

"About Photography Books"



Raúl Ortega - Pedro Meyer © 2002

by Pedro Meyer

I was talking to an audience of about 150 people, who had gathered that day to listen to a series of speakers (me included), who were trying to pass on information, as to the best way to go about having one's photography book published and distributed.

The audience received all sorts of tips, from copyright issues, to production and distribution matters that need to be taken care of, so that a photographer could publish his or her own work. When the time came for me to speak, and being the last one of the day, I started out by asking a simple question: "How many of you gathered here today have actually been offered to have a book of your work published, by an either small or large publishing house?" Save for a single hand, there was no one else in the room who had been offered such hope. Well, that was a revelation of sorts, to those attending.

There are obviously many possible reasons for such a lack of support. The easiest to single out, is that the work did not merit being published. However, I thought that this was probably not the main reason that could explain a reality that affected so many photographers, both in that room as well as all over the world. As I was standing there, all of a sudden, it occurred to me that, we as photographers might be buying into a rationale similar to that of lottery tickets. We all have this idea of becoming wealthy if we participate, however the odds are always against us as only few ever win anything.

“About Photography Books”

The idea of pursuing ones' dream of having a book printed, as all those in attendance had entertained, started to look very close to that same logic of the lottery tickets. Every photographer wanted to have his or her book published, yet very few indeed ever got to see their work coming off a press.

During my lecture, I went on to explain, how electronic books could be created. Actually the production process is very simple and efficient, and I explained how everyone gathered there that day, could that very night, publish their work if they wanted to.

What was clear, at least to me, was that there ought not to be any more excuses for not publishing ones' work. Under this perspective, all of a sudden, we all seem to be empowered, to publish our work electronically [of course always leaving the door open for having a printed version if the opportunity presents itself]. But most importantly of all, the work can be seen now, and not in ten years. Even musicians have come these days to the same conclusion, as their predicament, when it comes to publishing work, is strangely enough along the same lines of photographers.

One year ago, during the Day of the Dead celebrations here in Mexico, I went with a colleague friend of mine, to take pictures in the area of Xochimilco. She did her work on film; I took my pictures with a digital camera. That evening as I looked at my images on the computer screen turned into a light table, I said to myself: "Hmm! There is stuff there that might be interesting to turn into a small book." So I made it, and sent it around to a good number of my colleagues, mentioning the fact that here was a new medium that no one was using, and I explained the enormous potential it had. I also called up my friend next morning to find out how she had done with her pictures, and to inquire if she had seen the book I'd sent her. She laughed, and told me, "I have not even developed my film yet, and here you already made a book". We both had a good laugh. I suspect there was some degree of nervousness on the part of both of us, as we had to acknowledge how things were changing before our very eyes.

A year has elapsed since I made that first book, and yet there has been no reaction by anyone, no other electronic book came to light during this period as a result of that example, no one seemed to have much use for this solution. However something did happen, I was approached by one of my colleagues with a book project which had been offered to many editorial houses during these past ten years, I repeat, ten years, and no one had any particular interest in publishing it. It is a book with 160 images done by fifty of the top Mexican photographers. The photos were taken in Mexico City, on December 12th, 1992, during the Guadalupe Virgin's Day.

“About Photography Books”

When I first started out with ZoneZero, everyone was putting down my publishing efforts over the Internet. The usual negative opinions where, who wants to see images on a screen? I prefer to have a printed book in my hands! No one is going to waste his or her time on a computer, and on and on it went. Today, after nine years we get close to ten thousand individuals per day. That is why we have now taken the decision to publish electronic books. It just might be that this new direction will benefit all of us.

As things sometimes happen, one situation leads to another, and before we knew it, we had developed a formula, worthy of exploration. We will make an exhibition in our Gallery section here in ZoneZero, with about 60 images from the original book project. This work can be seen for free, while at the same time we will offer for sale the entire book as it was originally conceived with all 160 images, only that now it will be in electronic format.

But not only that, we also thought about inviting everyone, all around the world to join us with their own imagery, giving everyone an opportunity to share with us their pictures taken around the celebrations of the Virgin of Guadalupe in their particular area. The images will be presented in a gallery in ZoneZero. Fulfilling one of the main aspects of the Internet, and that is the two way dialogue that can ensue. A few weeks later, a jury will choose the best images from all those received. The selected images will become part of an electronic catalog, and given to each photographer whose images appear in the catalog.

Publishing the book *Tonantzin/Guadalupe. A day with her. (Tonantzin/Guadalupe. Un día con ella)* motivated me to work on a new project, updating the images of the celebration after ten years of the original project. With the advantage that now, our efforts would be rewarded 48 hours after the images were taken, so on December 12th, 2002, ten photographers will go out once again and make new images.

Our very first book (about the Day of the Dead) was produced in 72 hours. It consists of 70 pages. It has an introductory essay that explains in a very scholarly manner what the Day of the Dead celebrations here in Mexico are all about. The book has 68 images in total. [The pictures are by Yolanda Andrade, Patricia Aridjis, Iván Carrillo, Francisco Mata, Pedro Meyer, Raul Ortega, Saul Serrano, Enrique Villaseñor]. The format is in a PDF file (Portable Document Format de Adobe.)

This first volume named “Long live the little dead ones” can be purchased with us on line, here at ZoneZero. Our regular price of \$5.00 USD has been reduced to half the price: \$2.50 USD.

“About Photography Books”

The existence of a new option to produce and sell photography books will depend on you. We believe that to spend two dollars and half, or its equivalent in other currencies, is a very small price to pay in order to participate in the creation of a new paradigm. Do help us to make it happen. If we see that this is a successful formula, a lot of photographers will stand to benefit.

Please give us your feedback as users, share your comments in our forums if you will, and tell your friends about this exciting moment, where quite possibly, we might be creating a new form of how we'll publish books in the future.

Finally, keep in mind that if you have some work that you're looking forward to publish, you can contact us to evaluate such a possibility.

Pedro Meyer
November, 2002