

NANCY REXROTH

Secrets of My Power

Large Print Labels

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NANCY REXROTH

Secrets of My Power

The photographer Nancy Rexroth (American, b. 1946) is best known for a haunting photobook she published in 1977. Titled *IOWA*, the book presents a sequence of dream-like, black-and-white images Rexroth made in rural Ohio, reflecting her feelings as a female artist in her twenties. For 50 years, *IOWA* has been personally significant for many viewers and influential among photographers.

To make *IOWA*, Rexroth used a simple plastic camera called the Diana. At the time, some photographers were challenging the notion that technically sophisticated, precision equipment was necessary to make art photographs. Photography was gaining a foothold in university

art departments, museums, and the art market at the same moment, while second-wave feminism and other social shifts created openings for—and resistance against—new perspectives, techniques, and subject matter.

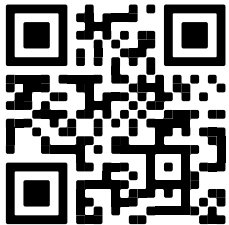
This exhibition's five sections move from Rexroth's early life, through her multifaceted exploration of the Diana camera, to work she produced in the late 1970s, early 1980s, and early 2000s using different tools and media. Many photographs on view have not been shown before and are unfamiliar even to those for whom *IOWA* is a beloved book. These pictures offer insight into *IOWA*'s development and meanings, revealing themes that stretch across five decades of artistic expression.

"How does this photograph hold an emotion?" is a pertinent question to ask of all Rexroth's work. Her handling of light is often key to the answer.

Welcome!

Please borrow these tools to make the most of your visit.

- 1 Choose the tools that you need.**
- 2 Use them throughout the exhibition.**
- 3 Return tools in the bin near the exhibition's exit, or at the museum's Front Desk.**



Scan for more information about accessibility at the museum.

All works on display are by Nancy Rexroth (American, b. 1946) unless otherwise stated.

The artworks and objects in this exhibition are drawn primarily from The Nancy Rexroth Collection, formed at the Cincinnati Art Museum in collaboration with the artist between 2017 and 2024. The Nancy Rexroth Collection consists of more than 400 photographs, many unique, as well as her personal and professional papers, tools, negatives, and other ephemera. Research inquiries are welcome.



Scan the QR code for more information.



1. Ringing Like a Bell

An introduction to Nancy Rexroth

Run Time: 9 min

Throughout this exhibition, experience captioned video and audio content on your smartphone where you see these symbols:



Scan the QR code. Select the desired item from the playlist. Please use personal headphones.

All video and audio content is also available at a seated media station near the end of the exhibition.

To Exist

(Youth and Early Work, 1946–1970)

Born in 1946 in Washington, D.C., Nancy Rexroth grew up in suburban Arlington, Virginia, in a household that exemplified both the social conventions and underlying tensions of postwar America. In 1966, Rexroth enrolled at American University, Washington, D.C., as an English major. She began studying photography in 1967.

Rexroth found her voice at a moment when art institutions, including New York City's Museum of Modern Art, began exhibiting paradigm-shifting street photography. Like a street photographer, she worked in the everyday social scene, gravitating to fraught intersections between one individual and another, or with society at large. Some of her most powerful early pictures suggest a dialogue between the longing for connection and the condition of isolation. Rexroth brought these foundational concerns with her when, in the fall of 1969, she moved to Athens, Ohio, to pursue an MFA in Photography at Ohio University.

Defeat, Wrestling Match, Washington, D.C.

1968

gelatin silver print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided
by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.2

Rexroth learned photography using a 35mm Nikon-F, an advanced camera favored by professional photographers and photojournalists. Most universities that offered undergraduate photography courses in the 1960s did so in journalism programs, and the tumultuous campus environment of the day offered plenty of topical subjects.

At American University, however, the photographer Robert Lautman (American, 1923–2009) taught one course in the fine art department. Lautman encouraged Rexroth to photograph the world around her as a means of personal expression rather than reportage.

Pounding Away, Wrestling Match, Washington, D.C.

1967

gelatin silver print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.1

Rexroth found many of her early subjects at prize fights and motor raceways in and around Washington, D.C. Her mother, or a college boyfriend, sometimes went with her on these photography sessions because of social norms that held it was inappropriate or unsafe for a young woman to attend such events alone.

