

Who Cares?! The Politics of Care Work in Photography

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Deadline: Jul 30, 2026

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This journal issue distinguishes itself from previous scholarship on workers' photography by focusing on how, in the 1970s and 1980s, the demands for emancipation and self-determination of the women's movement not only played a role in so-called "documentary" photography and social reportage but also influenced the work of female photographic artists. Through their critique of gender roles as expressed through the body, they contended with and represented care work – a form of labor rendered invisible in everyday life as well as in photograph. Moreover, the current generation of female photographers builds on feminist photographic art and social reportage. Photography festivals—such as the upcoming 2026 Triennale in Hamburg—are bringing care work and its politics into focus as socially relevant central themes.

Social issues, the labor movement, and working conditions were central themes and motifs in photography during the age of industrialization and capitalism; particularly during pivotal moments of class struggle and economic crises, and in the visual depiction of ideologies and identities shaped by capitalist structures of livelihood and life stories. The instrumentalization of "labor" and "the worker" in the dictatorships and authoritarian regimes of the 20th century found its visual expression primarily in photography, through portraits of workers and their social environments and workplaces in the regimes' propaganda. Moreover, through photojournalism, activist photography groups (such as the Workers' Photographers), private photography, and photographic art, photographers addressed social injustice and poverty, redefined the depiction of the working class, and made the economic realities of rural and urban populations visible, and communicated the working class's struggles for social justice.

In the planned volume, these more classical research topics since the 1970s are expanded to include how female photographers and photographic artists turned their cameras toward social and political movements that concern them and their lived experience. With the advent of mass photography—particularly the compact Leica—during the Weimar Republic, the growing number of women photographers began to focus decisively on social and political issues in urban settings, both in photojournalism and within the activist amateur scene, centering the nature of care work and their contribution to it.

POTENTIAL PERSPECTIVES AND QUESTIONS OF INTEREST

- Is care work a visible theme in personal photography, and how does the social sphere manifest itself as a photographic motif in private contexts?
- How visible is care work within the canon of motifs in photojournalism and artistic photogra-

phy—is it a subject reserved solely for female photographers or gallery owners?

- What role do bodies, gender roles, and portraits play in shaping the visual identities of workers, social milieus, and their societal significance?
- How is social documentary photography and feminist-social photographic art researched and politically discussed in archives, museums, photo-festivals and exhibitions today?
- Why do some social struggles receive visual attention while others remain invisible?

PUBLICATION

Papers of 5000-6000 words are due in November 2026.

The publication is planned for April 2027.

Texts should be 5000-6000 words long.

For the selected articles, reproductions fees for the images will be covered (subject to prior negotiation). Language support in terms of proof-reading and translation is available for authors. Precariously employed authors will receive an honorarium.

SUBMISSION OF PROPOSAL

To submit a proposal please send title, abstract outlining the topic, approach and source material of max. 500 words and a short CV in a single PDF-document

Please send your abstract by 30 July to: dorothee.linnemann@stadt-frankfurt.de

We will get back to everyone by mid-August and inform the selected authors about the detailed publishing schedule.

The Special Issue is edited by:

Dorothee Linnemann (Curator for Photography, Historisches Museum Frankfurt, www.historisches-museum-frankfurt.de)

Reference:

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