Ian Fowler: Welcome, everyone. Thank you for joining us this afternoon. My name is Ian Fowler. I'm the Curator of Maps, History, and Government Information here at the New York Public Library. Work/Cited is a program series that showcases the latest scholarship supported by the rich collections of the New York Public Library with a behind the scenes look at how the finished product was inspired, researched, and created. Today, we are joined by Dr. Elizabeth Cronin, Robert B. Mitchell Curator of Photography at the New York Public Library. She will speak with Russet Lederman. Unfortunately, Olga Yatskevich could not be with us here today, we do apologize on her behalf. Olga is a contributing writer to Collector Daily, which reviews recent museum exhibitions, gallery shows, photography auctions, photo books, and art fairs. Russet is a writer, editor, and photobook collector. Together, Olga and Russet founded the nonprofit project 10x10 Photobooks in 2012. And most recently, they edited the book, What They Saw; Historical Photobooks by Women, 1843 to 1999, which we're here to discuss today. Our speakers will discuss women's involvement in the emergence and development of the photobook. I'm going to put some links here in the chat for everyone where you can purchase the item and also some events that we have around the 10x10 Photobook project here at the library. Our guests will speak for about 30 minutes and then we will open up the conversation. Please use the Q&A function to share your questions and comments for our panelists. Questions will be submitted throughout the talk. If you wish to remain anonymous, please click that option before submitting your question. If you'd like to chat during the program, please do, just make sure to change your chat settings to everyone so that we can all enjoy the conversation. And with that, I will hand it over to Dr. Cronin.

Elizabeth Cronin: Thank you, Ian. And I want to say how happy I am to do this. We're excited, I think we have a really great conversation for you all to listen to today. So let's just get started. I have the book here with me to show everyone. As you can see, it's actually quite hefty [laughs]. And you'll get more snippets of it in a minute when we go through the slides. But I want to talk to and ask Russet first a little bit about the background of the book. And I shouldn't, I've fallen behind here. Here's the handle. And how about we can start with this. And I can ask you to talk a little bit about the background of the book.

Russet Lederman: Thank you, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth: How you first got interested in photobooks.

Russet: Yeah, thank you, Elizabeth. Thank you, Ian, for that wonderful introduction. As Elizabeth and Ian said, I am Russet Lederman. I am one half of the team of 10x10 Photobooks with my found -- cofounder, Olga Yatskevich who, unfortunately, could not be here today. I also work with a woman named Dolly Meieran who was the associate editor on this book. 'What They Saw' is
actually the fifth book that 10x10 has published. We started in 2012 and we are focused on supporting the photography book community. And that is through several different platforms; through publishing which is what we’re talking about today; through salons which are gatherings that allow people interested in photography publishing to get together with authors, designers, photographers, and editors to learn about current publications that are out; as well as through social media; and we also have a grant program that supports research in photobook history. So we started in 2012. And our first publication came out in 2013. And they focus on different areas of photography that we feel might not be well represented or have gaps in their representation in publishing. And so we started with American Photobooks, and then went on to publish another book on Japanese Photobooks, Latin American Photobooks. And then the book that preceded 'What They Saw' in 2018 was called 'How We See Photobooks by Women.' And we’re called 10x10 because we use a structure normally to put together our projects where we ask 10 experts to each select 10 books and they can’t have any kind of conflict of interest of having been the publisher or writer for the publications they pick. And so 10x10 started 'How We See' by inviting 10 women from around the world to each pick 10 books and that was focused on contemporary photography books. And as that book came out and an associated reading room that toured to the New York Public Library, as well as to France and to Buenos Aires and to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, among other locations, we were asked, what about the history? What about women’s involvements in photobook publishing prior to 2010, which was the cutoff for the 'How We See' book. And so we took on that challenge during COVID and we released in November 2021, what we saw, 'What They Saw, which is the follow-up and it’s kind of a follow-back, it goes from 1843 to 1999. And it is an anthology that documents photobooks by covering not just Western photobooks, but photo books by women who are on other continents, as well as women who normally might not have access to publishing. So can I have the next slide? Okay, so in 'How We See,' we had a small section that was documenting several historical books. And that was the basis for our selection for the current anthology, ‘What They Saw.’ And you can see, this is the cover of 'How We See' as long, as well as on the right, the historical photobooks section of that publication which showcases an image by Germaine Krull called 'Metal' from 1928 on its pages. And can I have the next slide please? It also had a reading room. So here, you can see the reading room at the New York Public Library in 2018. And our reading rooms are hands-on experiences where the books are out and the public is invited free to touch the books and really explore them at their leisure, sit down at a table. They are organized in this particular reading room by geographic location as that was the structure for the 'How We See' publication. So we’d launched also 'What They Saw' because there were several kind of glaring omissions we felt in the current photobook history that had been written. And we undertook to do a little bit of research on statistics of women's representation in various sides of the photobook world. And so we looked at anthologies that were historical documentations of interesting photobooks and significant photobooks. And we found that in the major anthologies, only 10.5% of the entries were by women. So this was kind of one indicator for us that there was a need for this kind of research. We also went into bookseller inventories and found in the field of photobooks that there was, only 16.2% of the inventory were books by women. And then we looked at awards that were being offered for recent publications of photobooks. And for first books by women in that award category, only 39.5 of the first books
that were shortlisted were by women. And then when we went to the winners of those awards, it went even lower to 28.5%. So that was our kind of catalyst for starting this project. I think we should go to the next slide.