**Man with Drink,
Washington, D.C.**
1967

gelatin silver print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:
Museum Purchase with funds provided
by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation
2019.3

Today, Rexroth recalls the making of this photograph with mixed feelings. She took the picture over a backyard fence without asking for permission and continued on her way. The camera gave Rexroth the feeling that she could go where she wanted and take what she needed from the world around her—liberties she did not feel entitled to outside her photography practice.

Girl in Car, Winchester Raceway, Virginia 1968

gelatin silver print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:
Museum Purchase with funds provided
by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation
2019.8

Girl in Car is among Rexroth's favorite early pictures. For some observers, her portrayal of the sitter's edgy, self-possessed individuality inside the black borders of the film frame calls to mind the work of photographer Diane Arbus (1923–1971).

Although Rexroth was not familiar with Arbus's work as an undergraduate, she came to admire the elder photographer in graduate school. In 1971, she sent slides of this and a handful of other pictures to Arbus at the suggestion of photographer Lisette Model (Austrian, active New York City, 1901–1983), a key mentor to both women. Arbus rebuffed the outreach, finding the work Rexroth had chosen to share too like her own pictures.

**My Mother, Poetry Pose,
Arlington, Virginia
1969**

gelatin silver print, toned
The Nancy Rexroth Collection:
Museum Purchase with funds provided
by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation
2019.7

**My Mother Poses in the
Nude with Clothes On,
Arlington, Virginia
1969**

gelatin silver print
The Nancy Rexroth Collection:
Gift of Nancy Rexroth, Archive Transfer
2024.164

Rexroth made these two pictures for an undergraduate English course in which she was required to respond to a Wallace Stevens poem. She understood the poem to be about the unfulfilled life of a housewife.

The artist's mother, Florence, is the model; in Rexroth's view, she might have been a novelist had she not become a homemaker. Florence supported Rexroth's artistic ambitions and was an occasional muse. In another sense, she exemplified ways in which social expectations could foreclose a woman's creative life—a path Rexroth did not want to follow.

Woman at Sink, London, England

Spring 1969

gelatin silver print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.10

Rexroth made this image after “talking her way in” to a stranger’s apartment during an undergraduate trip to England. Photographing inside others’ private spaces would later become central to her practice.

The counterintuitive handling of focus in this picture is reminiscent of the work of Robert Frank (Swiss, 1924–2019), another photographer Rexroth did not know as an undergraduate but would come to admire in graduate school. Along with other students, Rexroth hosted Frank when he visited Ohio University in 1969.

Boy with Gun, Athens, Ohio

Cheerleader Practicing, Pomeroy, Ohio

(right wall)

Reva Holds a Chicken,

Pomeroy, Ohio

Fall 1969 or early 1970

gelatin silver prints

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.11, 2019.14, 2019.15

Rexroth made these three pictures in the early months of her graduate studies at Ohio University. *Boy with Gun* is largely continuous with the approach and mood of earlier pictures like *Girl in Car*. However, *Cheerleader Practicing* and *Reva Holds a Chicken* move in new directions. In them, Rexroth explores blur and light, using these as foundational elements for her pictures. According

to convention, both of her expressive choices—the blur in *Cheerleader* and the backlighting in *Reva*—were technically incorrect ways to use a camera.



2. Origin Objects

Nancy Rexroth reflects on her early life

Run Time: 9 min

Once-known makers, Arlington, Virginia,
Teacup and Saucer, circa 1950

Various artists,
Vinyl 45 RPM Records, 1930s–1950s

Ideal Toy Company,
Saucy Walker Doll, 1950s

Nancy Rexroth (American, b. 1946),
Collaged Photo Album, 1950s

Various photographers, **Rexroth Family
Snapshots**, 1952–1958

The Nancy Rexroth Papers, Mary R. Schiff Library
and Archives, Cincinnati Art Museum

The materials in this case recall the culture and environments of Rexroth's childhood. These objects also convey ideas and expectations about gender that shaped her world. Rexroth discusses many of

these objects in the video **Origin Objects**, available via the QR code on the left.

On view to the left of the case:

- A teacup and saucer made by Arlington neighbors for Rexroth and her older sister, Carol, when they were small children.
- Records Rexroth's father gave to her, which she listened to in an attic playroom he created for his daughters.
- A childhood doll, which Rexroth saved as a symbol of ideas about femininity in her upbringing.
- A photo album in which Rexroth collaged family snapshots with images and text from magazines.

