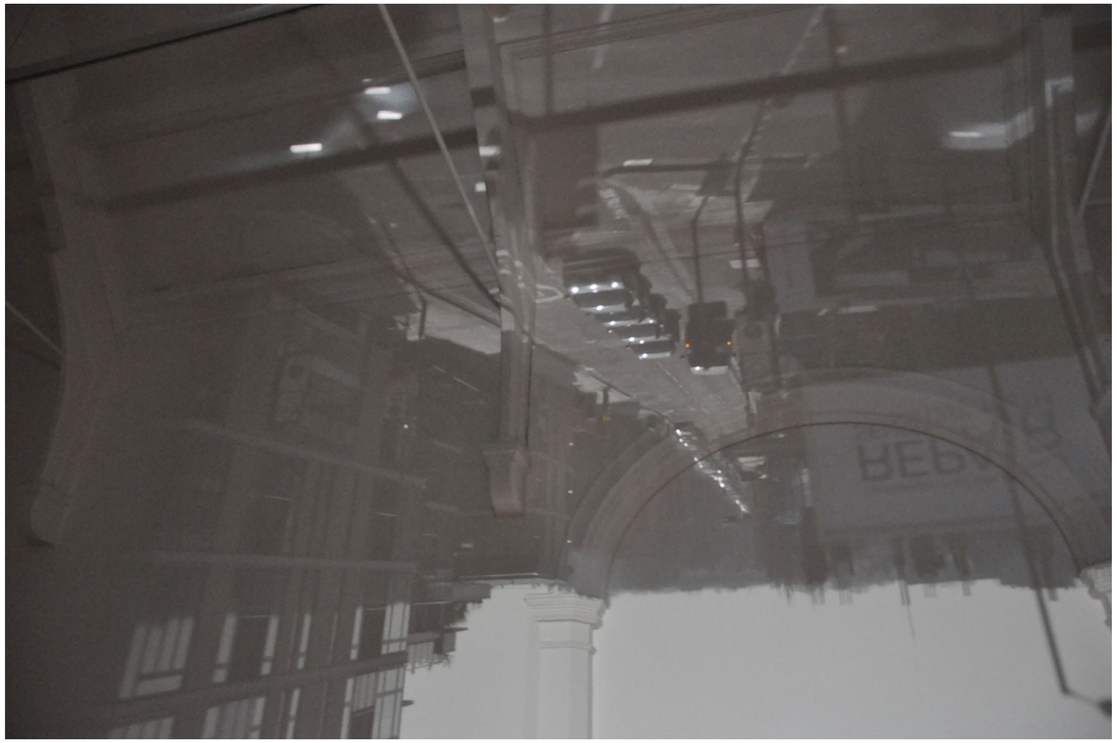
Zoe Leonard, *Arkwright Road,* exhibition view (2012).



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Zoe Leonard/ *Arkwright Road*/ Exhibition view at Camden Arts Center/ 2012

EXAMPLES



Zoe Leonard, *Arkwright Road,* exhibition view (2012).

Zoe Leonard, (Liberty, New York, US, 1961) transformed one of the gallery rooms at Camden Arts Centre into a camera obscura.

Daylight filters in through a lens, projecting an image of the world outside onto the floor, walls and ceiling.

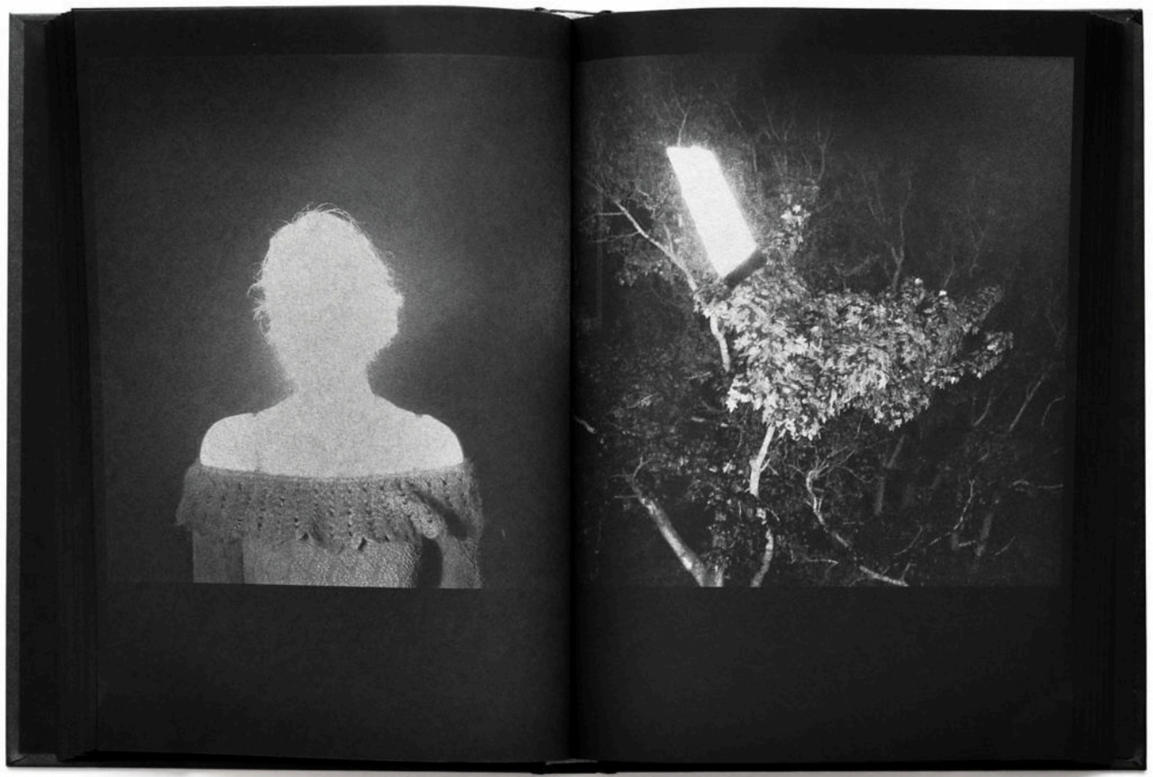
The camera obscura (dark chamber) is a naturally occurring phenomenon that has been used since antiquity as a tool to understand the behaviour of light.

