

PHOTOGRAPHY IS A DEVICE FOR THE IMAGINATION

Selva Barni is the founder and editor in chief of *Fantom*, the new quarterly dedicated to photography, the direction of which she shares with Cay Sophie Rabinowitz. A Toscan raised in Florence, 34 years old, today Selva lives in Milan after the experience of living and working in New York. She has always been into photography, both as a photographer and curator. We have put a few questions to her about her new editorial project and about photography in general.

From what need was Fantom born?

The need was the desire to imagine and show photography in a new way, different, multifaceted, less rigorous or boring. We're taking off from the extreme idea that, when you get down to it, all magazines feature photography or at least they are partially composed of photos. With this idea in mind we're trying to intersect all aspects of the photographic image from the artistic to the commercial. *Fantom* was also born out of the awareness that today photography has a particular relevance that stands between true, fake, and false. This is one of the most intriguing themes of our art world and there are not many magazines exploring it, not even one, the way I would like it. It was also born partly, but not insignificantly, out of a form of unconsciousness.

You are an independent magazine: do you do everything by yourselves or are you backed by an editor?

Our editor is a newborn publisher from Milan named the Boiler Corporation. Beyond the magazine, we are starting up with a small line of photography books – *Fantombooks* – that we have just inaugurated with a volume on the photographer Takashi

Homma on eleven Ligurian widows, in a limited edition of 350 copies.

Have you away been into photography? What is your rapport with what is happening in photography today, after various experiences as a photo editor and now as an editor of a magazine on photography?

I studied photography then I happened to fall into the photography department at the MoMA and I assisted several New York photographers. There I started to realize that other peoples' photos interested me as much or more than my own. Going forward this tendency became clear to me, but being a "photographer" has helped, the people I know, even the techniques, guided and facilitated me in various fields. For example in printing which I control personally like a maniac. Researching, choosing, talking things through and putting all the work together satisfies my needs for now.

How do you think photography will find its space and dignity in the panorama of future media and in its profound technological transformation?

How does Fantom look at the web and at the future that printed journalism is headed for?

Fantom speaks to the way in which the diverse forms of photography and the discourse on photography intersect one another. Michael Fried, an American art critic, has recently published a long and very dense book entitled "Why photography matters as art as never before", where he explains how photography, since its inception, has anticipated and continues to influence all artistic practices and our ideas about art and its perception. I think that photography is in a very interesting moment of transition and

is in good health – maybe a little less in Italy - and that it continues to be a "modern" means rightly subject to change, variation and multiplication. I am not nostalgic: evolution is a process I am interested in living and observing, even if I am convinced that the web will not substitute printed-paper and that mediums function when they are working together and are stratified instead of being mutually exclusive, up to the point where they don't become truly obsolete.

Chronicling, reportage, art, fashion, portraiture. Is it still necessary today to make these distinctions? Which ones? Why?

The way I see it, it is necessary to make these distinctions, but only in a qualitative way: photography is a device for the imagination and if it has an "historical" function that is to teach us how to look.

Let's name a couple of sacred cows of photography that have and still today continue to influence you and give us a couple of names from the "new generation" that Fantom is focusing particular attention on?

That's a difficult question to answer. My interests vary: right now I'm passionate about anonymous photography from the end of the 1800s and the early 1900s: daguerreotypes, ferrotypes, magic lanterns. But if I have to name two sacred cows, I would have to say, as always, August Sanders and Ugo Mulas, also for his reflections on photography. Of the living I look at everyone, without regard to generations. Those who follow *Fantom* will see.

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