

A Questionnaire on the Photobook

Publishers

Akio Nagasawa | Atelier EXB | Blow Up Press | Bookshop M | Chose Commune | Éditions
Loco | FW:Books | Libro Arte | Roma Publications | Skinnerbox | STANLEY/BARKER |
The Eriskay Connection | Void | XYZ Books | Zen Foto

By

José Bértolo

David Company

Publisher: Akio Nagasawa Publishing

Name: Akio Nagasawa

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

Our mission is to preserve artists' important works for future generations. In terms of non-global context, it is to introduce Japanese artists to the world.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

Our publishing house is based in Japan. I think there is no geographical difference in making photobooks. However, in terms of distribution, we have some disadvantages in distributing in Europe and the U.S. due to shipping costs, which is not a big matter.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

Although I believe what is essential in photography is to experience actual prints in person, a photobook is especially important because exhibitions are often temporary and accessible only to a limited audience. It is a medium that allows people to experience an artist's universe wherever they are in the world. A photobook can convey an artist's work to the present generation, but also to those 10, 20, or even 100 years from now.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

I do not know much about who is buying our books. Since our photobooks are kind of high-priced compared to other books, I believe that these are the people who are really consciously committed to the photography culture; they are more than general audiences.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

I do not know the first thing about it since I am not familiar with that field.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

They are very important. An image on the Internet cannot present an essence of a work like it is crucial to appreciate its scale and *matière* for a print. For a photobook, you can experience the world of an artist without seeing an actual photograph, but by touching a physical material that contains other information such as layout design, size, paper, printing quality, bookbinding, weight, etc.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

There is no particular threat. I think digital and photobooks are two separate worlds. Each has its own advantages and audiences.

Publisher: Atelier EXB

Name: Jordan Alves

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

Atelier EXB publishes works that address new forms of photography, contemporary art and science. Founded in 2002 by Xavier Barral, and taken over in 2020 by the five members of the team (Jordan Alves, Nathalie Chapuis, Yseult Chehata, Charlotte Debiolles and Perrine Somma), the publishing house conceives each book with great attention to both content and form. Interrogating the forms of photography, discovering artistic writing, addressing the major issues that permeate our contemporary societies through images: Atelier EXB is at once a space for creation, curiosity and openness to the world. Aesthetic excellence and editorial content, developed in close collaboration with major names in contemporary creation as well as more emerging figures, make up astonishing works in which numerous artists and authors from all over the world come together. To date, the catalogue includes more than 200 critically acclaimed works.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

We are based in Paris, France, but we can see that the market is now global. It is really important for us to publish in French, but we often publish in English and we see that the boundaries are now very thin and almost don't exist anymore. Photobooks are circulating much faster and efficiently, especially with the internet and the social networks.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

Photobooks are still an accomplishment for the artists. I feel like it is an important moment in a career, doing the right book with the right publisher. Books also often complete an exhibition: either by being a part of it, or by continuing the purpose of the artist after it is closed.

Most of all, I feel like in this world of multimedia content, where everything is dematerialized, books appear as a physical necessity, an object that is real and in which you can experiment sensations: touching, smelling, seeing, even hearing!

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

We have a good general idea of our audience but we are still surprised by the diversity of it. Our books were once quite expensive but now with the multiplicity of new publishing houses and the raise of materials, we are as expensive as the others! The situation of the market enlarged our audience and, once again thanks to internet, gathered more people from different landscapes around our publications. We also try to propose events, lectures, book signing or projections to make the link with the authors.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

The place of photobook criticism in the press is still very small, almost non-existing. It is different in the digital world, where it can be faster, cheaper and in a different quantity even if it doesn't mean it is good. There is still this good feeling of having a good critic, but, on the other hand, I still don't know if a good critic helps or not the book to be sold. Sometime social networks or the good work of a bookshop/distributor is enough.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

Of course they do! We try to be as much open to the world as we can, and going abroad to show the books is the best way to defend our message. Every book has a place in our editorial line, saying something of our world in which we recognize ourselves. Spreading the message outside our country is very important, as much as doing it domestically. Book fairs are always a good moment to meet our readers or make new ones. It is essential.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

I don't think so. In terms of selling it is a good complement to the bookshops, a good way to find an information and be redirected to the right publication. About the e-books, I don't see the point of making it. Nothing could ever replace the sensation of the paper under your fingers and the ink to your eyes, and we work hard for that.

Publisher: BLOW UP PRESS

Name: Grzegorz Kosmala

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

From the really beginning we wanted to talk about important topics, to make people think about them, to ask questions more often than giving simply answers to them, especially if there are no answers at all. We don't want to publish books that you go through just one time and then you keep them on your bookshelf and never come back to them. That's why we created a motto, "When the story matters", that we are trying to follow in our publications even if they are artbooks. So, we cover difficult topics, often taken from personal experiences of the authors, that somehow describe the world we live in, describe us, and I hope they contribute to better understanding who we are, what we are doing and what effects this may bring.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

Right now we are based in Warsaw, Poland. I think today's geography of photobooks has some spots where it feels very well. It mainly results from the long traditions of photography and photobooks in those areas. When I look at the map of Europe, they are mostly located in the western part of the continent. Traditionally France, Great Britain but also the Netherlands. These three spots are the leaders followed by Italy, Spain and Switzerland. So, it is Europe. Then, skipping to the map of the world, we have three countries that contribute a lot to the world of photobooks: USA, Japan and China. From our perspective, it is how the world of photobooks looks like.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

