

What goes
where?

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**What goes
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ART PHOTOGRAPHY & THE ART MARKET
 AND THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S POSITION
 IN THE ART MARKET



Fred Hüning, pages from *einer* (2010)

The American artist Nan Goldin once said that everybody can be a photographer, as anyone who takes a hundred pictures will have made two good ones. Whether you agree with her or not, wandering about your local town or city taking pictures from the hip does not necessarily make you a street photographer – much as a three-year-old is not an Abstract Expressionist merely by virtue of the quality of her drawing. Incidentally, Robert Frank set the bar much higher than Goldin: he shot 27,000 photos (760 rolls of film) from which he chose the 83 pictures that make up his classic book *The Americans* (1958); only one in 325 was good enough in his eyes.

Photography is, of course, a trickier business than just pointing a camera and pressing a button. The selection of an image – editing – is at the very heart of photography. Think of how many pictures you take before you choose the one that you think is best. What are the criteria for choosing the 'right' one? What makes a good photograph? What makes a bad one? With the advent of digital photography, the editing process has become all the more important as we don't have to worry about wasting film to get a picture, which means we tend to end up with more than ever before to choose from.

There are many ways to edit. Much of it depends on context. A newspaper or magazine will be edited very differently from an art book, which in turn is very different to a wedding album. In each instance, a story has to be told. A single photograph can do this on the front page of a paper, but different instances need a different flow, logic and pace that suits the context. Think, for example, how a cookbook uses only a few pictures, but a food blog may have many more. Blogs are not restrained by the commercial limits of book making and can afford to show the process unfold in a way a book cannot.

Art photography often works as a sequence rather than as a one-off photograph. The best way to illustrate this is in a photobook. Photobooks are now becoming as collectable and as important as photographic prints, and their success or failure rests on the edit. A careful consideration of what goes where gives the book life and its identity and character.

An autobiographical work might take the form of a diary, mixing text and images. An example of this is the trilogy *einer* (2010), *zwei* (2011) and *drei* (2011) by the German artist Fred Hüning (born 1966; see left). These photobooks do not present a linear story, but instead weave photographs, poems and prose in a fluid, non-chronological form. The jump-cut style, the fragmentation and the entwining of past and present together create a work of great immediacy that is part memoir, part lyric and deeply self-conscious about the act of making and editing.

