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# EXPOSURES

Do you have a special photography project? Contact section editor Anthony LaSala at PDN, 770 Broadway, New York, NY 10003. E-mail: [alasala@pdnonline.com](mailto:alasala@pdnonline.com)

Edited by Anthony LaSala

Earlier in this issue of *PDN*, Martin Parr and Gerry Badger discussed the importance of the photobook (page 64) as a way for photographers not only to display their work, but to preserve it throughout history. With this in mind we examine a series of new photobooks launched by photographer Paul Schiek's publishing company These Birds Walk. Schiek and three other photographers—Jim Goldberg, Ari Marcopoulos

and Mike Brodie—will be releasing small books in a subscription format, with one arriving every three months over the course of a year. While the subscription idea isn't unusual, it is original for the photobook world (Schiek got the idea from record labels like Sub Pop that would release 7-inch singles monthly). This month in *Exposures* we take a look at the series and the four photographers behind it.



## Connect Four

By Kristina Feliciano

WHEN PHOTOGRAPHERS PUBLISH A BOOK OF THEIR WORK, IT'S USUALLY A statement of how different they are from everyone else who ever clicked a shutter. A photo book is tangible validation of the artist as individual: I publish; therefore, I am. Which is what makes the recently launched "The Kin Series" so unexpected. Featuring a book apiece by four photographers, including Ari Marcopoulos and Magnum member Jim Goldberg, "Kin" underscores the ties that bind artists together, and suggests that even those who seem completely independent in their creativity are under the influence of others.

"Kin"—the brainchild of Oakland, California-based photographer Paul Schiek, who runs the publishing company These Birds Walk—was inspired by an encounter he had with a 21-year-old

photographer named Mike Brodie. In Brodie's gritty but elegiac Polaroids, taken while roaming the country with his camera, Schiek could see similarities to photographic forebears Goldberg and Marcopoulos, both of whom he knew from California College of the Arts, where he studied and where they both teach. When he noted these similarities to Brodie, the young photographer "freaked out."

"He didn't know who Jim or Ari were," recalls Schiek. "His work was coming directly from that work, but he didn't know. And I thought, 'Man, that's so interesting.' These lessons are kind of handed down through the generations, whether we know it or not."

Recalling the punk-rock record series that he used to savor as a kid in Wisconsin—an annual subscription to labels like Sub Pop would get you a new 7-inch every month—the 28-year-old Schiek decided to start a photo-book subscription, with "Kin" as the inaugural series. Every three months for a year, subscribers will receive a new installment: First up, on October 1, was Brodie, the greenest of the

**Above: Three images from *Living in the New Rome*, the book by Ari Marcopoulos. Below: Three shots from Schiek's collection.**

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## Connect Four

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four shooters; then comes Schiek, followed by Marcopoulos and Goldberg, respectively.

Priced at \$75, a subscription to "Kin" is within reach for the average art-book buyer—or art collector. Schiek is issuing the quartet of tomes as limited editions (there are 300 unsigned copies and, for a \$150 subscription, 50 signed) targeting young collectors who can't afford prints. "I like the idea that these exist as artwork but on a cheaper level," says Schiek.

