

Introduction

There is nothing new about women and photography. Among its earliest pioneers was the English botanist Anna Atkins, who, in 1843, became the first person to publish a book illustrated with photographic images. This was followed by the early artistic experiments of Julia Margaret Cameron and Virginia Oldoini. But for most of photography's 180-year history, women practitioners have been a small minority – and overlooked at that. Indeed, women have more often been in front of the lens than behind it. Yet, as the photographer Eve Arnold famously said, 'I do think that women think differently and have something to offer that men don't have'.

Our first Prix Pictet shortlist in 2008 included Lynn Davis, Mary Mattingly and Susan Derges, outstanding photographers within an otherwise male cast, and each with their own unique style. Since then, women have been increasingly represented in our shortlists, but we did not have our first female laureate, Valérie Belin, until 2015. After that groundbreaking moment, Joana Choumali (2019) and Sally Mann (2021) won the award. Yet, this is only part of the story.

Of the thousands nominated for the prize, fewer than 120 artists have reached the shortlists. This book allows us to reflect, widen our vision a little and place the work of women photographers in the spotlight. We invited all of the women nominated for the prize since 2008 to submit recent work on the broad theme of photography and sustainability. We then worked with a guest editor, Fiona Shields (Head of Photography at *The Guardian*), to make our final selection.

In some cases, such as Tomoko Kikuchi's photographs of funeral performers in rural China, shrouded in neon light, they reveal their secrets slowly. Others are more direct, with themes ranging from global catastrophe – Rena Effendi's images of Irena Kovalenko amid the rubble of her Ukrainian home or Penelope Umbrico's technological waste – to the deeply personal, such as Diana Markosian's exploration of her mother's search for the American dream, and Georgina Goodwin's Covid-enforced moment 'with a new baby and a bubble of uninterrupted time'.

In her introductory essay, Jan Dalley, the *Financial Times*' Arts Editor and a regular member of the Prix Pictet jury, asks 'can we possibly identify such a thing as women's photography, or a female sensibility in the genre? Almost certainly not.' Yet, it is clear that women face particular obstacles to success. The legendary Mexican photographer Graciela Iturbide, in her interview for *Collage*, spoke eloquently of her need to escape first an overbearing father and then the strictures of marriage to pursue her muse and become a photographer, while at the same time caring for her young children. The result is a collection of some of the most iconic images ever made of Mexico and its people. 'It is,' she says, 'the photographer's job to synthesise and to make strong and poetic work from daily life.'

This book showcases women photographers of the Prix Pictet. Each of the 70 works featured in this book does exactly that. It is indeed strong and poetic work: a powerful collage and a beacon of inspiration for future generations of female photographers.

Isabelle von Ribbentrop
Executive Director of the Prix Pictet