



ANZAAB *Aspects of Book Collecting*

Collecting Photography Books

Sainsbury's Books

Background: While the medium of photography has been collectable for many years, it has only been in the past decade or so that more attention has been paid to photography books. This is not surprising given that photography translates so well into the format of the book. As photography books have increased in value and recognition, there are now auctions devoted entirely to the subject, as well as a number of specialist photography bookshops, mainly in Europe and America. It is now common to see photography books included in exhibitions at galleries including the *National Gallery of Victoria*.

Range: Photography books offer the collector many diverse and interesting avenues. Collections may cover subjects as varied as technical books and manuals, books by a particular artist, subjects such as landscape, travel, portraiture, maritime or war, books containing original photographs or albums, as well as contemporary artist books. With such a wide range available collectors can develop their own area and collect within a budget. This is not always the case with book collecting. Like any other area of collecting, photography books may be valued for their scarcity, condition as well as the reputation of the photographer. More recently pamphlets, journals and magazines, containing the work of well known photographers have become increasingly collectable. For example, Alfred Steiglitz's publication *Camera Work*.

Availability: Nearly all general second-hand book dealers will have a photography section. However, books may be found elsewhere in the shop depending on subject matter and it's often up to the intuition and dedication of the collector to discover them.

Price-range: Photography books vary in price from as little as a few dollars for pamphlets and catalogues to many hundreds of thousands of dollars for highly collectable and rare books by significant artists. For example, Edward Curtis: *The North American India*, (containing original prints) sold recently for \$900,000, while books by American artist Ed Ruscha sell for tens of thousands of dollars. Melbourne photographer Bill Henson's books now are worth around \$700. These books sold for \$85 or less when they first became available.

Footnote: Recent books by Australian photographers are often overlooked however, many are still very affordable for collectors. Most photographers take a 'hands-on' approach to the production of their books, often self-publishing in limited editions. Photographers including Trent Park and Narelle Autio, through their *Hot Chili Press*, Matthew Sleeth who has a book listed in Martin Parr's *Photobook*, Derek Henderson, Laurence Aberhart, and Jesse Marlow, to name a few, have all published books in the past few years. Local graphic designers, publishers and galleries are also getting involved in various aspects of the production, with companies like *Fabio Ongarato Design* producing some very interesting, high quality publications. These books usually sell for under a hundred dollars new but quickly become scarce and sought after.

Artists such as Patrick Pound, Bruno Leti and Peter Lyssiotis produce limited edition, hand-bound artist books. Pound has produced limited edition books for as little as \$30 while Leti and Lyssiotis have produced beautiful hand crafted books containing original photographs.

These books are not distributed through mainstream companies and are usually only available from the artist themselves or specialist secondhand bookshops. They can quickly become rare and highly sought after. Any early work by Robert Rooney for example is almost impossible to find.

The collector can have a great time visiting galleries like *The Center for Contemporary Photography*, seeing local photographers work and then talking to booksellers about publications that may contain the photographer's work.

Reference books specifically on collecting photography books include Andrew Roth: *The Book of 101 Seminal Photographic Books of the 20th Century*, and Martin Parr: *The Photobook: A History*, in two volumes.

The rule for collecting photography books is buy what you like and buy when you see it.