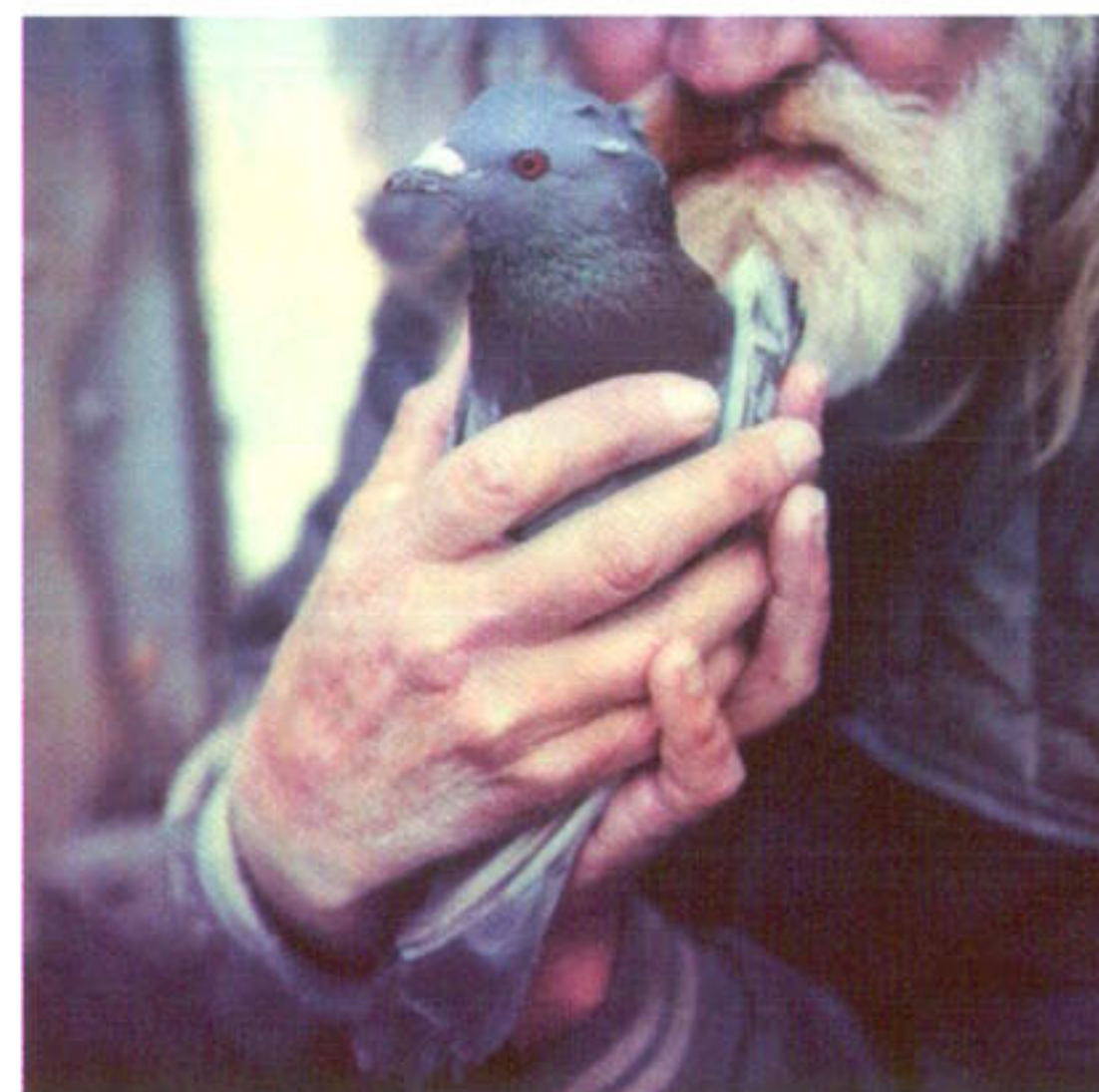
Though the books reference each other, each one is an individual work and has its own name. Brodie christened his *Tones of Dirt and Bone*, a truncated version of the exhibition title from his show at the M+B Gallery in L.A. this past fall. "It seemed so appropriate," says the peripatetic photographer, whose images came from his encounters riding the railways and communing with individuals who function on the fringes of society. "I mean, I was filthy at the moment, like usual—keepin' clean isn't real conducive to traveling like I do—and I thought about my photos and how attracted I am to faces of youth, especially when their faces are a little dirty, making their beautiful eyes glow even more."

Vacillating at the time between cynicism and optimism, Schiek opted to represent both perspectives by giving his book two titles and leaving the choice to the book's future owner. His doubly dubbed book is called *How Many Humans Does It Take to Change a Light Bulb? or Stubborn Tiny Lights Versus Clustering Darkness Forever*.

"Both are appropriations of lyrics that I've heard in songs," explains Schiek, whose first foray outside of Fon du Lac, the factory town where he grew up, was at age 18, when the avid skateboarder booked a one-way flight to San Francisco to check out the skate scene. (His publishing company's name is an allusion to his growing up "broke" in a working-class neighborhood. "Where I come from, to have a new car is a big deal. It's like the goal," he says. "And I found myself with broken-down cars and taking buses and walking a lot. So the name is kind of a jab at that. No matter what, you gotta walk sometimes.")

