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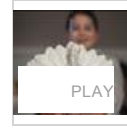
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A new exhibit highlights the pioneering role women photographers played at National Geographic Magazine

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By ANNA RUSSELL

When National Geographic magazine's first female staff photographer, Kathleen Revis, was on assignment in the 1950s, the chief of the photographic lab gave her some advice. "If you find the going too tough, why not run over to Paris for a week and get some new clothes," he told her. "I understand that is good for a woman's morale."



Sisters by Maggie Steber

Sisters by Maggie Steber

A half-century later, National Geographic is hosting an exhibit to celebrate its women photographers. "Women of Vision: National Geographic Photographers on Assignment," opening Thursday at the National Geographic Museum in Washington, D.C., profiles the work of 11 women in 99 images.

"I'd like to see someone try to say that now," said Elizabeth Krist, the show's curator and a senior photo editor, about the advice given to Ms. Revis. "All of the women who are in this show have proven that they can handle tough, dangerous situations. They go into these incredibly stereotypically macho situations and come back with these amazing images."

The exhibit, on display through early March, focuses on work made since

2000 with a section for each photographer; among them, magazine notables like Beverly Joubert and Lynsey Addario, as well as more recent contributors like Carolyn Drake and Kitra Cahana.

Jodi Cobb, who worked at the magazine for nearly three decades, is one of just four

AIRFRANCE advertisement featuring a blue background with a white airplane flying across the sky. Text includes 'Indulge in true French cuisine' and 'Find out more'.

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## National Geographic's Pioneering Women Photographers



Erika Larsen/National Geographic

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See highlights from a new exhibit at the National Geographic Museum in Washington, D.C. highlights the work of women photographers at National Geographic magazine.

women—compared to about 50 men—to have held the position of staff photographer in the magazine's 125-year history. "It was lonely," she said. "I spent a long time trying to prove myself and trying to prove I could do everything that the guys could do. That meant I was sort of running all over the world."

She found her gender gave her access to the subjects she wanted to cover. She has photographed geishas in Japan, a children's beauty-pageant contestant in Georgia, and a tribal festival in Papua New Guinea. In 2003, the magazine published "21st Century Slaves," about

human trafficking, for which Ms. Cobb spent a year visiting about a dozen countries.

In one image, women carry columns of red bricks on their heads next to a dusty brick wall in India. In another, Mumbai prostitutes stand in windows overlooking the street; one leans against the curtained frame, her face turned away. "What I was trying to do was make images of victims that did not re-victimize," she said. "You don't want people to turn away, you want to draw them in."



Amy Toensing

[Enlarge Image](#)

Amy Toensing's clothesline

Many of the projects in the exhibit required intense immersion, often lasting months or longer. Erika Larsen spent about four years on and off among the Sami People in the Arctic Circle for a project published in 2011. She worked as a "beaga," or housekeeper, and learned the Sami language. "I think it is important for me to get as close as possible," said Ms. Larsen. "When you're more a part of the story, people

relax, they open up and they give more of themselves."

In a photo taken by Amy Toensing for an assignment on drought in Australia, published in 2009, a pickup truck is parked on a wide expanse of dry land. In the truck's side-view mirror, the field owner lifts his son from the vehicle while, outside the mirror, his daughter pushes the hair out of her face. Ms. Toensing took the shot from inside the truck, where she had returned to change her lens.

"There's a tension in the girl's body language and then there's a resilience in the son and the father off the back of the truck," she said, "For me, it really encapsulated what I saw there."

Miami-based photographer Maggie Steber has photographed in Haiti since the 1980s, and in the process has been held at gunpoint, threatened with a machete, and included on a death list. She returns again and again, she said, because, "for all the poverty and tragedy and violence, there's also extraordinary beauty and extraordinary courage."

Sometimes her work takes on personal tones. In 2006, while Ms. Steber's mother was suffering from dementia, the magazine asked her to work on a project about memory. "How do you photograph memory?" she asked herself. "There were so many different ways to do it." She photographed brain slices, nuns who participate in memory research, mementos left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial—and her mother, staring over her coffee cup in bed at a Florida facility.

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