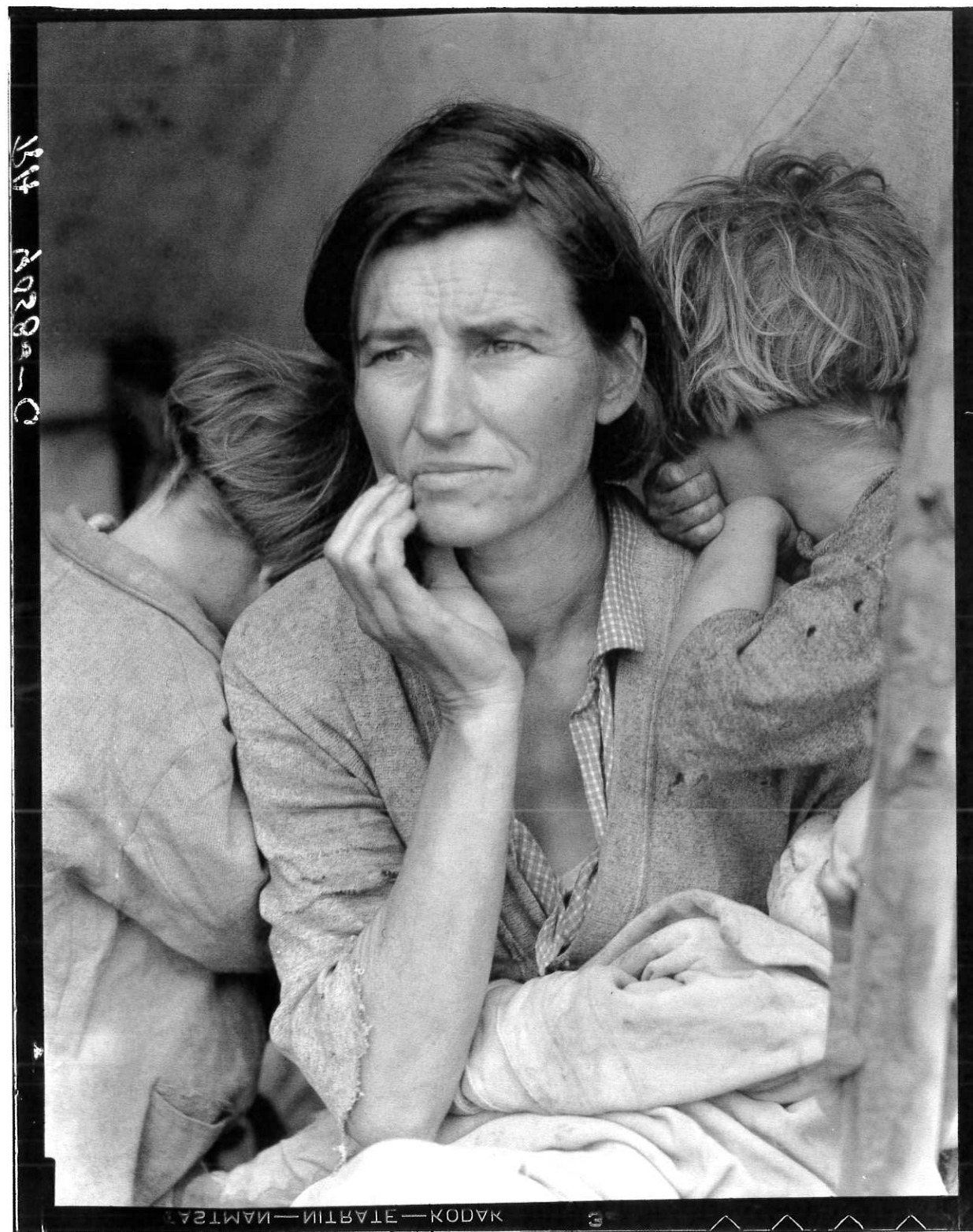
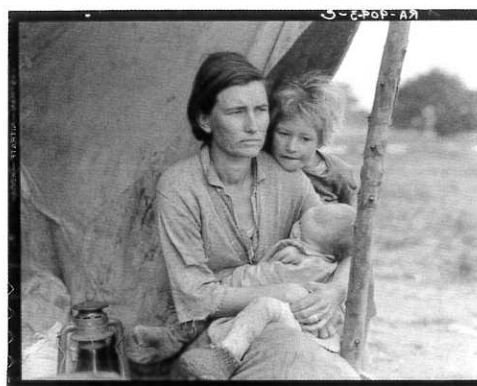
This form of editing is storytelling, and as such, it can be manipulative – the pictures and the sequence in which they are presented can work to pull the audience in a certain direction.

Migrant Mother by the American documentary photographer Dorothea Lange (1895–1965; see opposite) is a perfect example of a brilliant single image within the context of a wider story (the US Farm Security Administration employed several photographers including Lange to document the effects of the Great Depression). Lange's choice of image is the 'best' picture in that it responds to the conventional theme of the Madonna and Child in the way it is structured. The subject's face is worn out and worried and the turned-away heads of the children provoke an emotional response of sadness. The photograph operates on both an emotional and a universal level.

Because this one picture has been so frequently reproduced, it is only when we see other photographs from the contact sheet that we realise that Lange actually took five different exposures of the woman in the tent (three of which we see here). Seeing the pictures together allows the viewer to explore the way in which the photographer edited her pictures, and consider its iconic status in comparison to the others. This kind of storytelling is very different from a news story that needs an image that says everything with one very quick glance. There is no need for universal meanings to resonate. Graphic qualities and obviousness are key to how news pictures work.

Editing is the most difficult stage in photography, because it requires the photographer/editor to grasp the importance of narrative and understand how to convey it, sometimes using only a single image. Similarly, in a sequence of images, as Hüning shows, editing is about much more than simply selecting one extraordinary single image after another. There is a certain analogy with film to be made: Robert Frank's use of a contact sheet was as important to him in the editing process as a storyboard to a film director. This process ideally takes place over a longer period of time and a number of different phases, each phase being more and more meticulous in its attention to context and narrative progression.

If anything, the art of editing is even more important today, when our cameras have the capacity to store thousands of images, and the ability to choose and keep only the best images is increasingly crucial. This is as true of our personal photography as it is of commercial and journalistic photography, where whole departments are given over to picture editing, and where stories and aesthetics are very carefully mediated and controlled.



Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother* (1936)



Phil Collins (born 1970)
free fotolab (2009)

Philip-Lorca diCorcia (born 1951)
Heads (2004)

What the two images shown here, as well as the bodies of work to which they belong, have in common is an erasure of the artist by the use of found photos or an automated process. Nonetheless, the artist's hand can be seen in the editing process – controlling what is seen, and how this is displayed to the viewer.

The British artist Phil Collins's *free fotolab* (see above) is created from a series of 35mm slides – of a sufficient number to fill the carousel of an old-fashioned projector. The artist sourced the images by issuing a public call for undeveloped film, then edited what was submitted, choosing to leave many images out as he sought to evoke a particular mood of melancholy, surrealism and pathos. Displayed over a nine-minute period, they show a range of everyday activities and scenes – from holidays to quiet moments in the garden – and their power lies not only in the eerie familiarity of what they depict, but equally in the sequencing and the hypnotic sound of the slides dropping into the light for projection.

The American artist Philip-Lorca diCorcia created *Heads* by remotely triggering a long-lens camera and strobe, so that people walking through New York City's Times Square had their portraits taken while being completely unaware that the act was happening. The shots were taken in broad daylight, so the flash would be unnoticeable, but it isolates the subject from the crowd as though they are caught in a dramatic spotlight. Thousands of photographs were taken, so the skill of the artist really was in the editing and production of the series, for which only 17 shots were chosen – including *Head #13* (2001), shown here.

The production of both of these works relies on a mix of spontaneity and method. On one level, the formalism and simplicity of diCorcia's headshots seems far removed from the more haphazard snapshots presented by Collins, but both have a resonance with daily life and are at their most effective when viewed in sequence, as the artists intended.



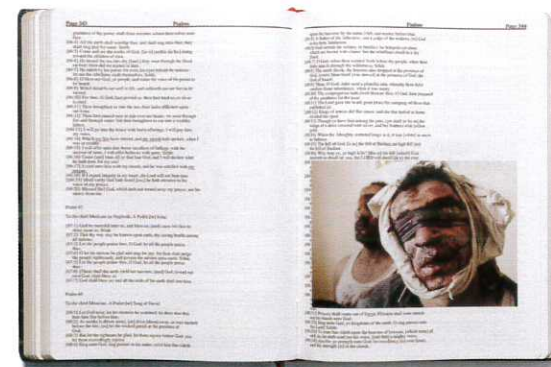
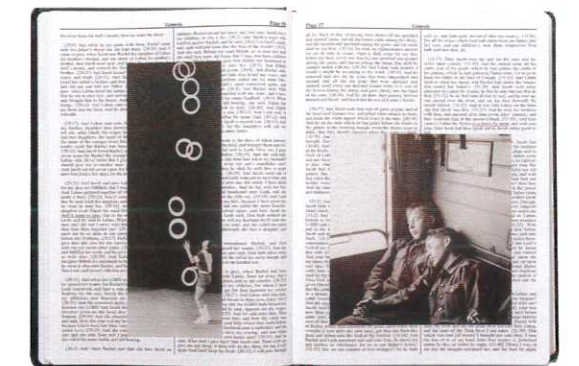
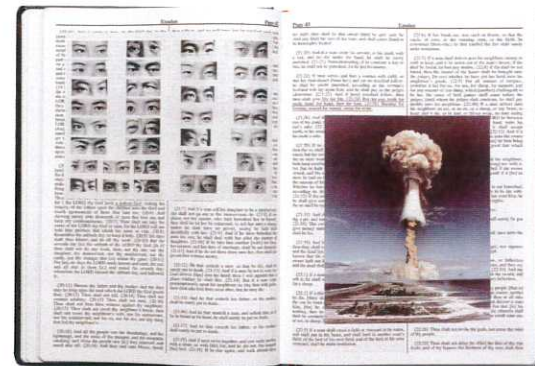
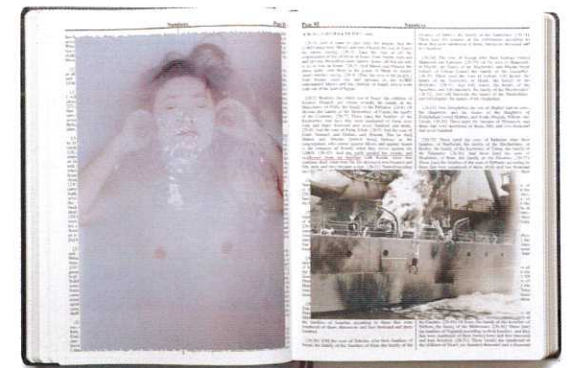
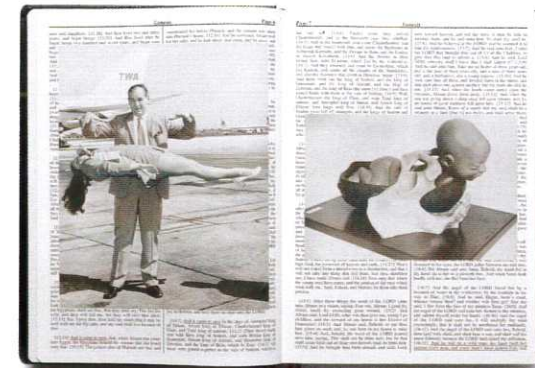
Oliver Chanarin (born 1971)
and Adam Broomberg (born 1970)
Holy Bible (2013)