Schiek's insistently unfussy approach to photography includes using film bought at drugstores and processed by "Mom-and-Pop shops" and working with cameras as ordinary as an \$8 underwater point-and-shoot that he uses everywhere but in the water. "I try to make the tools that I use not an issue," he says. "I like the idea that you can walk into a thrift store, walk out with a 50-cent camera and make something."

In this way, he is similar to Marcopoulos, who was a guest speaker at Goldberg's class at CCA when Schiek was a student there. "When I met Ari, he talked a lot about selling prints to galleries that he made on a photocopier," says Schiek. "I really loved his reduction of value." After Marcopoulos'



visit, Schiek began sending him photo books that he'd made himself.

"I always thought this was a nice thing to do," recalls Marcopoulos, who even now, with more than five books (including *Pass the Mic: Beastie Boys 1991-1996* by powerHouse, 2001) to his name, has a strong DIY ethos that he indulges by making limited-edition 'zines. "And I thought that the books were also getting better as they went." So when Schiek called him to see if he wanted to be part of "Kin," he said "yes."

The title of the book Marcopoulos submitted, *Living in the New Rome*, is an allusion to the rise and fall of the Roman Empire and is his statement about what he sees as the treacherous ambitions of our current Administration, the struggle of the country's underclass and other socially oriented topics. The last two photos are portraits of what looks like a young girl in an oversized T-shirt, disaffected-looking the first time we see her and smiling radiantly in the book's last image. Except she's not a girl but a boy skateboarder Marcopoulos met briefly. "For me, [this teen] is like a future human being where gender ends and race ends, and it's a beautiful person, very open," he says.

The series' final installment is by Goldberg, who called his book *It Ended Sad But I Love Where It Began*, a wistful title scrawled across a black-and-white image of a James Dean type on a motorcycle, taking a drag off his cigarette as he passes the photographer. Goldberg is highly regarded in his own right, with books including 1995's *Raised by Wolves* (Scalo), but he took this opportunity to acknowledge those who inspired him—namely, Robert Frank. "Jim wanted to make it really clear that it wasn't like we were all coming from him—that he was coming from somewhere else," Schiek notes.