In the center of the case is a group of family snapshots dating from 1952 to 1958. Respectively, Rexroth appears with her father, sister, and cat; her mother, sister, and maternal grandparents; Arlington playmates; and alone as a twelve-year-old (in a photobooth self-portrait). This group also includes two pictures (one of dolls, the other a double exposure of kids on the steps of

a sleepaway camp cabin) that Rexroth took with a Brownie camera her parents gave her around the age of six.

Nancy Rexroth (American, b. 1946),

Photography Friends,

American University, 1969

Bill Hatfield (American, 20th century),

Nancy Rexroth, American University, 1967

Nancy Rexroth (American, b. 1946),

Bill Hatfield, American University, 1967

Nancy Rexroth (American, b. 1946),

Contact Sheet, The Doors Concert,

Washington, D.C., 1967

gelatin silver prints

The Nancy Rexroth Papers,

Mary R. Schiff Library and Archives,

Cincinnati Art Museum

At the right of the case are four photographs dating to Rexroth's undergraduate years at American University in Washington, D.C., where she was part

of an overwhelmingly male photography community. This gender imbalance continued when Rexroth went to graduate school at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, in 1969. It also characterized the broader photography world in the 1960s and 1970s.

Self-Portrait, London, England

Spring 1969

gelatin silver print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.20

As Rexroth emerged from adolescence into young adulthood, she depicted herself standing in a threshold with her camera, her direct gaze looping the viewer into her act of self-presentation. Rexroth made this self-portrait in the final semester of her senior year in college, on a trip to England organized by one of her American University photography instructors.

Power

(Self-Portraiture, 1970–1976)

During her MFA studies at Ohio University (OU), Rexroth's graduate cohort was composed mostly of men and led by a male instructor. She often chose to work alone, taking pictures on solitary drives into the rural areas around Athens, Ohio, or in her apartment, where she had her own darkroom.

Rexroth began using the Diana camera at OU, alongside her 35mm and several large-format cameras. Although her graduate program valued sophisticated tools, for her, the Diana's lightness and spontaneity unlocked a new way of working.

By March 1970, Rexroth was making images that would grow into *IOWA*—a body of work in which she never appears. She was also making self-portraits, most of which she kept private. In retrospect, these images suggest an intense period of self-examination in relation to social and family structures, and an emerging sense of power seated in the surfaces, emotional depths, and sensations of her body. Importantly, Rexroth explored this territory in her self-portraiture at the same time she was developing the visual language of *IOWA*.

My Mother's Bedroom, Arlington, Virginia

1970

gelatin silver printing-out print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.37

During her first year of graduate school, Rexroth used a very large, tripod-mounted camera to make a picture of her parents' rumpled bed while at home in Arlington, Virginia, over winter break. The camera produced an 8×10-inch negative, which Rexroth placed directly onto photographic paper and exposed to light to make this print. From a technical perspective, she was practicing the equipment and craft emphasized in her graduate program. Her choice of subject, however, broached the emotional structures of her childhood alongside adult concerns including sexuality and mortality.

Winter Self-Portrait, Athens, Ohio

February 1970

gelatin silver print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.23

Rexroth made Winter Self-Portrait on the first roll of film she took with the Diana camera, after returning to campus from winter break in 1970. Many of the rolls she would later shoot with the Diana include self-portraits. Sometimes these were made in sessions devoted to self-portraiture. But often, they were made spontaneously—like this image—when Rexroth answered an impulse to turn the camera on herself in the flow of taking other pictures.



3. Catching Up to the Work

On Florence Rexroth

Run Time: 3 min, 30 sec

Behind, Touch, Self-Portrait with My Mother, Athens, Ohio

Facing, Touch, Self-Portrait with My Mother, Athens, Ohio

May 1970, printed 2026

gelatin silver prints
Collection of the Artist

Rexroth's mother, Florence, visited her periodically in Athens, Ohio. During a visit in the spring of Rexroth's first year of graduate school, she invited Florence into a photography session in her apartment. Rexroth took these pictures with her 35mm Nikon-F, which she continued to use alongside the Diana and other cameras. In some pictures from the session, Rexroth controls the camera using a timer. In others, her mother controls the camera using a hand-held device connected to the

camera's shutter by a cable. The model missile visible on Rexroth's dresser at the left of the frame came from her father, who was an engineer at the Naval Ordnance Systems Command in Washington, D.C.

