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edited by Tom Griggs

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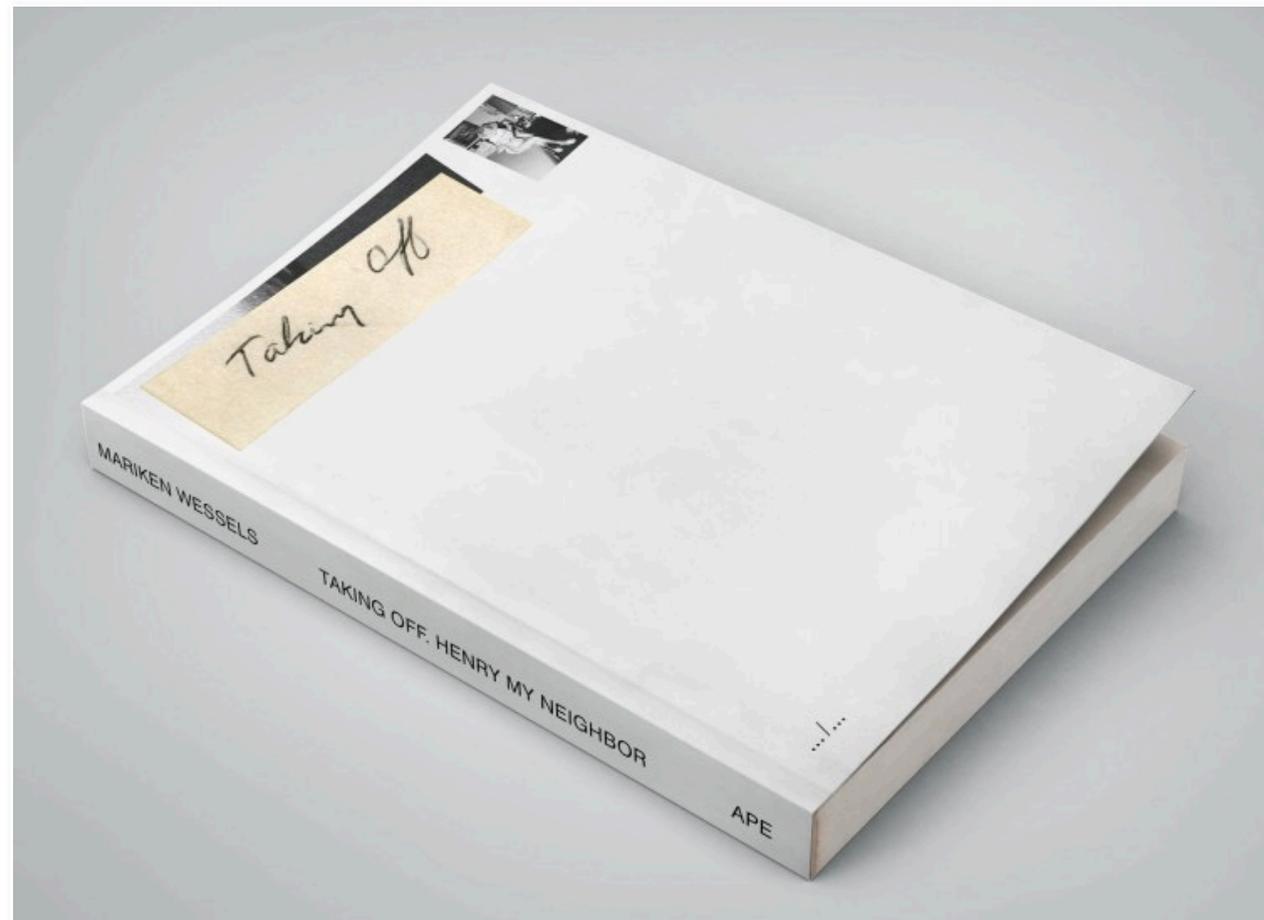
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Latin American Photography
Project Map

CURRENT MICROGRANT

10.13.2016

Editing with Mariken Wessels



© Mariken Wessels, *Taking Off. Henry my Neighbor*



\$4366.56 :: funds will be raised until 11.20.17

SEARCH BLOG

We are talking to a range of photographers, photo editors, professors of photography, book designers and others about the physical process of editing images. Selecting, sequencing and laying out photographs - be it for a magazine, book, online site or gallery presentation - seems something of a mysterious process for many photographers and a process that seems perhaps hard to give words to. I haven't found much written about the process and that's exactly why I'm excited to see what comes up in this series.

