

[Our Selves: Photograph by Women Artists from Helen Kornblum]

How have women artists used photography as a tool of resistance? As a way of unsettling established narratives? As a means of unfixing the canon?

Our Selves brings images that span more than one hundred years of photography into dialogue with each other. All of them were made by women artists who have responded to asymmetrical systems of power and have reframed gender and subjectivity in the process. Modernist artists in the first half of the twentieth century interrogated the politics of gaze and explored new forms of address in portraiture, documentary images, and advertising; contemporary artists have highlighted the intersection of women's rights, diasporic histories, and indigenous sovereignty through oblique fabulation, queer language, and performative actions.

This exhibition, which reflects the generosity of the collector Helen Kornblum, is not a chronological history of women photographers, nor is it a historical account of feminist photography. Rather, *Our Selves* presents specific constellations of works and ideas that are guided by obscured and omitted legacies. It is an invitation to look at pictures through a contemporary feminist lens; it declares the capacity of women to assert their political motivations, it proposes unexpected connections that mount a challenge to convention. By showing these works together, *Our Selves* affirms the powerful words of artist Carrie Mae Weems: "In one way or another, my work endlessly explodes the limits of tradition. I'm determined to find new models to live by. Aren't you?"

+) <https://flashbak.com/a-hundred-years-of-art-by-women-the-helen-kornblum-collection-455049/>

Helen Kornblum was a psychotherapist in St. Louis for forty years. She began collecting art and realised "I was thinking about who is writing the art history books, who are the directors of the museums — they were all men! I turned my focus on collecting just women artists, from the early 20th century into the present. It changed my life in many ways." The Kornblum Collection consists of 100 works of art by 76 women and was donated by Kornblum to the Museum of Modern Art – where the new additions "add significant examples of women artists' pioneering achievements across the field," according to a press release from MoMA.

Incidentally the MOMA has had only six directors since 1929 and it isn't a great surprise to learn they have all been men. While its collection is mostly the work of men. Roxana Marcoci, the senior curator of photography at MOMA, was quoted in Buzzfeed "this is because most women artist have not necessarily been affiliated with an 'ism' and have often worked as independent agents unjustifiably left out of art historical discourses."

Marcoci again, this time writing about women artists featured in the exhibition at MOMA: The discourse was forever changed by Linda Nochlin's 1971 essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," which was published in ARTnews as part of the special issue "Women's Liberation, Woman Artists, and Art History." Nochlin questioned the validity of the very idea of greatness—of the stand-alone genius associated with male artists and masterpieces.

Charlotte Rudolph – *Margarete Wallman* (1920s)



Nelly – *Elizaveta "Lila" Nikolska in the Parthenon, Athens, Greece* (1930)



Ursula Johanna Richter – *Totentanz (Dance of Death)* (1926)



Jane Reece – *Triangle Composition* (Harry Losee) 1922



“Dance photography,” German photographer Rudolph wrote in 1929, is “the representation of the movement of the dancer in picture form, that means the dancer dances during the shooting.” To capture the spirit of dance in a still frame, she contended, the photographer must imagine herself as the performer, anticipating the flow of motion. Rudolph and other interwar photographers sought inventive ways to picture the freedom of moving bodies and affirm the expressive agency of women. Through engaging with dance as a reflection of society and culture, these photographers advance different utopian and progressive models of community.