Self-Portrait in the Closet, Athens, Ohio

In Between, Self-Portrait in My Living Room, Athens, Ohio

May 1970, printed 2026

gelatin silver prints
Collection of the Artist

After Florence left Athens, Ohio, to return to Arlington, Virginia, Rexroth continued to work in her apartment in privacy. Here, she explores two ways of using her body and the camera to experience and convey self-possession. *Self-Portrait in the Closet* mobilizes unconstructed and seemingly unabashed frankness. *In-Between, Self-Portrait in My Living Room* is a choreographed self-representation of Rexroth as a young artist, with her own photographs displayed on a print rail behind her.

Self-Portrait with View Camera, Athens, Ohio

Late May or early June 1970

gelatin silver print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided
by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation
2019.21

Here, Rexroth uses her 35mm Nikon to depict herself standing next to a view camera, an enormous and technically complex machine that was (and still is today) associated with serious art photography. This picture is both a self-portrait of the artist as a photographer and a bold, surprisingly nuanced composition of shapes, shadows, and light.

Self-Portrait in My Mother's Bedroom, Arlington, Virginia

Summer 1970, printed 2026

gelatin silver print

Collection of the Artist

After finishing her first year of graduate school, Rexroth returned to Arlington, Virginia, for the summer. She worked with the Diana intensively, even physically modifying the camera so she could mount it on a tripod to make self-portraits in and around the family home.

In her negative logs (brief notes describing what was on each roll of film), she referred to this image as “me in striped sunlight.” It exemplifies her burgeoning interest in the tactile experience of light, as well as in the visual and symbolic effects light could produce in a photograph. The journal on view in the case behind you—in which Rexroth recorded her excitement about using the Diana to make visible her own experience of light—is next to her right hand in this picture.

Self-Portrait, My Mother's Bedroom, Arlington, Virginia

Self-Portrait, Ocean City, Maryland Summer 1970

gelatin silver prints

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund

2019.263

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.25

Rexroth used the Diana's simple plastic lens to create pictures that give the feeling of drifting through a fluid atmosphere—a sensation she experienced while photographing with the light, nimble camera and hoped to convey to viewers. As she explored the Diana over the summer of 1970, she became increasingly deft at using composition, blur, grain, and light effects to symbolize her interior experience and emotional states. Notice that in some of these images,

Rexroth no longer directs her gaze at the camera. Rather, she closes her eyes. What effect does this have on your experience of the picture?

Brushing Teeth, My Mother's Bedroom, Arlington, Virginia

Summer 1970

gelatin silver print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund

2019.262

Rexroth made this image by exposing the same frame of film twice—once to make a close-up picture of her face and once to make an image of herself brushing her teeth in front of her parents' slightly open bedroom closet. She later developed various double exposure techniques with the Diana, sometimes layering entirely different images and sometimes making quick, sequential exposures of one subject from slightly different points of view. Making quick successive exposures could create a sense of movement or vibration in the image; layering different images, like in *Brushing Teeth*, could communicate a sense of duality or suggest secret meaning.

Hand, My Mother's Bedroom, Arlington, Virginia

Self-Portrait with Long Distance Cable Release, My Mother's Bedroom, Arlington, Virginia

Summer 1970, printed 2026

gelatin silver prints
Collection of the Artist

During the summer of 1970, Rexroth shot many rolls of film with a Diana camera at her childhood home in Arlington, Virginia. She often worked in her parents' bedroom, sometimes making pictures that pushed boundaries of propriety. (While she no longer fully recalls the circumstances, today she speculates that she worked in her parents' room while they were away on vacation.)

Although the bedroom was shared by Rexroth's mother and father, in her titles she consistently referred to it as "my mother's bedroom." Why do you think she made that choice?

**Diana Camera Box and
Instruction Pamphlet, 1960s**

Nancy Rexroth's Journal, 1970

**Contact Sheet from Diana
Roll Shot in Wapello, Iowa,
June 1973,
gelatin silver print**

The Nancy Rexroth Papers, Mary R. Schiff Library
and Archives, Cincinnati Art Museum

The Diana camera was manufactured in China and sold as a novelty item beginning in the 1960s. The camera body and lens are plastic; it has simple settings for aperture and focal length, and a fully manual film-advance mechanism. It can be used with black-and-white or color 120 film. In the 1960s, some university photography teachers began assigning the Diana to students to challenge reliance on sophisticated equipment. There was a ripple of interest in nontraditional tools and processes among photographers at the time—including the Diana and other low-tech cameras like the Kodak Instamatic, notably used by Rexroth's contemporary, Bea Nettles (American, b. 1946). Rexroth was not assigned to use the Diana. Rather,

she picked it up herself, after noticing how freeing it was for others at Ohio University.