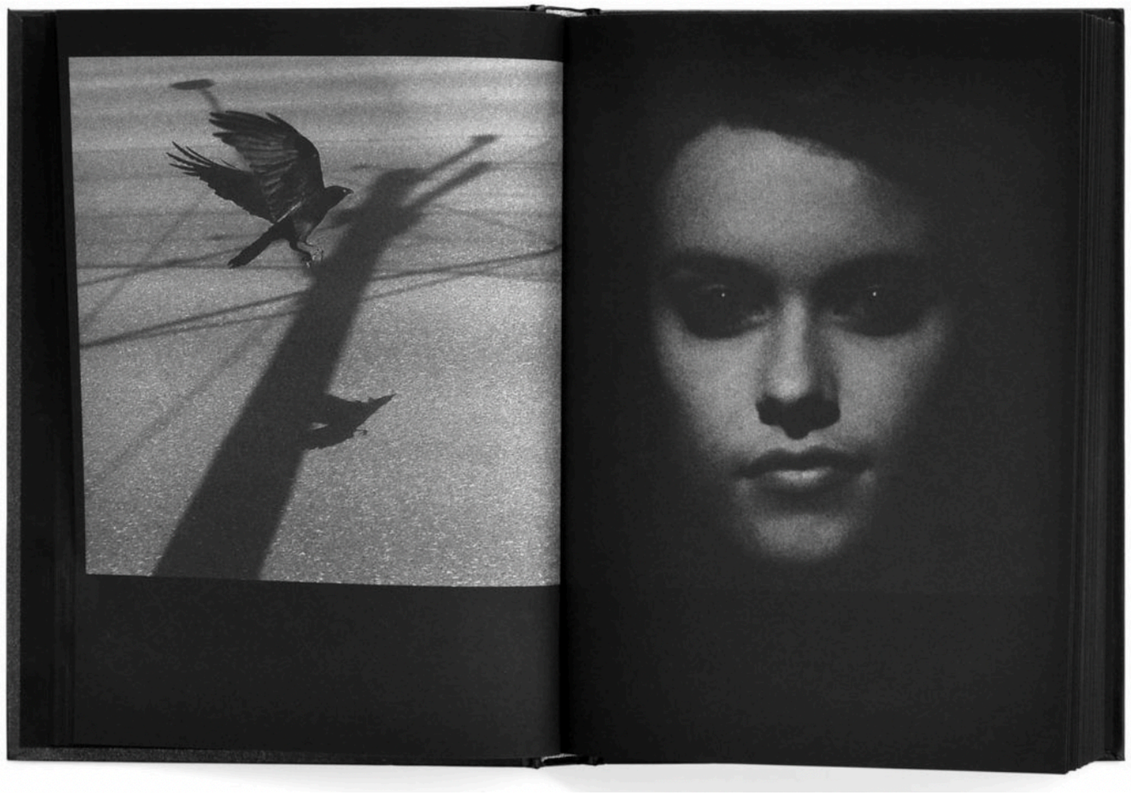
Depending on the time of the day that you visit, for example in the morning or afternoon, you would have a completely different experience of the work. You almost feel like you are in a movie theatre, but in this case the images projected are just an upside-version of what is going on at the outside of the building.

Since what you experience with this work is the changing light, the meteorological conditions and the ebb and flow of life, it seems to imply that it can be a metaphor for life with its shifting patterns and fragility.

