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New Zealand Photography Collected

175 Years of Photography in Aotearoa

ATHOL MCCREDIE

THE NEW EDITION OF A NEW ZEALAND PHOTOGRAPHY CLASSIC

Expertly curated, and showcasing images taken between 1850 and 2025, this book is an essential reference that honours artistic legacies and explores our identity as a nation. Together these photographs tell stories about life in this country from almost the earliest days of European colonisation and about how the practice of photography has evolved here.

When it was first published in 2015, *New Zealand Photography Collected* was a landmark book, captivating audiences. In this fully revised and enriched edition, of the more than 400 images, almost half are new, reflecting the dynamic and increasingly diverse nature of the collection, allowing for previously unseen treasures, and enabling familiar works to be recontextualised with fresh insights.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Athol McCredie is Curator Photography at Te Papa, where he has worked since 2001. He has been involved with photography as a researcher, curator and photographer since the 1970s. His publications include *Brian Brake: Lens on the world* (editor, 2010), *New Zealand Photography Collected* (2015), *The New Photography: New Zealand's first generation of documentary photographers* (2019), and most recently *Leslie Adkin: Farmer Photographer* (2024), shortlisted for New Zealand's national book awards.

SALES POINTS

- Another superb book from Te Papa Press, bearing the gravitas and expertise of New Zealand's national museum.
- Ideal for every home and reference library.
- Biographies of the known photographers aid understanding of our photographic history.
- Driven by changes to Te Papa's national collection of almost 400,000 photographs.
- Since the publication of the first edition in 2015, Te Papa's photographic holdings have expanded significantly, with the addition of nearly 25,000 catalogued items, works by photographers who broaden our understanding of the diverse visual heritage of Aotearoa.
- Reflecting a growing representation of women, Māori and Pasifika artists, including new information that has come to light about many images and photographers.



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NEW ZEALAND
PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTED

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‘What intrigues us about a photograph? What holds us? It is often the absence of a single, limited, controlled meaning, and rather, the excess of possible meanings. The photograph can seduce us by inviting us to create a meaning or narrative for it.’

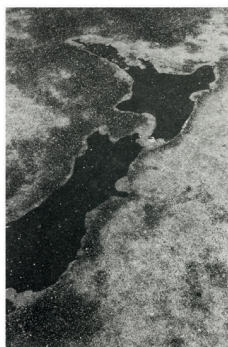
Chris Wright, *The Impossible Science of Being: Dialogues between anthropology and photography, 1995*¹

This is a book of photographs from the 1850s to the present, drawn from the collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Some of these collection highlights will be familiar to photography aficionados; others have never been published before. Major New Zealand photographers — the Burton Brothers, Brian Brake, Ans Westra, Anne Noble — are present. So too are photographers whose work should be better known, and others whose identities are now lost. The selection ranges across portraits, landscapes, events, advertising, science, documentary and art. This broad view is made possible both by Te Papa's large photographic collection — some 388,000 items — and the museum's cross-disciplinary nature that encompasses the natural environment, Māori and Pacific cultures, social history and art.² It includes the earliest types of photographs seen in Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as some of the most recent art photographs. Together, these photographs tell stories about life in this country from almost the earliest days of European colonisation. More particularly, they show us how photography has been practised here.

The focus of this book is New Zealand photography: images made by New Zealand photographers; images that depict New Zealanders or Aotearoa (and its past and present territories); plus a handful of overseas photographs that circulated here or provide context for New Zealand developments. They have been chosen for their depth, richness and resonance. In a world saturated with images, we are used to the quick flick — or the quick click. These photographs withstand repeated and prolonged viewings. Their power is lasting because they sustain multiple meanings and interpretations — which is exactly why they are in a museum collection.

Collections are the natural home of photographs. Most of us have collections of photographs, whether we realise it or not. We might store these in physical albums or loose in boxes, on our mobile phone or personal computer, or, increasingly, on social media. Indeed, in the 185-plus years since photography was invented, image making has become so ubiquitous that we are all in some way collectors.³ Collecting photographs is also, to varying degrees, the domain of scientific and research bodies, government departments, newspaper and magazine offices, medical or organisations, law enforcement agencies, commercial photography studios and city councils. Such institutions have collections mainly because they produce photographs. In this sense, all these collections — personal and institutional alike — are first-generation, formative collections.