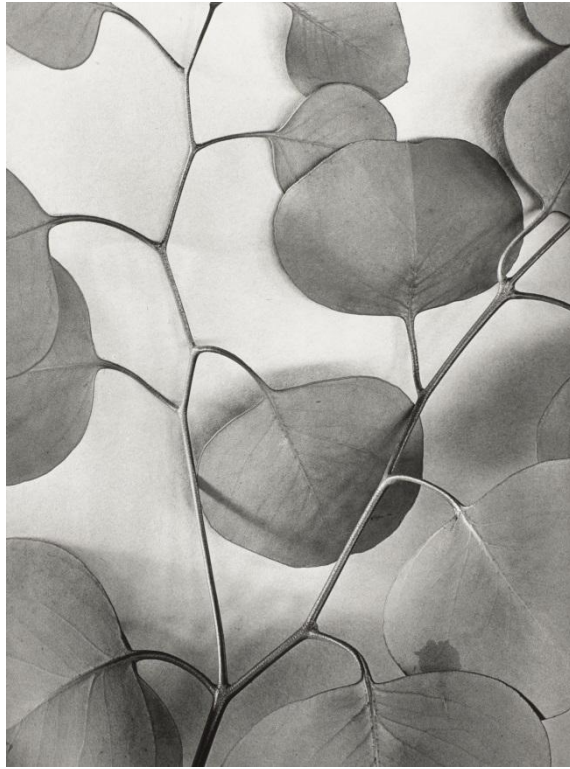
Barbara Morgan – *Corn Stalks Growing* (1945)



Imogen Cunningham – *Agave Design I* (1920)



Alma Lavenson – *Eucalyptus Leaves* (1933)



Sonya Noskowiak – *Plant Detail* (1931)



Florence Henri – *Composition Nature Morte (Still Life Composition)* (1931)



Ruth Bernhard – *Angel Wings* (1943)



Throughout the twentieth century, photographers transformed perceptions of the natural world through different kinds of photographic technology and techniques. Cunningham, Noskowiak, and Lavenson, all members of the California-based Group f/64, used stark lighting and close-up framing to render the patterns and textures of botanical forms. Bernhard photographed seashells, discovering, as she put it, “forms so complex and weird as to exceed human imagination,” while Morgan superimposed images to suggest what she called the “invisible urges” underlying the life cycles of plants.

Marta Maria Perez Bravo – *No vi con mis propios ojos (I didn't see with my own eyes)* (1991)



Mariana Yampolsky – *Mujeres Mazahua (Mazahua Woman)* (1989)



Graciela Iturbide – *Mujercita (Little Woman)* (1981)



Flor Garduno – *Reina (Queen)* from the series *Testigos del tiempo (Witnesses of Time)* (1989)



Ana Mendieta – *Nacimiento (Birth)* from the *Gunpowder Silueta Series* (1981)

In the 1980s and early 1990s, many artists explored the interrelated histories of colonialism and patriarchy in Latin America. Through what she called “**emotive anthropology**,” Yampolsky engaged directly with the lives of Indigenous Mazahua women in the State of Mexico rather than simply snapping photographs; similarly, Garduno’s intimate portraiture meditates on the adaptations of ancient cultural rituals in contemporary life, with the figures of women of Indigenous heritage at the center. Ritual was central to Mendieta’s practice, too: she incorporated Mesoamerican goddess archetypes into photographically documented performances that she described as “**a dialogue between the landscape and the female body**.”

Barbara Probst – Exposure #78. NYC, Collister and Hubert St., 06.22.10, 7:56p.m. (2010)



To create the works in her Exposures series, Probst used radio-wave transmission to simultaneously release the shutters of multiple cameras and thus capture a single scene from different distances and perspectives. The resulting images challenge the idea that a photograph presents an objective view of reality. "The substance of the series," Probst has said, "exists not in the individual image, but rather in the interrelations between the images..." The viewer is invited to travel through the space they mark out, to take on different points of view and to see [themselves] looking."

Dora Maar – *Mannequin en vitrine (Mannequin in Window)* (1935)

Ellen Auerbach – *Das Ei des Columbus (Columbus's Egg)* (1930)

Kati Horna – *Man and Candlesticks* (1933)

Igne Morath – *Siesta of a Lottery Ticket Vendor, Plaza Mayor, Madrid* (1955)

Ilse Bing – *Christa on Edge of Bathtub* (1934)

Yva – *Untitled* (1935)

Kati Horna – *Untitled*, from the series *Flea Market* (1933)

Doll Parts (1938)

Doll in Doorway (1938)

Marie Cosindas – *Masks, Boston* (1966)

Tina Modotti – *Yank and Police Marionette* (1929)

Laurie Simmons – *Three Red Petit-Fours* (1990)



Silvia Kolbowski – *Model Pleasure III* (1983)



Josephine Pryde – *Far Horizons Draw No Nearer IV* (2002)



Louise Lawler – *Sappho and Patriarch* (1984)



In this work Lawler set her viewfinder on two sculptures in a darkened gallery at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut. In the resulting image a towering Sappho is overshadowed both literally and figuratively by the stern and spotlighted bust of a male elder in the background. Through her careful framing, Lawler reveals how museum display can reinforce inequalities, even inadvertently, and invites us to reevaluate the art institution as a space in which identities and gender roles are in play – a space of ongoing ideological construction.