Elizabeth: Yeah. So I want to know, I mean, you can see here that you've won awards with this project. So I'd like to offer my congratulations. And I think, you know, to create something like this was really ambitious. And, you know, you have 258 photobooks in this anthology and it's a huge project. How did you, how did you come up with the parameters of what to include, what not to include? What, what is considered a photobook for you?

Russet: It was a very interesting experience because particularly, when we looked at the latter half of the 19th century, the photobooks that had been published -- and when I use the word photobook, I mean a book that is primarily photography -- were by Western women, primarily in France, in England, and the US. And as we reached out to other scholars and tried to kind of seek out books that might have been published in Africa, or Asia, or Latin America, I encountered an interesting conversation with a scholar who said to me, "Your framing is wrong." And, at first, I thought, what does she mean my framing is wrong? You know, Olga and I have been discussing books as bound objects that were published by a publisher or self-published by an individual photographer. And she said, "No, most women didn't have access. They didn't either have the social connections, they didn't have the professional connections, or they didn't have the financial ability to publish a book." So that --

Elizabeth: That's a really good point that you bring up in your introduction. I like the phrasing that you use, you said, "You're not rewriting history, you're unwriting it." So I think that goes along really well with what you're saying.

Russet: Yeah, exactly. I mean, we're unwriting because we had to also redefine what constituted a photography book. So once we were able to look at things that might have been a pamphlet that were used for humanitarian rights or look at something that was a promotional tool for a real estate company, we were able to broaden very much the women we could include. And so I think this is a key element in terms of the research is that, when you're looking at a marginalized community, you have to also look at their inability to have access and reframe, you know, what then makes for a book. Can I have the next slide, please? So, of course, we started with Anna Atkins, who in 1843, who was a botanist, created what we consider to be the first photobook. She was very well connected. She was very much in conversation through her father and his connections with many of the great scientific minds of her time. And she created this book which are cyanotypes of algae to illustrate scientific information. And she did it in small, what's called fascicles, which are like little pamphlets. And she self-distributed it to friends and other scientists. And in many anthologies, this is not considered a book, or wasn't at the time because it was self-published and it was not published by a respected publisher. And so we felt it was very important to kind of right that wrong and say, "No, this is the first photography book by a woman," and cement that history. Can I have the next slide, please? This is another example by Alice Seeley Harris who was a missionary in Belgian Congo. And she and her husband, who
was a minister, were there at the time that King Leopold was advancing the rubber trade. And in his advancement of the rubber trade, the Human Rights aggressions were really quite drastic. And so she photographed the community in Belgian Congo. And when she returned to the UK, she and her husband went about putting on like magic lantern shows, as well as providing the photographs that we see here that were published in a pamphlet for information about the atrocities to alert the public in Britain about what was happening in Belgian Congo. And so this normally wouldn't have been considered a book but in our definition, it's very much a book. Next slide, please. Another example is Christina Broom who was a woman whose husband had health issues so she