

SUMMARY

My doctoral dissertation aimed to fill the gap in source-analytical research on female pioneers of professional photography in Bydgoszcz during the period 1888-1945. The timeframe begins with the first mention of a woman running a photography studio with her husband in Bydgoszcz, then known as Bromberg, and ends in 1945, with the conclusion of World War II, which brought significant changes to technology and working conditions for photographers. My aim was to uncover forgotten female photographers and document their work. However, the goal was not only to bring them out of the "historiographical vacuum" and simply restore them to the collective memory, but to look at photography in such a way as to see them beyond the canon of the history of photography, the essence of which until recently constituted of great masters and their artwork. My work aligns with the critical perspective of the New Humanities, which challenges traditional authorities and canons and seeks to promote previously neglected areas of knowledge. In the case of the Bydgoszcz photographers, history understood as a "discourse of power," moreover exposes the relationship between the center and the periphery not only in the dichotomy of artistic and vernacular photography, but also in the literal sense. Due to the Bydgoszcz's peripherality, the contributions of female photographers to the field were overlooked by the already small group of historians of photography in Poland.

My doctoral dissertation belongs to a well-established trend in the research on the history of photography, which focuses on studying the specifics of local photographic environments. However, it is not a typical canonical account of history of the entire milieu in chronological order. Instead, it contributes to the ongoing process of re-framing the history of photography through the prism of gender and cultural decentralization, which is a subject of interest for scholars in world history of women's photography. When I embarked on my PhD, the history of Bydgoszcz photography as such did not exist. In describing this milieu, I outlined numerous issues hitherto unexplored by historians related to the development of photography in Bydgoszcz during my chosen timeframe, which turned out to be extremely interesting from the point of view of the history of photography and can, I believe, provide a starting point for further research. While these micro-histories are important in restoring the memory of forgotten initiatives and marginalized figures in Bydgoszcz photography, they served only as a

background for the hitherto untold stories of female photographers in Bydgoszcz that I aimed to bring to light. Hence, my dissertation can be seen as a feminist intervention in the history of photography, which takes as its starting point the need to "write another history" and „write it differently," putting the "the repressed question of gender" at the forefront.

My work aims to give rightful status to those who have been invisible in the past, particularly professional female photographers who were doubly excluded as women and craftsmen, i.e., non-artists. They produced utilitarian photographs that deprived them of a voice in the canon of the best and most beautiful photographs in the history of photography, rendering them almost non-existent. Although there have been progressive research and studies on women's participation in the history of photography, there is still a lack of relevant studies on the subject of women's professional photography. Despite the publication of the book *Dokumentalistki. Polskie fotografki XX wieku* published in 2008, the achievements of Polish women professional photographers remain unnoticed, marginalized and underestimated. This displacement from the discourse of the history of photography is best evidenced by the word "fotografistka", which was commonly used before the war and meant "female photographer", but has almost completely fallen out of use. The female precursors of professional photography have not been included in historical studies, their work is not displayed in exhibitions, and their history is unwritten which is an obvious paradox considering that photography, invented during the emancipation movement, presented itself as an "accessible profession appropriate for women". New technologies, like photography, provided women an opportunity for their own creative and professional activity when they could not take up other fields of art. The photographic atelier became "a room of one's own", one of the most important feminist metaphors referring to women's independence and intellectual freedom.

As a result of the emancipation of the history of photography from the history of art, photography today constitutes a comprehensive and complex research material for interdisciplinary analysis. The methodology of my research combines interpretive ideas from the study of unconventional histories, which considers the practice of science, its politicization, the relationship between knowledge and power, the researcher's involvement, and struggle for social change and justice. I also use traditional methods of history such as archival research, source criticism, and in-depth analysis of the

phenomenon. My work is biographical and focuses on defending the subjectivity of the oppressed group. It is divided into three chapters.

In Chapter I, I discuss the long history of women's emancipation in the history of photography. Drawing on examples from the world of photography, I highlight how women photographers were marginalized and overlooked in the cultural narrative that favoured male careers. I show how women photographers were consistently dismissed or slighted in general histories of the medium, which were modeled after the history of painting and focused on the names of its fathers - geniuses, inventors, artists and their iconic photographs. I illustrate how this process obscured significant contributions by some once well-known female photographers and it ignored entirely those who never made it into the spotlight. Next, I examine how feminists reacted to the inequalities that existed in photography, and how their interventions have helped to restore the visibility of female artists who were previously excluded from a male-dominated field. I discuss key books and exhibitions that challenged the rules for creating the canon, and pulled women photographers out of the shadows. Finally, I show how the process of revising the canon of photography has accelerated in recent years, thanks to numerous feminist interventions. Half a century after Linda Nochlin posed the question "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?", the visibility of female artists in photography is on the rise, even in Poland.

Chapters II and III are part of the trend of archival research work on the role of women in the history of photography, which I discussed in Chapter I. In these chapters, I delve into the work of two very different female photographers who were active in Bydgoszcz during the research period: Władysława Spiżewska (1879 - ?) and Jadwiga Szopieraj (1907 - 1975). By examining these two case studies and analyzing their "small range theory" in contrast to the abstract "big theory," I aim to verify the thesis of the emancipatory nature of photography. To uncover the herstories of the female photographers of Bydgoszcz, my work combines interpretive approaches, drawing on the ideas of critical historiography, biographical interpretation, the turn to micro-histories and the photographic archive. My dominant perspective is feminist, and I strive to present the specific problems faced by the women who created these herstories, such as their background, their access to education and professional opportunities, and the conditions under which they worked. Of particular interest is the question of whether these women had a "room of one's own," as Virginia Woolf famously described it, and

the economic conditions involved in their professional engagement in photography. Another fascinating theme is the use of the camera to subvert the symbolic order of the Renaissance "central perspective," in which men were associated with "seeing" and women with "being seen." The invention of photography had an emancipatory significance for women, allowing them to become the "gazing subjects" and defy centuries of stereotyped iconography.