'Right from the start, almost every appearance he made was catastrophic ... Catastrophe is his means of operation, and his central instrument of governance.' This quotation from the Israeli philosopher Adi Ophir was the starting point for the *Holy Bible* project by the South African artists Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin. The 'he' of the quotation is Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, and the quote refers to the idea that when God reveals himself, it is often to catastrophic effect for the world and humankind.

With Ophir's words in mind, the artists investigated the Archive of Modern Conflict in London to find images that would illustrate, contradict or subvert the text of the Bible, in the King James Version. For example, where the phrase 'And it shall come to pass' appears in the Bible (as it does 120 times) they show a photograph of a circus or a magician. The archive is an eclectic one, so while there are sometimes pictures of magicians, there are also photographs of atrocities. By placing photographs of the latter against text that refers to equally violent ideas, a correlation between ideologies is created.

Why might this be considered blasphemous? It is certainly provocative, because many of the images are distressing. Indeed, for the Bible to be tampered with at all might seem transgressive – even without the graphic photographs. Through their intervention, the artists comment on power, both on its abuse and those who abuse it.

The project amounts to an extraordinary feat of editing, with every included photograph considered in terms of how it works with or against the text and how it changes the overall meaning of the words. The disasters of the Old Testament are made to seem very real by their similarity to real-world disasters. The end product was a limited-edition photobook with tipped in reproductions of the photographs from the Archive, something that also comments on the desire of humans to photograph and look at images of crisis and human suffering.



Larry Sultan (1946–2009)
and Mike Mandel (born 1950)
Evidence (1977)

Another example of found photographs being used to strange and disconcerting effect is *Evidence*, a book of 59 photographs that the artists selected after poring through 2 million images housed in the archives of a variety of US federal agencies, corporations and industrial bodies over a two-year period. Removed from their original context, the images appear funny and absurd, devoid of any meaning beyond what they show. We can try to guess, but the images are often so specific to the situation they were originally tethered to that it is impossible to know what is going on. The selection of the images is vital to the book's success. The images play off one another and encourage the viewer to invest them with their own interpretations.

Now almost half a century old, *Evidence* continues to be highly influential, especially to a generation of artists working today who grapple with photographs that constantly appear out of context on the web. The book also highlights issues of authorship and ownership: should the photographers who took the images be credited? Ambiguity is often key to conceptual photographic practices. *Evidence* adroitly engages in this. Firstly, the title – evidence of what? Secondly, many of these photographs appear experimental, which seems antithetical to the fact and clarity the word 'evidence' implies. The structure of the book makes the United States of the 1970s look like a mysterious and strange place, and although the images were clearly taken with objectivity in mind, they seem imbued with a Cold War aesthetic.



Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904)
Animal Locomotion, Plate 535 (1887)

In 1879 the British photographer and inventor Eadweard Muybridge introduced to the world the zoopraxiscope, an early device for projecting moving images. Indeed, while he first won renown for his majestic images of the Yosemite Valley in 1868, his best-known images, from later on in his career, are reminiscent of frames from a film. It was motion, above all, that obsessed him.

