



## Tracing Light

Eleanor Oakes & Millee Tibbs

Tracing Light proposes a critical reexamination of this foundation. This panel brings together artists, historians, and scholars who challenge traditional definitions of photography by foregrounding expanded lineages that include, but are not limited to, revised uses of historical processes, material experimentation, performance, social practice, camera-less making, collaborations with artificial intelligence, and other practices that broaden how photography is understood. This session invites each participant to define photography and their understanding of its origins.

In alignment with SPE's theme Community in Contrast, this panel understands photographic history as a collective and contested space shaped through multiple communities of knowledge. By unfixing photography's origin story, we aim to resist erasure, expand disciplinary boundaries, and open new possibilities for how the medium can be understood, taught, and practiced.

This session also serves as a platform to initiate contributions for "Tracing Light," an edited volume that will gather diverse voices to reimagine the field's past and future.

## The Embedded Lens: Auto:Ethnography and Counter-Narratives of Kinship

Armon Means

The panel's foundational anchor examines the intersection of fine art photography, sociological research, and solidarity across varying structures of identity within BIPOC, mixed-race, and broader minority or marginalized communities. While rooted in an initial case study utilizing multimedia portraiture to unpack paternal legacies and embedded documentary practices within the Black motorcycle community, the session expands to investigate similar methodologies across diverse cultural landscapes. Whether documenting the inherent kinship of niche subcultures—seen through shared lived experience, or exploring the intersectional realities of marginalized groups, the panel highlights how embedded methodologies transform photographic practice from passive observation into active, localized participation.

This proposed session seeks panelists who similarly leverage their dual roles as practitioners and community members. The call will invite educators, scholars, and image-makers documenting either inherent (familial, cultural) or chosen (subcultural, artistic) communities to share their methodological approaches. The resulting panel will dissect the complexities of auto-ethnographic image-making, the dismantling of systemic stereotypes, and how teaching community-engaged art actively champions equity, belonging, and solidarity.



## Within your means: experimental exhibition-making as pedagogy Ashley Kauschinger

This panel brings together artists, educators, and curators working within experimental exhibition models, focusing on how these practices translate inside and outside of the classroom. Experimental exhibitions enable unique pedagogical practices by either encouraging accessible professional development or opening new possibilities. This interactive panel will engage the audience through experimental exhibition activations, including sticker packs, receipt printing, a collaborative digital exhibition, and more!

We are interested in presentations that examine how real-world exhibition making, with its genuine constraints, collaborators, and audiences, can serve as a model for teaching curation, professional development, and community engagement to students and emerging artists.

## No Turning Back: Documenting Environmental Crises in the American West Alexander Heilner

In 2026, the West is ground zero for social, political and economic battles that are poised to shape our lives for generations to come. From agriculture and infrastructure, to energy and extraction, to wildfires and water; many of our systems are on the brink of collapse, but there seems to be scant will to make the hard decisions necessary to avert radical entropy.

This panel will highlight artists, critics, and researchers whose work documents physical evidence in the landscape, as well as the political and cultural forces that are currently driving these outcomes. Aesthetics and activism are equally welcome, with an aim of moving past resignation and toward potential solutions.

## Witching Hour 2: Pedagogy, Community Activations, and Institutional Support Zen Cohen & Stephanie Dowda DeMer

Witching Hour 2 expands the conversations initiated during the 2026 SPE Witching Hour panel, where panelists and attendees expressed a desire for deeper dialogue surrounding how witch identities intersect with artistic practice, pedagogy, research, and institutional spaces. This session invites presentation proposals from lens-based practitioners whose work engages ritual-based image-making, documents queer and occult communities, explores alternative systems of collective knowledge and magical pedagogies, radical experimentation, studio "weirding," classroom rituals, community collaboration, and navigating making and being within the institution. We welcome presentations addressing how students engage in photographic ritual, how educators cultivate radical pedagogies

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rooted in care and embodiment, and how communities form within and beyond academic spaces. Particular attention will be given to projects that foster collective activation, collaborative research, and unexpected forms of support among peers, students, and broader communities.

With a focus on speculative, experimental, and mysterious studio practices that propel artistic research, *Witching Hour 2* proposes a nontraditional conference format that encourages participation beyond the standard lecture model. Participants are invited to enact visual ephemera, temporary altars, performative gestures, and collaborative activations that blur the boundaries between presentation, ritual, and communal gathering. Through collective reflection and embodied exchange, this session aims to create space for alternative modes of learning, visibility, resistance, and belonging within contemporary lens-based practice.