In a journal Rexroth kept as she explored the Diana camera in Arlington, Virginia, in the summer of 1970, she wrote of her fascination with the grainy, undulating quality of her visual perception in very low light. In the same entry, she expressed triumph at figuring out how to use the Diana to approximate her optical experience in a photograph—or, as she put it, capturing “Night-Grain with the Diana.”

The contact sheet on view illustrates how Rexroth habitually took pictures of herself in the flow of shooting other subject matter.



Diana Cameras

circa 1960s

Please Touch.

Turn the dial on the top of the camera to hear the sound of advancing or winding film.

Press the lever on the right side of the lens barrel to feel the shutter opening and closing.

What do you notice about the camera's weight?

How do things look through the viewfinder?

How are the aperture settings indicated on the underside of the lens?

(Aperture refers to the size of the hole through which light enters the camera when the shutter is open. Photographers change the aperture setting based on the lighting conditions they are working in.)

Self-Portrait, Arms Crossed, Athens, Ohio

Late May or early June 1970

gelatin silver print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.22

The pushpin and tape on the wall behind Rexroth in this photograph are revealed tools: they helped her focus the lens when she was behind the camera and then position herself in the frame when she stepped in front of the lens. In the final picture, they serve as compositional elements and symbols of Rexroth's authorship.

Rexroth also juxtaposes the surface of her body and her shadow in this picture, suggesting aspects of her inner life beyond what a camera conventionally makes visible. As in many of the self-portraits she made in the period, she looks directly at the camera with a neutral expression, wearing everyday clothes. What impact do these choices have on your response to the picture? Do you notice Rexroth using other self-representation strategies in nearby works?

Selections from a Group of Thirty-Three Photobooth Self-Portraits

1970–1976

gelatin silver prints; gold-toned (far left),
selenium-toned (center)

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided
by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.26e, n, q, h, t

Nancy Rexroth's Slide Carousel Box, 1970

I TRY, incised slide from Rexroth's untitled Diana slideshow, 1970

Untitled Frames from a Group of Acetate Film Positives, 1970

The Nancy Rexroth Papers, Mary R. Schiff Library and Archives, Cincinnati Art Museum

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase with funds provided by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation, 2019.29

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase with funds provided by FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund, 2019.266c, e, and f

On the original box containing her carousel slideshow, Rexroth added a typed label describing the work as a comment on the struggle through failure that has shaped the history of photography, which she was learning about in her graduate program. In another, handwritten label she wrote that the slideshow is "about a journey"—a phrase she later used to characterize *IOWA*.

While Rexroth was making the slideshow, she also shot a series of images of herself with a classmate, the photographer Alex Traube (American, b. 1946). She trimmed the film for presentation as a slide projection but never mounted the individual frames as slides.

Untitled Diana Slideshow

1970, exhibition facsimile 2026

53 slides, mounted and sequenced for projection

Run Time: approximately 5 min, looping

***Please note: there is a 2 min, 30 sec gap
between showings***

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:
Museum Purchase with funds provided
by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation
2019.29

In 1970, Rexroth used her Athens, Ohio, apartment to stage and shoot a 53-image Diana camera slideshow. In the slideshow, she enacts a dramatic narrative, rising from a bed, donning a coat, and eventually exiting through an open window. Like intertitles in a silent movie, two slides carry the phrase "I try to fly," which Rexroth physically scratched into the film.

At the time, established photographers including Duane Michals (American, 1932–2026) were exploring narrative sequencing, text, and double exposure, and artists across disciplines were

making works using the then-new format of carousel slide projection. Rexroth's slideshow, however, is a unique tether between her early-1970s self-portraiture practice and the careful, allusive sequencing she later used in *IOWA*—including the book's culminating image of open sky.

