

LIGHTBOX BEST PHOTOBOOKS OF THE YEAR

TIME Picks the Best Photobooks of 2015

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Martin Parr, Alec Soth and many other experts, including TIME's photo editors, select the best photobooks of the year



Jen Tse for TIME

Selected by photographer and publisher Jason Fulford: "In *Lago*, Ron Jude presents us with 54 images that are ripe with associative potential. It is up to the reader to put the pieces together and find meaning. The edit is a masterful example of gestalt, and each reader will decipher their own private narrative."

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Each November, as hundreds of photographers and artists converge on the French capital for Paris Photo, photobook enthusiasts gather to celebrate the year's best productions at events like the Paris Photo-Aperture Foundation PhotoBook Awards, which has established itself as the leading photography book award, and Offprint, a popular independent publishing fair.

This is usually the time when, here at TIME, we work on our own list of the year's best photobooks, selected by a committee of photography writers, editors and curators.

Coincidentally, **Alec Soth** used this year's Paris Photo-Aperture winner, *Illustrated People* by Thomas Mailaender, to justify his selection of *Diary* by Boris Mikhailov. "It's boring to be part of the consensus, but I agree with the jurors of the Paris Photo-Aperture Foundation PhotoBook Awards that *Illustrated People* by Thomas Mailaender is the PhotoBook of the Year," he says. "But the existence of such a book is only possible because of the uncomfortable path carved by the great provocateur Boris Mikhailov."

When I think of him, I picture a bowhunter in face paint and loincloth. Mikhailov has always been more interested in the hunt than in artful taxidermy. His newest book, *Diary (Walther König)*, is a thrilling reminder of how long Mikhailov has stayed out in the woods.”

For **Martin Parr**, who, each year selects 10 titles that caught his attention, one title tops this year’s list: *Cabanagem* by Andre Pentead. “Editora Madalena continues to publish great new books from Latin America, most of which come from Brazil where the publisher is based,” says the Magnum photographer and avid photobook collector. “This book, cunningly disguised as government documents, explores an area of the Amazon where they had civil riots in the 1830s.”

Yet, as we interviewed more than 35 photo experts, one particular book came up multiple times: *Moisés* by Mariela Sancari. Selected by **Susan Bright, Larissa Leclair** and **Erik Kessels**, and mentioned by many other people, *Moisés* offers a clever take on design to strengthen its message. “Many artists return to themes such as love, birth, and death in their works. The best convey a unique and personal quality to these universals. The project *Moisés* by Mariela Sancari was sparked by her father’s death, and specifically by not being allowed to see his body. She still doesn’t know why this was the case — it was perhaps due to the cause of death (suicide) or related to her family’s religious beliefs,” Kessels explained to TIME in an email. “To find closure, Mariela placed a classified ad featuring an old portrait of her father. She asked men of her dad’s age to study the image and contact her should they see a resemblance. Despite the unusual nature of the request, she got the help she needed.”

For Bright, *Moisés* is simply extraordinary: “No other book this year has had even remotely come close to the power of *Moisés* for me.”

In these selections, all genres of photography are represented, from photojournalism with Will Steacy’s *Deadline*, to portraiture with *Charleroi* by Stephan Vanfleteren, to archival with Kishin Shinoyama’s book of portrait of John Lennon and Yoko Ono, a book selected by TIME.com’s new culture photo editor Ken Bachor. “Shinoyama’s ability to capture Lennon and Ono in a subtle and candid manner provides an intimate glimpse into the couple’s later period in 1980,” he says of the book published by Taschen.

For **Russell Lord**, curator of photographs at the New Orleans Museum of Art, Quentin Bajac’s *Object:Photo. Modern Photographs: The Thomas Walther Collection* showed that looking at the past can offer us a way of thinking about the future of the study of photography. “The spirit of experimentation in the modernist moment that this book traces is not unlike that of today,” he says, “and the thoughtful analysis (both scholarly and scientific) of the synthesis of image and object might offer some keys to thinking about how new processes inform the meaning of digital work made now.” And for photobook expert and writer Colin Pantall, *Early Works* by Ivars Gravlejs was “funny, original, and completely relevant to everybody who has ever been bored in school.”

These are just a few of the 36 books our experts from around the world and the photo editors at TIME have selected. Far from being a comprehensive list, these are personal choices made with the agonizing rule of selecting just one photobook to represent 2015 in its entirety.

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