They are extremely important as they have become the way we can experience photography today. We realized not everything can be experienced online. Photobooks are here excellent example of this. More and more photographers perceive the photobook as a natural end to their projects. Not a publication in magazine, not a presentation at the gallery or museum. It took a while to realize this but it finally happened. So it is photobooks that drive photography today. In the past, there were festivals and their exhibitions. But it is too ephemeral, too temporal, while photobook stays with you for much longer if not for ever.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

Well, we have a group of people collecting all our publications. They are with us from the first printed publications. When we participate in different fairs, we have the same people approaching our table. Luckily, this group increases and each fair results with new customers. Who are they? In most of the cases they are collectors of photobooks, people who like this medium or like photography and the artists we publish. Then we have people who buy books as an inspiration for their projects or materials for their studies. Depending on the market, we also have students of design or photography. I cannot say it has changed over the years. I would rather say it is constant.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

You are right, there are not so many places where people can read about photobooks. And those which exist are under permanent attack by photographers and publishers trying to make them interested in their publications, hoping for a good review. On the other hand, there is an increasing group of reviewers-amateurs promising a review in exchange of a book, building their position that way. But honestly, I don't know how to strengthen this critic. Maybe it should be somehow regulated how to work with reviewers, something like a code of good practices. I'm sure of one thing: we all, publishers and reviewers, need each other a lot.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

Yes, and since the pandemic — extremely important. It is the most important channel of reaching our customers and giving them a chance to experience our books. It is the moment when we can talk to them directly and when we can finally meet, also with our artists.

Of course, depending on the festival, some are better, and some are worse. For us, the best are fairs focusing on photobooks but also on art books. Photography fairs are less interesting as they are focused on galleries, and publishers are always gathered somewhere in the corner of the fair.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

I can hardly imagine a photobook on a Kindle or iPad. It is just a substitute, for me. Even online bookfairs which were so popular during the pandemic couldn't replace offline events which come back after a forced 2-year-long break. It is because people

who buy photobooks are different customers. They are fascinated by this unique connection to photography and paper, which is the best carrier for this medium, almost an irreplaceable one.

Publisher: bookshop M

Name: Satoshi Machiguchi

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

I run *MATCH and Company Co., Ltd.*, a Tokyo-based design studio that edits and book designs photobooks by leading Japanese photographers, does editorial design for magazines, and graphic design for films, plays, and exhibitions.

In 2005, in order to take on the challenge of publishing and distributing our own photobooks, I launched the photobook label *M* and at the same time established the photobook sales company *bookshop M Co., Ltd.*

Since 2008, the company has continued to exhibit at Paris Photo, one of the world's largest photography fairs.

My younger brother, Hikari Machiguchi, also works as a designer, and we work together.

The photobook label *M* publishes mainly the works of Japanese photographers.

Selecting mainly photographers of the same generation as us, but also esteemed predecessors and younger photographers, we continue to pursue the possibilities of the Japanese photobook in a global perspective. This is because we want to fulfill our responsibility to show the work not only of Japanese photographers but also Japan's excellent paper, printing, and bookbinding techniques to the world.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

Tokyo, Japan.

Japanese photobooks have a special history in the world.

While following this history, we are always looking for new ways to express photobooks using new Japanese techniques.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

I recognize that a photograph and a photobook are two very different modes of expression.

As you know, a photobook is more accessible than a photograph, as it begins to walk on its own.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

Although our readers are mainly from Japan, we have been expanding our readership to Europe by continuing to exhibit at Paris Photo, one of the world's largest photography fairs since 2008. We are also aware that it is spreading to other Asian countries that are neighbors of Japan.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

Recently, a number of long-established Japanese photography magazines have been forced to discontinue publication in rapid succession. However, in January of this year, a new photography magazine *Sha-shin* was launched, for which I serve as art director. It has attracted more new readers than expected.

While it is important to develop critique through WEB and SNS, I believe it is also important to develop critique through print (substances that can be sensed by the five senses) media. This is because we have received proof that print media will definitely *remain* and we feel that new readers are returning to print media as a *material*. I also think it is important to replace the critique with all kinds of language.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

Of course.

This is because it is possible for people to meet in person and communicate through the medium of photobooks as material.

As an example, at this year's Paris Photo, I proposed a photobook that I planned to publish in Japan to my foreign publisher friends, and it was decided that the photobook would be published not only in Japan but also in other countries around the world.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

I mentioned earlier that photography and photobooks are completely different modes of expression, and, in the same way, I believe that electronic media and paper media are completely different modes of expression.

I believe that it is my job to appeal to readers by taking advantage of the characteristics of both, while carefully considering what can only be done with electronic media and what can only be done with paper.

Publisher: Chose Commune

Name: Cécile Poimboeuf-Koizumi (co-founder / director)

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

At Chose Commune, we aim at producing books that *don't exist*.

By this, I mean that most of the books, if not all of them, are book projects before being anything else. We never work with ready-made dummies and don't really accept any submissions. I always say that I am happy to receive an invitation to see some work, whether it's a gallery/museum show or a school's graduate show, or even anything that would be underground is most welcome. People tend to think that when I say "I don't accept submissions", it means that I'm not interested in discovering new work. It's actually quite the opposite. But I just don't like my eye to be directed.