## The Photobook Reinvented: Photographic Experience in Book Form

### Vanessa Woods & Allie Haeusslein

Though photographic experience is increasingly dispersed across screens, many contemporary photographers have turned to the printed book as a sculptural, tactile, and materially contingent site of photographic meaning. This panel brings together photographers who view the book not simply as a vessel for images, but as an object in its own right — one whose scale, binding, sequencing, paper, folds, inserts, and physicality shape the experience of the work.

Rather than serving as a substitute for an exhibition, or a neutral format for reproduction, the photobook can operate as a materially specific space in which photographs are encountered through touch, pacing, interruption, and close attention. The panel will examine how artists use the book's objecthood in experimental ways to complicate narrative, activate form, and extend photographic practice. In this sense, the book becomes not only a publishing format, but also a space that can deepen the conceptual and experiential dimensions of the work.

Panelists will address collaborations and processes between photographer, designer, and publisher, asking how these relationships shape the final object, and how self-publishing/independent publishing have served to reinvent the book form. Together, the panel will explore how contemporary, artist books use material form to produce experiences of photography that cannot be replicated in either digital spaces or traditional exhibition contexts.

## Del mero centro del medio venimos, del centro de América — y lo damos todo

### Martin Wannam

This panel uplifts the expanded photographic practices of Central American artists navigating cultural assimilation, diaspora, migration, and representation in the United States. While Central Americans are often subsumed under the broader Latinx diaspora, this grouping frequently obscures the specificity of our countries, our histories, and the particular strategies we employ to survive and move through U.S. spaces.

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Drawing on Dr. Kency Cornejo's framework of Visual Disobedience, we argue that Central American image-makers are not simply documenting suffering — they are interrupting, exposing, and constructing counter-narratives and other ways of seeing. This is not art made from victimhood; it is art made from agency.

The panel brings together photographers whose work enacts this disobedience — centering joy, memory, community, and self-determination as political acts, rooted in the *mero centro del medio*: not on the margins, but at the very heart of the conversation.

## Monumentally Dirty

Colleen Mullins

In 1991 performance duo, Men of the World (Mark Alice Durant and Mathew Wilson), systematically washed statues throughout Chicago, responding to inquiries from the public who asked, “Is father dirty?”

Father’s dirty, alright.

Artists have continually interacted with, recorded, performed and intervened as an act of voicing objection, or drawing attention to the monuments everyday Americans have passed without much notice for 250 years. Until 2017, when Sam Durant’s “Scaffold” was removed from the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, our host city—a true community in contrast—the largest objection ever launched against a monument here was in 2001 over a TV Land-sponsored work depicting Mary Tyler Moore as iconic television character, Mary Richards, throwing her tam jubilantly in the air. What are the moments that turn community to look harder, or at all, at these objects in our everyday peripheral view? And how do artists and writers who have, through lens-based, prose and/or performative means, examined the monument?


I hope to bring together a wide range of voices for a rigorous and entertaining discussion of our ways of seeing public depictions of public figures in the United States.

## Shared Power

Melissa Borman

Artist collectives offer alternatives to art-world systems shaped by scarcity, isolation, and gatekeeping. This session invites artists, educators, and organizers to consider how collective structures can generate care, access, mentorship, and opportunity while sustaining artistic practice over time. Drawing from the experiences of FotoMatter and Form+Content Gallery, I offer two examples of artist-run models that build infrastructure through exhibitions, publications, public programs, shared labor, and reciprocal support.

Rather than presenting a single model, this session creates space for multiple perspectives on collective practice. Panelists may speak to the ways their collectives form, evolve, and respond to

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changing needs, including questions of access, inclusion, financial burden, labor, leadership, and public engagement. The session welcomes a range of formats and experiences, from critique groups and artist-run spaces to hybrid and informal collectives.

Within the context of Community in Contrast, this session asks how artist collectives can resist profit-driven and pay-to-play models by centering inclusion, sustainability, and shared responsibility. It also considers how collective practice shapes community beyond the studio, in educational, civic, and relational life. By bringing together varied perspectives, the session aims to generate dialogue about how artists make structures that support one another and expand what community can mean.