Contact Sheets from Diana Rolls Shot with Wide-View Camera, Albany, Ohio 1976

The Nancy Rexroth Papers, Mary R. Schiff Library
and Archives, Cincinnati Art Museum

These contact sheets illustrate one of the creative directions Rexroth was considering for her wide-view transparencies in 1976. They show that she cut some of the wide-view films into segments and selected pictures from them, establishing the boundaries of the picture according to her eye rather than the square frame imposed by a conventionally used, unmodified Diana camera. She never made finished prints of these pictures, however.

(in case)

Untitled Sequential Frame Diana Self-Portraits, Albany, Ohio

acetate film positives, 1970

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.264a, b, d; 2019.28

Rexroth explored several experimental ways of using the Diana camera in 1970, including making transparencies—that is, works on film that are not intended to be printed on photographic paper. One way to present transparencies is as a sequence of individual frames projected in a slideshow. However, Rexroth also made transparencies in which she treated a length of film as a unified image made of overlapping exposures. Whereas a slideshow might tell a story in a series of separate pictures, these works register physical movement and the passage of time in a continuous, multifaceted image.

Although Rexroth worked in isolation, some of the directions her work took were part of a zeitgeist.

Other photographers were also exploring ways to use film to make multi-panel images or to treat film itself as a medium in the 1960s and 1970s. Additionally, Rexroth's exploration of her body shares characteristics with slightly later work by artists including Melissa Shook (American, 1939–2020) and Francesca Woodman (American, 1958–1981).

(on wall)

Untitled Wide-View Diana Self-Portraits, Albany, Ohio

acetate film negatives, 1976, tonally reversed,
enlarged, and printed on vinyl 2026

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided by

FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund

2019.265a and c

In 1976, as Rexroth neared the end of her work on IOWA, she added another experimental aspect to her work with lengths of film by shooting them with a wide-view Diana. This hand-modified camera allowed the entire image formed by the lens to hit the film each time Rexroth opened the shutter.

The lack of a horizontal black border between the pictures gave the resulting multi-image film strip an almost surreal appearance of continuousness and simultaneity.

Both examples on view illustrate the physicality of Rexroth's photography practice. In one, images of her face interspersed with images of the landscape she was moving through show that she sometimes turned the camera upside down in the flow of photographing. In the other, she explores movement in close contact with another kind of "ground"—the floor of her Albany, Ohio, house.

Self-Portrait with Unknown Person, Athens, Ohio

1970 or 1971

gelatin silver print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided
by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.27c

Nude Self-Portrait with Flowers, Athens, Ohio

Self-Portrait, Arms Akimbo, Athens, Ohio 1970 or 1971

gelatin silver prints

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided
by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation
2019.27e and 2019.27f

When Rexroth returned to the Ohio University campus for the 1970–1971 academic year, she decided to complete her master’s thesis by making Diana camera pictures in the small towns around Athens, Ohio. She continued taking pictures of herself with the simple plastic camera while she worked on her thesis. She also began using a 4×5—an advanced camera that could yield sharp, detailed photographs like these—to make self-portraits inside her Athens apartment. In her journal, she wrote about the erotic charge she experienced making those pictures.

Self-Portrait Posing as My Mother, Athens, Ohio

January 1971, printed 2026

gelatin silver print
Collection of the Artist

Rexroth's mother had a habitual way of posing for photographs: she would strike a series of poses she derived from the dancer Isadora Duncan (American, 1877–1927), a role model from her own youth.

This self-portrait comes from an intense session Rexroth shot in her Athens, Ohio, kitchen after returning from a winter break visit to Arlington, Virginia, in her final year of graduate school. In the session, Rexroth shot through a roll of 35mm film in rapid succession, moving her own body through the repertoire of poses she associated with her mother.



Contact sheet of 35mm film roll logged as *Me Posing as Mother*, January 1971, scanned from negatives 2025, The Nancy Rexroth Papers, Mary R. Schiff Library and Archives, Cincinnati Art Museum



4. Surfaces and Interiors

Reflections on self-portraiture

Run Time: 3 min, 26 sec

Self-Portrait, Menstrual Flow, Athens, Ohio 1971

platinum print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided
by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation
2019.19

Rexroth took this picture during her final months as a graduate student, as she prepared to leave student life and pursue public recognition as an artist. It remained a touchstone image for her throughout the 1970s. She printed it multiple times using various media. The print on view here was most likely made while or soon after Rexroth researched platinum printing at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., in the summer of 1971.