Museum collections, like archives and library collections, are different, acquired with the very long term in mind. They are — with notable exceptions — the places where photographs go once they have outlived their original purpose. Owners die, societal interests change, and formative collections cease to be valued (yesterday's news is, as the saying goes, old news). If these collections are not disposed of, dumped or deleted — and by far the majority are — they may end up in a museum. Museum collecting usually requires the passage of time: for curators to discern what will have long-term significance, and, perhaps most importantly, for photographs to cease to be of practical use to their owners (and often, for them to see that they have public value). By their nature, therefore, public photographic collections tend to be backward-looking, behind the times. The earliest photographs in



Above:
Augustus Hamilton
Old Dominion Museum — interior view of the Main Hall, c1910
Gelatin glass negative, whole plate
MA, C00050

Below:
Leslie Adkin
The daisy's verdict — He loves me, he loves me not?, 15 April 1914
Gelatin glass negative, half plate
Gift of GL Adkin family estate, 1994, B122015

Opposite:
Peter Peyer
New Zealand 15.3.1991
Gelatin silver print, 408 × 268 mm
Purchased 2004, 0027069



Introduction

Te Papa's collection, for example — daguerreotypes from the 1850s — were not acquired until the 1990s. An exception is contemporary art photography. Here the museum or art gallery acts like a formative collection, acquiring work soon after it is made.

Of course, photography was once too new to be collected retrospectively. Te Papa's earliest predecessor, the Colonial Museum, was founded in Pōneke Wellington in 1865.⁴ The museum's early photographic acquisitions recorded phenomena of scientific interest — a whale stranding, moa bones, geothermal scenes — or were landscape images collected for illustrative purposes to provide background and context for geology displays. Photographs were also, probably, displayed as technological wonders in and of themselves. Only in the twentieth century did New Zealand museums begin to collect photographs as historical items.

As photographs move from private and formative collections to museum collections, the meanings they embody also shift. Leslie Adkin's 1914 photograph of his future wife, Maud, surrounded by Adkin's sister and cousins, was made for entirely personal reasons ('My darling looked lovely in a grey costume... + red silk tie', a besotted Adkin wrote in his journal entry).⁵ After Adkin died, in 1964, Maud gave all his negatives to the Dominion Museum. Later, family members donated Adkin's albums to Te Papa. With all the people pictured gone long before the current generation's memory, the albums had ceased to enable reminiscing, but the family recognised that the photographs had a wider value, as illustrations of their time. Today, Adkin's skill as a photographer still delights. But his photograph of a group of young women also speaks of time itself. We look at this image knowing that the four have grown old and died and will one day be entirely forgotten, even as their photograph survives.

A similar shift occurs with commercial photography. In one feverish week in 1970, Dominion Museum and Alexander Turnbull Library staff went through tens of thousands of negatives from Gordon H Burt's Pōneke studio, which specialised in advertising and industrial photography. The negatives, dating back to 1924, had long since ceased to have commercial value for the studio, and now, as it prepared to move to new premises, were destined for the tip. But the rescued photographs were far from worthless to a museum: they now spoke more broadly of consumer desire, marketing and the sorts of products in use decades ago.

When photographs are reborn as collection items, they also enable us to make connections and draw comparisons that would have been veiled to the original owner. Many personal albums from the mid-twentieth century, for example, include photographs of ships, either as snapshots or postcards. In isolation, this may not seem remarkable. But once dozens of such albums are collected, the period's preoccupation with shipping emerges. This impulse, driven by a sense of wonder at how technology was closing the gaps of distance, is long gone. But for the evidence of these photographs, seen in bulk, it would also be forgotten.

Public photographic collections like Te Papa's are, in essence, collections of collections. They also represent only a tiny fraction of photographs taken. It is easy nonetheless to slip into the notion that such collections are encyclopaedic, so large that they cover 'everything'. Or that they are representative — of the history of photography or of social history. But even before they get to a collection, photographs themselves are made in prescribed ways and for specific reasons. Commerce is one: nineteenth-century landscape photographs were made for public sale; twentieth-century news photographs enticed people to buy newspapers. Even amateur



Left:
Unknown photographer
Southern Cross, Wellington, 1956
Postcard, offset lithograph, 92 × 142mm
Private collection

Below:
Unknown photographer
Untitled, c.1910
Postcard, Woodbury type
Purchased 1996, PS 000448

Opposite:
Berry & Co
Mrs Robinslaw, c.1905
Gelatin glass negative, half plate
Purchased 1998 with New Zealand
Lottery Grants Board funds, L 044433