Katrin Koenning and Protick Sarker/ *Astres Noirs*/ 2016

EXAMPLES



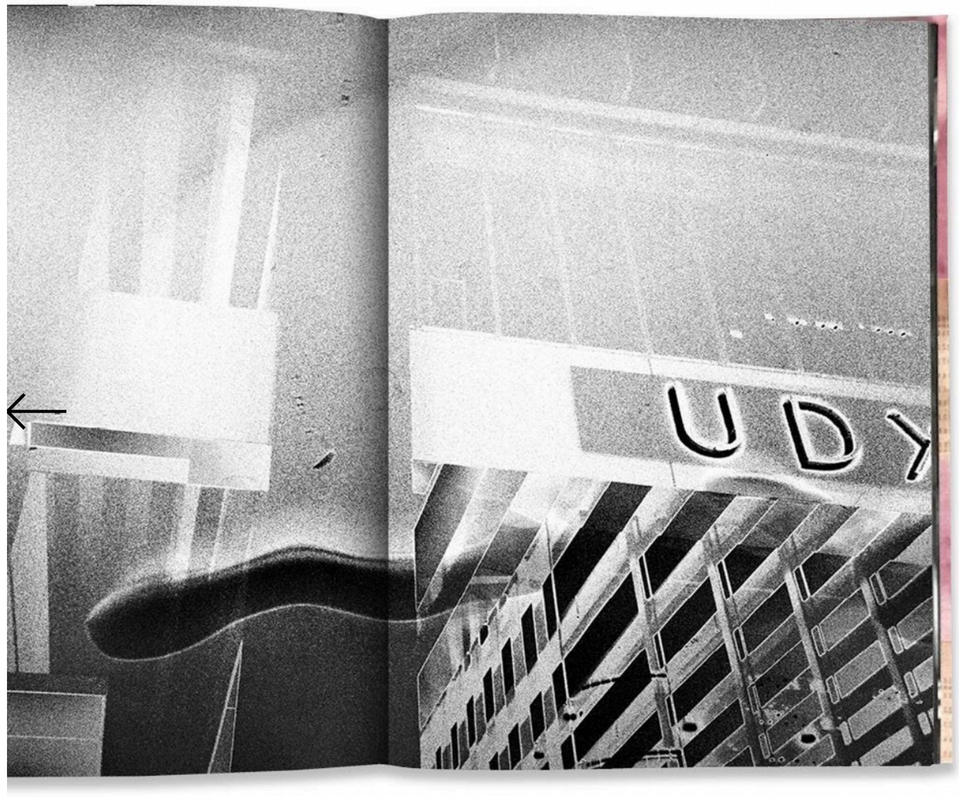


Katrin Koenning and Protick Sarker, *Astres Noirs,* Chose Commune (2016).

Antony Cairns/ *CTY*/ 2018

EXAMPLES

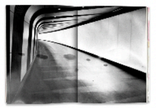
MÖREL












Antony Cairns

£59.00

Antony Cairns/ *CTY*/ 2018

EXAMPLES



Antony Cairns, (London, UK, 1981) is fascinated by the idea of the city at night and for his larger project entitled *CTY* he alludes to literary sources without making specific reference. For instance he draws on science-fiction and futuristic writing, like JG Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962). Not only he uses that science-fiction literature as a source but he also employs the visual codes of genre.

In this book he uses a metallic paper to reinforce the almost abstract quality of the images. What he is doing is taking a broad topic, a classic within photography, urban spaces at night and finding collective resonances in that particular environment. In that sense his images become almost an extension of how he navigates and feels about the city. An abstract, complex, metallic, palimpsest like surface, where he seems to be exploring without a clear direction. In that sense it becomes not a 'real' city but an imagined one like for instance the surrealist Paris in Louis Aragon's *Paris Peasant* (1926).

In his work the artist reflects on the urban landscape by using techniques and technologies usually consider obsolete. This recourse to processes and supports which date from many decades ago - which could be considered a long time given the relatively short history of the photographic medium - permit Cairns to rethink and rework individual images.

Antony Cairns/ *London by Night*/ 2018

EXAMPLES



Dorothea Lange and Sam Contis/ *Day Sleeper*/ 2020

EXAMPLES





Dorothea Lange and Sam Contis, *Day Sleeper,* Mack (2020).

