

Epiphanies



By
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Photobooks are incredible artifacts for photography, since they have found a great way of circulation and persistence over time. They bring together a wealth of ideas, and what José Luna calls “the exercise of the gaze...” is present. The tradition around this kind of portable gadget is long-standing in our country, although its diffusion could be improved; using this as a pretext, I propose a brief overview of three projects that may well give an overview of the importance of telling in images our journey through the world.



What country is this?

For photographer and editor Pablo Ortiz Monasterio, books are still the best platform for photography. Pablo's first major work in photography editing was the México Indígena series sponsored by the former Instituto Nacional Indigenista, now Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas (INPI), which at that time had the great Juan Rulfo at the head of the institute's publications department, and it was to him that Pablo presented the seven issues of said collection about various indigenous peoples of the country. This series, as its name indicates, addresses a topic of vital importance and current in our country: indigenous peoples.

The generation of photographers to which Ortiz Monasterio belongs led the vindication of Mexican and Latin American photography in the last decades of the 20th century, and several of these creators come together in this series.

In the book *La casa en la tierra*, Mariana Yampolsky gives an account of the diversity in the creation of houses in different indigenous communities, accompanied by an excellent text by none other than Elena Poniatowska.

For his part, Nacho López in *Los pueblos de la bruma y el sol* (The People of the Mist and the Sun), exercises an attentive gaze, but with a subtle closeness to the person he portrays and at times achieves that expected complicity.

No less interesting is the work of the famous Graciela Iturbide in *Los que viven en la arena* (Those Who Live in the Sand), about the Sonoran people.

For his part, Pablo Ortiz Monasterio, a reference in national and international photographic publishing, and responsible for the famous *Río de luz* collection, together with José Manuel Pintado, poet and chronicler, gave life to the piece *Los pueblos del viento* (The People of the Wind); Pablo mentions that Pintado said that what they were doing was “anthropoetry,” because they were combining monographic studies of indigenous peoples and documentary photography that goes beyond the mere act of historiographic documentation.



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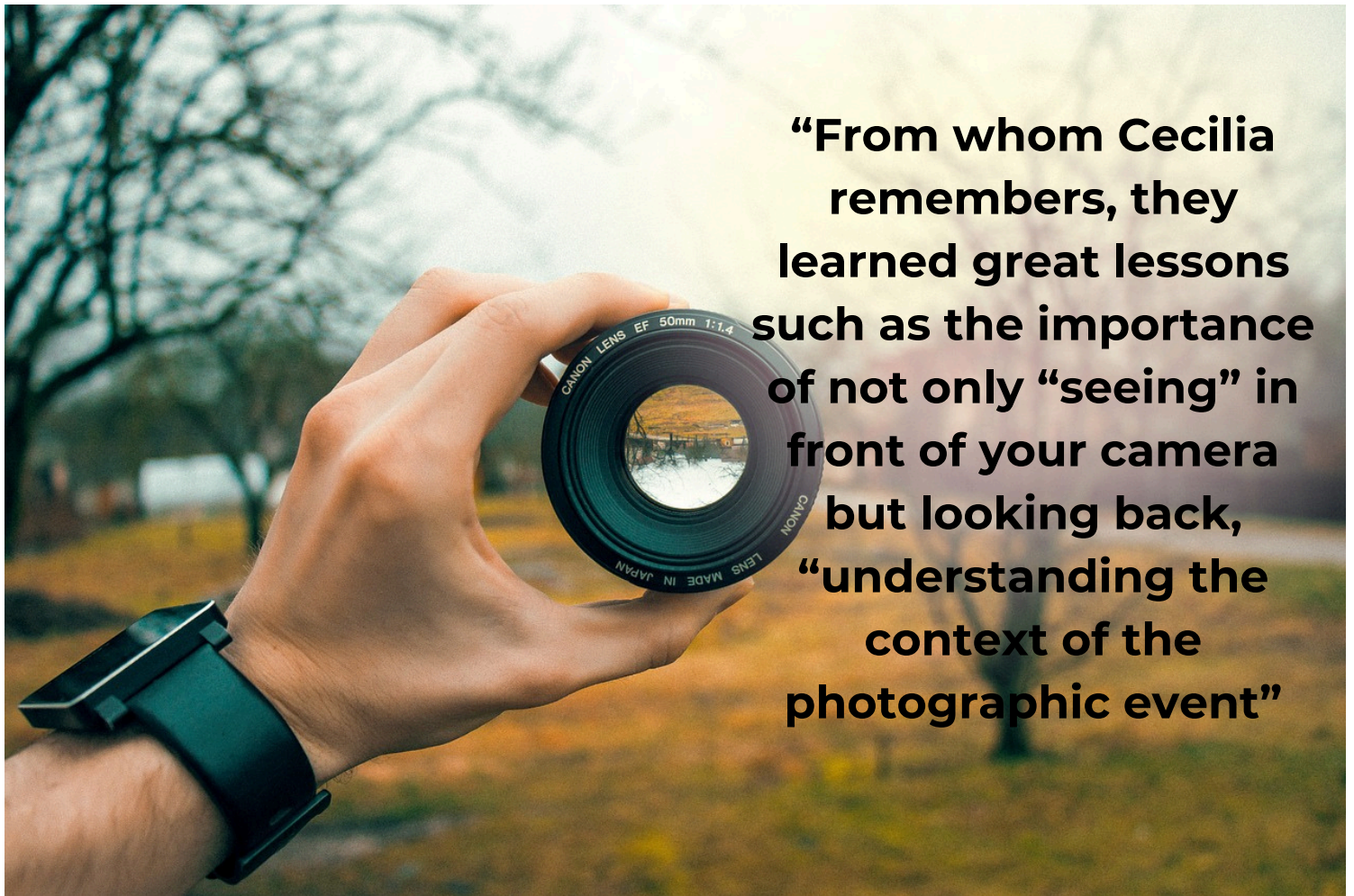
Hybrid times