had to go to work and she became a photographer. And in her early photographic career, she was a street photographer documenting the women's suffrage movement in the UK. And what she would do is photograph them while they were out on their marches or staging their satirical shows. And she set up a kiosk, her daughter would be the printer, and she would sell them as postcards back to the women who are involved in the suffrage movement. And this album was put together by Isabel Marian Seymour who was a secretary for the Women's Social and Political Union. And she gifted it to them with 15 postcards by Christina Broom, as well as portraits of the important suffrage women involved in the movement. Next slide, please. And another book from Russia, this is by Varvara Stepanova. And in this case, she is a designer, as well as an artist. And she collaborated like many women involved in Russian constructivism on this book. And so as a result of the collaboration, many of the women's names were omitted. And so this book is often attributed to Mayakovsky who is the writer, or to Rodchenko who was her husband. She did that image on the lower left which are the endpapers to the books which is of a soldier, Red Army soldier holding a bayonet. And it's an image by Ignatovich but she used his work to then make her own work. And her montages are seen throughout this book, as well as being the designer of the publication. Next slide, please. So I think it's important to acknowledge this question of, that women had obstacles. And sometimes, they wanted to produce a book but couldn't produce a book, even at the most kind of basic sense as a pamphlet, they just didn't have the opportunity. So we created something called the timeline. And you can see that on the left which runs throughout the book of important events that either were in photography, or in women's rights, or were a feminist event of note. And they might not have produced a book, or they might have produced a book where the attribution is ambiguous. And you can see, for example, on the left, there's like a little pinkish framed image, Elizabeth moving her arrow there now. And that's by a Japanese woman named Ryu Shima who has been noted as the first woman in Japan to take a photograph. And this is a book that she made with her husband but it is always attributed to her husband. And so in researching and contacting scholars in Japan, we asked, I mean, was she one of the authors of this book? Did she contribute photographs? And the response that came back was most probably yes but it is not documented anywhere. And so our timeline follows these kinds of probes that we call them. And we hope the future scholars will take some of these noted timeline entries and expand further and maybe prove them true or unearth the full information associated with them.

Elizabeth: Either way, it's nice to know about the influences, sort of the behind, the behind-the-scenes influences, especially when they're overshadowed by, you know, numerous
male authors.

Russet: Yeah, I mean, there's one interesting case where there's Laura Betta [assumed spelling] who, on that left page, it's on the right column, that one, and she's probably the rare case of a woman in Germany or in Europe at all, who was both the photographer and the publisher. She ran a publishing imprint which was something very rare in the 19th century for a woman. So, and this was --

Elizabeth: I'm sorry. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about, just speak more about diversity in the publication? And how, how you were able to, you've mentioned already that it was hard, that sometimes they weren't published books. But how was it difficult for you in this vision of creating this anthology to have a more complete, to sort of unwrite history to include all of these other aspects that maybe were in pamphlets or albums that were put together by women? Or maybe even published books? But how difficult was it to find these women? And, you know, how did you go about that?

