

THE PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTOR

INFORMATION, OPINION, AND ADVICE FOR COLLECTORS, CURATORS, AND DEALERS

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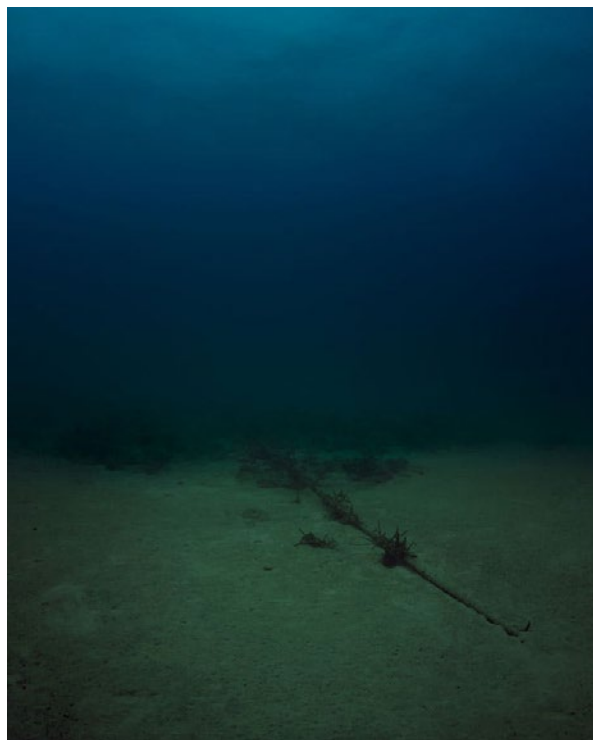
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PHOTO LA VIRTUAL COLLECT + CONNECT by Stephen Perloff



John Dowell: *The Poet*, from *Cotton*, 2017, at Laurence Miller Gallery at Photo LA Virtual Collect + Connect

seeing meaningful patterns. His effort is cumulative and encourages us as viewers to comprehend cumulatively — to understand our world through an expansive leap of making connections between images and information rather than simply consuming our daily media, as has become custom, as hors d'oeuvres.



Trevor Paglen: *Bahamas Internet Cable System (BICS-1) NSA/GCHQ-Tapped Undersea Cable Atlantic Ocean*, 2015 (Courtesy the artist and Pace Gallery, New York)

All of the recent use of “systemic” (as in “systemic racism”) is but a reminder of the need to pull ourselves out of isolation, to see the long-established connections between things, particularly at the intersections of conflict and power — everything is systemic, intersectional, interconnected. Walter Benjamin envisioned truth as “the encircling dance of represented ideas” — like identifying the Big Dipper as it moves through the sky, if you know how to find it. Rather than seeing our experience as flashes of symbolic insight, we must work toward understanding our reality as evolving toward new realities, much like individual images in a film layer one frame over another. One moment must yield to the next just as we must yield to our best collective instincts. And we cannot do this in the isolation of an instant.



A Museum of One's Own: Alice Sachs Zimet, Pioneering Photography Collector

By Jessica Robinson

“I don’t want easy listening in my photos,” says Alice Sachs Zimet, a trailblazer in photography advising, collecting, and educating. Long before it was fashionable, profitable, or even considered a major art form, Zimet began collecting photographs.

In December of 1984 she attended an exhibition at the Parrish Art Museum in Southampton, New York. She had come with Sam Wagstaff, the partner of Robert Mapplethorpe. They were there to see a flower exhibition from Wagstaff’s vast and groundbreaking collection.



Andrew Bush: *Columbines*, 1982

That’s where Zimet saw an image by contemporary photographer Andrew Bush titled *Columbines*. It was love at first sight.

“I tracked it down at the Julie Saul Gallery and that was my first purchase.”

But she could not stop with one. So she bought a second Bush piece titled *Studio Kitchen*. “I bought two pieces because I thought the first one needed a partner. Looking back, I realize that was the seed of a manic collector. You can’t just have one. To this day I still buy in pairs. Or even threes,” says Zimet, spoken with the passion of a true collector.



Andrew Bush: *Studio Kitchen*, 1982

That was a time when the photography market was still in its early stages. There were not nearly the number of photo galleries or photo-only auctions as there are now. “I had to defend my love of photography as most people said ‘it wasn’t art.’”

Today Zimet’s collection numbers around 300 museum-quality pieces from the mid-twentieth century to the present.

Alice Sachs Zimet’s ties to the world of fine art go back to her birth. To celebrate her arrival her parents purchased a series of 13 Bonnard lithographs, titled *Quelques Aspects de la Vie de Paris*. Indeed, art in her life goes back even further. Her great uncle, Paul Sachs, was the Associate Director at the Fogg Art Museum and created one of the first museum studies courses at Harvard.

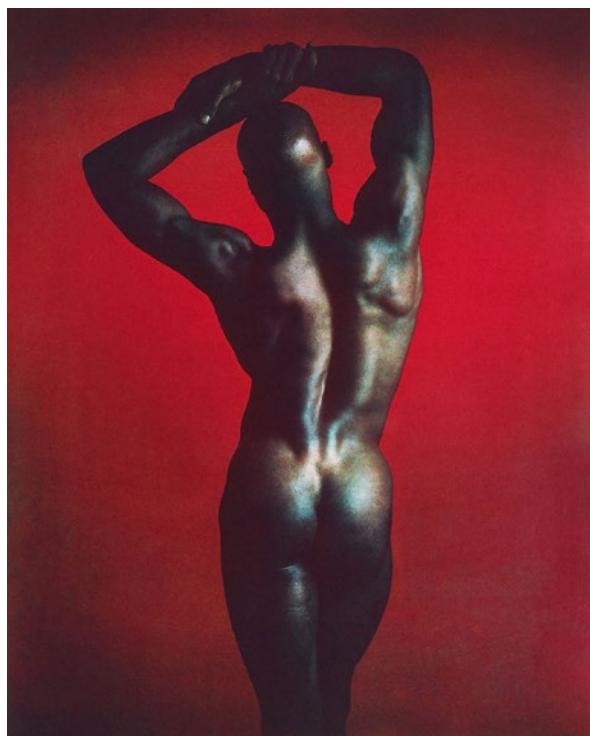
Zimet’s excitement about photography was launched with an internship in the very early days of the International Center for Photography. “It influenced me tremendously,” she says. “But collecting was far from my horizon. I didn’t know how to collect.”