We started the conversation with Rob Haggart, Ashley Kauschinger, Jeff Rich, Miska Draskoczy, Kevin WY Lee, Aya Takada, the pairing of Jessica Dean Camp and Cole Don Kelley, Amy Wolff, Daniel Coburn and Zora Murff. Today we continue the series with Mariken Wessels.

Mariken Wessels (The Netherlands, 1963) makes artist's books, installations, sculptures and photo and video works. She published *Taking Off. Henry my Neighbor* with Art Paper Editions (Belgium) in 2015 to international acclaim. The book was honored at The Best Dutch and Flemish Book Designs 2015, won the Author Book Award at the Recontres d'Arles photo festival 2016 (France), and was awarded an honorary appreciation by the international panel of Best Book Design from all over the World (Leipzig Book Fair, Germany).

In exhibition format *Taking Off* was on show at the Fotomuseum Antwerp (Belgium) during the spring of 2016.

Among Wessels' earlier books are *Elisabeth -I want to eat* (2008) and *Queen Ann. P.S. Belly cut off* (2010), which together with *Taking Off* form an open trilogy exploring the self-image in amateur photography and the limits of the public and the private.

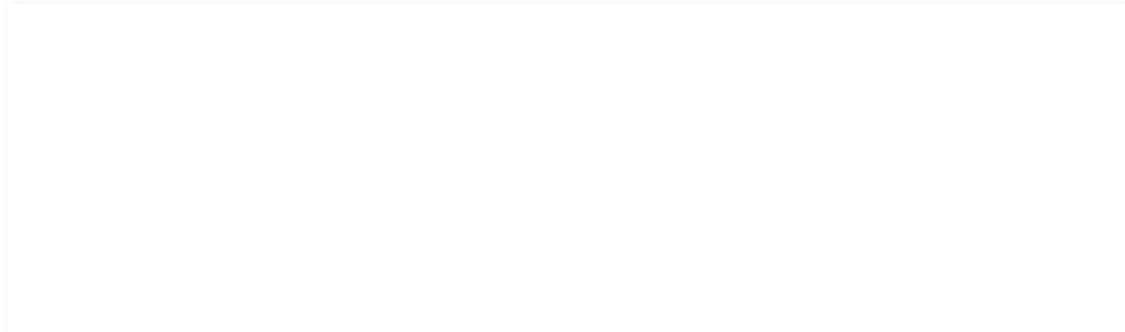




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fototazo: Tell us a little about yourself and what area of photography you work in.

Mariken Wessels: I studied drama at the theater school in Amsterdam, where I graduated at age 26. I have worked as an actress for theater and television for a good decade, before I decided my future should be in visual arts. I then started my studies at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie (also located in Amsterdam), where my focus shifted towards working with photography, books, and to a lesser extent installation and sculpture. I believe that my background and experience in drama still influences my attitude in photography today, in the sense that I often work with characters and story lines.