Russet: Well, I should note before I kind of answer that question more fully, we worked with a team of researchers who are PhD students who were at CUNY or Boston University, doing fellowships at the Smithsonian or a part of the University of California system. And we purposely worked with our researchers who wrote the book description blurbs, trying to incite the next generation to hopefully take up this research a little bit further. And that's also in keeping with the grants program that we offer 10x10, the nonprofit that I co-run with Olga offers, because our feeling is that this history is quite fluid and that others need to kind of keep going further. We just kind of took a little bit of the history and are presenting it but there's so much more that we haven't even unearthed or touched upon. So our researchers were tasked and it was during COVID so it was quite difficult, a lot of libraries were closed, and we had to kind of source many of the books online. And fortunately, because they are books by women, they are not well known and they were very reasonable for us to buy [laughs] so that the researchers could have the physical copies in hand. This book is a wonderful example of a book that should be better known. And fortunately, it is getting a little bit more attention. It was recently in the show, 'The Woman Behind the Camera' that was at the Metropolitan Museum that also has toured to the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., and it's by a woman named Eslanda Goode Robeson. And she was the wife of Paul Robeson, the activist and actor. And she was a very interesting woman, she had a PhD from Columbia University. And during the 1940s, she traveled with her son to Uganda in South Africa. And she did all the photographs and documented the meetings that she had with various officials, as well as community leaders in those countries. And I think that it's a wonderful book because so many of the books of that time were done by white anthropologists or historians and documented Africa as this kind of one-dimensional continent. And she is very clear to kind of make the distinction of the various different countries and communities within it. And she's also visiting it and documenting it as an African American woman. So I think that this book, you know, speaks a bit to that kind of diversity that we were looking for, not just in terms of African Americans, but in terms of Latin Americans, Latin women, Japanese women, Chinese women, South Asian women. I mean, we tried very hard to kind of
reach beyond the canon of photography history that is primarily white and male. Oh, yeah, go back to that slide you just passed. Okay. This is an interesting Japanese woman speaking to diversity, whose name is Eiko Yamazawa. And like many Japanese women who had some means, she studied in the US in San Francisco with Consuelo Kanaga, an American photographer, where she first learned her trade and she was doing portraits. And so this book is an interesting combination, it's called "Far and Near," or [foreign language] in Japanese which translates loosely as perspective. She published the book with both an English and Japanese title. So she was obviously thinking that she was going to touch a broader, broader audience [inaudible] Japanese audience. But she then returned to America, again, to New York, and became very involved with the abstract expressionists. And so her photography changed, it became color, and it became these close-cropped images of plants and flowers, as well as folded paper and these abstractions. And so this book combines both sides of her photography, her earlier portrait black and white work, along with her color, more abstracted work. And she's also then returned to Japan and set up a photography school which ended up being on the top floor of a hospital because that was where she could get space, and teaching others and sharing the information that she had. So she wasn't just a photographer but she was a mentor and teacher. Next slide. Let's see what that is. This is a woman named Clarissa Sligh. And this kind of ticks off the boxes of a book that is not a traditional book. It was made at the Women’s Photography Workshop. And it was a handmade book done in a limited edition and it's called 'What's Happening with Momma?' And it's very biographical about Clarissa Sligh's family and the time when her mother is giving birth and the children are kind of pushed outside, yet, they don't know what's going on. And she talks about wanting to kind of write the history that she felt had been very skewed of African Americans from a perspective that was an African American woman's perspective. And this book will be on view, as Elizabeth and Ian mentioned, in our upcoming reading rooms that will be at the New York Public Library from the 19th of May, to the 21st of May. And there are two rooms, one for books that can be touched. And another room which is the prints and photography study room in room 308 for books that are a little bit more delicate and one has to make an advance appointment but anyone can make that appointment by emailing photography@nypl.org and can come in and look at the books that are the rare books there. There are about 45 rare books in that room and about 155 touchable books that are in the Center for Research in the Humanities on the second floor. Next slide, please. Okay, I think you have another question for me. Elizabeth, maybe?

Elizabeth: Sorry. No, no, it's fine [laughs].

Russet: If not, I'll talk about this while you get your note. This is, this is [inaudible].

Elizabeth: No, no, it's fine. I apologize to the audience. The window to Bryant Park is right outside and there's lots going on so I have to keep muting and unmuting myself. And it has distracted me slightly but I, I would like, I would like to talk about, and maybe this applies to this question and maybe some of those coming slides do, over the course of the project, are there books that you didn't know about before or didn't really, you haven't really seen that maybe are now your favorites, or that you want to especially share with us, or maybe you can just talk
about? Or you can just talk about this if it's not --

