

# Bookshelf

## WHY AM I SAD?

**Dana Stirling**  
Kehrer Verlag (£40)



**There is a melancholy to photography. Even a record of the most joyful**

scene is a document of loss because it represents something past that will never recur. Then again, looked at in another way, this is the happiness that photography can bring – the ability to hold onto something that is no more. Either way, it is bittersweet. American photographer Dana Stirling explores this duality in her monograph *why am i sad?*, originally published as a zine.

Stirling was compelled to make this work as a way of

grappling with her own depression, a condition that affects 280 million people around the globe, according to the World Health Organisation.

There is an increasing recognition of the camera's potential as a tool for mindfulness. In 2022, Thames and Hudson published Sophie Howarth's *The Mindful Photographer*, while in the past few years the Society has hosted a number of mindful photography workshops.

By tuning us into our surroundings, photography can be grounding for some. "Photography allows me to identify and explore the complex interplay of emotions that defines my experience," Stirling wrote in an Instagram



'In a jar, Queens, NY, 2020' by Dana Stirling

post about the book. "It's a medium through which I can express the contradictions I feel."

This comes across in images fusing a sense of playfulness with an attention to mortality, decline and impermanence. Tatty street signs, abandoned toys and animal corpses are rendered in nostalgic candy hues.

Particular attention is paid to childhood. One shot shows a bay window stuffed full of pink balloons. Perhaps inflated for a kid's party, they point to the passing of youth.

It's in deceptively simple moments such as these that Stirling's work reveals poetic depths. **Rachel Segal Hamilton**

'Photograph of Abraham Lincoln taking a selfie' – generated by DALL-E in response to a text prompt from Fred Ritchin, February 2023



## THE SYNTHETIC EYE

**Fred Ritchin**  
Thames and Hudson (£20)



While photographers are figuring out how Artificial Intelligence is rapidly reshaping the industry, this book takes a critical step back to consider the theoretical implications of

what Fred Ritchin, Dean Emeritus of the International Center of Photography, terms 'synthetic images'. These works, eerie and intriguing, illustrate Ritchin's exploration of how generative AI is distorting our sense of reality and what this means for democracy.

## IMPOSSIBLE ISLAND

**Henry Roy**  
Loose Joints (£48)



Henry Roy may just be the greatest travel photographer you've never heard of. If so, this 40-year retrospective of his work is the perfect introduction.

The Haitian-born photographer chronicled people and places encountered on journeys through France, Thailand and Tunisia. Portraits of slumbering figures alternate with light-drenched landscapes in images that have a dreamlike allure.



**Above**  
'Girl sleeping, Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo, 2002' by Henry Roy

## PHOTOGRAPHS OF BRITISH ALGAE: CYANOTYPE IMPERFECTION

**Mandy Barker**  
GOST (£50)



In the 19th century, botanist Anna Atkins pioneered early photography with

her cyanotypes of plants. Two centuries on, Mandy Barker is inspired by Atkins in her own cyanotype series portraying textile fibres, found on the British coast, that resemble algae. Barker's book delights us with visual tricks of the eye that stitch over a serious message, building on her previous environmentally driven projects to raise awareness of the synthetic pollutants filling our waters.



**Below**  
'Patterned blouse' by Mandy Barker

## Watch out for ...

### Benidorm

**Rob Ball**  
Hoxton Mini Press (£35)

Rob Ball is known for photographing coasts, with previous projects focused on Dreamland Margate, Coney Island in New York and colourful seaside arcades found across Britain. Here he turns to Benidorm, the Spanish resort beloved of British tourists since the 1950s. With its crowds and dense construction, this is a place shaped by tourism.

### Unyoñ Ufok

**Emily Nkanga**  
GÖKÊ (£45)

Shot in 2021 when Emily Nkanga returned to Nigeria's Akwa Ibom state to bury her father after living in the UK for seven years, *Unyoñ Ufok* documents everyday life here "from the inside". It shows everything from local leaders to young boxers in training. The foreword is by Isaac Huxtable, writer and V&A assistant curator, photography.



'Jerry Hall for French Vogue' by David Bailey HonFRPS

### Eighties

**David Bailey**  
Taschen (£100)

David Bailey HonFRPS found his artistic outlet in fashion photography – a way to channel his restless creativity while earning a living. This lavish book takes readers back to the era of power dressing, a time Bailey remembers as "magic". From the pages of *Vogue* and *Tatler*, Bailey's 1980s images have become some of his best known.