If I had to present the editorial line — something I never really feel comfortable with as what comes out of Chose Commune is basically mostly what I like, personally —, I would say that I am particularly interested in making visible unpublished works by famous or unknown artists. I want people to be surprised each time we publish a book, because they've heard of the name but they didn't suspect he/she was also making such work, or be blown-away because they had no idea the photographer even existed. I hope my contribution lies there especially. In the discovery. One might notice that there are a lot of Japanese photographers published by our imprint. Being half-Japanese and having an extensive knowledge of the language, culture and photography from this part of the world certainly guides my choices. But I feel we are more generally very much interested in the international scene. We are a French publishing house but we don't publish that many French photographers. The photography scene is very strong in France but there are already many publishers doing a wonderful job representing France, so when Chose Commune came to life, I thought I would use my strength (Japanese/French background + an overseas upbringing) to offer something a bit different.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

Chose Commune is based in Marseille, France.

I am not sure geography is such a big deal in today's global world.

People may travel less or rightfully so, but books can and should travel.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

To me, photobooks are everything. I feel very close to the way photobooks ruled the culture of photography in Japan, much more than exhibitions. I feel that in the West, exhibitions bring approval and books are often considered catalogues of the said-show. I aim at making books that are the exact opposite. Not long ago, someone asked, talking about one of our releases, if the book was the show's catalogue. I replied that the show was conceived and imagined from the book, not the other way round. And it was true, as the book was a project long before the exhibition was even planned.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

We have a strong network of faithful collectors and buyers. Those I know, and meet regularly at book fairs. But I like to think that I don't know most of the people buying our books, through bookshops for example. Nothing would be more sad than selling your books to the same people every time. I don't make books for photobook collectors. I make books that can bring a little something to anyone, especially those who never even thought a photobook was a thing.

Talking exclusively about the photobook world, which is not what interests me most, as you may have understood, yes, I think it has changed slightly. Let's say that there has been a self-publishing/small presses's boom around 2013/2014, there was a crazy energy back then. Of course, new publishers flourish every year, but it feels different.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

It is totally lacking. Most magazines write about photobooks (well, let's say art book, broadly speaking) only once a year, at Christmas. To think that photobooks are considered like coffee table books that one would only buy for Christmas is pretty much depressing. Of course, there is a specialized press that works differently but I wish that national newspapers and more mainstream magazines would also want to write about it. I've been looking at a way to change things for the past 10 years... Please let me know if you find the magic trick.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

Yes, book fairs are an important moment both socially and financially. To be honest, it can be a bit disappointing financially speaking, but it's just so good to meet the people who make what you do worth it.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

I don't think so. A screen just cannot replace printed matter, especially images.

Publisher: Éditions Loco

Name: Eric Cez

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

Since their creation in 2008, Loco editions have developed several axes in the field of photography. We are attached to author photography, ranging from an exploration and plastic research, to more documentary works, set up through the photographic image of the narrations.

For each book, we want to find the most accurate form and editorial approach in relation to the singularity of a photographic work.

We want to give visibility to a demanding photographic creation in France and abroad.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

Our publishing house is based in Paris and our books are distributed worldwide with greater importance in Europe.

The photobook now enjoys an incredible aura and the circulation of books is mainly through international trade shows and fairs.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

The book has always been, by its reproducible nature, intrinsically linked to photography. A book is often more important to a photographer than an exhibition. It makes it possible to develop a work and to perpetuate a plastic, documentary or aesthetic position in a united whole. Reproduction techniques now make it possible to restore all the qualities of a photographic print. The book is the most faithful ambassador of a photographic work.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

Buying a photography book is still an insider act. Buyers are still collectors, passionate about photography.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

We suffer from a lack of serious criticism around the photobook. It is true that the place devoted in the press to the book in general tends to be reduced, giving even less space to the criticism of a photo book. The space is now moving a little more in the blogs and websites of photobook enthusiasts. But a whole critical field remains to be invented.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

They are certainly important to make the books more visible to the public.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

I don't think digital is a problem for the photobook. On the contrary, the book develops an increasingly rich research on materiality, a reflection on the object, the choice of a format, a paper and a binding which gives all its singularity and originality to a book. The book is assimilated more and more to a luxury craftsmanship which contributes to its aura.

Publisher: Fw:Books

Name: Hans Gremmen

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

We see the choice of an artist to make a book as a choice to make a new work. Making a book is a collaborative act in which design, editing, and production are all merged into one organic process. This way of working is very much rooted in the Dutch tradition of collaborations between photographers, designers, and printers; which can be traced back to the experimental reproductions of Piet Zwart, and to the collaborations between Emmy Andriessen, Cas Oorthuis with designer Dick Elffers, and Ed van der Elskens' books made with Jurriaan Schrofer. And later, in the nineties, the books made by Mevis and van Deursen for photographers Aglaia Konrad, Geert van Kesteren and many others.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

This year I was part of the jury of the *Best Books from all over the World* competition, and I see that the books that are made are more and more starting to look alike. Which makes sense, because the education also is no longer limited to borders of countries. If I look at the Netherlands, where we are based, I see many important Dutch designers, like Karel Martens, Mevis & van Deursen, Irma Boom, Joost Grootens, all teaching at international schools, such as Rietveld, Yale, Ecal, etc. The input at art schools is therefore no longer limited to a specific country.