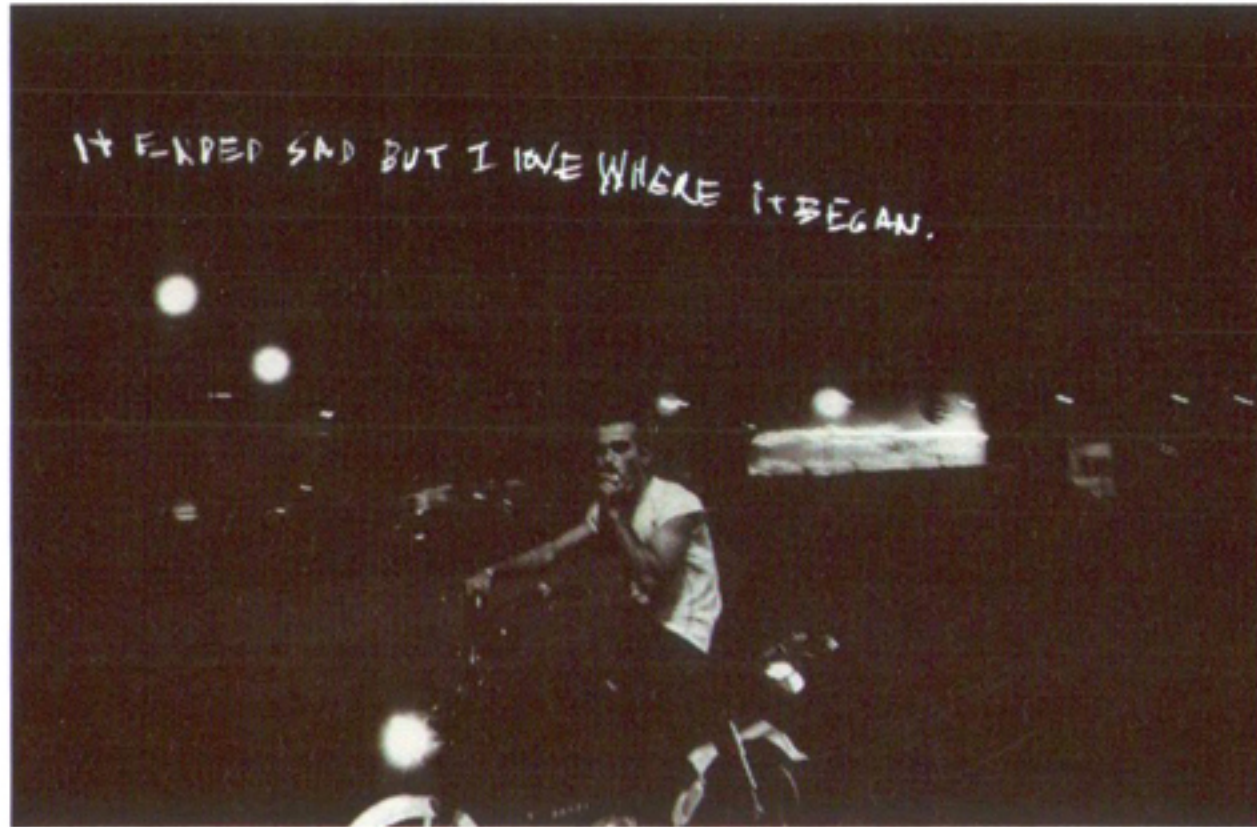
Still in the early stages of establishing himself as a commercial and fine art photographer (his clients include *Mass Appeal* magazine, and he's represented by the Stephen Wirtz Gallery in San Francisco), Schiek did his best to keep the series' production budget modest. Each book costs only about \$9 to make because the pages are actually 5 x 7 postcards (he used PsPrint in Oakland). "Once they're bound into a book, the printing on postcards actually feels like an intentional decision," he says of the chunky volumes, which are all 20 pages and can accommodate the same maximum number of images (40).

Schiek designs the books himself in Photoshop

ALL PHOTOS THIS PAGE © MIKE BRODIE



# EXPOSURES



ALL THREE PHOTOS © JIM GOLDBERG

**Opposite page: A selection of images from Mike Brodie's *Tones of Dirt and Bone*. Paul Schiek saw similarities in Brodie's work to both Marcopoulos and Goldberg, which helped lead to the grouping of the photographers for the book series. Above, left: The cover of Jim Goldberg's book, *It Ended Sad But I Love Where It Began*. Above, right: A diptych from Goldberg's book.**

and Quark, farming out the typesetting to his designer friend Jason Munn of *The Small Stakes*, also in Oakland. Schiek then has the cards perfect bound by the independently run 1984 Printing and, with the help of an intern, hand-stamps each one with the title of the series and the four photographers' names.

To keep distribution costs down, he's selling the

books exclusively through his Web site, <[www.thebirdswalk.com](http://www.thebirdswalk.com)>, and does the packing and shipping himself, as well as publicizing them to art and culture magazines like *Tokion*. "Kin" is the first series Schiek has produced but the fourth book project he's done under the aegis of These Birds, which he founded in 2003. So far, the company has not turned a profit, but he's started to at least break even. "It's been a really long learning curve—a financially draining learning curve," he says.

Schiek, who promises there will be a new series with different photographers every year, is already mulling ideas for the next subscription. (He's leaning toward a series on found photos.) And as more

people hear about These Birds Walk, he's been fielding emails from photographers who wonder how they too can publish books of their work. An unprepossessing sort, Schiek doesn't purport to have any answers, but he does have a philosophy.

"There's no reason you can't do anything," he says. "If someone gets your package in the mail and laughs at you—like, 'This dork just sent me this package and thinks it's a cool idea and thinks I'm gonna write about it'—big deal. There's gonna be a couple of people who are gonna call you back and be like, 'Wow, this is really interesting. We are gonna write about it.'"

Maybe his next series should be on self-help. □