This example here shows a partially hidden, masked man, sitting at a table against a dark backdrop, beating time with his hand. Muybridge made many similar studies with other human and animal movements, some of which reveal aspects of motion that are otherwise imperceptible to the human eye. Famously, he was the first to prove through photography that there is a moment in a horse's gallop when all four hooves leave the ground at the same time.

Muybridge produced many thousands of serial images analysing movement, often using several cameras simultaneously so as to capture the same action from different angles – as here. With his sequences, Muybridge made his contemporaries believe the illusion of movement even when there was none. His working proofs, however, reveal that he edited his images carefully and that he altered the order to get the result he desired. Although it makes his work less scientific, his manipulation does not diminish the value and artistic quality of his work, nor the lasting effect that his oeuvre has had on our lives.

Muybridge's ground-breaking technological achievements have been immensely influential: from Thomas Edison's motion picture camera to special effects in computer games and Hollywood films. One way to generate a frame sequence is to set up a series of still cameras and have them take a series of shots that can later be played back in sequence. The same principle that Muybridge invented has been exploited in films such as *The Matrix* (1999), where it was used to create the sequence with the bullet, the trajectory of which should not be visible to the human eye, yielding the eponymous name for the technique known as 'bullet time'.



ANIMAL LOCOMOTION. PLATE 535

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Jan Hoek (born 1984)
María (2014)

The Dutch artist Jan Hoek consciously works on the edge of controversy. He has photographed Ethiopian homeless people with mental health problems, addicts, a girl without limbs, and members of a Lonely People's Club that he himself founded. His portraits rarely meet the expectations of those portrayed, because, as a maker, he often looks for something very different from the way his subjects want to show themselves or expect to see themselves reflected in their photographs. In Hoek's portraits, he tests the boundaries of what is ethically sound, all the while wondering how far he can go. Hoek wants to explicitly show this in his work because he thinks that crossing the line in terms of the ethics of representation is something that is too often concealed by his fellow photographers.

When he shot the subjects of his book *New Ways of Photographing the New Masai* (2014), he asked them to decide how they wanted to be photographed, in an attempt to offer an alternative to the caricature of the Masai that we know from earlier photographers such as Leni Riefenstahl, who showed them as athletic men and women who stand close to nature, either naked or dressed in traditional garb. After taking the portraits, Hoek asked his subjects to indicate their preferences, which Hoek included as notes in the final piece, prominently showing the sitter's first choice. By incorporating the choice of the Masai in the final work – the person who is portrayed decides what goes where – the question of whether he has exploited people by photographing them seems to become less urgent. Still, Hoek challenges viewers and fellow photographers to take a position.