Russet: This is one of my favorites, the one we're looking at, and it's by Hannah Hoch. And it's a unique book, it's a scrapbook that she made during World War II when she was living in a suburb of Berlin. And Hannah Hoch is well known for her montage work. And she, this book is almost like her inspirational journal where she cut out images that would influence her, that she'd want to look back at. And it's a very soft cover book, it's housed in Berlin. So obviously, we have a facsimile edition that will be on view that will be in the Center for Research in the Humanities on the 19th. But I just, I just love the montage and I love that it kind of also shares with us kind of German society in the interwar period, as well as the war period but from a very personal kind of woman's perspective. She had been a photographer as well and with, I believe, it was a kind of women's magazine. And so she cuts a lot from popular women's magazines, as well as from advertising. And I just love the layouts of this. I think it's an incredibly beautiful book.

Elizabeth: Well, it's great because she's, you know, she's known for these montages that she does, but how fun that they're all collected, you know, into one sort of collection, collection album.

Russet: Yeah. And it's also, you kind of see a little bit the way her mind works. And I love that idea that we're, we're looking into someone's journal in this one. It's, you can see on the lower left, our publication is, follows a chronology. So you can see that this one is from 1933. And next slide, I think, we're going to talk about --

Elizabeth: Yeah. So I also wanted to say, you know, this collection, this album, it also illustrates what's so great about photobooks to begin with, is that you're not just seeing one photograph by the photographer, you're really getting a larger picture, a story, an artistic vision from being able to turn the pages. So another reason to come to the reading room [laughs].

Russet: Yeah, and books are tactile, I mean, the experience of a book, I mean, like, like a film, it's sequential. And so, you know, you turn from one page to the next, maybe you move backwards by flipping the pages in reverse order. But a book is a very different experience than looking at something on a screen. And so like this, for example, 'Amazonia' is a book by Claudia Andujar who is from Brazil and was very involved with the Yanomami people who is an Indigenous group that lives in northern Brazil. And she lived among the people and she partook in many of their ceremonies which were kind of psychedelic experiences where they would have mind-altering rituals. And so she created her photographs often by altering the photographs by smearing Vaseline on her lens so that things would blur so that they'd have this kind of out-of-body or otherworldly experience. And I know that Olga likes this book very much, in particular.

Elizabeth: It's one of my favorites, too [laughs].
Russet: Yeah. And I just, you know, felt that it was a way to show that, you know, photographs are not just about documenting, it's also about sharing, you know, kind of a spirit or a mindset or, or an experience that can't necessarily be verbalized. Here's another book that I'd say both Olga and I like very much, it's actually, we're borrowing it from the Library of Performing Arts, it lives there, normally. And it's by a woman named Dayanita Singh who is a woman from India and she is a very prolific bookmaker. And we like this because it's her first book. She started making this when she was in college and finishing her art studies. And it is about Zakir Hussain who's a tabla player which is like a traditional Indian drum instrument. And she followed him on tour and he would travel with his family. And so the book includes photographs of him both performing and relaxing in between performances, as well as she's written, handwritten on this book, some of his comments and her own comments. And I just find this book as kind of this wonderful evidence of her early bookmaking and also of a very personal student approach to making books which now resonates that we see her as someone who's made so many books. And you can see also on this one, on the right side are some timeline entries. Viewfinders is a wonderful reference guide by Jean Moutoussamy-Ashe who is a photographer, as well as she was the wife of the tennis player, Arthur Ashe. And she, in 1986, did a book about African American photography, women, specifically, because she felt that she didn't see Black women represented in photography history. And so it's this incredible resource, we used it quite a bit during our research of this, for this publication. And then down below it is a book by Sue Ford who's an Australian photographer who photographed Australian women in a book called 'A Sixtieth of a Second; Portraits of Women from 1961 to 1981,' if I can read correctly, that small type. And so all of these books will be on view, as well, as of the 19th and in the touchable section so that you can really go through them and feel their materiality, as Elizabeth said, which is a very important part of looking at photography books. I think, next slide. So here, you see a little bit of the name of my coeditor, as well as the essayists we invited to write. Each chapter kind of covers both the books with the spreads, similar to what I just showed you, but it also provides historical, cultural, and social context for the books. And so we invited writers from around the world, and men and women, we don't feel that this rewriting of history of photobooks by women is just by women, it can be done by men. I think that what our goal is, is that a book like ours in the future doesn't need to happen, that this history is integrated into the larger anthologies. And so our writers came from, from Europe, from all over. They were librarians, they were historians, they were photographers, and curators. And also, below are the contributing book description writers who are the graduate students that I spoke about.