## Photography After the Sabines: Rape and Dispossession

Tesora Garcia

The Latin root for rape is raptio — seizure, carrying off, taking by force. Europe romanticized it in canons of Renaissance painting, psychoanalysis suppressed it and called it hysteria, and the manosphere attempts to engineer it as a domestic weapon in online chatrooms and websites. Rape is all around us, and seemingly nowhere. In her comments on the absence of rape in photographic archives, Ariella Azoulay exposes a paradox of vision: even when sexual violence appears in cultural narratives, its crime is allegorized or aestheticized into obscurity, leaving collective appeals for justice underdeveloped and incomplete.


What photography inherits from this history is not neutrality but a set of unresolved iconographic debts. Unlike confession or testimony, devotional image traditions have long held space for what exceeds forensic language — for grief, violation, and bodily knowledge that resists direct representation. This session asks what it means to reclaim that capacity: to make images that bear witness without demanding disclosure, that analyze without spectacularizing, that build toward justice without requiring survivors to re-perform harm.

We will discuss the iconography of sexual violence while centering historical and contemporary image-makers speaking from their positions as survivors and theorists of bodies, memory, and sight. How can something that exceeds the registers of vision be captured as an object of analysis? To what ends can this analysis be deployed? This session models a collective practice of devotional looking that refuses sensationalism and the confessional posture alike — proposing instead an ethics of sustained, justice-oriented attention .

## Beyond Pay to Print

Micah Cash

As photobook publishing becomes a crucial component of contemporary photographic practice, the industry continues to exploit emerging and mid-career artists who seek publication with business models that require substantial upfront financial investment while offering limited transparency, ownership, or long-term return. This approach often eschews large-scale distribution and broader public readership, placing emphasis on the photobook as an artistic object for limited audiences rather

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than a vehicle for engagement and broad dissemination.

Positioned within the framework of Community in Contrast, this panel considers how photobook publishing can resist extractive systems that disproportionately burden artists. Bringing together photographers, publishers, and industry professionals, this panel will examine how both traditional publishing structures and alternative publishing models might offer more sustainable and photographer-friendly pathways for photographic publishing.

Panelists will explore the possibilities and challenges of positioning photobooks within broader commercial and cultural publishing ecosystems alongside art, documentary, and narrative nonfiction titles. Topics will include distributor relationships, audience development, production scale, editorial positioning, bookstore access, and how publishers might better balance financial sustainability with fair treatment of photographers as authors and creative stakeholders. The discussion also addresses how more accessible publishing and distribution models could expand public engagement with photography while creating stronger economic opportunities for artists.

## Matrilineal: Women on heritage, legacy, community networks

Jessica Hays


Lineage can be traced through bloodlines, and as academics, we often think of lineage as the people you study directly under. I am proposing a panel focused on women whose practices engage with matrilineal heritage and lineage in an expanded sense. Beyond our direct ancestors or the considerations of our direct descendants, how do we engage with the rhizomic network of female and femme identifying artists that precede us, as well as those that will follow. Matrilineal knowledge lines could be passed through mentor/mentee relationships, historical predecessor/current practitioner relationships, or amongst women of the same generation working in community. How do we grow from our matrilineal knowledge heritage, and what are we building for the future?

In addition to my own practice engaged with Anna Atkins revolutionary work, I am interested in artists and researchers considering women's contributions to the field both historically and in contemporary practice.

## What AI Can't Find: Photographic Scholars as Stewards of the Unseen Archive

Christine Lee Smith

As AI becomes the default research tool for students, a critical blind spot is emerging in humanistic scholarship. Students aren't simply choosing convenience—they are bypassing entire knowledge systems, treating AI-generated responses as sufficient and complete. But AI LLMs are only as deep as the digitized record, and vast analog archives remain entirely outside their reach.



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This creates a profound epistemological problem: when students rely on Ai to define what counts as valid knowledge, un-digitized archives become invisible — not because they lack value, but because they lack a digital footprint. The result is a new generation of scholars who may never encounter the knowledge they don't know to look for.

Photographic scholars are uniquely positioned to have concerns (with archival data spanning texts, equipment, and prints) and are uniquely suited to address this gap in student research knowledge. As many of us are scholars and practitioners, we hold knowledge Ai cannot retrieve, interpret, or distribute. In a time when learning communities are increasingly siloed and screen-mediated, the responsibility to bridge analog and digital knowledge systems falls to us.