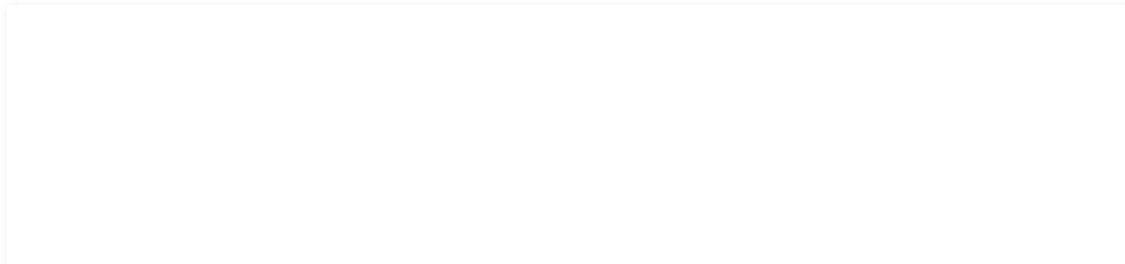


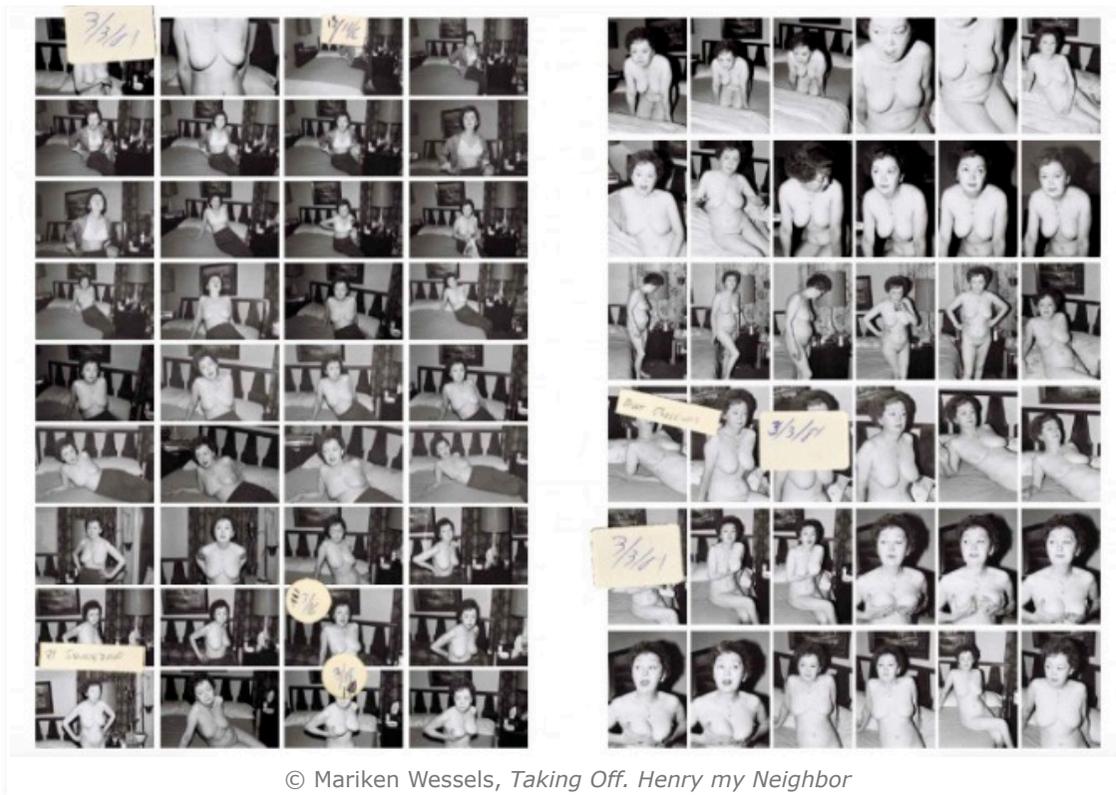


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f: How do you select images to work with from a larger group? What criteria do you use?

MW: It depends on the project I'm working on. For example, for my latest book *Taking Off. Henry My Neighbor* I puzzled with several narrative layers. First I conduct research into the characters I present and represent, then I try to shape a story line, which determines the editing proces and how I need to combine photographs with other documents. I keep track of my research results in a notebook, but most of all I past notes and images to the wall of my studio. Thus I can see clearly where a project is heading to. Afterwards is mostly editing and working on images. Basically the research and the narrative structure guide my choices in how a project is given shape and what selections I make. This effects a book's graphic design and layout as well.