Dorothea Lange and Sam Contis/ *Day Sleeper*/ 2020

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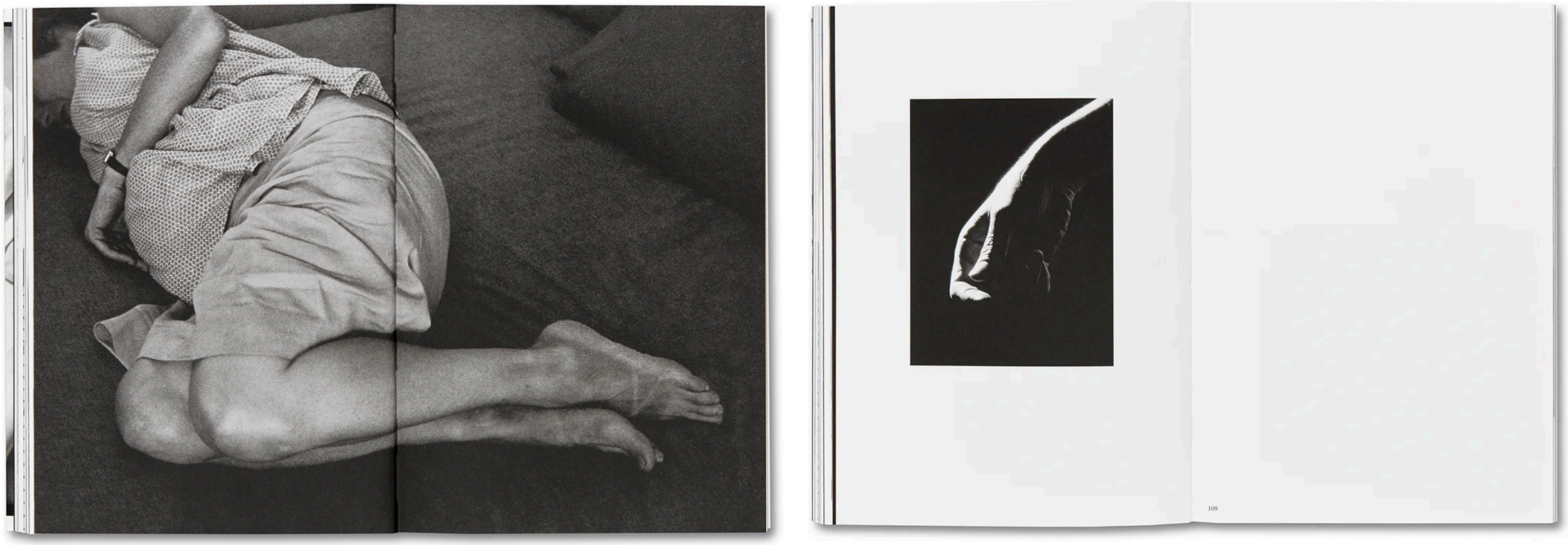




Dorothea Lange and Sam Contis, *Day Sleeper,* Mack (2020).

Dorothea Lange and Sam Contis/ *Day Sleeper*/ 2020

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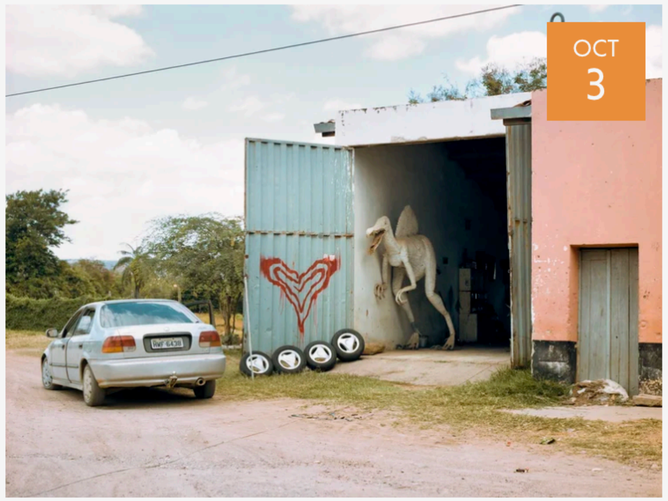


Dorothea Lange and Sam Contis, *Day Sleeper,* Mack (2020).

NEXT STEPS. ACTION POINTS:

-Bring your photographs from Rhossili. There will be discussion and feedback to assist you in the evaluation of your progress.
-Also you are all independent researchers/practitioners and as such it is your duty to do your own research into the artists/photographers discussed in the sessions.
-It is good practice to use a notebook and make annotations as the session progresses so after we finish here you can do your own investigations.

FFOTO CYMRU THIS FRIDAY



3 October 2026 – 31 October 2026 · Ffoto Cymru 2026, Exhibition

Paula Pedrosa: The Living Nature of the Stone-Dead

Elysium, Swansea



3 October 2026 – 31 October 2026 · Ffoto Cymru 2026, Exhibition

Richard Billingham: Public Spaces

GS Artists, Swansea



3 October 2026 – 13 December 2026 · Ffoto Cymru 2026, Exhibition

Foto Féminas Mobile Library

Elysium Gallery, Swansea

THANK YOU

Estéfani Bouza: e.bouza-arnoso@uwtsd.ac.uk/ September 2026