In 1977, Rexroth displayed this picture at a regional conference of the Society for Photographic Education (an important professional association), where she delivered a presentation critiquing the conventions of the female nude in photography.

Self-Portrait, Athens, Ohio

1971

platinum print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:
Museum Purchase with funds provided
by FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund
2019.258

Like the adjacent photograph, Rexroth printed *Self-Portrait, Athens, Ohio* many times. She used it as her test negative during a 1971 post-graduate research internship at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., where she studied platinum printing. In part, this was because it has a range of tones and values that made it a good test case. However, the choice was also a conscious exercise of power. The experts who visited Rexroth's office to see her research—primarily men—had to perform their professional obligations while looking at this image, with the young female photographer standing next to them.

IOWA

(1970–1976)

Rexroth made *A Woman's Bed, Logan, Ohio*—the picture that sparked *IOWA*—in March 1970. After earning her MFA in 1971, she moved to Washington, D.C., where she interned at the Smithsonian Institution and developed professional connections. In 1973, she won a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to return to Ohio and develop her Diana work into a book project. She also gained recognition in the art world during this period, including representation by LIGHT, then the leading contemporary photography gallery in New York City. She took the last images for *IOWA* in September 1976 and self-published the book in 1977.

After an introductory quotation, *IOWA* presents 71 Diana camera pictures that trace, as Rexroth has put it, “a kind of psychic journey.” The book’s three chapters represent winter, spring and summer, and the interior—which refers to internal spaces of houses and the mind as well as the inside of the body. Rexroth used movement or a flickering touch on the shutter release to instill her pictures

with a fluid, dreamlike atmosphere in which solid things seem to vibrate, fold, disintegrate, and glow. Her handling of light is especially significant.



5. Introduction

*Nancy Rexroth reads from her 1977
introduction to IOWA*

Run Time: 2 min, 56 sec



6. Epigraph

Nancy Rexroth reads the introductory quotation of IOWA

Run Time: 3 min, 26 sec

... But this is
the picture, this the one
scene that keeps on rising
at night
like a summons
calling me out into the white spaces above
the narrow focus,
to where I imagine I will find my
self, lying darkly among the pale weeds
and sunflowers, like some deep-red psyche
of the tropics, just dying to blossom.

from *Looking, Late at Night* by Wayne Dodd

Gelatin silver print unless otherwise noted.

I.



Theater, Vanceburg, Kentucky, 1975

gelatin silver print, selenium toned
The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Gift of
The 1988 Rexroth Family Trust, 2021.168



Morning Glory Strings, Albany, Ohio, 1975

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Gift of
The 1988 Rexroth Family Trust, 2021.169



Winter Bush, Washington, D.C., 1972

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase with
funds provided by FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund, 2021.72



House and Bush, Nelsonville, Ohio, 1974

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase with funds
provided by FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund, 2021.71



Complexity, Pomeroy, Ohio, 1976

gelatin silver print, selenium toned
The Nancy Rexroth Collection:
Gift of The 1988 Rexroth Family Trust, 2021.170



Bay Window, Muscatine, Iowa, 1973

gelatin silver print, selenium toned
The Nancy Rexroth Collection:
Gift of The 1988 Rexroth Family Trust, 2021.171



Back Porch, Washington, D.C., 1972

gelatin silver print, selenium toned

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase through the generosity of Lee Cowan Tour Group, 2021.99



Trees Crossing, New Lexington, Ohio, 1974

gelatin silver print, selenium toned

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase through the generosity of Betsy and Paul Sittenfeld in Memory of Dr. James M. Marrs, 2021.51

II.



Trees Crossing, The Plains, Ohio, 1976

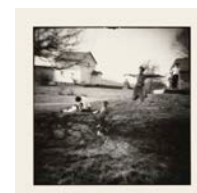
gelatin silver print, selenium toned

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase through the generosity of Barbara M. Weyand, 2021.101



Emmet Dances the Jig, Kreiger Falls, Ohio, 1974

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Gift of
The 1988 Rexroth Family Trust, 2021.174



Boys Flying, Amesville, Ohio, 1976

gelatin silver print, selenium toned

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase through the generosity of Barbara M. Weyand, 2021.102



Peter Mullins in the Rain, Albany, Ohio, 1973

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase through the generosity of anonymous donor, 2021.108



Mississippi Drive, Muscatine, Iowa, 1973

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Gift of
The 1988 Rexroth Family Trust, 2021.147