Also the students at art schools are becoming more and more diverse, and bring in their worlds into education, as well. This creates a great and energetic field that I also experience when I'm visiting international book fairs, such as the New York Art Book Fair or Tokyo Art Book Fair. It is great to see that design and books bind so many people. Yet, there is a danger to this globalisation, too: if we mix all these perspectives and flavours too much, we end up eating the same boring soup.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

Photobooks and photography have a unique connection. Within photography there is no such thing as "an original": every photograph is a reproduction of a negative, a slide, or a digital file. To print a c-print and frame it, and put it on the walls of the MoMA takes as many steps of reproduction as to print that same photograph on a page in a book. This means both prints are equal. Realizing this made me

fundamentally change my view on what a photobook is, and how it shapes photography.

A book has also another important quality: it can easily travel. Most of the photography i saw in my life was in printed form: through books and magazines. Also a book stays forever, and is always open, and on, without needing a plug, internet or opening hours.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

Our network is growing in an organic way. This is very much connected to the people we work with. Every new photographer, and writer, we work with expands our network. Also, many books are distributed through our partner Idea Books. They find shops for us, and show them our books. We could have a more active say in this part, but I like to stay a bit away from that. Being too much aware of your audiences can be distracting, and — in the worst case — it can dictate the outcome of the books. I think that a large part of our audience is expecting a book which is made without compromise, in edit, content and design. Sometimes this means a book is uncomfortable or difficult to read. But a good book is a bit uncomfortable and takes an effort to read. We expect the readers to engage with the book.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photo-books? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

I try to focus on my job (designing and publishing), and i hope writers and critiques are doing their job: to create a steady bubble in which there is reflection on this important medium.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

These fairs are a very important way to connect to colleagues, buyers, shops, curators, libraries. Interestingly, during the Covid pandemic, there were hardly any fairs. And we were afraid we would loose this connection to these groups, and — mostly — we were very worried that many shops could disappear. But the opposite happened: many new (small) shops opened their doors, and found their way to our books. Our distributor noticed that the percentage of books sold to Amazon shrank, and the “real” bookshops sales grew significantly. For me these sales, through bookshops, are the most important: I truly enjoy the idea that many people with love for books benefit from our work: the people working in bookshops, with all their knowledge and passion, the shops themselves, the distributors, and people they work with. They all benefit. From this perspective I struggle sometimes with the idea that

every book sold on (for instance) the New York Art Book Fair from my table is a book less sold at a nice NYC bookshop.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

The opposite is true: internet helps independent people to show their work and ideas.

Publisher: Libro Arte

Name: Yoshihiro Ikka

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

I would like to introduce young Japanese photographers to the world. I hope that as many Japanese photographers as possible will be active in the world. For that reason, I still want to make a photobook and present it to the world.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

Libro Arte is based in Japan. I have been exhibiting at French book fairs for the past 10 years, so, outside Japan, I often think mainly about France.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

I believe that photobooks are important in photography culture.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

I think that general people and people who like photobooks are buying them. I don't think it will change now or in the future.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

I didn't give it much thought.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

I think it's pretty important.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

I don't feel threatened by digital photobooks. I think of it as something completely different.

Publisher: Roma Publications, Amsterdam

Name: Roger Willems, director

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

Roma Publications aims to be a platform to initiate, design, produce and distribute artists' books, photobooks, and other contemporary art and design related publications. Every publication is the result of a close collaboration between an artist and an (editorial) designer, which is often me, but not all of the time. The goal is to stay close to the intentions of the artist, to handle this with care, and avoid institutional interferences when necessary.

We don't have any strategy or opinion about our place in a global context. It's fine to work in a margin as long as we find the opportunities and receive enough positive response to carry on.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

We are based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and distribute worldwide through Idea Books, also located in Amsterdam.

Photobooks can travel well, but still reach only few. I think, also if you try your best, it's not realistic to expect photobooks to be a very democratic medium. We are loyal to independent book shops all around the world because we think they still play a role in local communities. But on the other hand we deliberately make books that spring out of our limited and subjective context. We accept and enjoy the fact that we often drop completely out of place publications on the other side of the world. It's up to the individual to recognise it or not, to inspire, or to ignore it.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

Photobooks are great tools. But to be honest, I try to stay a bit out of the culture of photography. The world of photobooks feels very narrow to me.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

Based on my experience at fairs I can say that books that are somehow interesting for graphic designers and bought mostly by young designers, and art or design students. Photobooks are merely bought by senior photographers and collectors.

Over the last years I noticed that a large part of the design students have an Asian background.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

I don't know. Probably criticism regarding photobooks will always stay within the photobooks-circle.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

Yes, they do. It is a moment to come out of the studio and meet your audience. Last week we attended Printed Matter's Art Book Fair in New York, and it was great to experience this huge interest in independent publishing. It's really amazing and gives us a lot of energy.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

No, I don't see it that way. A book has different qualities.

Publisher: Skinnerboox

Name: Milo Montelli

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house?

Basically, I just want to have fun. At least this was my goal at the very beginning (2014).

I have another job totally far from the arts and I wanted publishing to be my space of freedom.

At a certain point I felt obliged to fit some business rules/strategies but I mostly like to see publishing as a way of expressing myself. I'm still looking for a balance between my personal taste, motivation, money, human relationship and publishing as a learning experience.

2. Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

Really hard to answer. Can I say I don't know? My aim is to give a voice to young artists as well as to most established ones.

I can do it with my tools and experience. I'm quite alone in this but I like to know new people, artists, designers, curators. If some of the books I made can give some new emotion, new impulse to people, so this is my contribution.

3. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

Skinnerboox is a very small reality, based in a small place in the country in the middle of Italy. The place is called Jesi. Publishing gave me the opportunity to travel a lot to several places in the world. I saw a lot of realities similar to mine, as well as most structured companies. Regarding the audience, I think the most interested people at the moment are from Asia. At least people I met, but also bookshops, are often very curious and have a very enthusiastic approach.

4. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

I think it's one of the most important vehicles to share the culture of photography. It allows artists to share their work even without institutional support (which in Italy is zero). Photobooks give them the opportunity to go deeper into their work, it's a space of freedom but also a learning opportunity. The problem is that doing/buying

books is very expensive. And I think this is the biggest barrier in order to make it a real global/democratic experience.

5. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

Yes. As I already stated, in the last 2 years I experienced a lot of growing interest from Asian countries. Also, most important, most of them are very young people.

6. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

There is no real criticism. There's no real debate on photobooks, with some few exceptions. Also, if you see the biggest book prizes are made (jurors, winners...) by friends of friends, typical of the art world (and not only, maybe). Sometimes you can decide if to be in or not. And not always quality is a prerequisite. So I think education is always the answer. But also this kind of education is very expensive. So I fear it will be quite hard to be out of this niche.

7. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

Definitely. Since we say that we are all in love with the materiality of books, fairs are the best moment to share your work. To allow people to touch and smell it. Personally, at the moment, fairs' participation are among the few moments I particularly enjoy this experience.

8. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

I prefer to say that photobooks could be a threat to the digital world.

Publisher: STANLEY/BARKER

Name: Rachel & Gregory Barker

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

We publish the books that we ourselves want to own, and more than that, the ones that stay on your coffee table, rather than sinking into the oblivion of the shelf.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

We are based in England but we work with photographers from all around the world. Where we are is irrelevant to the books we produce, we find photographers who's work we love and we distribute the books worldwide.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

Books give everyone the opportunity to enjoy photography and they can have the power to change and shape the culture of photography — if they are good. We are also interested in the world outside photography and getting our books into people's lives who wouldn't ordinarily know about the photographers we work with.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

Our collectors are located all around the world and are passionate and enthusiastic about our books. We have noticed our reach is much wider and grows each year, with people ordering books from near and far.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

There is no criticism. We would welcome honest criticism and comment.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

We attend Paris Photo, it's a good opportunity to meet our collectors, stockists and people in the photography industry.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

No. The digital experience killed the photography magazine, but books have a different nexus. For us, the book is the work itself, not a depiction of it.

Publisher: The Eriskay Connection

Names: Rob van Hoesel, Carel Fransen, Evelien Seegers & Jan van Helden

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

The Eriskay Connection is a Dutch studio for book design and an independent publisher. With a small team, we focus on contemporary storytelling at the intersection of photography, research and writing. In close collaboration with photographers, authors and artists from all around the world, we make photobooks as autonomous bodies of work that offer us new and necessary insights into the world around us.

The key for us is to convey the essence of the work through high quality editing, design and production. Our editions are mainly offset printed and bound in the Netherlands, and we strive to work with local producers and sustainable materials as much as possible.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

We are based in the city of Breda in the Netherlands, and our publications are distributed all over the world. Even though contemporary art is focused a lot on the Western world, we have been surprised and hopeful about the vast diversity of places where photobooks are being made (and bought). It is still a very Western practice and market, but there seems to be a shift in focus, which hopefully will continue.

3. How important are photo books in shaping the culture of photography?

Photobooks could be seen as a dedicated niche within the world of photography. But it is tough to determine how photobooks influence the culture of photography. For photographers there is some overlap, as there are a considerable amount of photographers represented by galleries who have also published photo books. For the audiences, however, there is a more clear division. People who buy photographic prints are often different from those who buy photobooks.

As an object, photobooks can be a physical document of an artistic or documentary project. But it can also be a piece of art on itself, something you'd call an artist's book. "Artists' books are books or book-like objects over the final appearance of which an artist has had a high degree of control; where the book is intended as a work of art in itself" (Stephen Bury, *Artists' Books: The Book as a Work of Art*, 1995). Most of what we publish falls in this latter category, and these are the kind of books we like to make most. Because for those books we need to work closely with an artist, not

only for the edit and sequence of their photographs, but also to see how we can tell a story in book form that goes beyond the simple representation of their work.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

The fact that most of our publications are in English, and often multilingual, makes it possible for us to have a far-reaching audience. We have a reasonably good feeling about who is buying our books, especially on fairs and on our web shop, and our audience is quite diverse. We feel this has not necessarily changed over the years, except for the fact that our reach has increased, of course.

Still, we operate in a niche market, also shown by the edition sizes we, and other publishers, generally work with. But what's interesting is that every book has a chance of reaching a specific audience outside of the photobook niche, based on the subject matter. But as these potential audiences change for every book, it is quite a challenge to keep finding ways to find out about, and reach out to them.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photo books? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

In general, it seems to us that the field of criticism for art in traditional media is coming short. There seems to be a lessening interest and room for niche subjects in a market that tries hard to compete with the fast moving online world. While being reviewed in magazines and newspapers undoubtedly helps out, we think that we mainly benefit from repeating visibility. If someone has read a review of one of our books, then sees it on social media, and finally on our table at a book fair, then they will likely already know what it's about. So whether it is an article on a blog, a post on social media, or a review in a newspaper, everything counts. But it's an ever-changing world, so we also need to listen to and learn from the new kids on the block.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

Book fairs are very important for our publishing house, so the last two years of lockdowns were very strange. Generally, we try to visit many fairs: a nice variation of smaller ones that do not require extensive travelling, but also bigger ones such as Polycopies in Paris, and the art book fairs in New York, Tokyo and Shanghai.