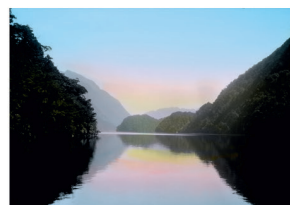
Algermon Gifford
Down Deep Cove, early morning, c.1895
Hand-coloured glass lantern slide, 80 × 80mm
Gift of Mrs Murray, 1961, LS 000466

Oakley Studios or Crown Studios
New Plymouth High School Old Boys
surf team, 1926
Gelatin glass negative, whole plate
Purchased 1998 with New Zealand
Lottery Grants Board funds, L 044433

photographers, who in theory operate under no such constraints, take their images in remarkably formulaic and purposeful ways: from family gatherings and birthday parties to holiday snaps and tourist sights. Look through any photographic archive and there are notably few photographs of people engaged in everyday activities such as brushing their teeth, washing the dishes, driving their car, sitting in an office. Photography is no 'eye of God', everywhere present — despite the camera, in the form of the smartphone, now being so.

Museum photography collections do not stand outside history. Like photography itself, they can only represent or illustrate the past in limited ways, and this makes them contingent, idiosyncratic and partial. They are shaped by museum policy, staff interests, public perceptions and chance events. And some photographs, due to their perceived lack of public interest or value, rarely make it into museum collections at all. Public collections seldom acquire pornography, for example, despite it being a use to which photography has been put since its earliest days.⁶ Technical, medical and police photography are also largely absent.

For these reasons, *New Zealand Photography Collected* does not aim to tell a 'complete' history of photography in this country. It responds instead to a call by photo historian Geoffrey Batchen for histories about photography rather than of photography.⁷ Histories of photography tend to base themselves on the model of art history. A linear progression of styles, developed by a series of exemplary practitioners and images, is constructed, and artist status is imposed on many workaday photographers of the past. Such histories are abstract, concerned with images rather than physical photographs and how they are used and consumed in the real world. Histories about photography, on the other hand, deal with questions of production, reproduction, dissemination and collection. They consider not only how photographs operate in their time but also how they operate through time — how their meanings change and multiply. This book is structured into chapters that reflect, broadly, why the photographs were made in the first place and some of the reasons they were then collected. It shows one way a history about photography can begin to look.



Chapter 1, 'How we looked', features studio portraits and snapshots of people. These are the photographs we take and accumulate of ourselves, our families and friends. Part of the motivation for taking such photographs is as a hedge against forgetting. Paradoxically, they are also easily forgotten. Once a person has passed from living memory, their photographs lose meaning, become mute. As family interest fades, such images often end up in a museum. Here — in volume, and across many individuals and families — patterns become clear. We see what sort of clothes people wore at a certain point in time, how they presented themselves in poses, the photographic techniques used, and what they did with the photographs. Where an individual might accumulate a composite family portrait from photographs, a museum assembles something approaching a national portrait, a catalogue of society. A coded set of private meanings is replaced by new, public readings.

Chapter 2, 'Being there', looks at the phenomenon of the 'view': from its origins in nineteenth-century landscape photography to its later expression in postcards and glossy publications. We consume these to bring what is remote close to hand: if we cannot easily visit Fiordland's spectacular scenery, for example, we can experience it vicariously via book, magazine and website photographs; and if an event does not happen in our neighbourhood, we can see photographs of it in a newspaper or online. Photographs of such subjects operate the same way in a museum collection, but here the distance is not so much in space as in time. By collecting these photographs we can see how a place or event looked in the past. Unlike portraits in museum collections, most places and events are identified, and it is their specific museums are more interested in than their general qualities.

Photographs of people, places and events combine in chapter 3, 'Belonging and aspiring'. Here it is not any of these in isolation, but how they operate, often together, to help form social identities. We acquire and display group photographs of ourselves in clubs, sports teams and school classes, on tramping trips or at workplace functions that help define who we are. We also consume advertising images that propose who we could be, if only we drank the right soft drink, bought the right clothes or drove the right car. Again, by assembling such images in volume, and applying the perspective of time, such images lose their individual character and allow museums to reveal how we thought about ourselves at a collective level.