Elizabeth: Can you speak on just, in general, on, you know, working with so many authors, maybe some, for some future editors out there? How, how maybe if there was any tips for how to, you know, there's a lot to handle [laughs]?

Russet: Yeah, a lot of people, I should also have mentioned that all the books were photographed and it was during COVID so it was not easy. Libraries were closed, museums were closed. And so, as I said, we purchased as much as we could. I have a personal book collection which you can see behind me so I had some of those books in my personal collection so we had access to, to photograph them and really just go through them and kind of look at
them up close as our researchers and contributing essayists were writing on them. So we worked remotely, it was COVID. And, you know, a lot of back and forth. But I think that's what makes the project rich is that there are a lot of different voices in this project. And those voices came through very loud and clear. We had to have discussions, particularly about books that were done in the early half of the 20th century that had a colonialist perspective. And we had to decide, you know, do we include these books, we might find them exceedingly offensive right now, the perspective that they present. You know, for example, Leni Riefenstahl's book about the Olympics in the 1930s was, was basically a Nazi propaganda book and do we include it? And we ultimately, you know, in lots of discussions and lots of kind of soul searching, decided, yes, we do. But we include it with a discussion, we unpack it, we look at its warts, we look at the faults of these books, we look at, you know, why it was popular in it's time, how we view it now from a perspective of 2021, 2022, and we don't cancel them. And that was a very important discussion that we had in putting together this publication, tackling those difficult subjects, those books that were maybe views of Africa that we felt were from a very, you know, white privilege perspective, that we did not feel comfortable with at this point.

Elizabeth: Yeah, I mean, it definitely shows that you did your research. I also, you know, I was part of the process. And I think it's really great that you thought out so many opinions from so many different people to make sure that you were presenting, you know, the best, the best view, you know, all views are subjective but the best, you know, informed view of them.

Russet: Right. And, and, you know, coming back to the idea that history is quite fluid. And, you know, that what we might have unearthed might be lacking and can be updated, you know, 10, 15 years from now and hopefully, integrated into the larger history that exists. I mean, we kind of went back to do statistics again to look at the inventory of booksellers and to look at the various awards that were offered for photography books. And the numbers increased a little bit but not a lot. And so I still think we have a lot of work to do in terms of the kind of marketplace, as well as the high-profile awards and high-profile publishers, publishing books by women and not just women from Europe, not just, you know, women from the US, but from women from all over the world and providing those opportunities.

Elizabeth: I think these changes, oftentimes, take a while.

Russet: They do. They do. I mean, the increase in numbers was maybe 5%, you know, 7%. We're getting there but it's not, yeah, it's not going to happen overnight, exactly. So here, you see the reading rooms that we've been talking about which I should also mention, we worked with the Bryant Park corporation. So on the cafe tables that are in Bryant Park, that are on either side of the front entrance of the New York Public Library, we have plastered them with images of historic photobooks by women. So even if you don't want to go into the library, you can still see the books and they're out there with a QR code for more information. But the Center for Research in the Humanities is free and open to the public, it's open from 10 to 5:45 and the books are out on tables to be touched. There's information with each book, giving you a little bit of the background of it. And then also in the prints and photo study room, Room 308, you can
make an appointment and just put 'What They Saw' on the head, in the subject header of your email, and they will invite you in to take a look at the books and handle some quite amazing rare books.

Elizabeth: All are welcome.

Russet: All are welcome.

Elizabeth: Thank you. I think we can, I think we can turn it over to Ian [inaudible] and the audience to ask questions.

