
This volume is based on a 2010 exhibition of the same name at the J. Paul Getty Museum and showcases the work of 10 documentary photographers: Leonard Freed, Philip Jones Griffiths, W. Eugene and Aileen M. Smith, Susan Meiselas, Mary Ellen Mark, Lauren Greenfield, Larry Towell, Sebastião Salgado, and James Nachtwey. The exhibition was structured around the acquisition of key bodies of work by the photographers under consideration and existing Getty collections. A chapter is dedicated to each photographer, which focuses on a book-length photographic project. Each chapter includes a biographical essay as well as reproductions of pictures and texts. The varied bodies of work display an engagement with major, often devastating, events or themes: the Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam, global migration, drug abuse, and the Iraq War, to name a few.

Brett Abbott's scholarly introductory essay offers a detailed history of documentary photography, from technological and ideological perspectives. Beginning with Life magazine and its famed editor Henry Luce's pivotal role in the development of the sustained photo-essay, Abbott traces photography's enduring, sometimes fraught, history as a documentary medium. For example, Abbott discusses the varied practices of Depression-era American photographers Margaret Bourke-White, Dorothea Lange, and Walker Evans as representing a spectrum of working methods, from the heroic to the detached. Later, photographers wanted greater editorial control over their work, which precipitated a rebellion against Henry Luce and led to the formation of the legendary photo group Magnum. Abbott balances these ideological considerations with the profound effects of technological innovations including faster emulsions and roll film, which enabled photographers to better capture movement. At every step of documentary photography's evolution, Abbott deals with the medium's complexities instead of glossing them over.

The essays in the book are scholarly yet appropriate for a general audience. The copious black and white and color reproductions, almost entirely from the Getty's collections, are of the highest quality. The index, list of plates, illustration credits, and end notes all complement this well-crafted catalog. This title is highly recommended for any general art library and especially for those libraries in museum with significant photography collections or academic libraries supporting history of art and school of art programs.

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