María (33 years) animal keeper

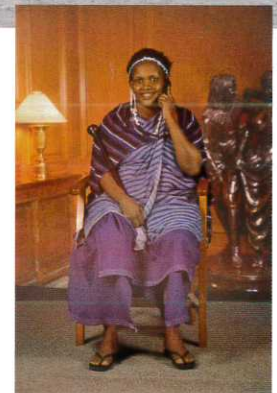


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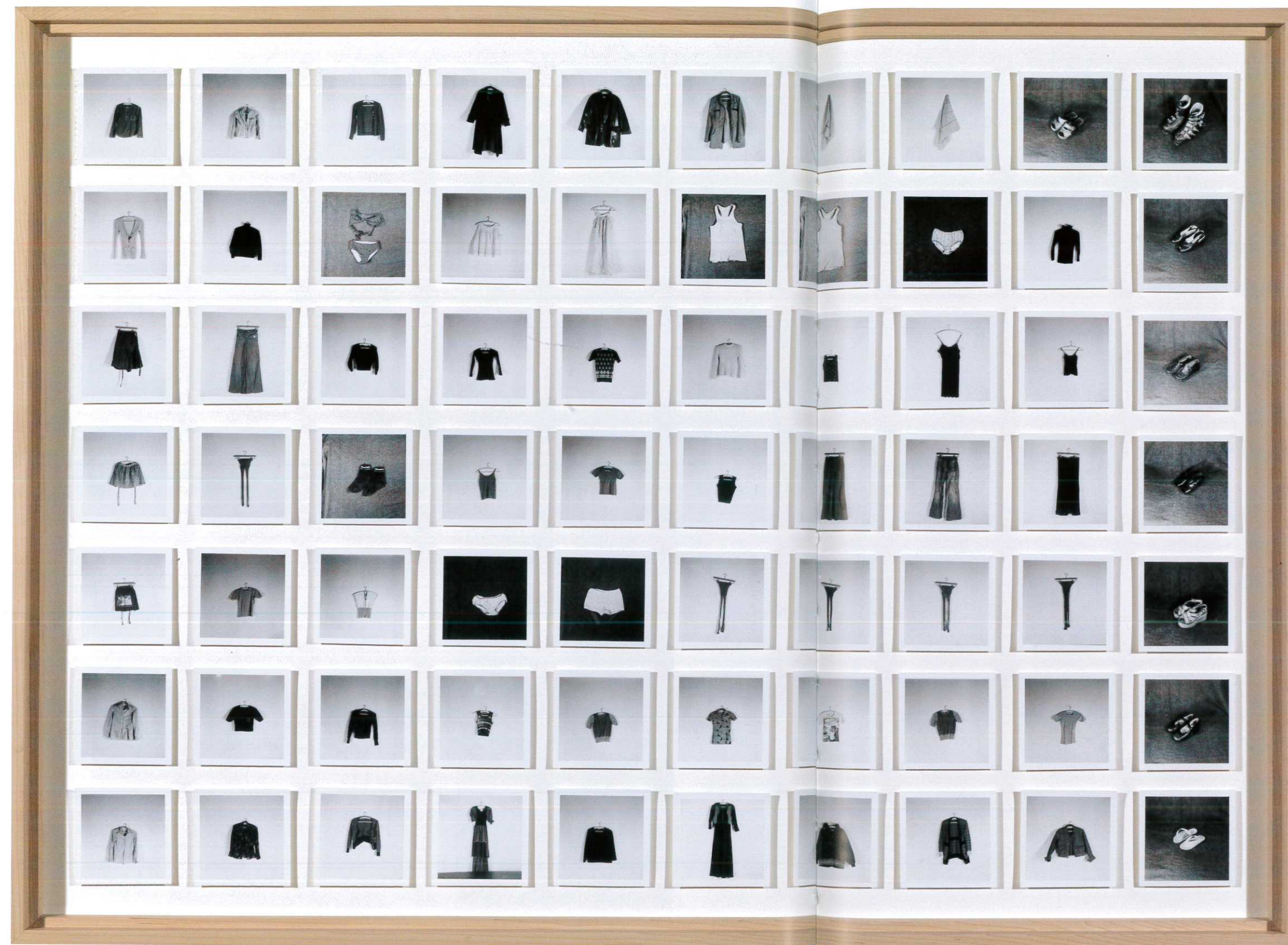
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Doesn't like:
sad photos

← 2nd choice



↑
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Hans-Peter Feldmann (born 1941)
All the Clothes of a Woman (undated)

The work of the German artist Hans-Peter Feldmann includes painting, collage, archives and collections of images. However, he is best known for his booklets of black-and-white photographs, each one dedicated to a banal subject such as unmade beds and women's knees. On the other side of the Atlantic, the American Ed Ruscha has worked on similar photographic catalogues. Intricate theories about both artists' work have been unleashed – Feldmann's work has been called conceptual, politically motivated and full of moral issues. He, however, has more than once rejected such theoretical interpretations.

The title of this work is indeed an indication that he is averse to such language. What you read is what you get. The collection of photographs shows one woman's entire wardrobe. It can be seen in terms of presence in absence, and associations have been made to piles of clothes in Auschwitz. A young viewer, however, might be just as easily reminded of online shopping options, or a common contemporary desire to catalogue objects. Asked by the Danish artist Mikkel Carl about the logic or selection of works in this piece, Feldmann replied: 'If I had come on to her [the woman] in the streets, or somewhere else, she would probably have slapped me in the face, whereas with this approach it was all a bit more sophisticated ... *All the Clothes of a Woman* was all about the woman, not the clothes. Anyway, I take things, I arrange them in a certain way, and that's it.' This seems like an elementary and wonderfully unpretentious view of the process of making art, to be topped only by the British conceptual artist and Turner Prize-winner Jeremy Deller. Asked in 2017 what, in his opinion, is the question facing artists today, he replied: "WTF?" That's the question facing artists today.'