Amanda Ross-Ho – *Invisible Ink* (2010)



Jeanne Dunning – *Leaking* (1994)



Catherine Opie – Angela Scheirl (1993)



Opie has noted of her intimate portraits that “even though I don’t believe that there is a true essence of a person, I do believe there is something that they see within themselves that I end up capturing.” Here, Angela Scheirl, a filmmaker and part of Opie’s LGBTQ community, sports a navy blue suit and short hair and has a commanding gaze. Scheirl eventually took the first name Hans, leaving the work’s title outdated but also emphasizing the flexibility of gender expression and its mutability over time. Unlike a traditional portrait, which fixes or freezes identity, this is a portrait of becoming.

Cara Romero – *Wakeah* from the series *First American Girl* (2018)



Romero's *First American Girl* series – whose title nods to the popular doll brand – counters overgeneralized pop-culture representations of Native Americans with authentic detail. Wakeah shows Wakeah Jhane, a Comanche-Blackfoot-Kiowa ledger artist and dancer, wearing buckskin dance regalia that assert the specificity of her Native culture, the artistry of regional handicraft traditions, and the creative power of Native women. The image's diorama-style arrangement evokes the ways in which photography has presented Indigenous people as anthropological specimens. Romero, a citizen of the Chemehuevi Indian Tribe, shows the vibrancy of contemporary Indigenous lives, in contrast to the colonial narratives that have become all too familiar.

Carrie Mae Weems – *Untitled (Woman and daughter with makeup)* from *The Kitchen Table Series* (1990)



In this image, one of twenty in Weems's Kitchen Table Series, the artist sits at the head of table, applying makeup with the help of a small vanity mirror. Next to her, a young girl looking at her own reflection puts on lipstick in a parallel gesture. The tender scene illustrates one of the ways in which gender is learned and performed, while also celebrating the private subjectivity, beauty, and inner lives of Black women. Asked why she appears as a protagonist in her work, Weems responded, "I use myself simply as a vehicle for approaching the question of power."

Meridel Rubenstein – *Fatman with Edith* (1993)



Tracey Moffatt – *Up in the Sky* (1997)



Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie – *Vanna Brown, Azteca Style* (1990)



“It was a beautiful day when I decided that I would take responsibility to reinterpret images of Native peoples,” Tsinhnahjinnie, a Seminole-Muscogee-Dine (Navajo) artist, has said. In *Vanna Brown, Azteca Style*, she has wittily recast *Wheel of Fortune* game-show star Vanna White as an Indigenous woman, a satirical choice that highlights the invisibility of Native Americans in the mass media and the stereotypes that are routinely employed when they do appear. In contradicting these fictions, which are rooted in America’s colonial history, her work claims visual sovereignty and self-determination for Indigenous people – the right to decide how they are represented.

Sharon Lockhart – *Untitled* (2010)