One of the most important and fun parts of book fairs for us is that we can directly connect to our audience. You can see how visitors react at your table, what they might pick up, and how they leaf through a book. And of course the possibility to actually have a conversation about the work.

We also try to invite the photographers we work with to join us at a fair, for example for a book signing or a talk. It is also very nice to see the people we work with to meet each other. As they all have book making as a shared experience, there is a lot to learn and to talk about.

Book fairs are also a place where you can see what other publishing houses are producing. We exchange experiences and share thoughts and drinks. Every publisher has their own creativity and strength. For that reason we don't really see each other as competitors, but more like colleagues.

Last but not least, it is a place where we meet new artists. Sometimes book fairs organise portfolio reviews, with students for example, but we also meet many artists who simply go to fairs to show their work and look for a publishing house that might suit them. Many of the books we published originate from a conversation at a book fair.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photo books?

That is a difficult question. The digital world is such a boundless and uncontrollable sphere of everything that yes, nowadays, it influences most of our daily lives. But its unlimited inventiveness is also exciting and give many new opportunities. New ways to find an audience, for example, or for artists to present themselves and their work. But those opportunities are mostly centered around the way to present photobooks and reach out to new artists and audiences. While it might have been a direct threat to the industry ten years ago, we think photobooks have since proved themselves unreplaceable by digital alternatives. So we will simply keep doing what we love to do, which is making well produced physical books with talented artists.

Publisher: Void**Name: João Linneu & Myrto Steirou****1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?**

Void is very invested in publishing books that wouldn't easily find another publishing house. As an example, we published *5 Dollars for 3 Minutes* by Cammie Toloui — a book that the artist had been trying to publish since the 90s.

We are very keen on publishing debut books of artists. Half of our titles are the first monograph of a photographer. As much as this is commercially challenging, there's great energy (and responsibility) when working on an artist's first publication. Treating artists fairly is something we prioritize. Void is self-funded, and our business model is drawn in a fashion that values the artists we collaborate with, and at the same time, grants us creative freedom and independence.

All our books, including the most colorful ones, have a dark twist to them. And this is a niche within a niche that we try to populate and take good care of. In our practice, we avoid templates and formulas. Every time we feel we are starting to repeat ourselves, we change routes. Not fearing to experiment and fail, we keep our slightly-not-that-commercial practice with enthusiasm and the same — or even more — passion than when we started. Looking forward to being relevant, fair and inspiring to the people we collaborate with, and to the audience.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

Void is a Greek company. With its stock and brick-and-mortar store in Athens. Though, its members are divided between Iceland and Greece. Geography is an extremely important factor in the editorial universe.

The country you are based in will impact the likelihood of getting grants and funding. There's no public grant for art publishing in Greece, to say. When — in northern Europe — you can find a multitude of support for artists and publishers. This has a direct impact on the regional representation within the editorial universe. It also has a big influence on the deal between publishing houses with artists and readers. Publishers can offer more to artists when they can rely on external sources.

As you can also offer much better product prices when you have to invest just a fraction of the production costs.

Open a book directly in the colophon of a Dutch publishing house. You will find more logos than in a Formula 1 car. This book will be sold at least 30% cheaper than a book by a self-funded publisher. This will also impact the selling of the book, the distribution, the edition run, and, therefore, the representation of such publishers and their artists.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

We are way too involved and too passionate to have a clear and objective opinion. We are motivated by the belief that books are an important part of the photographic fauna. And that if photography is deeply related to “memory” as a concept, the book is perhaps the best suit for such a concept.

On the other hand, the book became the fuel for speculative photographic practices. The need to make a book is “shaping the culture of photography” in a negative way. Many photographers need to make a book before needing to make a photograph. And the book starts before questioning if their project is suited for that format. Many times it is not. And inevitably populates the photography ecosystem with half-baked projects that saw the light of day too soon.

4. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

Our experience is that specialized photography book criticism spans from people wanting free books to Collector Daily (collectordaily.com). The latter do a very serious job. To start from, they purchase the books they review, so there are no influential dynamics of “favor-retribution”. They also do an interesting self-evaluation at the end of the year of how many reviews by gender, geography, etc. And, no less important, their review brings in-depth thoughts and interesting perspectives.

But maybe because of the niche nature, criticisms tend to always picture positive aspects. Speaking from a publisher’s shoes, we would be scared if there were way too many Simon Cowells out there. The financial sustainability of a book lies on a lifeline, and if negative reviews pop up more often than not, it would be even more challenging to be a publisher.

Now, wearing off the publisher’s shoe, it is at times boring to know every article you read will surely praise the critiqued book/exhibition/project. I remember reading “SHIT and Empty Infantilism” (an article by Brad Feurhelm on Erik Kessels’ book *Shit* by RVB Books) and was mesmerized that, finally, something non-praising was out there. And at the same time had the chills of feeling bad for the publisher who will have to deal with that in a small market.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

Fairs and festivals are good sales opportunities, being responsible for 12% of our revenue (yes... we have this number). But more than the sales figure, fairs allow a good connection with the audience. You have a good barometer of what you did right

and wrong. Just observing someone reading your book tells a lot about our hits and misses.

