

Photobook Reviews W39/2019



Publishing photobooks is a labour intensive and almost completely thankless business: at best, you might see your company's name listed in one of the many, many shortlists (that often aren't so short at all). If a prize is given, it's the photographer who gets it, regardless of the fact that while it's her or his photographs, it might actually be other people who made the book what it is, starting with, well, the publisher. The reality is that good publishers know how a photobook can succeed, whereas many photographers don't.

The best way to understand photobook publishers is through looking at their books. With many publishing houses, if the name on the spine is mentioned, one instantly has a good idea of what a book might look like or, roughly, what work an artist might have produced. For example, everybody knows what a Steidl book looks like and what kind of photography is likely to be found therein. In this

particular example, there is a dedication to the craft of printing that I can appreciate regardless of whether or not I like every book made in Göttingen (I don't) or whether I think every book needs to come with heavy layers of ink (nope).



Walter Keller might not be a household name in photoland, even though many of the books he produced and championed clearly are. In the world of photobook making, he's a legend. Whether it's Richard Billingham's *Ray's a Laugh*, Michael Schmidt's *Ein-Heit*, Merry Alpern's *Dirty Windows*, Roni Horn's *You Are the Weather*, Gilles Peress' *Farewell to Bosnia*, Nan Goldin's *I'll Be Your Mirror*, or *Here Is New York – A Democracy of Photographs* (the book that would ultimately wreck the publishing house) – these are just some of the books made by Walter Keller, some in conjunction with [Fotomuseum Winterthur](https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/) [https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/], an institution he co-founded.

A new book, [Walter Keller – Beruf: Verleger](https://www.editionpatrickfrey.com/en/books/walter-keller-beruf-verleger-urs-stahel-miriam-wiesel/)

[https://www.editionpatrickfrey.com/en/books/walter-keller-beruf-verleger-urs-stahel-miriam-wiesel] (*Walter Keller – Profession: Publisher*), now dives into the man's life and work (note that at this time, the book only appears to be available in German). Keller wanted to publish early on in his life, and he wanted to work with photographs. His earliest product was a pamphlet that later turned into a more refined magazine named *Der Alltag* (*The Everyday*). Besides Keller, the magazine involved a number of people who would go on to play serious roles in the world of photography, such as Urs Stahel (one of the driving forces behind the book) or Patrick Frey (whose own company published it).

There are ample examples of spreads from *Der Alltag*, just as there are spreads from the many books Keller ended up producing. In addition, there are numerous essays and conversations about the man, who comes across as incredibly driven and visionary, with the flip side of not the best sense of business and a certain degree of myopia. The book also dives into Keller's womanizing, devoting a whole essay to it, which I found a little bizarre. What insight is gained from the essay is unclear to me.



One aspect that I enjoyed about [Walter Keller – Beruf: Verleger](#)

[<https://www.editionpatrickfrey.com/en/books/walter-keller-beruf-verleger-urs-stahel-miriam-wiesel>] is to discover artists whose books I hadn't heard of before. So far, my own biggest discovery is Marianne Müller's truly extraordinary *A Part of My Life*, which is still available for next to nothing everywhere online. If that book were published today, I think it would be widely discussed: it's such strong work that does not betray its age at all (the photographs were all made in the early to mid 1990s). It's not included in the recent *How We See: Photobooks by Women*, so there's a book by a well known publisher that somehow ended up being more or less forgotten.

Walter Keller – Beruf: Verleger; editors: Urs Stahel, Miriam Wiesel; texts by Theres Abbt, Bice Curiger, Regina Decoppet, Nan Goldin, Martin Heller, Martin Jaeggi, Liz Jobey, Friedrich Meschede, Michael Rutschky, Joachim Sieber, Andreas Spillmann, Urs Stahel, Nikolaus Wyss; 432 pages; Edition Patrick Frey; 2019
(not rated)

[Rebecca Fertinel](#) [<https://www.rebeccafertinel.com/>] 's *Ubuntu (I Am because We Are)* [<https://lecturis.nl/en/product/ubuntu/>] employs a few tricks to elevate pretty standard documentary-style photographs into an interesting book. It speaks of a sense of community in ways that don't feel quite as restricted as an ordinary documentary photobook would be. To begin with, the text that provides the (basic) background of the pictures is hidden underneath the flap of the back cover. There are no title page or table of contents. The photograph on the front of the book continues inside, and this device is used for all horizontal images: one half can be seen on one side of a page, the other half on the reverse.