

Intimacy and Resistance:

An intergenerational dialogue on photobooks from South Africa with additions from Sub-Saharan Africa

Curated by John Fleetwood

Photobooks, like photographs, are messages to the future. And to the past. Silently, and intimately, the photographers of each generation are in conversation with previous and future generations. South African photography is deeply marked by these intimate exchanges between the past and the future. The influence of David Goldblatt, Peter Magubane, Ernest Cole and Santu Mofokeng creates deep currents in the thinking of contemporary photographers.

The book, the photobook, allows us to share and imagine. Its scale prompts real intimacy; its tangibility amplifies our sense of a physical past, and its materiality permits us to hold (on to) it. Like the photo album, we look for ourselves in these stories.

The stories of the past, of resistance against the brutality of apartheid, of looking at the structures of the colonial, have now moved into our present. There is much intensity during these conversations. Representational modes and politics continuously shift, and younger generations have to rethink, resist and reject as a way to make meaning of the present.

Photographers like Muholi, Lebohang Kganye and Jansen van Staden deal with their personal histories, positioning their own intimate experiences as a way of understanding their worlds. Eric Gyamfi's *dummy* is the representation of a final photobook. The intimacy of oral histories told from one generation to another, as a way to tell history, allows for narration rather than fact, for tentative positions, a provisionality that allows for shifts and changes.

Can we rethink the notion of the photobook in South Africa, and in Africa, as an act of decoloniality? Does the idea of a photobook take on a different shape and purpose? Might it be better to look at extracts scattered in different places that come together in an imaginary book?

Conversations

These conversations are an attempt to engage in intergenerational dialogue between photographers and the photography community.

At a time where our ideas of intimacy are regulated and reformatted due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and where social conditions are emphasized due to the subsequent economic and social crisis, how can photobooks help us understand our world?

BOOKS ON DISPLAY

Ernest Cole, *House of Bondage*, 1968, Random House

Eli Weinberg, *Portrait of a people*, 1981,
International Defence & Aid Fund for Southern
Africa

David Goldblatt, *In Boksburg*, 1982, Gallery Press

Jodi Bieber, *Between Dogs and Wolves*, 2006,
Double Storey Books

Jo Ractliffe, *A Terras do Fim do Mundo*, 2010, Mi-
chael Stevenson

David Goldblatt, *In Boksburg*, 2010,
Errata Publishing; Books on Books

Zanele Muholi, *Faces and Phases*, 2010, Prestel

Various, *Bily Monk*, 2011, David Lewis Publishing

Mikhael Subotzky, *Retinal Shift*, 2012, Sherman
Contemporary Art Foundation

David Goldblatt & Nadine Gordimer,
On the Mines, 2012, Steidl

John Fleetwood & François Hébel, *Transition*,
2013, Editions Xavier Barral

Santu Mofokeng, *The Black Photo Album*, 2013,
Steidl

Lebogang Kganye, *Ke lefa laka*, 2013,
Market Photo Workshop and Tierney Foundation

Simon Gush, *Work*, 2014, Goethe Institut,
Johannesburg

David Goldblatt, *In Boksburg*, 2015, Steidl

Peter Magubane, *June 16 40th Anniversary
edition*, 2016, Seriti sa Sechaba Publishers

Jo Ractliffe, *Everything is Everything*, 2017,
Stevenson Gallery

Delio Jassé, *Cidade em Movimento*, 2017,
Artiphilein Publishing

Sabelo Mlangeni, *Umlindelo wamaKholwa*, 2018,
Wits Art Museum

Eric Gyamfi, *A Certain Bed*, 2020, Self-published

Jansen Van Staden, *Microlight*, 2020,
Self-published