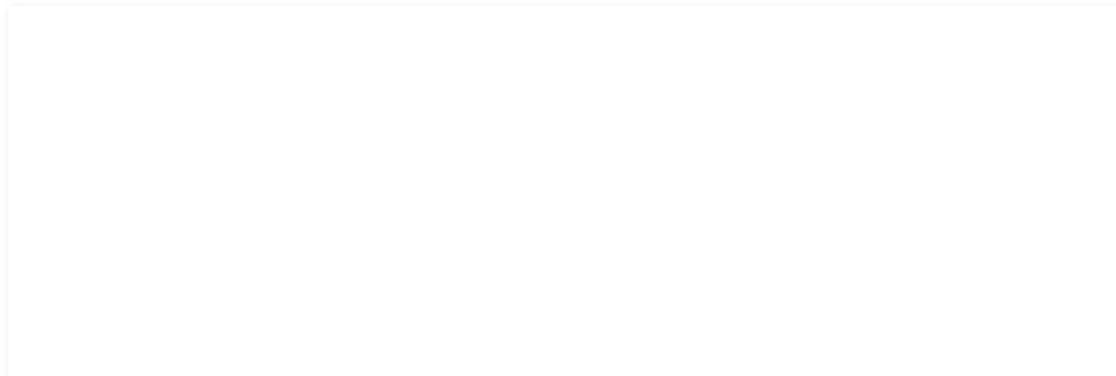




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f: How do you consider the balancing of formal qualities in the photographs with the content/narrative of the series as a whole as you select and sequence a series?

MW: For the balancing of formal qualities with the narrative structure of a series it is also the underlying research that proves decisive. At some point it makes the pieces fall into place. You feel what is right, so it's an intuitive process for a great deal, but with its foundation in preliminary investigations.

