



Vietnam War History - Real and Reimagined - Presented by Harper's Books at Paris Photo

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For Harper's Books, being part of Paris Photo is a no-brainer. Participation could be chalked up to a focus that melds rare books, fine art photography and contemporary art but that's not it. Rather, being part of—and contributing to—the artistic chaos that contemporary photography now finds itself in makes Paris Photo the perfect fit for the book shop and an owner who likes to shake things up a bit.

Out front, owner Harper Levine is blunt about one tie books and photographs share: they both may be on their way to extinction. All is not lost nor should it be, he said. Those who search for art and greatness will be able to find it. Those who search for the state of photography now and the changes that already swirl in the shifting winds ushering in a new era for photography will surely find it, explained Levine in an email letter to his collectors. Especially, after he gets there.

This change far surpasses the debate of the past whether film or digital was fit for photographers. The creative use of Instagram, iPhotos, self-published books, and projects that skirt all definitions of what fine art photography should be is the terrain for today's contemporary photography.

"...We would be foolish not to accept that the landscape has inexorably changed, and adapt accordingly," writes Levine in his email to collectors.

By way of example, he points to the work of Doug Rickard and his groundbreaking book [A New American Picture](#) that presented "...not a single "new" image, but nevertheless ushered in an entirely new way of seeing, where appropriated photographs are culled from inexhaustible source material, like Google."

"An Eggleston dye-transfer made from pointing a phone at a computer screen," he states. "Such a worldview expands the role of the photographer (and the viewer) exponentially, and clearly exemplifies the intellectual paradigm set forth by an artist like Richard Prince, who once presciently declared: It's a Free Concert From Now On. Going forward it will matter less (or maybe not at all) who originally takes the picture. It's permanent Woodstock, with the net as your camera. The world never recedes."

For the 2013 edition of Paris Photo, Harper's Books presents a debate in blurred lines with images that are inspired by the Vietnam War experience – whether actually experienced, fictitiously interpreted, designed to present documentary-style truth or to capture personal memories in snapshots. Part of the rare book shop's booth exhibition are several photo albums collected from the Vietnam War era. All were compiled by American soldiers as private reminiscences of their wartime experiences.

One exception in photo album made by the renowned North Vietnamese photographer Le Minh Truong.

"This is as fine a photographic document of the Vietnam conflict as I have seen," said Levine.



From Le Minh Truong's "North Vietnamese Diary." Courtesy Harper's Books.



From Le Minh Truong's "North Vietnamese Diary." Courtesy Harper's Books.

However, it was the experience of viewing the collection of personal photo albums that sent Levine's thoughts and creative muse whirling.

"After acquiring these albums, and buying some unused examples from the era, I became curious what would happen if you asked a contemporary artist to reinterpret war, or to create their own Vietnam scrapbook based on outside sources, or their imaginations" said Levine. "What would that look like? Would it be a paean to protest, a suicide diary, or maybe a drug fueled romp through the back alleys of Saigon? Is it a book, is it art?"



From Le Minh Truong's "Photo Album." Courtesy Harper's Books.

The answers may be held within the confines of Harper's Books booth at Parish Photo.

"...I'm also increasingly drawn to the vernacular archive: that whole substrata of photography which falls somewhere between art and documentation, but is neither book nor photograph. The merger of handwriting and antiquated technology: an analog antidote for digital debauchery."



From Le Minh Troung's "Photo Album." Courtesy
Harper's Books.

The Vietnam albums are only part of the history-bending photographs presented at Paris Photo by Harper's Books.

Visitors can also expect to find a collection of original woodblocks depicting the Belgium Congo woodblocks; vernacular snapshots of road signs in 1940s California taken by an unknown photographer and a collection of 76 color photographs by Martha Cooper that document the hip hop and graffiti subcultures of early 1980s New York City.

Also, a first editions quartos collection of 39 Japanese protest books that represent highlights of the genre that was assembled over the course of several years, several trips to Japan and includes seminal publications by a bevy of photographers. A collection of 67 unique handmade patient identification and incident report cards, written on 5 X 8 inch index cards, from the Boston State Hospital in the 70s is among the numerous books and photographs and their morphing presented at Paris Photo.

"We rewrite history, I don't believe in yesterday," Levine wrote to his collectors by way of invitation to visit Harper's Books at Paris Photo. "Thanks for coming: it's gonna be a fun ride."

BASIC INFO: Harper's Books returns to **Paris Photo** for its ninth presentation at the 2013 edition held from Nov. 14 - 17, 2013 at the Grand Palais in Paris. For details on the art fair, visit www.parisphoto.com.

Harper's Books is located at 87 Newtown Lane, East Hampton, NY 11937. They also exhibit annually at AIPAD and the New York Book Fair. www.harpersbooks.com.