Also, relevant to the geography and representation issue: the more relevant fairs tend to be in Central and Northern Europe. The recent increase in oil and transport is making it more and more difficult for peripheral publishers to attend fairs and festivals in a financially profitable way. Portugal has an interesting grant for Portuguese publishers to travel to book fairs abroad. But there are not many of those out there.

6. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

Probably no longer. The harm it could cause was already done. E-books hit the literature market, shrinking brick-and-mortar stores. This drove bookstores to run with less physical space, and art books, for their bigger dimensions, were the first to be kicked out of the stores.

Another aspect: we already learned how to appreciate photography in the digital world. We understand the unique nature of each realm. We won't look for an in-depth intimate relationship with photography on Instagram. As we can't ease the craving for reactive news in magazine or book form.

This is to say we might have reached an equilibrium moment, where books on photography have their niche. With specialized physical and online bookstores, specialized media, fairs, festivals, awards, producers and customers.

Perhaps the imminent threat to photography books comes from economics (paper supply crisis, inflation hitting ways of production, increasingly expensive shipping fees) and ecology.

Publisher: XYZ Books

Name: Tiago Casanova & Pedro Guimarães

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

We have tried to position ourselves as an open and collaborative hub for photography and photography books, being XYZ Books much more than just a publishing house. Inside our premises we are currently hosting five interdisciplinary and nonprofit projects: an exhibition space, a bookshop with a focus on photography, a publishing house, a printing lab, and shared studios for permanent and temporary residents. We envision our project in two perspectives: what we take out and what we bring in. Our two main missions are on one hand to create the means to internationalize local and Portuguese authors, and on the other hand create the means to bring in new, external and international knowledge to share it with our community. We do so by participating very actively in international photobook fairs, photography festivals and by creating partnerships with other international institutions, and by organizing workshops, exhibitions, presentations and also a very unique format of Residencies entirely dedicated to the photobook making, which we started in 2017.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

We are based in Lisbon, Portugal.

One of our greatest passions about photobooks is the fact that these can also be seen as portable and long-lasting exhibitions. There is not a specific place or a closing date to be seen. In this sense we have noticed the worldwide proliferation of the photobook, being in fact a global phenomenon, where you can see publishers and self-published authors based in all imaginable places of earth, a reality entirely allied with the fast growing of digital systems of communication and production.

The same can be said about the audience, and people in general who have interest in buying and owning photography books, since we have online sales for any country you can imagine.

On the other hand, although photobooks are a global phenomenon, we cannot say that we have accomplished a geographical equity of the photobook making. By being a physical object, and usually requiring very expensive machinery and materials, it is a fact that not every country and even not every continent have the means to produce and distribute high quality photography books. We have recently realized that even developed countries such as New Zealand have a tremendous difficulty to produce photography books due to the tremendous logistical problems they face in terms of machinery and materials, and ultimately on very high costs. There are probably 4 main hubs of photobook making/distribution: Europe; Japan, North

America and South America, but due to import/export logistics and high costs, even within these big hubs it is very difficult for artists and publishers to internationalize themselves outside those borders. Even for XYZ Books, which is located in Europe, it is difficult to be able to internationalize ourselves due to high costs on traveling and shipping, to be present on the main international events, which usually take place in Central Europe.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

There is somehow a fetish within the artist and photography community to be able to create their own book, especially their first book. The photobook as a way to showcase a body of work is more and more reaching the same status as exhibitions. This means on one hand that photobooks have allowed the democratization of the photography production (up to a certain point), allowing artists to self-publish without the need of a curatorial process or even a commercial purpose. On the other hand, this also means that authors, especially the younger ones, are more and more impatient about publishing their first work. This results in an excessive production of photobooks, with the creation and massive production of titles that add very less to the already overwhelming universe of images.

Nevertheless, photobooks are still somehow a way to be critical and analytical within the abundance of images that we are daily confronted with, especially with digital and social media platforms and advertisements. As professional creators of images, photographers who pass through the process of editing a book are often confronted with the task to narrow down and be more and more precise on their image selection in order to communicate a specific idea, concept or project. In a digital world, this is one of the greatest challenges we are now facing, on how to create meaning to an image in an already overwhelming world of images. In order to shape the culture of photography to a wider audience (ultimately the entire world population is an audience of photography, and the vast majority is an image creator too) you need to first shape within the professionals working in the field.

Photobooks have been playing an important role in shaping the culture of photography on two different ends, from the photographers who have published themselves a book, to other photographers, artists and consumers who see and consume photography books, since this has been revealed to be a more democratic, atemporal and borderless way of showcasing photography.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

Our main audience are other artists and photographers, other editors and publishers, and a few collectors. Maybe a few bigger publishers were able to reach a wider audience outside this spectrum, but we believe that the great majority of small independent publishers are still in a very narrow niche. Some titles, due to their thematic, might reach a new external audience, but again, that's just another niche.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

Art critics, and especially photobook critics, lack structural and financial support for their activity. Newspapers and specialized magazines and platforms struggle for means of survival, especially with the new digital formats. Most contributors work on a nonprofit base, meaning that the quality of contribution has decreased over the years, even in established magazines. Most of the more interesting examples of criticism have been created by fellow experienced photographers and educators who have created their own platforms of communication, who depend entirely on financial contributions by readers, and most of the time they also depend on book donations by publishers and artists.

