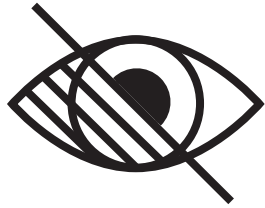


EN

large print guide



Beyond the
Image

Bertien
van Manen
& Friends

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The work of Dutch photographer Bertien van Manen (The Hague, 1942) is highly autobiographical. Her series of photographs are visual diaries that in different ways reflect her life and that of the people she encounters.

Van Manen often works for a long time on projects, which often develop from the journeys she makes and the close relations she builds along the way. She uses a lightweight, easy-to-handle small format camera, which she occasionally lends to others so they can use it as well. Characteristic of her work is a seemingly straightforward, almost snapshot-like style of photography.

Each gallery focuses on a single project by Van Manen. Her work is then shown alongside that of photographers she admires, sees as examples, or regards as kindred spirits: Wout Berger, Rineke Dijkstra, Rahima Gambo, Stephen Gill, Nan Goldin, Guido Guidi, Robert Frank, Seiichi Furuya, Jitka Hanzlová, Chris Killip, Josef Koudelka, Martin McGagh,

Boris Mikhailov and Newsha Tavakolian.
The combinations give Van Manen's work a visual or substantive context, accentuate certain aspects, pose questions, or offer a counterpoint.

Van Manen and her "friends" are rooted in documentary photography. They often choose themes from their immediate environment, such as the effects of sociopolitical changes, women's issues, memories, or personal relationships.

Van Manen's working method also invites viewers to ask questions about the position of the photographer in relation to the photographed. With what right and with what intention does the photographer record "the other"? Who has the right to represent whom?

Explore the exhibition with the free audiotour. Bertien van Manen shares her views on some of her favorite photo's.

0.27

WITH OTHER EYES

Let's Sit Down Before We Go is Bertien van Manen's second book about the journeys she made between 1991 and 1994 through the former Soviet Union. The title refers to an old Russian custom: before you embark on a journey, take a moment for yourself to think about where you come from, where you are going, and why. In a sense, Van Manen also takes time for reflection when she has British photographer Stephen Gill make a new selection from her material in 2010; this book is the result. Even more so than Van Manen does in the first book, *A Hundred Summers, a Hundred Winters* (gallery 0.25), Gill opts for informal and intimate images that depict a changing society from within.

Accepting overexposed photographs, seeing the beauty of a rough composition, or enjoying a hastily framed image: having an eye for

the expressive possibilities of such “errors” requires an open attitude. Stephen Gill, who also embraces the unexpected and unpolished in his own work, is therefore an ideal mentor for Van Manen. In his recent project *The Pillar* (2019), a camera equipped with motion sensors captures birds that descend to alight on a wooden pole in the vast Swedish landscape.

DISRUPTION

A recurring theme in Bertien van Manen's oeuvre is the life of mine workers. In 1979 Van Manen bivouacs for a week in a mining village in Yorkshire, Great Britain. In 1985 she is drawn to the Appalachians, a mountainous region of the United States that, in addition to its beautiful, unspoiled nature, is also known for its abject poverty. There, Van Manen becomes acquainted with Mavis and her husband Junior, who work in the mines. They live in a trailer on a hill overlooking Cumberland, Kentucky. Van Manen stays with them and listens as they share their joys and sorrows. She publishes the confronting and intimate photographs she takes of the couple and others in the book *Moonshine* (2014). The title is derived from the American term for high-proof spirits that are distilled illegally in the middle of the night, "by moonlight."

Between 1973 and 1985, Chris Killip captures the dramatic consequences of the decline of heavy industry in Northern England. With powerful images he shows the deep traces that the collapse of local industry left in its wake. Today, Irish photographer and filmmaker Martin McGagh portrays young adolescents in the Irish suburbs. Their introverted visages lend the youngsters a lost look. This feeling of hopelessness is enhanced through the juxtaposition with images of withered branches.

ONCE THE USSR

“A hundred summers, a hundred winters” — this is a Russian greeting upon an encounter after a long time. It is also the title of Van Manen’s surprising first book about her travels through the former Soviet Union, which appeared in 1994. Surprising, because it was not a reportage of significant historical events or personages, but rather an account from within. It acts as a visual counterpart to her written diary, which features people who were her travel companions and often became friends. Her notes reveal a struggle with the clichés of an orphaned society and the picturesque nature of poverty. The project heralds a new way of working: for the first time, Van Manen photographs exclusively in color, and likewise works with a simple, small format camera, which in turn allows her to get close to her subjects. Her new approach yields informal photographs, full of life.