Ian: Thank you, both, so very much. This has been an extremely fascinating discussion obviously, of an incredibly important topic. Again, for the audience, if you have any questions for our panelists, please put them in the Q&A. I have some questions. I'd like to start with an extremely niche question but that might be helpful for other researchers in the audience. Several times, you mentioned the process that your team went through in constructing the book. How did you have to deal with copyright and getting kind of permission to include these?

Russet: Yeah, well, when you are photographing a picture of a book cover that you own and it's very old, it's quite easy [laughs] because we're beyond, and many of the books were beyond that, that time period. Many of the authors who were alive, we contacted and we actually interviewed and spoke with them but we did all the photography here. In some cases, there were a few cases like, for example, where there were books by Margaret Cameron, we had to contact the Getty Museum, and Julia Margaret Cameron. And so we would contact the institutions and request permission and they would often provide us with the photographs. I mean, we went near and far because it, being COVID, and us not being able to go into the institutions to photograph on-site, auction houses shared images with us, in some cases. But we did, I'd say, 90% of the photography in-house.

Ian: That's great. Thank you. I hope this question isn't too facile but so, obviously, you're focused on diversity, inclusive voices, expanding the parameters here. Was there a discussion about using just the print photobooks versus kind of digital galleries or digital collections, if that, if that question makes sense?

Russet: Yeah. For us, the object is very important. And we knew that the reading rooms would be associated with the publication. When we did our first publication, we did the reading room first. We did a reading room of Japanese photobooks. And it was during the New York Art Book Fair which, in the past, happened in October at PS1 MoMA. And we reached out to colleagues in Japan and used the model of ‘10 experts pick 10 books’ and we put together that reading room. And, you know, basically, that was what kind of got us started as a nonprofit 501(c)(3). But we also realized that the objectness is very, very important. And for many years, I taught at the School of Visual Arts in MFA Programs. And I saw that my students, as more digital media was creeping into their lives, the object became much more interesting to them. And so we
wanted to remain connected to the object. And in the process of putting together our publication, as well as the reading rooms.

Ian: I certainly understand that --

Elizabeth: Your answer reminded me of something we talked about earlier that we didn't address today which is, I think, a good story of how you and Olga met and got into this collaboration.

Russet: Yeah. My colleague, Olga, whose day job is at the United Nations which is why she can't be here today, an event there came up. And she was organizing meetups for people interested in photography books. And on a hot, sweaty day in July in 2011, 2012, I think, she organized a bunch of people who were interested in Japanese photography books and we all shared our books. And that became the basis for what are now our salons. And we looked at all the selection of books around us that most people don't have access to see. And we said, you know what? PS1's New York Art Book Fair is coming up, let's propose that we do a reading room of Japanese photobooks with them. And it just took off. I mean, the room was overflowing. Once we set it up, we had all these photography books that people couldn't have access to because they were shipped over from Japan. And so hence, we became a 501(c)(3) several years later, like two years later.

Ian: That's a great story. You mentioned it briefly in the last portion, the last little segment of the program. But could you speak possibly a little bit more to the impact that you hope that these publications will have to the larger photographic world publishing awards?

Russet: I think the impact is to rewrite -- or first, unwrite photobook history which has been written primarily in anthologies that document books that skew very much towards Europe, America, and men. And to see future discussions of photography publishing, as well as photography exhibitions, that are very conscious of a diverse selection that is beyond what we read in the classic photography canon that was written by people like Beaumont Newhall and see it without having to think twice, inclusive of not just men and women, transgender, people from, you know, all different aspects of society who, who are making books, whether it be a zine or a kind of mainstream trade publication that you can get at a Barnes and Noble.

Ian: Wonderful, thank you. Elizabeth, would you just for people who may not be familiar, could you just briefly give an overview of the photobook collections here at the New York Public Library?