That was to take a few more years and a fascinating professional journey.

Armed with two degrees in Art History, she decided on an unexpected career path: philanthropy. And she landed a job in, of all places, The Chase Manhattan Bank. “I go for an interview dressed as an art person, long hair, no suit or Hermes scarf. I could not imagine they would hire me,” says Zimet. They hired her on the spot.

She was soon invited to create the first arts sponsorship program in a commercial bank. It was there that her trailblazing instincts flourished. Here she was able to convince the conservative

management to pledge money to everything, from the arts to the AIDS crisis.



Robert Mapplethorpe: *Ken Moody (nude with red background)*, 1985

After seven years she rose to Worldwide Director of Cultural Affairs. She was traveling the world, creating lucrative programs — “to do good and to do business for the bank.” There were Halloween performances in Paris with Martha Graham, events with Twyla Tharp and Paul Taylor. In those days programs like these were almost unheard of in commercial banks.

This diminutive, red-head’s career was on fire. Her department became a rainmaker for the bank, working across 14 countries and generating over \$2 billion in new business. Her red-hot work in the field of cross-over marketing and philanthropy continued for twenty years. The projects she managed became a model for what corporate sponsorship is today.

Today Zimet is totally immersed in the world of photography. She is the Chair of the Photography Curatorial Committee at the Harvard Art Museums. She serves as Chair of the Acquisitions Committee at the International Center of Photography, is on the Board of Magnum Foundation, and runs her own advising company, Arts+Business Partners, a consulting boutique focused on corpo-

rate sponsorship as well as the fine art photography marketplace.



Living with Art, Zimet's Apartment in New York City

Zimet's collection is largely made up of black-and-white photographs, although there are several in vibrant color. Why black and white? "One reason is it's easier to hang, you can have multiple images together, so you can be obsessive in black and white," says Zimet.



Lisette Model: *Singer at the Cafe Metropole, New York City, 1946*

Zimet is more than just a collector. With her enduring drive and unerring eye for quality, she exercises an acute form of connoisseurship. Her collection goes beyond personal. It is her autobiography.

Her first early theme was France. Her grandfather had lived there for 50 years and Zimet herself spent a year in Paris. Indeed, that first purchase of Andrew Bush's *Columbines* reminded her of her mother's garden. "It was the kind of post-impressionistic work my parents collected."

Her second early theme was artist's portraits. It began with the purchase of Bill Brandt's image of Cezanne's studio. Another was Cecil Beaton's shot of David Hockney with his friend Henry Geldzahler (whom Zimet interned under when he was the first Curator for 20th-Century Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art). "Like my comfort level with France, artist portraits were a natural given. I had two degrees in art history and my first job was at the Metropolitan Museum."



Christer Strömholm, *White Lady, Barcelona, 1959*

About 20 to 25 years ago the theme of artist portraits "morphed into portraits of people who are living their lives," says Zimet. "I have images by Swedish photographer Christer Strömholm of young men dressed as female prostitutes in the late 1950s / early 1960s in the red light district of Paris. Many eventually became women, and I befriended two of them, Nina and Jackie, as I learned more and more about Stromholm's work. Sadly they have both died over the past few years. Those

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two ladies were amazing human beings and certainly an example of people living their lives !”

This was decades before such images were widely seen. These are images she refers to as “portraits that are not easy listening — sometimes tough, but always about humanity.”

Another group of “not easy listening” portraits includes South African photographer Zanele Muholi, an artist who uses photography as a social activist to chronicle the queer movement in post-apartheid South Africa.



Zanele Muholi: *Vuyelwa Makubetsu, Kwa Thema Community Hall, Springs, Johannesburg, 2011*

As Zimet became more widely known as a “guru” in the photography world, *Arts+Business Partners* increasingly focused on the fine art photography marketplace. The mission is to bring her expertise to nascent collectors. She offers what she calls “boot camp” classes (virtual these days) to help young collectors navigate today’s marketplace, from advice on acquisitions to help with sales at galleries, art fairs, and auctions, Zimet takes the word “daunting” out of collecting. “I don’t tell people what to buy, I tell them how to

buy. My hope is to empower others to have confidence and to be smarter.”

As if that’s not enough, she offers another workshop specifically for photographers. Here they are given an insider’s peek into the collector’s mind. “How you communicate your work is critical,” says Zimet.

So, how does a photographer fine tune their communication skills? Perfect their “elevator pitch?” Land on a collector’s radar screen? Ask Alice.

What is the best advice the guru of photo collecting can offer? “Buy with your heart and buy with your brain, but you should never buy with your ears.”



Alice Sachs Zimet taking a class through the AIPAD Photography Fair

Zimet shares her experience and enthusiasms so intensely I can feel the collector’s passion in her. I am sure her students feel the passion too.

You can [learn more about Alice](#) at the [Arts+Business partners’ website](#).

A version of this article was originally published on Berkshire Fine Arts. All images in this article are from the collection of Alice Zimet.