Museums do not simply collect photographs; they also create them. Chapter 4, 'Pursuing knowledge', presents a range of photographs originally taken for scientific, research or documentation purposes, which have gained new significance with the passage of time. In the case of the Dominion Museum, for example, the identities of two men pictured demonstrating tukutuku weaving in the 1923 photograph overleaf were incidental: the photograph was taken by a staff member as an ethnographic record, to document a technique. The men are in fact Te Rangihirua (Peter Buck) and Apirana Ngata — two leaders of the 1920s renaissance in Maori culture who were both later knighted for their services to Maoridom. Today we understand the photograph as documenting a significant moment in Maori development and for this reason approaching the status of taonga, or cultural treasure itself. Photographs like this suggest that the meaning of an image can change not only when it enters a collection but also during its time within the collection.

A contemporary photography movement emerged in Aotearoa in the late 1960s, and the National Art Gallery began collecting in this field in 1976. When the gallery merged with the National Museum to form Te Papa in 1992, Te Papa inherited this body of contemporary work — examples of which appear in chapters 6 and 7.⁸ Chapter 5, 'Conceiving a photographic art', presents the historical backstory of the contemporary



Brian Brake
Oriental Bay, Wellington, 1960
Transparency, 35 mm
Gift of Mr Raymond Wei-Mao Lau, 2001, CT 02858

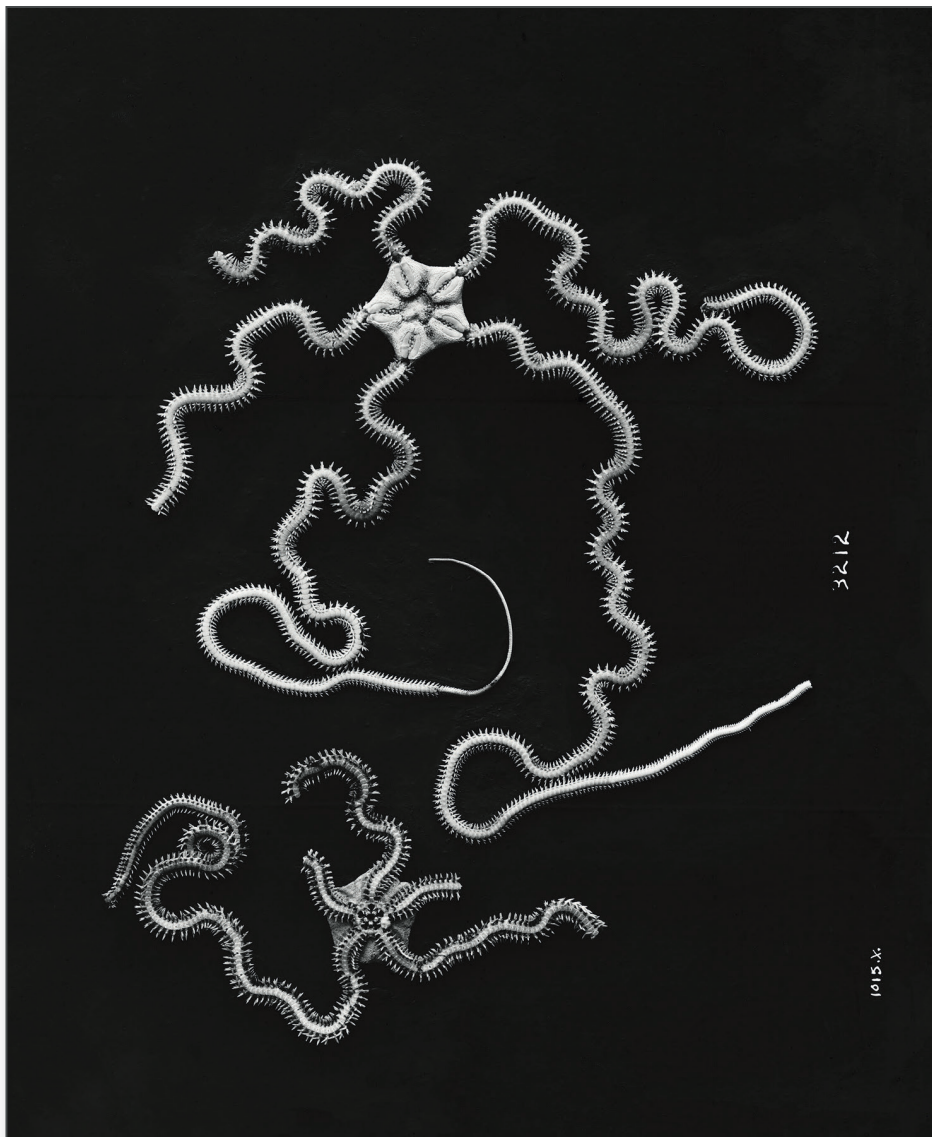
Opposite:
Brian Brake
Holidaymakers, Mount Maunganui, 1960
Transparency, 35 mm
Gift of Mr Raymond Wei-Mao Lau, 2001, CT 02858