Elizabeth: We have a lot of photobooks [laughing]. You know, what's interesting about this project -- and Russet can also speak to this -- is there are some photobooks which are at the New York Public Library that have been singled out by various curators and staff over the years as being rare, if you will, particularly special, not very many work produced, or perhaps they need a little bit extra of extra care because of their condition. And then there are, are great
many books that are just in, found within the general research collections or the art division or, you know, various other divisions. And so what I think this reading room and also this, this project, if you look at it and look at what books are at the library and where they are at the library, really highlights is that maybe in contrast, you know, you could also do a statistical analysis in contrast to many of the photobooks that we have, in sort of aligned in the special collections, how many are by men and how many are by women? And how many of the ones that are included in this anthology by women are really just found within the general research collections? And some of that siphoning really isn't necessarily about gender, it's about the topic. You know, the topic of the book is about farming or something [laughs]. So it's, so it's in a, like a section about farming history and [inaudible]. And previously, it wasn't valued for it [inaudible].

Russet: Yeah, I think that's a really good point. I mean, when the books that were going to be on view in the reading room come from the New York Public Library's collection and we're not just borrowing from photography collections, we're, we're borrowing from Schomburg, we're borrowing from Library of Performing Arts, some are in general circulation. So I think the topic, you find photography books everywhere. I just want to clarify something, I misspoke when I said that Clarissa Sligh's book is from the Women's Photography [inaudible] is the Women's Studio Workshop in Rosendale, New York, that helped her producers. So I just want to clarify that. And there also was someone who asked about whether we were going to do a follow-up on the contemporary view involving what they, 'What They Saw.' And we did. It's called, 'How We See.' We work backwards. So that book is out there and I spoke about it earlier when we first started this talk.

Ian: Fantastic. Are there any closing remarks, Elizabeth or Russet?

Elizabeth: I have a question for Russet which is, what is next for 10x10?

Russet: Oh, gosh [laughing]. Our projects take about 18 months to realize. And so Olga and Dolly and I are speaking about the next project. We, as I've said, we tried to look at underrepresented areas. And so I think we're going to take the summer to kind of really dig in and do a little bit of research. So I'm not going to share it yet but it will be an anthology, we do not publish monographs, we only publish anthologies that cover areas that need to have more exposure. But I just want to kind of say to people who are doing research out there, 10x10photobooks.org has a grants program and we're just about to open up our 2022 round of grants for research on photobook history. It's going to be focused on women. We're requesting submissions of research on photography books by women with a focus on Africa and Asia, in particular. And so those grants, we offer $2,500 to each grant recipient. There is the obligation to present your research once you're done. But I hope people will, if they're doing research, submit proposals that hopefully we can fund.

Ian: Fantastic!

Elizabeth: Really great. I hope there's lots of grad students out there and other, you know,
researchers that are listening to this.

Ian: I do, as well. Well, thank you, both, so very much. This has been a fascinating and wonderful program. Appreciate your time and your expertise.

Elizabeth: Thank you, Ian.

Russet: Thank you, Ian. Thank you, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth: And for those of you wondering if, you know, if you're planning on coming to the reading room, you can also get a copy of the book at the reading room if you want, if you're looking for where, it's available everywhere, so, very easy to buy one.

Ian: And the link to purchase online is in the chat, as well. Thank you, everyone, for coming. Stay tuned for a blog post with the video recording for today's talk and links to related resources. Links to these resources will be emailed to everyone who registered to, for today's event, whether you attended in person or not. I'm going to put a lot of links in the -- I've done this like 800 times and it was muted that whole time? [laughs] So stay tuned for a blog post with links for additional resources for this episode. The links in the chat that you can see our channel for our previous episodes and the blogs related to those, including additional resources for researchers. We also encourage you to stay in touch. There are handles for the social media and also, to get our monthly newsletter where you can also keep up on other events for researchers at the New York Public Library. Our next Work/Cited program will be on Wednesday, June 8th at 1:00 PM Eastern Standard Time when NYPL's Tal Nadan and Case-Western Reserve University Professor Einav Rabinovitch-Fox discuss her new book, Dressed for Freedom; The Fashionable Politics of American Feminism, and how the coordinated action of women executives changed what American fashion looked like and its acceptability in the mid-20th century. And that is also in the chat. Thanks, again, to Russet and Elizabeth. And have a wonderful afternoon.

Elizabeth: Thank you.

Russet: Bye. Thank you.