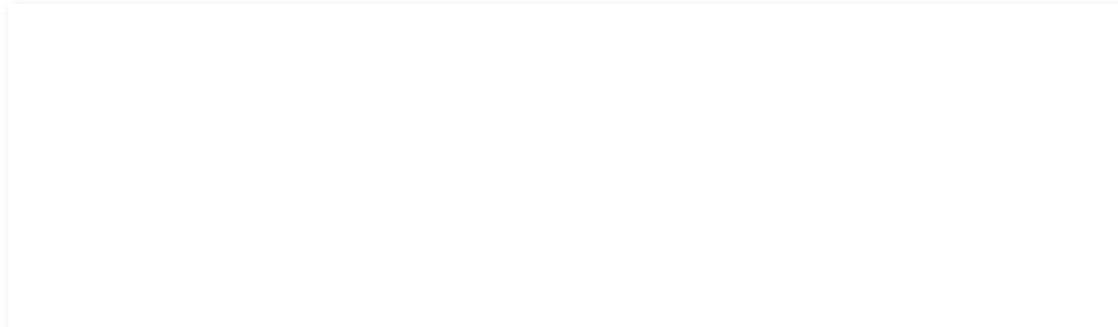


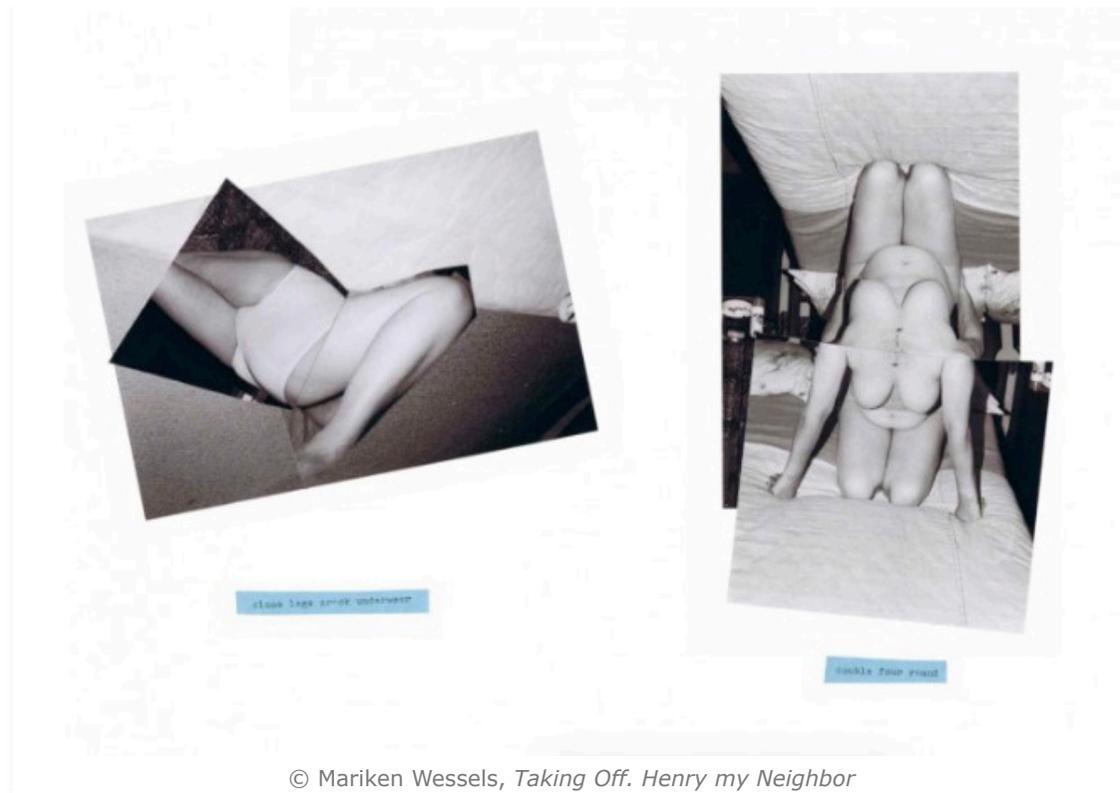


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f: What are common issues, problems and questions that unfold for you during the process of laying things out?

MW: I keep posing questions to myself, about why I'm making the choices I make. It helps me staying focused and alerts me to certain issues that aren't quite right yet. If I feel there are still knots to untie, I will need to figure out where the friction is. This is a natural part of the workflow. During editing and layout this flow sometimes comes to a standstill, but I know then that a solution will announce itself sooner or later. Things for me go easily wrong when I work too fast, so I need to take time and give projects plenty time to ripen.