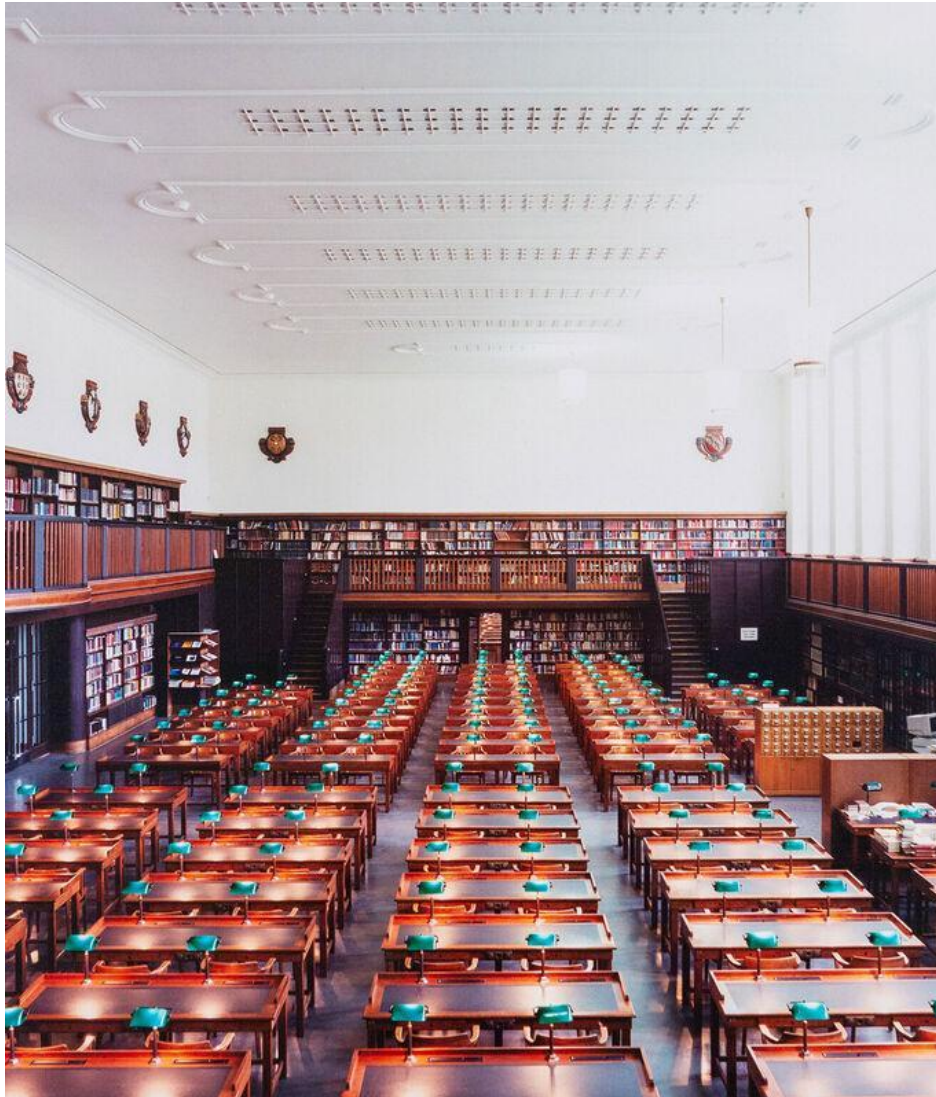


What appears to be a serene domestic interior – the artist’s niece working on a jigsaw puzzle – contains allusions to darker histories. Hanging on the wall is a colonial-era map of the Maine coastline, and the puzzle reproduces a painting by Winslow Homer, whose iconic seascapes portrayed New England as an idyllic land “discovered” by hardy explorers. Homer’s work did not acknowledge the deadly wars fought over the territory, nor the near annihilation of the Wabanaki people, the region’s Indigenous inhabitants. With these subtle and uneasy cues, Lockhart demonstrates the ways in which the comforts of home can be built on unseen histories of territorial expansion and forced relocation.

Lorna Simpson – *Details* (1996)



Candida Hofer – *Deutsche Bucherei Leipzig IX (German National Library in Leipzig IX) (1997)*



Jessie Tarbox Beals – *Untitled* (1908)