This 1960 cliff-top scene on Moturiki Island appeared in Brian Brake and Maurice Shadbolt's best-selling 1963 book, *New Zealand, Gift of the Sea*. The book was reprinted many times due to its popularity, but, when a revised edition was produced in 1973, the photograph was not reused. By then, the young holidaymakers' once-fashionable clothes appeared dated. Today, it is exactly that datedness that makes the photograph interesting. The elevated view and bright blue expanse of the

Padifto seems emblematic of the optimism of youth, and indeed of a country emerging from the dreary 1950s to the increasingly international, liberal and affluent era of the 1960s.

Such an upbeat outlook looks clouded, however, when we focus on the relationships between the three young people. The couple are embracing, but the young woman is not at all engaged with her boyfriend. Her body is limp and her attention seems directed towards the other young man as he glances, in turn, at her. The distant speedboat slowly traversing the scene might stand for time, like the play bar at the bottom of a video. When Brian Brake pressed the shutter, he put the unresolved drama on pause forever.





Frank O'Leary
Pterodroma lessona (white-headed petrel)
found on Lyall Bay beach, Wellington —
underwing, 1960
Sheet film negative, 4 x 5 inches
WA, 9.0/9926

Opposite:
Augustus Hamilton
Amphiura arenaria [now *Amphiura*
(*Amphiura*) *aster*], c.1913
Gelatin glass negative, whole plate
WA, 0/0670

These two brittle stars were photographed
under natural light over a hundred years ago



to accompany a published description of this
species of echinoderm. One is shown right-side
up, the lower one inverted; both have broken-off
arms. The photographer, Augustus Hamilton,
has carefully arranged the starfish to fit within
the frame. The black background was chosen to
provide sufficient contrast for them to stand out
clearly in reproduction, which was of relatively
poor quality at the time.



Christopher Matthews
Untitled no. 8, 1978, from the series 'The Doghouse'
Gelatin silver print, 287 x 387 mm
Purchased 1995 with New Zealand Lottery Board funds, 0.040418

The Doghouse sold hotdogs in Christchurch's Cathedral Square in the late 1970s and was the only place to stay open 24/7. It was also a pinball and video-gaming room. American fast food was a novelty at the time, as were video games. Photographer Christopher Matthews remembers:

The Doghouse was the place to go in town: a place to hang out, a place to meet up with your mates, dance even. Disco was still king — just. Friendships were intense, so were the rivalries. Shows of affection were frequently matched with outbursts of violence. Some of its regulars were living rough on the streets. Estranged from distant whānau, often on the edges of petty crime, they were tough yet vulnerable. Street kids. At night on the edges of the square, The Doghouse was a noisy satellite of food and warmth, and sometimes safety.²³

Opposite:
Murray Cammick
Mike Walker, Steve Bliss and Sandra Lindsay, Queen St, Auckland, 1976, from the series 'Flash cars'
Gelatin silver print, 152 x 250 mm
Purchased 2015, 0.042919

Murray Cammick
Keri Pratt, Virginia, Violet Pratt, Queen St near Wyndham St, Auckland, c.1976
Gelatin silver print by Jenny Tordin, 2015, 254 x 382 mm
Purchased 2015, 0.042749

Today we have boy racers, but in the 1970s there was the V8 scene. Young people would come into Auckland's Queen Street on a Friday and Saturday night to show off their Onys and Fords from the 1950s or early 1960s and maybe drag each other off. Some were 'do not touch' hotrods and restorations, others were battered tanks. Murray Cammick became fascinated with this overlooked scene — to the point where he became a fixture of it himself, a role aided by regularly handing out photographs to his subjects.

Late-night Queen Street was more than just cars though. Cammick met the glamorous Keri and Violet Pratt and friends on their nightly stroll from the Customs Street Café/Oro coffee lounge to Mike's nightclub, opposite the Town Hall. Their walk up Queen Street could cause a stir — high fashion, high platform heels and high as a kite, recalls Cammick.²⁴ But they too were more than happy to be photographed, posing like models and pleased to receive the prints Cammick posted to them.