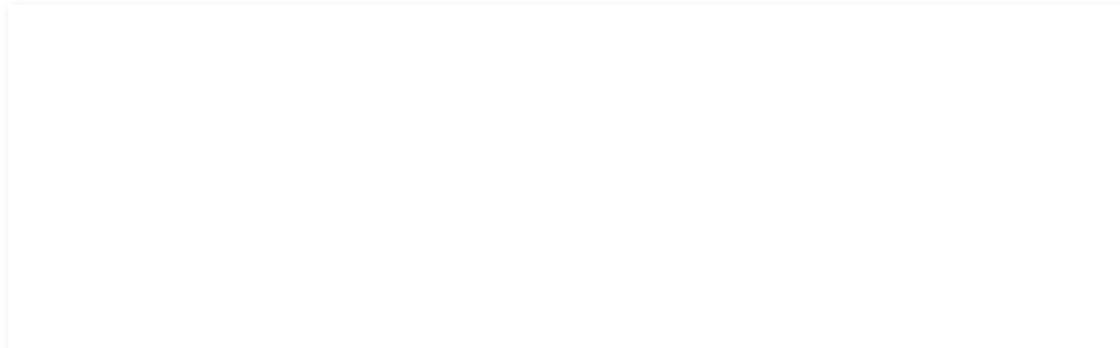


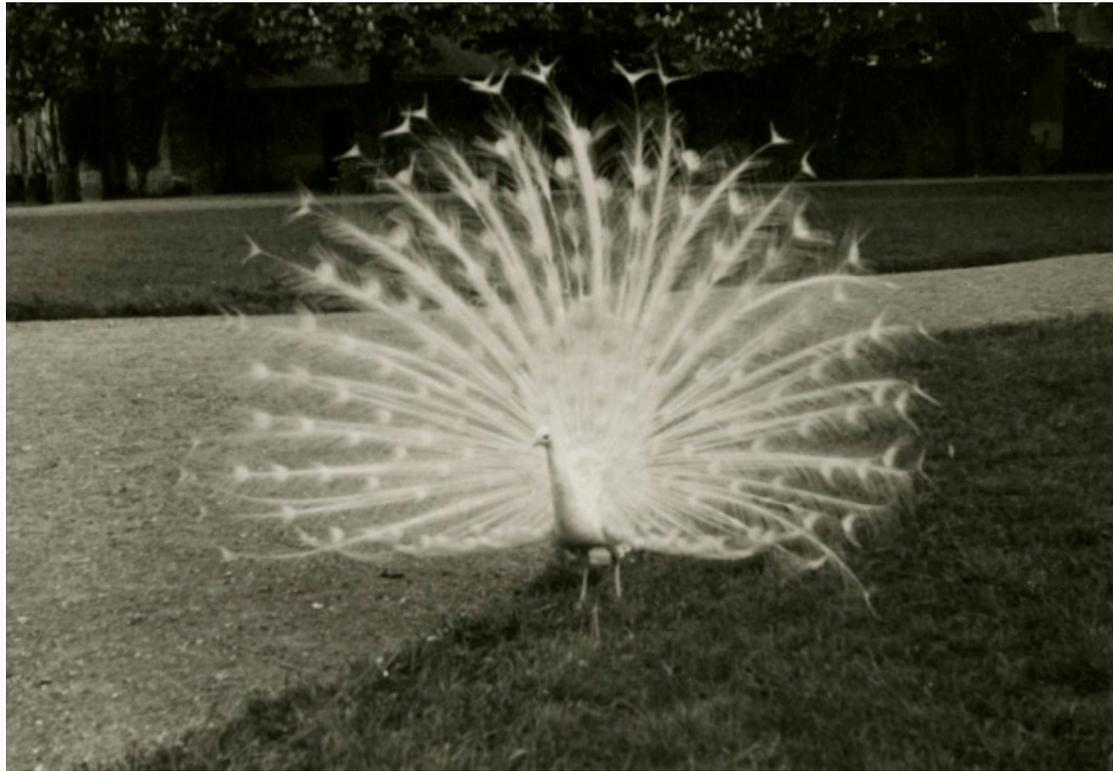


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f: How do you know when a layout is done?

MW: I begin making book dummies in the very early stages of a project. Making dummies is what I consider essential. Turning the pages, a thousand times, leafing through again and again. It makes clear to me what otherwise remains unsolved, so that I know where to smoothen rough edges for the final edit and layout. If a dummy leaves me unsatisfied, I'm up to the daunting task of confronting myself: where did I go wrong? I have to be honest and never compromise in order to achieve a book that I feel has the right form.

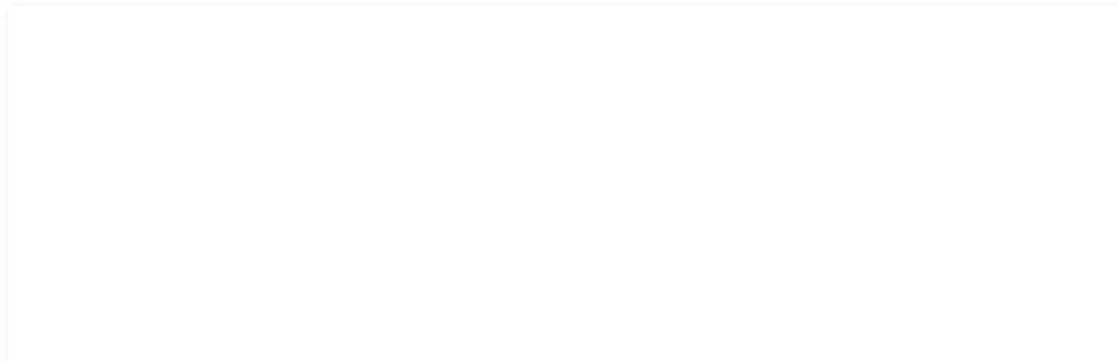




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f: What are common mistakes you see in editing?

MW: Often I see a choice of paper that doesn't match with the content or story. The same goes for choices of fonts, style of layout or binding. I believe that everything should have been brought together in such a way that one doesn't wonder at all why a book appears the way it appears, it is just naturally there. The relationship between design and edit must be right on all levels.





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f: Finally, what is the best advice you've ever gotten about editing?

MW: Not an advice on editing per se, but one of my teachers at the Rietveld one day said to me "Make a book!" This advice went straight to my heart. While I was already being fascinated by photography in series, I felt that photographs organized within the book format could make everything fall into place.



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