The only possible way to strengthen the field of art and photography criticism is to create structural and state sponsorship, so that authors who want to specialize themselves in the field can count on grants and financial support for their activity, the same way many artists and curators can also count with financial support for creation and dissemination of artworks.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

International Photography and book fairs are the main concentration point of people working in photobook making, from photographers and publishers, but also booksellers, printers, designers, curators, journalists and much more. Considering that, these are the moments we are able to more closely showcase our work to our peers, create the so valuable network to promote the books and artists that we publish, but also find new works to be published.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

The past 10-15 years have taught us that the digital world is far from being a threat to photobooks. The more digital the world is, the more physical photobooks we see being produced and the more publishers we see pumping out. The digital world has in fact created a platform to ease the sharing of knowledge, especially to curious photographers searching for ways to self-publish their first books, and also it has eased the production processes, where many authors and publishers see their photobooks being printed and produced at a physical distance in other cities, countries and even continents. Also, the digital world has paved the way to many publishers, authors and even bookshops based in remote locations.

The current biggest threat to photobooks lies in the extreme increase of production costs, including the costs of paper. Photobooks are becoming more and more

expensive to produce, while our audience (other artists, photographers and publishers) also have less and less financial means to buy expensive books. We are afraid that the photobook world will have a massive reshape in the very near future.

Publisher: Zen Foto Gallery

Name: Mark Pearson

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

The mission of our publishing efforts was never made explicit. It began in a very small way as a series of thin monographs to form a record of exhibitions that we held in Zen Foto Gallery from 2009 onwards. The purpose was to leave a record of the exhibitions which would otherwise have been forgotten and which would be helpful for the artists in the promotion of their work more widely. The exhibition can be analogous to the live performance of a symphony which is experienced only by the audience present and disappears when the resonance of the music fades, whereas the photobook might be closer to the printed sheet music and the reproduced recording.

As the years passed, we recognized that these simple monographs could be “improved” with better printing quality and “better” design, in order to leave a better more permanent record. Yet the pace of our exhibitions was relatively rapid, and we had to be self-financing, so we had to make the books with rather tight budgets.

We do not see the mission in a global context or as a project, beyond leaving a record in the form of a book of a series of photographs that often might otherwise not exist, and which will help the artists and reach widely to the people around the world who appreciate them.

The books are arguably little more than a statement that “we were here”.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

We run out of Zen Foto Gallery in Roppongi in Tokyo, Japan. It is interesting to see the contrasting styles in different places around the world, in different houses, which is one of the advantages of events such as Polycopies, in Paris, that bring publishers together from around the world.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

I do not feel qualified to answer this question. I simply hope that people will appreciate the photographs and the books. I have been blessed to be involved with Japanese and Chinese photography in the past two decades, and this has tremendously enriched my own life. I am told by some people that they like the books and I feel glad that I have been able to play a part in the greater appreciation of

Japan and China in the world of photography, which makes me some kind of ambassador.

Although I do not profess a higher purpose than a small contribution to the cultural life of Japan and its wider appreciation, it seems to me that photobooks are important in shaping the culture of photography in several ways. Firstly, most people associate books with the written word, and photograph books are inherently unusual. The content is often interesting, and permit a view of a subject that cannot otherwise be experienced, they are accessible and relatively affordable in comparison with original prints. They also provide a very different sensory experience in comparison with social media.

Finally, it is clear that one book or one artist or one country's style often influences others, and the incorporation of these lineages of influence contributes to the dynamic development of the medium.

The medium is also relatively organic and independent. Being far below and largely independent of legacy corporate media, whilst often influenced by such conventional views, the photobook can yet be an opportunity for subversive expression, to the benefit of society.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

Likely the majority of people in the world have no interest in photography books. The medium is a mystery to them. I don't think it is possible to characterize the kind of people who buy our books. However, there are a very small number of people across the world in all countries who do. Obviously, they are photography fans of various kinds, often people who are also practitioners themselves, whether professional or not. Most people who buy the books seem to have a true passion for the art form, but I cannot explain why they formed this passion in the first place. Nor do I have a clear sense of whether the trend has changed.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

I do not read many critical appreciations of photobooks, so I am not very qualified to comment. Occasionally I do encounter comments and reviews and am impressed by the thoughtfulness and analysis contained therein. I enjoy reading some books that are appreciations of various genres, such as those on "The Japanese Photobook" by Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, and so on. I am naturally very happy to read favourable appreciations of our own books.

However, I think there is a fair amount of critical comment out there, albeit rather diffuse and often obscure, so I do not sense that there is a lack of criticism in the field.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

They are good events for us to reach people who enjoy the books, so the answer has to be yes. The problem is that it is expensive to participate in fairs — apart from the participation fee (which is sometimes quite reasonable for book fairs but often very expensive for photo fairs), the shipping cost for the books, travel and hotel cost and salaries are high and make it an unprofitable activity.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

Digital is likely complementary to photobooks rather than a replacement. The sensory experience is entirely different. One is a transitory experience that will surely disappear in time, the other is an enduring record of the artistic work.

Of course, the physical book is limited by physical constraints, while the digital version can do things that are impossible in book form.

One might argue finally that, in extremis, viewing a digital version of a photobook is inherently unhealthy in several ways, whereas the viewing of a real book seems to me to be entirely benign to physical health.

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