

PHOTOGRAPHIC **STYLE**

PHOTOGRAPHIC **SYNTAX**

Consider the ways in which specific technical choices made by photographers combine to create a recognizable style. These choices can be thought of as a [photographic syntax](#).

Francesca Woodman (April 3, 1958 – January 19, 1981) is a photographer whose work had a distinctive visual style that has influenced generations of art photographers. Beyond her content choices (the self, the sole female body, the nude, interior space), her syntax includes:

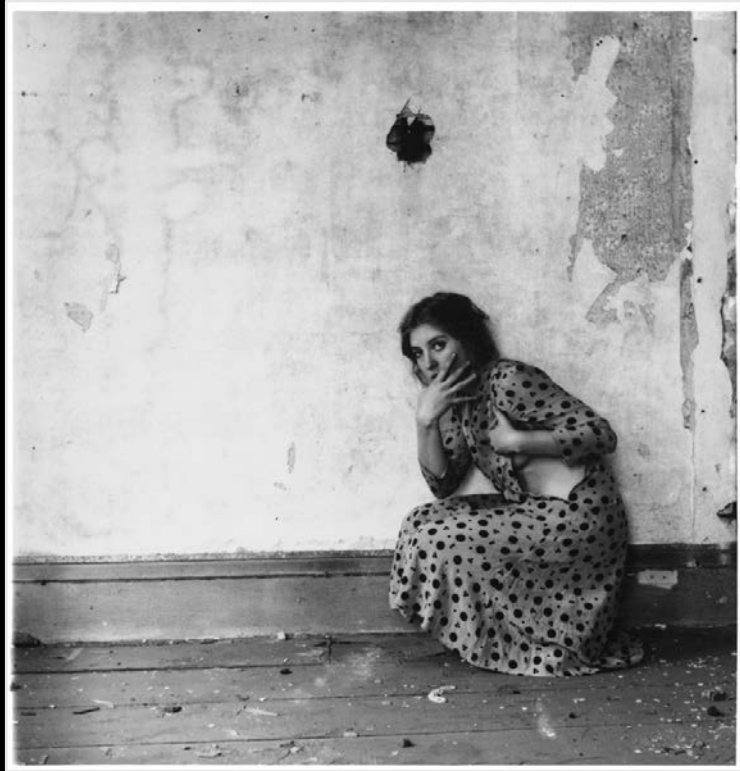
- The square frame
- Black & White film
- Slow shutter speeds and rendered motion
- Use of a tripod
- Low ISO's
- A full tonal range
- Natural light



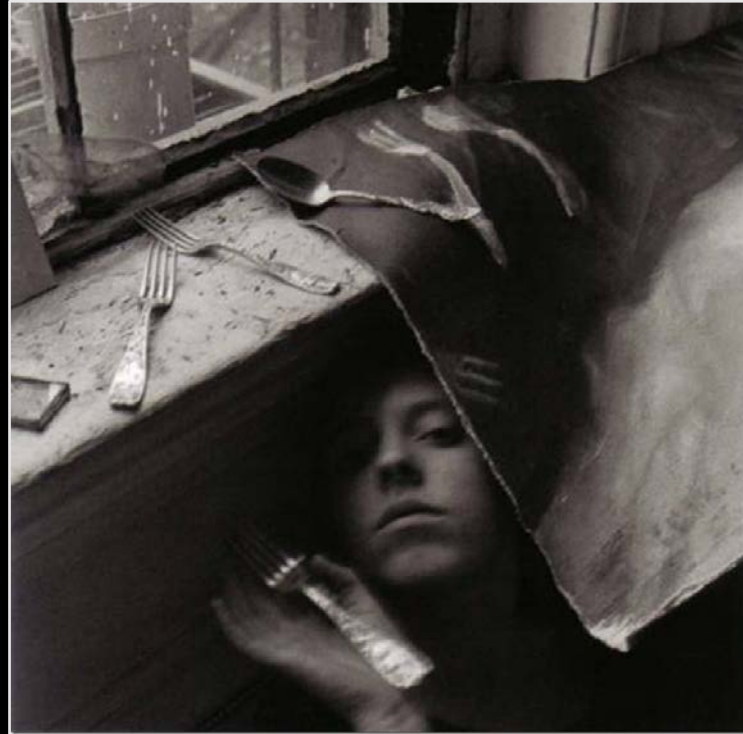
Francesca Woodman



Francesca Woodman



Francesca Woodman



Laura Letinsky made a shift from photographing people to photographing still lifes that would solidify her singular style. These bodies of work are a nod to Dutch still life painting with their interest in a combination of freshness, ripeness, and decay. But their minimalist approach and inclusion of contemporary consumer objects makes them unquestionably “photographic.” Beyond her chosen content, consider her syntax:

- High key lighting (bright, even, shadowless)
- Color film
- A large format camera
- Focus on white
- Low ISO's
- A limited color palette
- Unexpected framing (empty spaces and objects on edges of the frame)
- Use of a high or slanted perspective (PoV)











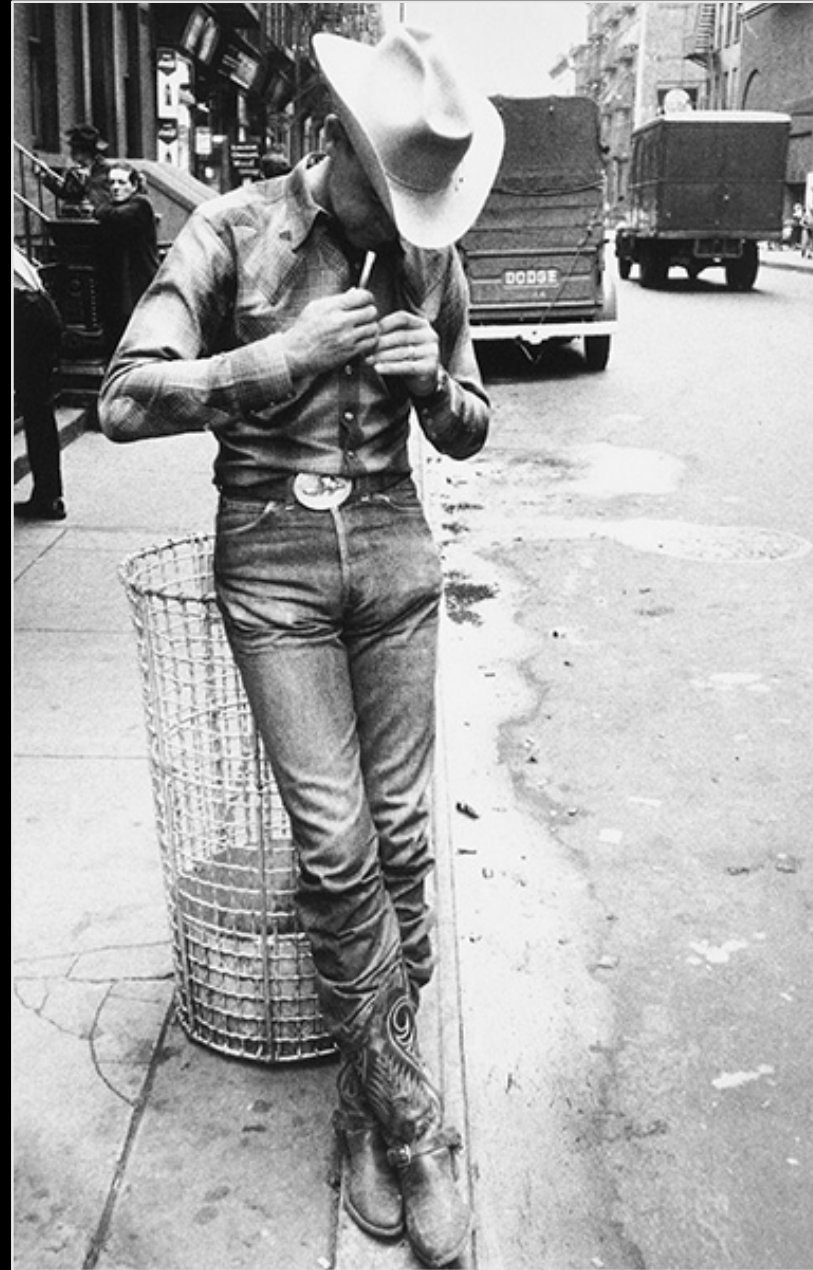


Robert Frank

The Americans

Swiss photographer Robert Frank's *The Americans* is a seminal project (and book) that has, since its first publication in France in 1958, become a linchpin of photographic history. While it's easy to focus on Frank's content (and perspective as an American outsider), his syntax was the truly groundbreaking element of the work.