This panel asks how photographic scholars and researchers can communicate archival knowledge to their learning communities and beyond—and how we do so with both urgency and care. How do we ensure our research remains accessible as the shape of education shifts in real time? Do we prioritize digitization, or do we make deliberate choices to preserve the analog? And how do we use emerging educational spaces to offer our communities a sober, grounded hope—one rooted not in algorithmic shortcuts, but in the deep, irreplaceable work of the archive?

## Out to Dry: On representation, over exposure, and the future of trans image culture

June T Sanders & Kelsey “Chloe” Sucena

Following the ascendance of the second Trump administration, transgender Americans have entered into a state of near daily crisis that has largely gone unheard among our colleagues, allies, and fellow citizens. New policies prohibiting the federal funding of art dealing with transgender themes, the removal of protections and privacy for transgender students, the genocidal prohibition of care for transgender minors in some states, and recent National Security efforts to designate “pro-transgender” groups alongside formal terrorist cells, all cast serious doubt on Trans\* futures. In the midst of this, little is being done to support us.

Out to Dry invites photographers, community members, anti-scholars, teachers, and wayward thinkers to contribute to essays, presentations, projects, observations, thoughts, and hybrid/alternative approaches centered around these concepts and themes. Together we will ask: Has the push for “representation” lent itself to our thriving or persecution? How do photographers navigate the tricky question of representation during times of active political repression, and what are the consequences of either our advancement or our retreat?

This round-robin discussion seeks to better understand the potential role of photography in this “post-tipping point” context. Here, chairs and panelists will critically engage with the successes and failures of “representation-first” models of trans liberation so common throughout 2010s, questioning the efficacy of these efforts while drawing attention to the critical failure of the institutions which once championed us and to new methodologies for the production of a trans\* image culture that matters.



## Beyond Documentary: Reimagining Expanded Practices

Nate Larson & Elena Volkova

This panel will consider photography as a collaborative, process-driven practice that can foster resilience within communities shaped by trauma. Expanding documentary modes, strategies to be discussed will emphasize participation, co-authorship, and ethical accountability, positioning image-makers in a continuing and expanding partnership with their subjects to promote belonging, create space for agency, self-representation, and shared narrative control.

Central questions include analysis of power: who controls representation, how images circulate, and what responsibilities do practitioners have to/for/with communities with whom they engage? We will also explore how participants actively shape the conditions of their own visibility, while negotiating and redirecting the gaze to challenge histories of marginalization and imposed ways of seeing. The panel will also explore the nature of long-term and ongoing engagements: how do relationships form and change over time and how does this shift the work itself? How can social practice and engagement support dignity and community resilience over expanded timeframes?

We invite panel submissions from photographers, social-practice artists, and artist collaboratives that work in socially and community engaged, and/or expanded documentary practices and are willing to share critical moments, vulnerabilities, and successes within their work.

## Fumbling in the Dark

Meggan Gould

The photographic darkroom was the historic epicenter of photographic labor, brimming with all of the complexities, toxicities, and pleasures of two centuries of image-making. Photographs of the experience of the darkroom are, by necessity, limited by light conditions—and when pictured at all it is often reduced to a cinematic trope of a lone photographer's epiphany under a dangling red bulb. Within these spaces, however, I see so much more: a larger societal picture defined by aesthetic thirst and experimental innovation, but also interwoven with tangled threads of labor histories, corporate successes and failures, gender inequities, and ecological disquiet.

This session will look at the darkroom as a surprisingly undertheorized site of photographic experience. What are the complexities of this unique relationship to latency and darkness? How have the esoteric tools of analog photographic labor shaped how we experience photography today? How is community experienced in the space of the darkroom? This session invites a broad range of conversation about experiences in the darkroom—as practitioners, as students, and as teachers.

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## Teaching Art History in a Post-AI World

### Epiphany Knedler

During the turn of the twentieth century, photography was reckoning with its place in the art world. As it has increasingly become the visual language in our lives, we are inundated with thousands of images every day. Over the last few years, a new medium has emerged that is unsure of its place in our visual system – AI imagery. Teaching visual literacy in our classrooms becomes more important than ever. Finding truth in images has always been difficult, but with the daily progressions in AI's ability to render realistic images, the skills to decipher differences and why that is important is being ignored. Using art history as the guide, this session will explore the considerations that must be made to address the changes in how we teach art in the higher education classroom, including an overview of the current situation, ways art programs are engaging with these updates and guidelines, as well as a look at how the art world has managed these changes previously. This session will also include some suggestions for incorporating this into your own curriculum.