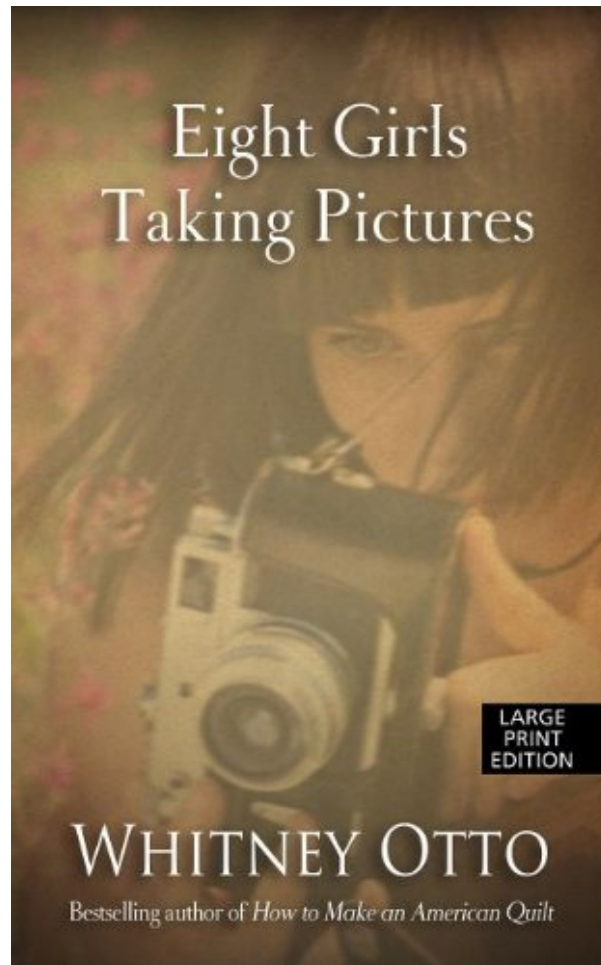


EIGHT GIRLS TAKING PICTURES (BASIC) BY WHITNEY OTTO



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Eight Girls Taking Pictures

LARGE
PRINT
EDITION

WHITNEY OTTO

Bestselling author of *How to Make an American Quilt*

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A New York Times Bestselling Author -- In a profoundly moving novel, the bestselling author of *How to Make an American Quilt* imagines the thoughts and circumstances that produced eight famous female photographers of the twentieth century. This captivating novel opens in 1917 as Cymbeline Kelley surveys the charred remains of her photography studio, destroyed by a woman hired to help take care of the house while Cymbeline pursues her career. This tension -- between domestic duty and ambition, between public and private life, between what's seen and what's hidden from view -- echoes in the stories of the other seven women in the book.

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Most helpful customer reviews

18 of 19 people found the following review helpful.

"Nothing is any one thing really, and isn't that the beauty of it all?"

By Amelia Gremelspacher

Above all this book is about the world of women in the arts. Otto introduces the reader to the world of photography and it's inherent ambiguities. As a printed reflection of a moment in time, it would seem superficially to be more representative than other art forms. Yet we learn that photography, as all art, is never just one thing.

So it is with women divided between the traditional roles of helpmate, parent, and homemaker competing with the often selfish role of artist. The girls in the book are born into worlds from the early 1900's to the present. The cameras they use vary. The settings range from the farm to pre war Berlin. They are the proverbial free woman or wife and mother. But each must master the contradictions in their worlds. Reactions to photography can be extreme, given that the nudes are demonstrably real people. Otto does a good job of leaving some judgements for us to desolate for ourselves.

Otto describes the worlds of these women in such a way that one can taste the internal conflict inherent in each. The first story presents a young mother, left to care for two children and a farm, while her narcissistic husband travels for his work. Her own photography is often caught in the bind despite her own superior credentials. I sighed, thinking here is the classic woman's story. But Otto takes it quickly into her interior world and brought me in. Cymbeline, trained in Berlin, is the first cameo, and her views reappear through this book. I think that the vignettes set in pre WWII Berlin were most bewitching to me. The frisson between the exquisite glowing world of the growth of the arts and the looming of the Nazi end of it all, plays out in the world of the girls taking pictures.

Otto notes that this is not biographical, but she did draw heavily on her researched stories of some prominent women photographers. The aesthetics she expresses read true and brought me to a new view of this art form. An interesting book to experience.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Women behind the lens

By Cate Garrison

Once again, Whitney Otto has woven together, melding fact and fiction seamlessly along the way, a handful of lives in a space/time continuum where the common threads are art (specifically photography) and the role of women in society. Her subjects are fascinating both in themselves, and in their interplay. In particular, the image of the woman, once a world-traveler and now, having started a family, taking pictures only through her apartment window, haunts the reader for a long time (I can't stop thinking of The Lady of Shalott). Woman trapped...if trapped she is...not only behind a lens, but also behind a pane of glass? And yet the photographs are beautiful...is she happy with her lot?

Several of these women are recognizable as historical figures, others not. This is a glorious book, and I recommend it highly.

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

Life lived. And reimagined through a woman's eyes.

By guiltlessreader

Amazing! This makes it as another of my favourite reads for the year. With the same appeal as Otto's How to Make an American Quilt, this is altogether bold, romantic, tender and outspoken. I loved everything about it and I could relate on so many levels, as a woman, and as someone who has always been fascinated with

photography and art in general.

The novel is broken up into eight sections, each featuring a famous female photographer and her story. The obvious common thread -- photography -- is just one among the many threads that hold the individual stories together. Spanning decades (early 1990s to the present), across several continents, during various historical moments -- these themes are the stuff of our lives. I just breathed it all in! I am betting that women readers will be able to relate to one (or more) of the eight characters in some way.

Women photographers are simply ordinary women who face the issues all women do: the men (or women) who we love, fulfilling the roles expected of women (or breaking out of them), feeling comfortable in one's sexuality, children (or none at all), of wanting to carve out one's one path personally and career-wise. What makes a woman happy? What makes you happy?

What sets these eight women apart is their vision (and tempestuousness) to continue with their craft -- and do so with great courage and passion -- despite (or in spite) of the many hurdles. They all managed to make their mark in photography in rather profound ways.

Each vignette opens with a photograph which figures in the story somehow (and which I tended to flip back and forth to try and see the image through that particular photographer's eyes).

The first photographer's story opens with the photo of an unmade bed with some hairpins. Note that all these photos are apparently taken by real women photographers, and then the characters' lives are reimagined by the author based on that photo. How creative and what a wonderful way to draw readers in! Of course I want to find out who Cymbeline is, who this "woman in love" is! Of course I want to know the story behind that unmade bed. Like we always say, a picture is worth a thousand words ... in this case, the words follow.

Each has made their own distinctive mark in the world of photography -- with some extremely fascinating points woven into the narratives. There are references to photography styles and influences, lenses and cameras and details that will satisfy the photography buff. And since this draws from the lives of women photographers, there is a list at the end of the book you can check out.

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