While Van Manen primarily seeks the intimacy of the interior, the Ukrainian Boris Mikhailov photographs on the street in the early 1990s. In *Case History*, he records the dramatic effects of the demise of state communism in confronting scenes of human misery.

0.23 and 0.22

PERSONAL FREEDOM

Curious about the cultural changes in post-Maoist China, Bertien van Manen travels frequently to the country between 1997 and 2001. At the center of her project East Wind West Wind is a young generation of Chinese. They grow up in the 1990s, a period when greater space for personal freedom arises under a regime of mass control; one that temporarily loosens the reins in order to take full advantage of the technological progress provided by capitalism.

Like in her journeys through the former Soviet Union, Van Manen learns the language. And here, too, she uses an analogue, small format camera. This approach ensures that her presence is often taken for granted, resulting in spontaneous and unforced photographs. The pictures are at odds with the idea of a uniform, modest, and tightly regulated society.

Limited personal freedom is an important theme in the work of Iranian photographer Newsha Tavakolian. In the video installation *Listen*, she depicts the plight of female singers in Iran. Ever since the 1979 revolution, it is forbidden for Iranian women to sing in public. Although it seems like the women in *Listen* are performing before an audience, their voice has been literally and figuratively taken away from them.

MEMORIES

For the project *Give Me Your Image*, Bertien van Manen travels through Europe between 2002 and 2005. She asks the families she meets along the way to share photographs that evoke memories of their past. Snapshots in photo albums and carefully framed prints give Van Manen insight into anonymous family histories, war stories, and political idols, but also tales about love and the yearning for kinship. Van Manen carefully rearranges each of the displayed images in its owner's interior. The result demonstrates photography's power as a bearer of memories.

The projects *Education Is Forbidden* and *Tatsuniya* by Nigerian photographer Rahima Gambo focus on recollecting the abductions of groups of schoolgirls by Boko Haram, a violent faction in northeast Nigeria. The media places the girls in the context of terror and trauma,

but what are the stories the girls themselves want to tell? With this question in mind, Gambo portrays ten schoolgirls in *Tatsuniya* in an improvised setting. In this way she captures a generation attempting to preserve its idyllic and nonviolent memories.

STROLLING

Bertien van Manen is certainly not known for being a street photographer. Yet the series she produces in 1970s Budapest belongs to this genre. In sober black and white, Van Manen depicts scenes from everyday life under the yoke of communism; paradoxically, however, these images are infused with an atmosphere of nostalgia. In the snapshots of individuals, commuters, shopkeepers, and people in cafés, Van Manen's typical focus on proximity is already clearly identifiable.

Like the series *Easter and Oak Trees* (gallery 0.21), Van Manen's work from Budapest remained unseen in her archive for a long time. Photographer Stephen Gill made a new selection from these images in 2017, which resulted in the book *I Will Be Wolf*.

Gill's preference for unpolished images (gallery 0.27) is visible in his choice for casual cropping and the atmospheric use of black and white.

Robert Frank's iconic book *The Americans* (1958) inspired Bertien van Manen to travel to Budapest in 1975. Much the same as Frank, Van Manen freely creates her own world while traveling. Frank's other work, such as the photograph from the From the Bus series shown here, is also understood by Van Manen as a way to stretch the boundaries of traditional photography.

FREE PLAY

Lightness dominates these family photographs from Van Manen's personal archive. She brought the pictures together in 2012, in the photobook *Easter and Oak Trees*, which practically radiates the delight of being a child during the free-spirited 1970s and '80s. Not only are the looseness, the sensuality, and the melancholy remarkable, but also the sense of balance and composition; seemingly completely free improvisations on themes that take on a much more pronounced shape in Van Manen's later work. Here they are still snapshots, impressions, yet the search for form is already apparent. This is most evident in the attention Van Manen gives to how the children and their parents are posed. At times the pose is deliberately assumed, but more often it is captured by Van Manen in all its innocent expressiveness and almost heartrending beauty.

Bertien van Manen rediscovered these photographs thanks to her son's memories, whereas Jitka Hanzlová meticulously sought out images of youth in the Czech village of Rokytník, where she grew up. Rineke Dijkstra's use of a large format camera, in addition to creating a certain distance, inevitably leads us to concentrate on the pose. Her portraits of teenagers on the beach are both monumental and poignant.

