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2023 in Culture Photography

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The best photography shows of 2023



Densely collaged ... a detail from *Khoy* by Sheida Soleimani, 2021. Photograph: Andy Keate/© Sheida Soleimani. Courtesy Edel Assanti

Childhood memories generated by AI, photographic activism and prize-winning magical realism were among the standout exhibitions of the year

More of the best culture of 2023

10. Sheida Soleimani, *Ghostwriter*

Edel Assanti, London

Soleimani ghostwrites the story of her parents - pro-democracy activists exiled from Iran and arriving in the US - in a series of lucid, intricate tableaux. The pain of the past left behind, embodied in a hand gripping the handle of a suitcase, collides with a determination to nurture and heal. With a sense of vitality and hope, birds, fruit and flowers burst forth against densely collaged backgrounds made up of layers and layers of photographs. Soleimani's sculptural, performative handling of photography is masterful.

9. Maisie Cousins: *Walking Back to Happiness*

TJ Boulting, London



Said farewell to loneliness, 2023, by Maisie Cousins. Photograph: Courtesy the artist and TJ Boulting

This was the year everyone kicked off about AI in photography, but Cousins takes on the technology with irrepressible wit and nonchalant charm, recreating her childhood memories with Dall-E software. The results are strange and hilarious images made to look as if they were plucked from a 1990s family photo album - think nights of karaoke in Butlin's with Mr Blobby.

8. Markéta Luskačová

Stills, Edinburgh



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Two boys with their jumpers over their heads, Booker Avenue Primary School, Liverpool (1988), by Markéta Luskáčová. Photograph: Markéta Luskáčová

The average exposure speed of Luskáčová's Leica camera is 125th of a second - "there is not time to think of any feelings, but they are there", the Czech photojournalist, 79, said. There were feelings, many of them timeless and universal, in 50 works from 50 years presented at this exhibition, focusing on Luskáčová's pictures of children, from remote Slovakian mountain villages to Spitalfields market. A fan of [Weegee](#) and a friend of [Chris Killip](#), Luskáčová has been eclipsed by her peers despite easily matching their tenderness and vitality. Her own infant son makes a cameo in the pictures here and there - the mothers and children she photographed also helped watch him, enabling Luskáčová, a single working mother in a foreign country, to work. It's thanks to her tenacity and theirs that we have this fulgent document of half a century.

7. **Rene Matic: A Girl for the Living Room**

Martin Parr Foundation, Bristol

When Martin Parr's foundation commissioned Rene Matic to create a body of work, there was one request: the work had to be made in Bristol. The city is a passing backdrop in the diaristic 35mm photographs Matic made there - most of them taken in the home of the queer performer and playwright [Travis Alabanza](#). Matic and Alabanza met on the dancefloor of a queer night in 2017, but the portrait that evolves of their relationship is softly intimate and tender - and defiantly humdrum. The unequivocal right to a quiet life, the pictures suggest, is freedom. Matic grapples with the knotty, messy nature of being British; they are a worthy successor to Parr himself.

6. **Poulomi Basu: Fireflies**

East Gallery, Norwich



Sensitivity and imagination ... Fireflies by Poulomi Basu. Photograph: Poulomi Basu

Violence against women is a global epidemic and a hard thing to make great art about. After a decade documenting the lives of women who have suffered patriarchal assault, for first time Basu tells her own story as a survivor of abuse. Basu deftly handles the difficult subject with sensitivity and imagination, drawing on ancient myths and science fictions, while experimenting with various photographic techniques, as well as moving image and sound. A vital account that is unexpectedly uplifting.

5. **Trish Morrissey: Autofictions**

Impressions Gallery, Bradford

Morrissey's contributions to photography have long been overlooked. This two-decade survey moves from early staged portraits to hammy collaborations with her sister, re-enacting photographs from old family albums, to more recent self-portraits in lockdown. A gutsy, eerie and satirical take on women's place in British society.

4. **A World in Common: Contemporary African Photography**

Tate Modern, London, until 14 January

A continent-themed exhibition in 2023? It can be done without being corny. From the glittering jewels of Nigerian monarchs in [George Osodi's lifesize portraits](#), to the quiet beauty of families immortalised in black and white at the studio of Lazhar Mansouri in the mountains of northern Algeria in the 1960s, this exhibition moves across genres and through nations with very diverse histories and cultures to find a shared sense of autonomy and self-invention. Curated with scholarship and soul, the show proves that the pulse of photography is found in Africa.

3. **Re/Sisters: A Lens on Gender and Ecology**

Barbican, London, until 14 January





📷 Nine Year Ritual of Healing by Fern Shaffer, part of Re/Sisters. Photograph: Othello Anderson/Courtesy of the artist

Alona Pardo's swansong as curator at the Barbican, this exhibition is a generous parting gift: an unprecedented look at the relationship between women's bodies, the Earth and the camera. Moving from the protest movements of the 1960s to today, this is staggering, multilayered research into the possibilities of photography as a form of activism, and it is as visually engaging as it is deep in knowledge.

2. Prix Pictet: Human V&A, London

The Prix Pictet is the world's top photography prize. It's not the 100,000 CHF prize money that made this exhibition great - it's the funding that allowed every effort to be poured into it, from months of extensive curatorial work with the shortlisted photographers and artists (some not used to exhibiting their work in galleries) to the gorgeous exhibition design. But then the photographs - such as those by 2023's winner [Gauri Gill](#), which document the desert in India with notes of magical realism - possess something money can't buy: the beauty and pain of the desolation we face as a human race.

1. Daidō Moriyama: A Retrospective The Photographers' Gallery, London, until 11 February



📷 Politically piquant ... Harumi, Chūō, Tokyo, 1970. Photograph: © Daido Moriyama/Daido Moriyama Photo Foundation

A rapturous, intoxicating and overwhelming deep dive into the seemingly endless work of the enigmatic Japanese master of photography. Moving between erotic vignettes, poignant snapshots of nature and politically piquant peeks into life in postwar Japan, this exhibition proves there is so much more to Moriyama than fishnet stockings and street scenes. Ambitiously curated by Thyago Nogueira, the pictures here don't hang prettily on walls; they jump out and grab you by the throat. Unmissable.

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