

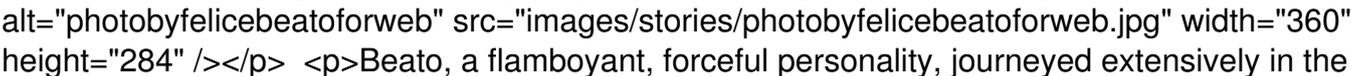
Louise Abbott has written on the subject of photography for more than thirty years. Below is a review that appeared in *The (Montreal) Gazette* on December 11, 2010. It was reprinted in *The Edmonton Journal* and in the *Ottawa Citizen*.

**Photographers Explore the World**

**LOUISE ABBOTT** SPECIAL TO *THE GAZETTE*

After the photographic process was invented in the nineteenth century, two kinds of photographers emerged: those who set up their equipment in a studio, and those who took to the road or the high seas with their cameras. Photographers today continue to pursue studio or field work. This season's photo books embrace both genres of photography, but the most compelling showcase visual explorations of the real world.

In the mid-1850s, Italian-born Felice Beato was hired by an older photographer to record battlefields of the Crimean War, and then religious architecture and biblical sites in the Middle East. When he branched out on his own, Beato kept up a peripatetic existence, driven by a combination of wanderlust and entrepreneurialism. As Western interests expanded across the globe in the second half of the nineteenth century, European publics sought images of newly accessible countries and culture. Anne Lacoste writes in a handsome new coffee-table book, *Felice Beato: A Photographer on the Eastern Road* (Getty Publications, 204 pages, \$47.95).



Beato, a flamboyant, forceful personality, journeyed extensively in the Sudan, Burma, India, and the Far East. He created detailed images of buildings, monuments, landscapes, and people, and sold them as illustrations for popular anthropological and travel accounts; over the years, he gained fame, made many fortunes and lost them.

Today Beato's photographs are represented in private and public collections internationally, and he is recognized as a seminal nineteenth-century photographer. But Lacoste is the first to provide an overview of his life and work. Her book was published in tandem with an exhibition of the same name at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. It boasts 162 reproductions of sepia-toned and sometimes hand-coloured images, and it bears the high-quality printing, design, and binding that have become the hallmark of Getty Publications.

**Engaged Observers: Documentary Photography since the Sixties** (236 pages, \$59.95) is another impressive offering from Getty Publications, and it, too, was issued on the occasion of an exhibition at the Getty Museum. It presents powerful photo essays by nine of the world's finest concerned photographers: Americans Leonard Freed, W. Eugene Smith, Mary Ellen Mark, Susan Meiselas, Lauren Greenfield, and James Nachtwey; Brazilian Sebastião Salgado; Canadian Larry Towell; and Welshman Philip Jones.

These documentarians have tackled subjects that range from race relations and war to eating disorders and mass migrations. Departing from the confines of traditional photojournalism, they have combined their skills as reporters with their personal vision as artists. They have produced images that can be horrifying, like Salgado's scene of scattered body parts after a massacre in a school in Rwanda; beautiful, like Towell's view of a farmer carrying milk cans at an Old Mennonite Colony in Mexico; and both horrifying and beautiful, like Smith's portrayal of a mother cradling her deformed daughter, a victim of mercury poisoning, in Minamata, Japan.

Many of the photo essays have appeared in magazines or newspapers; some, like Mary Ellen Mark's *Streetwise* about runaway children in Seattle, have been published as books. But all merit inclusion in this commendable volume, which includes an informative introduction by Brett

Abbott that serves to introduce a younger generation of readers to the history of social documentary, and an older generation to the newer practitioners of the genre.

Ottawa-based photographer Mark Schacter has also produced a book of expressive documentary photographs titled **Roads** (Fifth House Publishers, 192 pages, \$39.95). When Schacter was growing up in Thunder Bay in the 1960s and 70s, he frequently accompanied his father—a scrap iron and metal dealer—on drives around northwestern Ontario. I loved the emptiness of the highway—the mystery of lakes and rivers glimpsed through the darkness of the boreal forest, he recalls. I liked the look and feeling of the sad and solitary little towns.

Inspired by the memory of those childhood trips, Schacter travelled across much of Canada last year and photographed some of the highways and byways that act as—the connecting thread—the ubiquitous sign of human presence in and movement across the landscape. He shot about 15,000 photographs and selected 150 or so for this medium-format book, reproducing some in black and white, some, in colour.

Despite his argument that any attempt to explain in detail what a photograph is supposed to be about or why it was taken is doomed from the start, Schacter's written observations are as engaging as his often-dramatic images. Unfortunately, the graphic designer chose to extend most of the photographs to the inner and outer edges of the book; double-page spreads look like panoramas with mismatched halves. In the few instances where photographs appear alone on a page surrounded by white margins, they have the impact that they deserve.

Quebec photographer-pilot Mario Faubert took to the skies to document the territory beyond the 55<sup>th</sup> parallel in the province for his large-format book **Nunavik** (les Éditions du passage, 184 pages, \$49.95); the title is the name that the Inuit give to their homeland in northern Quebec. Faubert's striking colour aerial views of the uninhabited or sparsely settled landscape are accompanied by captions and interwoven with short essays, often by well-known Inuit. The texts appear in French, English, and Inuktitut. Although the French-to-English translation of texts is stilted, the essays written originally in English are often poignant. In less than forty years, we have gone from the igloo to high-speed Internet, Pita Aatami, the president of the Makivik Corporation, points out. My role is that of an explorer who will lead the Inuit across the henceforth-changing tundra.

Aatami's reference to the changing tundra is not merely metaphorical: Global warming is wreaking havoc on the Arctic. In a sign of the times, Faubert notes that the greenhouse gas emissions caused by his flights have been offset by the purchase of carbon credits from Planetair.

One of the animal species most threatened by climate change in the north is the polar bear, the subject of a photo book by Norbert Rosing. **The World of the Polar Bear** (Firefly Books, 216 pages, \$29.95) is not a new release—it is an updated, soft-covered third edition—but it is more pertinent than ever. Rosing's documentary images of polar bears and the foxes, seals, walruses, and birds that share their northern habitat are genuinely awe-inspiring; they reflect the photographer's patience, passion, and desire to convince the public of the need to address the environmental crisis.

A placeholder image for a photograph by Norbert Rosing, showing a polar bear in its natural habitat.

Another nature photographer, Geraldo Pace, hiked around over a two-year period to portray the forests and wetlands near his home in St. Sauveur des Monts, north of Montreal. More than 100 of his exquisite, enigmatic black-and-white images are paired with poems by legendary Quebec bard Gilles Vigneault in a sumptuous oversized book called **E**xile (Éditions Guerrera, 164 pages, \$120). The poems and biographical texts appear in

## Review of New Photo Books

Written by Administrator

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both French and English.

***Still Life in Photography*** (Getty Publications, 112 pages, \$24.95) is one of the few new photo books to focus on images created under controlled conditions in a studio setting. The author, Paul Martineau, traces the transplantation of the still life from painting to photography in the nineteenth century, the waning of interest in this art form in the twentieth century, and the revival of still-life photography in the twenty-first century. He speculates that digital technology may cut the photograph loose from its moorings as a sign of the real. Still life may well be the anchor that allows photographers to explore new and yet unimagined depths. Perhaps. But the world beyond the studio still fascinates a great many photographers and viewers.

Louise Abbott is a writer, photographer, and filmmaker in the Eastern Townships. Her latest book is *Eeyou Istchee: Land of the Cree/Terre des Cris*, produced in collaboration with her husband and co-photographer, Niels Jensen.