- High ISO film (graininess)
- 35mm small-format camera
- “Tight” or cropped compositions
- Unexpected or unusual focus points
- High contrast
- Slow hand-held shutter speeds
- A slanted frame
- Low PoV



Robert Frank
The Americans



Robert Frank
The Americans



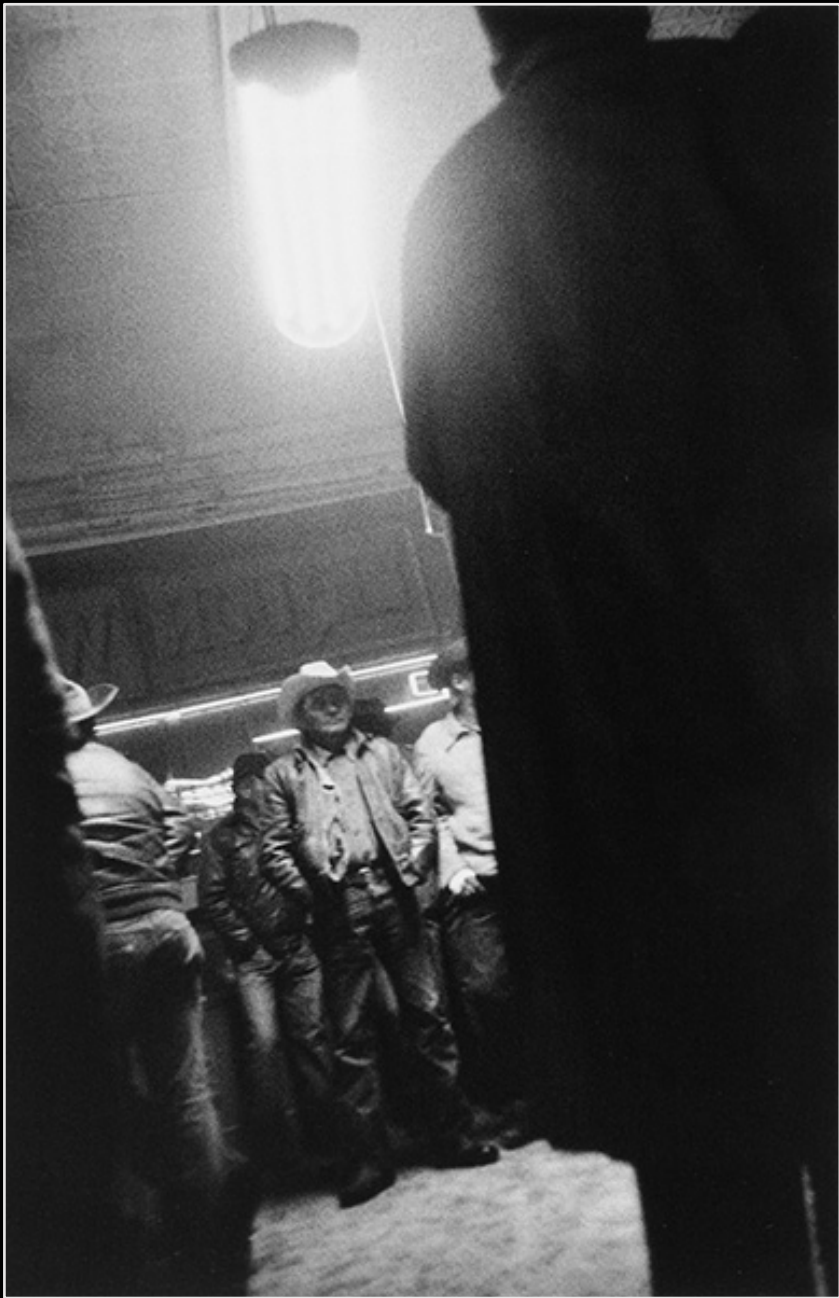
Robert Frank
The Americans



Robert Frank
The Americans



Robert Frank
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Robert Frank
The Americans



Robert Frank
The Americans



Robert Frank
The Americans



Rineke Dijkstra is a leading contemporary Dutch photographer. Known for her stark, engaging portraits, she often focuses on particular communities of people with an emphasis on capturing the awkwardness and self-consciousness of adolescence (as with *Beach Portraits* [1992–1994]). Regardless of her project, she often employs the same style/syntax:

- Color film
- Direct flash, balanced with the available light in the background (open flash)
- A “normal” lens (sees as the eye sees)
- Direct, “straight-on” compositions
- Low PoV
- Framing: the figure often takes up approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ or more of the frame









Joyce Tenneson is best known for her mystical and sensual photographs of the female form. At once haunting, enigmatic, and evocative of dreams and forgotten memories, her painterly photographs celebrate human beauty while discovering new archetypes. In her portrait work, she uses the camera as a way of capturing the sitter's presence rather than simply their likeness, revealing things about the person that are usually kept private. Her style is unmistakable, in part because of her distinctive syntax:

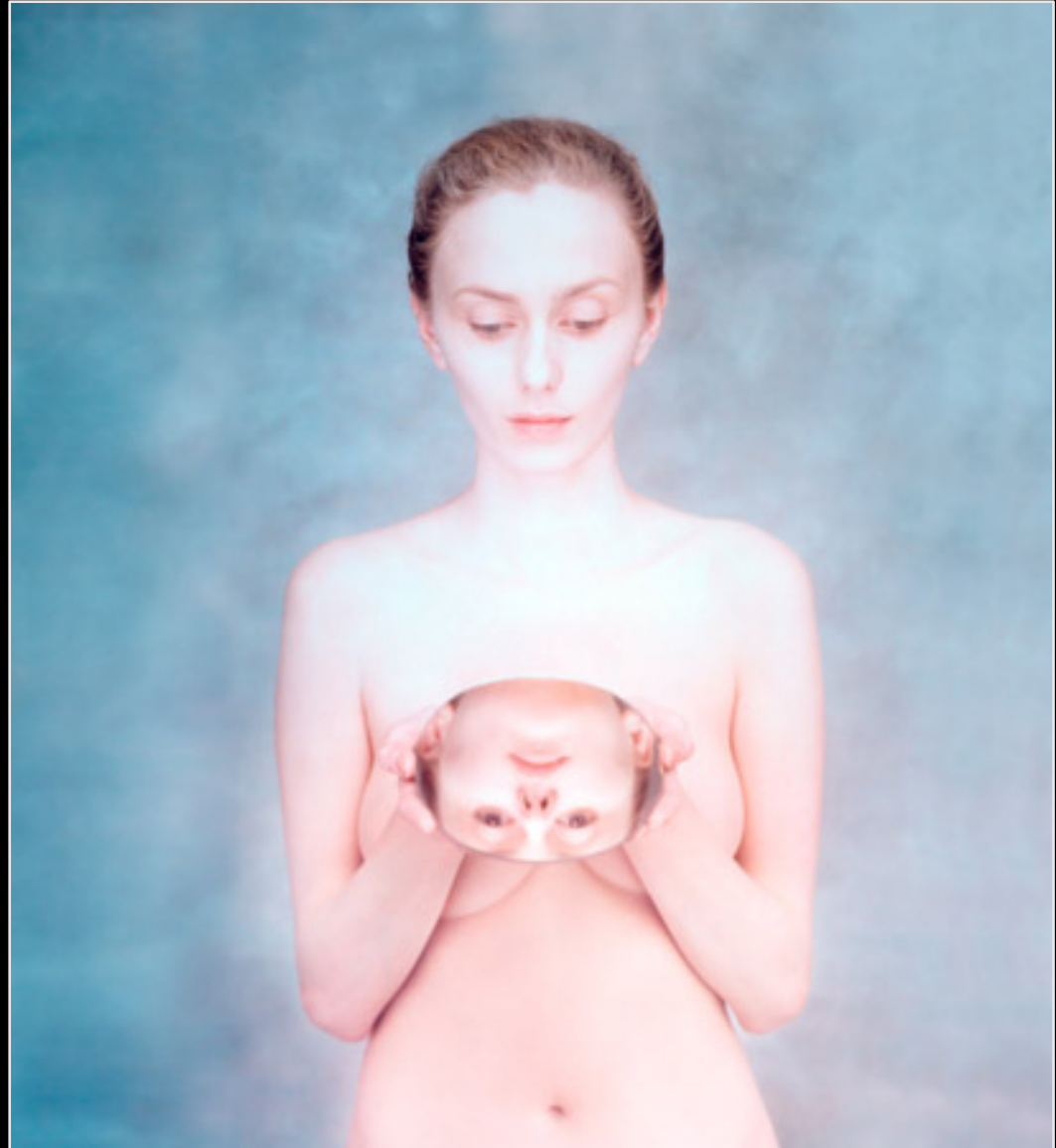
- High key, almost shadow-less lighting
- Color film
- Intentionally overexposed or “hot” highlights
- Hand-painted backgrounds
- Painted/powdered flesh of her subjects
- Limited, pastel color palette
- A ”painterly” look (a nod to photographic Pictorialism), often achieved with Vaseline on the lens.



Joyce Tenneson

Suzanne and Chair

From *Transformations*, published 1993







Joyce Tenneson



Joyce Tenneson

Suzanne and Chair

From *Transformations*, published 1993