Thinking about the 1990s brings me back to my adolescence, to a violent country that disguised everything with mockery and euphoria, where several photographers gave an account of that cruel and at the same time hopeful time in Mexico City, as only this great metropolis can be for its inhabitants. I still remember that back then, photographic work was still mostly done with cellulose film. Digital processes began in a hybrid way for photojournalists until the end of the last century.

In 1994, in Chiapas, while covering the nascent Zapatista Army of National Liberation, Cecilia Candelario and Omar Meneses dreamed again, perhaps in the mist of the mountains, of the idea that it would be good to make books of their photographic work. Years later, in the framework of the Bicentennial of the Independence of Mexico (2010) and the call launched by the Fondo de Cultura Económica, the first four photobooks of the Ojo de Venado collection emerged, precisely from the mist of the new millennium, headed by Cecilia Candelaria, Ernesto Ramírez and Omar Meneses (1961-2018), whose book in this collection: *Historia y vida, is a real pig in a poke.*

The name of this collection alludes to the idea of a charm and a sure-fire way of achieving that long-awaited image. For Cecilia, one of the contributions of the collection was “to encourage other colleagues to try to publish their own collective publications.” The approach was an exercise in collective and individual memory: each author reviews the last 20 years of work and presents a publication about it, in a context of collective work. Over the course of three years, the nine titles that make up the collection were published, by those who are perhaps the last documentary photographers in the terms in which we knew them throughout the last century (dixit Hermann Bellinghausen).

In 2023, Cecilia and Elizabeth Andriopolus organized the relaunch of the collection at Casa de Lago, while paying tribute to prominent figures in Mexican photography such as Patricia Mendoza and Lázaro Blanco. In fact, Cecilia, Elizabeth and Omar took classes in the legendary workshop that the maestro Blanco led for more than forty years at the university campus, from whom Cecilia remembers, they learned great lessons such as the importance of not only “seeing” in front of your camera but looking back, “understanding the context of the photographic event.” Currently Elizabeth and Cecilia are promoting the continuity of this collection.



Wherever you see an eagle, take a photo.

In 1823, the Federal District, now Mexico City, was founded “to house the Executive, Legislative and Judicial powers” with a clear liberal and federalist idea. Since then, many stories have been told in this navel of the moon or CDMX, many of them narrated by the lenses of photographers. In *Erase una vez un Distrito Federal*, Four views of the city, the work of precisely four photographers grouped in the F Collective comes together, who from different generations and ways of living the photographic work seek to tell the passage of time in the capital of our country, always emblematic, excessive and full of stories.

The book contains the view of Alfredo Estrella, a photographer with a long career and complex coverage of natural disasters, social movements and drug trafficking, for whom Mexico City “is everything” and has “given him many photographic moments”; that of Antonio Nava, an author who has walked and photographed the city for several decades, and who, together with another group of photographers, has generated various projects around photojournalism and documentary photography with great impact in this city; the view of Keith Dannemiller —who decided to settle in Mexico in 1987— who seeks to portray that idea of the immeasurable nature of this place, once known as the Federal District; finally José Luna, who in his walk notices specific elements capable of condensing what makes us call chilangos. His view is shrewd and with a hint of irony, always attentive to the social events of everyday life.



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The photobook, originally promoted by José Luna, based on his literary training, his work as a cultural manager, and his experience in Germany, where he saw the existing culture in that country around the photobook, was presented and distributed free of charge throughout the last months of last year in places such as the El Rulo Cultural Center or the International Book Fair in the Zócalo of the capital, materializing a visual proposal around what we understand by Mexico City.

This is the end of the journey, but not before mentioning that the F Collective is already preparing a work about the bicycle... And although the gaze persists and undoubtedly confirms a long life for photobooks and photographers, it will always be important to find new ways of understanding and portraying our environment.

