

**Reviews by Dalia Al-Dujaili and Diane Smyth**



**Bookshelf**

**Why Exhibit? Vol 2**

Anna-Kaisa Rastenberger and Iris Sikking  
Fw:Books, €30

Back in 2018, Anna-Kaisa Rastenberger and Iris Sikking published *Why Exhibit? Positions on Exhibiting Photographies*, an intriguing mix of essays and interviews with artists, curators and writers, circling round the question of what it is to display work in physical space, particularly when there are so many alternatives. Now they are back with *Why Exhibit? Vol 2*, which has the subtitle *On Curating Photography*. As the subtitle suggests, it hones in on curating and curators, though it does still include artists; it also returns to the essays-plus-transcripts format.

As before it is an interesting read, and the talking heads are well-chosen; slightly more mysterious is why some of the conversations are several years old, conducted back in 2021. Their contents sometimes necessitate a double-take mental shift back to Covid; at other times the book reflects more recent, even less comfortable changes. There is a fascinating conversation with Kateryna Radchenko, for example, on creating images in Ukraine after the full-scale invasion by Russia; there is a brief mention by Tanvi Mishra of the cancellation of the Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie in Germany after curator Shahidul Alam posted pro-Palestinian content on his social media.

Beyond that it is a wide church, with contributions on many and varied aspects of curation; it is almost a magazine in sheer zeitgeistiness, though published in book format. Deeper questions circle, perhaps about what curators add, or why they exist, or even about photography itself. Eszter Erdosi and Taru Elfving's contributions stand out, wondering fundamentally about what it is to look, and the inherent violence of the "trespass of the boundary of visibility". **BJP**

fw-books.nl



Installation view of *Project Iceworm* by Anastasia Mityukova. Image © Jens Nober, from *Why Exhibit? Vol 2*.

**Father**

Diana Markosian  
Aperture, £40

*Father* feels familiar – Diana Markosian takes us into her dad's home in a way that is highly personal and yet, at the same time, deeply universal in its depiction of domestic warmth. But something haunting lies beneath the surface of these seemingly tender images of one man and his daughter. Markosian's latest monograph is a moving narrative of estrangement, reconciliation and the search for missing family members, both an intimate memoir and a shared meditation on loss and reconnection.

Through a combination of documentary photographs, archival materials and her own diaristic writing, Markosian explores her relationship with her estranged father and the experience of finding him in Armenia, after years of not knowing him. The cover, with his silhouette debossed, reflects this – it is a copy of a family photo in which Markosian's mother cut out her father. Both lyrical and raw, the book speaks to the complexities of parenthood and family, and the dissonance between idealised notions of a parent and the reality of their absence.

Markosian's story begins with her childhood in Moscow, where her parents' separation set in motion her father's gradual erasure. After immigrating to California at the age of seven with her mother and brother,

Markosian slipped into an existence in which her father was not only physically absent but deliberately excised from their family history. For her father, she and her brother became missing children, and he sought to find them for years.

The book's visual narrative mirrors the fragmented nature of memory and familial bonds, and Markosian interweaves her contemporary photographs with archival images and snapshots, to create a mosaic that is both intimate and unnerving. The diary text that accompanies these visuals lends vulnerability, as she recounts her journey to Armenia to find her father. The style is both documentary and stylised, demonstrating the photographer's range and flexibility.

The inclusion of an empty envelope in the back of each book invites readers to participate in the narrative by sharing their own stories of loss and reconciliation. This addition transforms *Father* from a solitary memoir into a collective exploration of intimate bonds and the human need for connection. As a follow-up to her acclaimed first book, *Santa Barbara* (2020), which followed her mother's movements, *Father* further proves Markosian's ability to weave intensely personal stories with broader social and cultural themes. **BJP**

aperture.org

Image from *Father*  
© Diana Markosian.



## Between the skin and the sea

Katrin Koenning

Chose Commune, €55

Shot between 2020–23, *Between the skin and the sea* covers a seismic period in global history marked by lockdowns, quarantines and the threat of a small but deadly virus. Shot in 'Australia', as Katrin Koenning puts it, "AKA unceded Wurundjeri, Tati Tati, Mutti Mutti, Gubbi Gubbi, Gunai Kurnai and Taungurung Country", the project is also born of a contemporary experience of global warming and uncontrollable fire, and a very personal loss. There is only a short text to point the reader in these directions though, and you would not necessarily know any of them from the images. Depicting often-domestic scenes, they instead quietly appreciate the small moments of a good life – sleepy babies, clean washing, fresh fruit and the beauty of cats.

Mostly shot in black-and-white, with occasional bursts of colour, these images are largely timeless and often universal; there is a shot of a woman cradling a young girl's leg, for example, which is relatable as a parent, or as a child. There is room to wax lyrical here about the everyday and extraordinary but *Between the skin and the sea* wisely does not try; there is no essay beyond the enigmatic introductory text and some thanks and credits. "Here, tales of entanglement, relation, connection and intimacy unfold," writes Koenning. "Leaning into the shadows, the photographs trace networks of love, grief, kinship, shelter and repair."

Currently intent and concept sometimes seem to take precedence over the artwork, but *Between the skin and the sea* is that rare thing – page after page of absolute killer shots. Koenning seems to be able to take fantastic photographs of just about anything, and her book is a visual delight; the networks of love are discernible, through the repetition of certain faces and places, but there is space for the images to be images, without trying to speak for them or push an interpretation. *Between the skin and the sea* received a Polycopies & Co publishing support grant and it is easy to see why; this is a photobook lover's photobook, and maybe a photographer's photographer, though both deserve to have wide appeal. **BJP**

chosecommune.com



Image from *Between the skin and the sea* © Katrin Koenning.

Image from *Aisha* © Yumna Al-Arashi.



## Aisha

Yumna Al-Arashi

Edition Patrick Frey, €68

The form of *Aisha* interrogates the colonial interpretation of the archive, and the imperial roots of photography. Photographic technology found its use most distinctively across former colonies of Europe, North Africa, the African continent and West Asia; today, Yumna Al-Arashi interrogates the violence of these methods, and subverts the power of the camera to hand authority and dignity back to the women at the heart of her project.

*Aisha*, which is named after Al-Arashi's grandmother, finds its origin in the artist's maternal lineage. Her grandmother has traditional tattoos and Al-Arashi became interested in their aesthetic, which is found across the North Africa and Middle East regions. The ancient art has pre-Islamic roots, but became less utilised as Islam spread more widely; now the tattoos face erasure completely, and older rural women are the last to carry the body-ink tradition. This book is a remedy against institutional archives, many of which house images of these women in glass cases and behind closed doors. Al-Arashi intends to democratise her archive, and humanise once again the people of the region.

The book design, by Naima Schalcher, also speaks volumes. The images are full-bleed, and since Al-Arashi chose to include every shot she took over her four-year project, it is a hefty tome. Even so, it avoids being a heavy read. Instead, it is paced with slow movement, images that are almost copies or duplicates, showing people or animals moving in and out of the frame. *Aisha* also includes Al-Arashi's diary entries and poetic vignettes, printed on thinner paper through which the words show in reverse. It is a transparency that reflects Al-Arashi's ethical intentions.

The images are vibrant and colourful and emit a quiet joy. The simplicity of the photography is refreshing, and Al-Arashi's vulnerability is evident throughout as she attempts to challenge her own ideals of images and come to terms with the violent history of the medium. **BJP**

editionpatrickfrey.com