

Michael Hoffman (1942-2001)

Written by ZoneZero

Director of Art Photography Publisher

Dies at 59



Michael E. Hoffman, the longtime director of the Aperture Foundation, a nonprofit publisher of fine-art photography books and Aperture magazine, died on Friday in Manhattan. He was 59 and lived in New York City and Shekomeko, N.Y.

The cause was complications from meningitis, said his wife, Melissa Harris. Mr. Hoffman had been associated with Aperture since 1964, when, as a college student and aspiring photographer, he attended a workshop led by Minor White, the legendary photographer and teacher. At that time Aperture was a quarterly journal of photography that White had edited since its founding in 1952.

Mr. Hoffman later recalled that when he met White, Aperture was deep in debt and had virtually ceased operations. Mr. Hoffman took over the magazine's business affairs and for the next few years worked with White to produce a series of landmark issues that reflected White's interest in photography as a tool for spiritual enlightenment. Some, like "Light 7" (1968) and "Be-ing Without Clothes" (1970), grew out of exhibitions organized by White and were in turn published as books or catalogs.

This set a pattern for Aperture's later operations; projects that began as issues of the quarterly became major traveling shows and books. Mr. Hoffman continued to work with White until his death in 1971.

Under Mr. Hoffman's leadership Aperture produced more than 300 photography books, including influential monographs of work by Diane Arbus, Edward Weston, W. Eugene Smith and Dorothea Lange. Typically produced with high reproduction quality, these books in many cases cemented the photographers' reputations.

Aperture's record of producing important photo books has continued in recent years, as it has published major collections of work by Sally Mann, Robert Adams, Mary Ellen Mark, Nan Goldin and Sebastião Salgado, among others. The foundation also continues to publish Aperture magazine, which is widely respected for its aesthetic diversity and high technical quality.

While Mr. Hoffman was best known for his work at Aperture, he played other important roles in photography.

In 1964, with the support of Dr. Evan Turner, then the director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and Dorothy Norman, the photographer and collector, Mr. Hoffman founded the Alfred Stieglitz Center at the Philadelphia Museum of Art; he served as an adjunct curator of the museum for more than 30 years, often presenting shows that grew out of Aperture projects.

He also befriended Paul Strand, the photographer, in his later years. After Strand's death in 1976, Mr. Hoffman served as executor of his estate, arranging major exhibitions and publications of his work.

Mr. Hoffman grew up in New York City but as a teenager spent summers in Montana, where he

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worked as a rodeo rider and bead salesman. In 1964 he graduated from St. Lawrence University, which awarded him an honorary degree in 2000. In later years he became an avid organic gardener at his country home, in Columbia County.

Mr. Hoffman's first wife, Katharine Carter, died in a car accident in 1973. He is survived by Ms. Harris, a senior editor at Aperture, whom he married in 1998, and by two children from his first marriage, Sarah Warren Hoffman of Jackson Hole, Wyo., and Matthew Perkins Hoffman of Boston, as well as by a granddaughter.

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