

PHOTO BOOTH

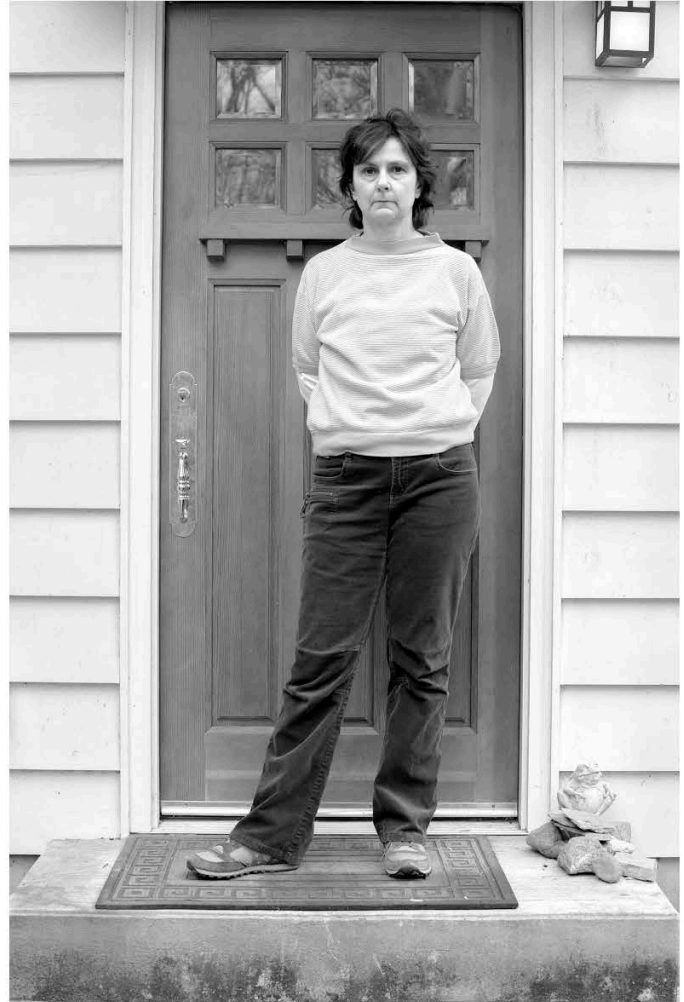
THE PHOTOGRAPHER WHO SET OUT TO WATCH HERSELF AGE

Nancy Floyd's new book, "Weathering Time," collects nearly four decades of anti-perfectionist self-portraits.

By Johanna Fateman December 16, 2020



February 8, 1984. Photographs by Nancy Floyd / GOST Books



January 6, 2013.

Over nearly four decades, beginning in the early eighties, the photographer Nancy Floyd executed an epic project of self-documentation, the results of which are collected in her new volume, "Weathering Time." But it is not Floyd's strict adherence to a plan that makes her project so compelling. It's that she completed it with a laid-back kind of tenacity—an anti-perfectionistic, unfixed attitude, which lends her book, a curiously organized archive of some twelve hundred black-and-white images, a meandering charm.



August 13, 1983.



September 16, 1993.



April 5, 2003.



August 5, 2019.

Floyd began the undertaking in 1982, at the age of twenty-five, as a recent graduate of the University of Texas at Austin. Each morning, she'd capture herself in a full-length shot, with her camera set up on a tripod in the corner of her room. Her aim, at the start, was to keep up the daily ritual for twenty years, in order to observe herself aging. At first, on days when she skipped taking a photo, she advanced the film in her camera, leaving a blank when she processed the roll. But, as the project continued, she ended up skipping weeks, entire months, a good chunk of the nineties. Over the years, she moved the tripod around, from room to room, from house to house, outdoors, and around the world; she included family members and pets in her pictures. The metamorphosis or decline of her own body turned out to be, it seems, less interesting than—or inextricable from—the major events, changing backdrops, and interdependent relationships that made up her life.



March 26, 1983.



December 27, 1996.



March 22, 1999.



May 6, 2002.

We see Floyd's haircut shorten, the lines of her face deepen, but her distinct, solid bearing and forthright (she says "sullen") demeanor before the lens is unwavering—a persistent, uncalculated anti-pose, absent of vanity or clichéd tics of conventional femininity. The shutter's cable release is like a part of her, always in hand, its dark tail trailing out of the frame. Strangely, somehow, her commitment to the inquiry, to showing things as they are, seems to preserve her—if not exactly keep her young. In these images, change is concentrated, or seems to be accelerated, in the things around her. Typewriters and telephones evolve; the goofy, adoring white dog, who accompanies Floyd, under the heading "Success" (because she is holding her acceptance letter from CalArts for graduate school?) disappears; her parents die.



January 27, 1984.



June 11, 1985.



May 27, 2003.



April 4, 2009.

In her book, Floyd eschews the undisrupted chronology you might expect from this sort of endeavor in favor of a structure more like that of a personal photo album. Floyd has even integrated photos that she did not take herself, from her family's archive: "Weathering Time" begins with a photo of her as a newborn, and subsequent sections are titled for her father, mother, and husband, before the categories become more abstract or funny. The arrangement of images in groups ("Underwear," which shows her standing before various messy-nightstand still lifes; "Backpack," a landscape series featuring her in hiking gear) is savvy: Floyd has said that by 2012 she began to consciously re-create setups from old photos in the series, to illustrate the passage of time with more dramatic jumps.



February 22, 1985.



July 12, 1999.



August 6, 2006.



July 28, 2018.

Again, though, the physical transformation between then and now is not what stands out. A section titled "Shirts with words" documents instead Floyd's political commitments (an anti-Bush tee in the two-thousands; a Black Lives Matter one more recently) and her enduring slouchy style. If Floyd's self-portraiture lacks the methodological precision of some of her contemporaries—say, Tehching Hsieh's 1980 "One Year Performance," for which he took a picture of himself every hour, on the hour, for an entire year, or Cindy Sherman's landmark "Untitled Film Stills" series from the late seventies, which ushered in a new era of feminist inquiry into the mediated nature of identity—Floyd's flexible rigor over the long haul has produced a body of work with a distinctive power. Her strain of snapshot conceptualism, profoundly personal and eminently personable, could have been overwhelmed with minutiae or weighed down by retrospective insight. Instead, with its light touch and searching, unsmiling star, the book breathes with open-ended nuance.



July 17, 1985.



August 15, 1990.



January 3, 1998.



July 10, 2011.



June 21, 1982.



April 4, 1984.



March 28, 2007.



January 18, 2013.



April 22, 1985.



August 4, 2004.



September 7, 2008.



January 30, 2015.



May 12, 1983.



November 11, 1988.



December 29, 1998.



November 8, 2016.