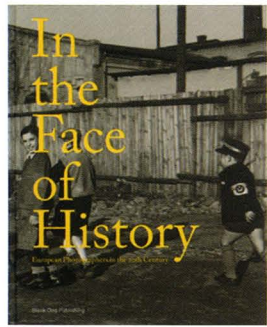


simple reflection into a general pronouncement about the times in which the photographer is living (or lived), to my mind one still has to pull some all too frequently obvious rhetorical tricks out of the hat.

(Translation from Dutch: Don Mader)



**IN THE FACE OF HISTORY.**

European Photographers in the 20th Century.

Ed. by Kate Bush and Mark Sladen (Engl.).

Black Dog Publishing, Barbican Art Gallery, London 2006.

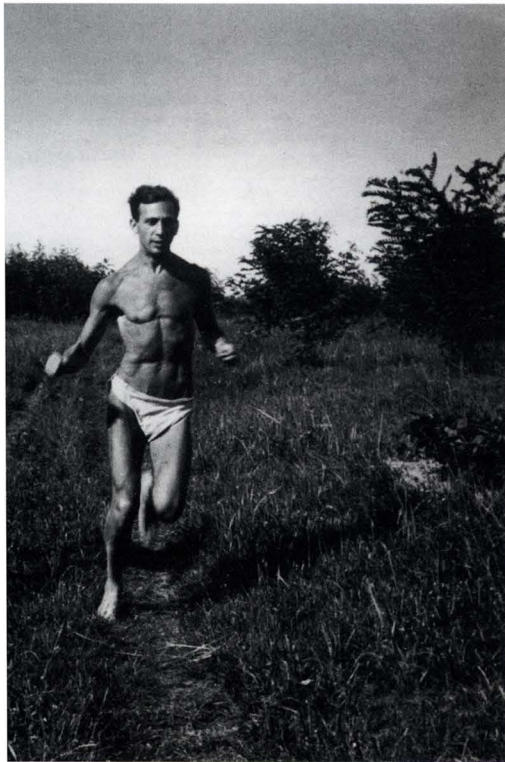
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ary, 1919. © The Estate of André Kertész.

**BERTIEN VAN MANEN:  
GIVE ME YOUR IMAGE**

De Hallen, Haarlem, 2.12.2006 – 11.2.2007

by Maartje van den Heuvel

The Amsterdam photographer Bertien van Manen has garnered praise for her engaged documentary photo series. Especially »A Hundred Summers, A Hundred Winters« (about Russia, 1994) and »East Wind, West Wind« (about China, 2001), in which the influence of her prime sources of inspiration, Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander and Nan Goldin, can be seen, were well-received and brought her a nomination for

the Citibank Photography Prize, among other honours. For these series she photographed the encounters she had with people very informally, working with a snapshot camera.

In »Give Me Your Image« Van Manen takes an interesting new step in her oeuvre. From 2002 to 2005, all over Europe she asked people into whose homes she had come to show her their most precious photograph. She placed these somewhere in the interior and re-photographed them, hanging on the wall or in the midst of details from domestic furnishings such as tablecloths, lamps and vases. What is peculiar about the series is the mental work that you do as a viewer, forming a picture of the owner of the photograph and his/her life on the basis of these details. Like still lifes, these photographs and the short captions (»Tirana 2003«, »Madrid 2004«, and sometimes additional clues such as »Civil war« or »Immigrants from Algeria«) offer a collection of associations, but not the whole story.

On a simple wooden shelf lies a photograph of a women's camp in Auschwitz at the moment that the prisoners have just arrived: their own summer dresses still blow in the wind around their well-nourished bodies, but their heads have already been shaven. With two arrows the owner of the photograph has indicated the two women who were her aunts. In an interior in Madrid photos of a Fascist pro-Franco demonstration during the Spanish Civil War lean against a big chunk of rock crystal, and in a holiday picture we see Hungarian nouveaux riches on their yacht. As Paul Wombell puts it in the book, we see European history from the position of the individual.

Along with history, »Give Me Your Image« also shows us the variety of cultures of Europe. Anyone reading the photographs with care discovers a range of styles of decoration, lifestyles, religions and norms. Moroccan immigrants bring with them a wedding photo and domestic ornaments in a sugary Arab style. The Spanish photographs of bullfights in a private arena would never have been made in Sweden, while the Swedish photographs of a heavily pregnant nude woman playing with her other, likewise naked child, while they could also have been made in Spain, would never have been shown so openly there.

»Give Me Your Image« is also about the role that photographs play in our lives. They are replacements for people, things or times that are past, far away, or otherwise out of our reach. This function as substitutes means that we cherish these memories-become-tangible as ritual objects. The extremes to which this can lead were revealed recently in the exhibition »Forget me not!« by Geoffrey Batchen. It included frames, holders and sometimes even jewellery designed for cherished photographs, sometimes complete with a fragments of clothing or human hair. Two of the texts in the book Give Me Your Image deal with this human need for photographic ritual: a text by a former Russian soldier about the enthusiasm with which soldiers in the Red Army photographed one another, and a text by Bertien van Manen herself about the loving care with which her mother polished the silver frames on the family photographs.

Van Manen presented »East Wind, West Wind« as what could almost have been qualified as an installation, with sound. The pictures from »Give Me Your Image«, which hung in the MoMA in New York among other venues, were



BERTIEN VAN MANEN, Tirana, 2003. C-print, 40 cm x 50 cm. New York, the artist.

presented in a very classical manner, with passe-partout and frame. For several presentations, such as that at Gallery Van Zoetendaal in Amsterdam, she tried larger formats and the softer texture of ink jet prints; however, the classically framed colour prints already most fully do justice to the quality and the layeredness of her images.

Just as in her other projects, the photographs in »Give Me Your Image« are pervaded by Van Manen's intense interest in people, their circumstances and their desires. Here too we once again encounter the deep intimacy that Van Manen is able to achieve with diverse people who are actually strangers to her. It is the reflection on our use of images that makes »Give Me Your Image« fascinating and timely, and links it with the current research into »used photography« in the work of artists such as Larry Sultan, Susan Meiselas, Julian Germain, Hans Aarsman, Walid Ra'ad and Joachim Schmid.

(Translation from Dutch: Don Mader)



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