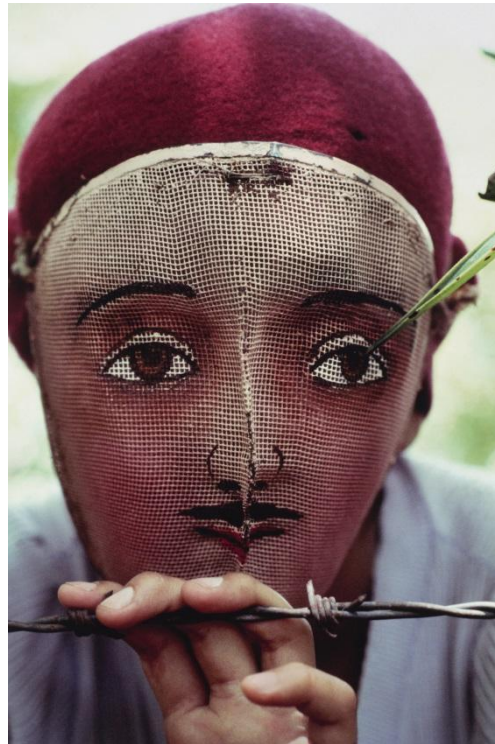


Copyright 1908
JESSIE TARBOX BEALS, N.Y.

Frances Benjamin Johnston – *Penmanship Class* (1899)



Susan Meiselas – Traditional Mask Used in the Popular Insurrection, Monimbo, Nicaragua (1978)

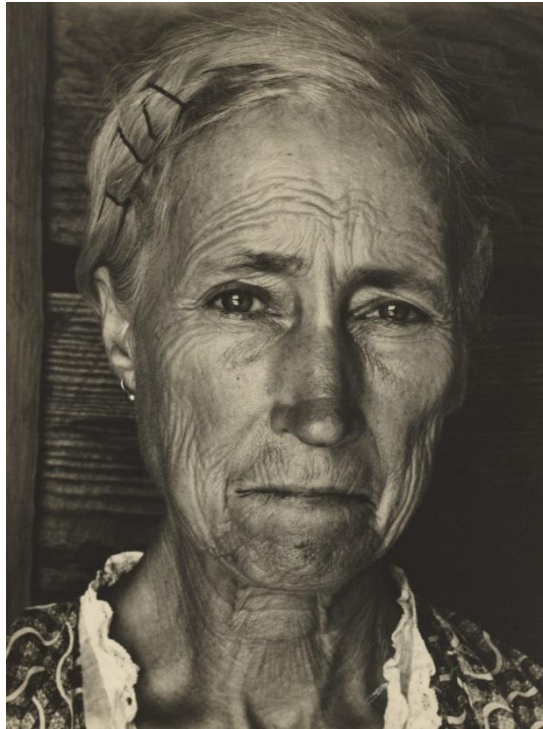


Susan Meiselas – A Funeral Procession in Jinotepe for Assassinated Student Leaders. Demonstrators Carry a Photograph of Arlen Siu, an FSLN Guerrilla Fighter Killed in the Mountains Three Years Earlier (1978)



Meisela's photographs reveal a nation in turmoil. Taken in Nicaragua in 1978, shortly before the revolt of the socialist Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) ended the brutal forty-year authoritarian rule of the Somoza family, they trace the evolution of a popular resistance among student groups and indigenous communities. Meiselas, one of the few photojournalists documenting the conflict, mostly used color film for these images. She later reflected that "the vibrancy and optimism of the resistance, as well as the physical feel of the place, came through better in color."

Margaret Bourke-White – *Locket, Georgia* (1936)



Mary Ellen Mark – *Tiny, Halloween, Seattle* (1983)



Anne Noggle – *Shirley Condit de Gonzalez* (1986)



Consuelo Kanaga – *School Girl, St. Croix* (1963)



Dorothea Lange – *Mother and Child, San Joaquin Valley* (1938)



Nell Dorr – *Mother and Child* (1940)



Contemporary photographers seeking to record political and economic hardships often found a model in documentary photographs from the 1930s and '40s. When Noggle organized her groundbreaking exhibition *Women of Photography* in 1975, she selected Dorr's Depression-era photographs for inclusion. Noggle's staged portraits of retired women Air Force pilots, made during the 1980s, were likely inspired by Dorr's intimate, carefully composed portraits of friends (on view in the vitrine). Similarly, Mark's images of impoverished youth, such as Tiny, a homeless sex worker in Seattle, are patterned on Bourke-White's powerful yet sensitive images of disenfranchised workers.

Ruth Orkin – *American Girl in Italy* (1951)



Ruth Orkin - *Jimmy the Storyteller* (1947)