CULTURES

Bertien van Manen takes up being a fashion photographer in 1977. But she soon switches to socially engaged photography, strictly in black and white. In her first photobook, *Vrouwen te gast* (1979), she addresses the isolation of women guest workers in the Netherlands; the preservation of family traditions and cultural rituals plays an important role in the series. Van Manen manages to gain the women's confidence, permitting her to photograph them while at work and in the intimacy of their own homes.

In 1985, in collaboration with photographer Catrien Ariëns, Van Manen compiles the book *Dienstmaagd des heren*. It is a captivating portrait of women in the Dutch Catholic community—a context Van Manen is familiar with, since part of her childhood was spent attending a Catholic boarding school. Using

highly stylized images, Van Manen illustrates a rapidly vanishing world of female monastic life and its associated rituals.

The Czech photographer Josef Koudelka lived in exile for a long time, a consequence of the Russian invasion of Prague in 1968. His series *Gypsies* depicts the preservation of one's own culture in foreign lands. Koudelka photographed the daily life and rituals of Roma communities living throughout Europe. Like Van Manen, Koudelka gained access to his subjects' private lives.

FAMILY ALBUM

Much of Bertien van Manen's work has a strong autobiographical character. This applies to the family photographs she took in the 1970s and '80s, as well as to the series *Men*. Around 1995, Van Manen photographs four men who play an important role in her life at that moment: her father, her husband, her friend, and her son. In 2009 she photographed a fifth man: her grandson Roman. It is not a typical family album consisting of classic portraits, highlights, or festivities. The images are visual notes about five men in five different phases of life. Without her presence as a photographer being noticed, Van Manen records their behavior and surroundings in intimate images.

Just as Van Manen records loved ones immersed in their own world, for decades Guido Guidi has been concentrating on the

less spectacular aspects of his immediate surroundings: the nature and suburbs of Cesena in Northern Italy.

ELEGY

The devoured carcass of a lamb, two ghosts wandering through a vast landscape, an overexposed likeness of Jesus that emerges from a dark, ominous emptiness: the photographs from the series *Beyond Maps and Atlases* (2016) markedly depart from Van Manen's earlier work; the colors are grayer, the contrasts starker. While in earlier series she captures human emotions and behavior, in this series Van Manen focuses on the overwhelming Irish landscape. It is an ode to the beauty of nature, which photographer Wout Berger sees in the "ordinary" Dutch landscape.

Beyond Maps and Atlases is Van Manen's first series after the death of her husband. The inescapable grief leaves indelible traces through this last work. Photography is also a form of mourning for Japanese photographer Seiichi Furuya. He photographs his wife,

Christine Gösler, as she struggles with depression until finally choosing to die. Nan Goldin also uses photography to keep the memory of loved ones alive. *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* and the *Cookie Portfolio* are both based on the revealing slideshows in which she records her life and that of her friends in the turbulent New York of the 1980s.

PHOTOBOOKS

For a documentary photographer, publications are just as important as exhibitions. Almost all of Bertien van Manen's projects have taken shape as a book at some point. Publications by others are also a source of inspiration for her own work. A number of books by photographers who Van Manen admires are shown in this gallery. Books that are now very expensive or difficult to obtain have been filmed or placed in a display case. Others are available to freely browse.

Photographer friends have often assisted with the realization of her books, and Van Manen is keen to mention them here. In particular, Hans Aarsman and Noor Damen advised the making of *A Hundred Summers*, *a Hundred Winters* and *East Wind West Wind*. Van Manen also received advice and help from

**Taco Anema, Stephen Gill, Kenneth Hope,
Paul Gaffney, Bas Vroege and many others.**

0.28

The film Bertien van Manen Photographer is a short edit of the film *Siberian Diary — Days at Apanas*, made in 1994 by filmmaker Michael Pilz (1943) in Siberia. The result is a poetic document that gives surprising insight into the working method of the photographer behind the camera. The original film lasts ten hours and gives an account of a journey that takes place during the freezing winter months.

The film runs circa 55 minutes and starts at 10.15 am; 11.15 am; 12.15 pm; 1.15 pm; 2.15 pm; 3.15 pm; 4.15 pm, 5.15 pm; and on Fridays also at 6.15 pm; 7.15 pm; 8.15 pm; 9.15 pm.

Production by Michael Pilz

Concept and realization by Michael Pilz

Cinematography by Michael Pilz Original

Sound by Michael Pilz

Music by Szemző Tibor

Edited by Michael Pilz

Featuring Bertien van Manen, Volodya
Sjabankov, and others