House with Melting Roof, Pomeroy, Ohio, 1971

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase through the
generosity of Christopher English and Meda Lane, 2019.227



Folding House, New Lexington, Ohio, 1974

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase through the
generosity of Toni LaBoiteaux, 2021.107



My Mother, Pennsville, Ohio, 1970

gelatin silver print, selenium toned
The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Gift of
The 1988 Rexroth Family Trust, 2021.177



Mother's Knees, Albany, Ohio, 1976

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Gift of
The 1988 Rexroth Family Trust, 2021.182



Aunt Martha's Hands, Grandview, Iowa, 1973

gelatin silver print, sulfide and gold toned
The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Gift of
Martin Weinstein, 2021.198



White House, Pomeroy, Ohio, 1971

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase
through the generosity of Carol Feiser Laque in honor of
her husband Glenn Frederick Laque, 2021.103



Turkeys Advance, Albany, Ohio, 1973

gelatin silver print, toned

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase through the generosity of James and Linda Miller, 2021.110



Children Playing, Amesville, Ohio, 1976

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase through the generosity of Maggie and Eric Kuhn, 2019.229

III.



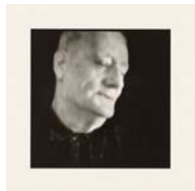
Diane's Hands, Athens, Ohio, 1976

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase through the generosity of Jon Calderas, 2019.230



A Woman's Bed, Logan, Ohio, 1970

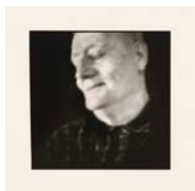
The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Gift of
The 1988 Rexroth Family Trust, 2021.186



Emmet with Eyes Closed, Pomeroy, Ohio, 1971

Emmet Blackburn in Profile, Pomeroy, Ohio, 1971

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase through the generosity of Helen and Brian Heekin, 2021.111 and 2021.112



Cola Machine, Pomeroy, Ohio, 1971

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase through the generosity of Kent B. Krugh, 2019.232



Mirror, Pomeroy, Ohio, 1971

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase through the generosity of Rosalie van Nuis, 2019.231



Two Windows, Athens, Ohio, 1976

gelatin silver print, selenium toned
The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Gift of
The 1988 Rexroth Family Trust, 2021.189



Streaming Window, Washington, D.C., 1972

gelatin silver print, sulfide and gold toned
The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Gift of
The 1988 Rexroth Family Trust, 2021.188



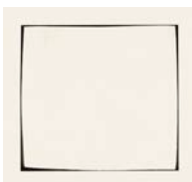
Hotel Room, Glouster, Ohio, 1974

gelatin silver print, sulfide and gold toned
The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase through the generosity of P.J. and Cindy Sturdevant, 2021.52



White Hole, Athens, Ohio, 1971

gelatin silver print, toned
The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Gift of
The 1988 Rexroth Family Trust, 2021.195



White Sky, Chauncey, Ohio, 1976

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase through the generosity of Anu and Shekhar Mitra, 2021.48



7. A Canvas

*Nancy Rexroth on photographing
white houses*

Run Time: 3 min, 25 sec

Nancy Rexroth's Diana Camera and Chest Pod

The Nancy Rexroth Papers, Mary R. Schiff
Library and Archives, Cincinnati Art Museum, and
Collection of the Artist

By the time Rexroth began working on *IOWA* in earnest, she had customized her equipment to suit her intuitive, physically active shooting style. She mounted her Diana on a chest pod—a one-piece, hand-held version of a tripod—which attached to a threaded nut she glued to the underside of the camera. Anchoring the bottom end of the chest pod at her stomach gave her freedom of movement and the ability to bring the camera to her eye quickly. Literally, she was working “from the gut.”

In the video **A Canvas**, available via the QR code on the left, Rexroth demonstrates how she used her camera and reflects on her interest in photographing the white clapboard houses she found in rural southeast Ohio.

Experiments and Choices (1970–1976)

From winter 1970 through fall 1976, Rexroth shot 980 rolls of film with the Diana camera, producing over 15,000 negatives. She published 71 pictures in the original edition of *IOWA*. Alongside that now iconic selection, Rexroth printed from a handful of negatives that are part of the *IOWA* body of work but did not appear in the book. She also made Diana photographs connected to *IOWA*, but that pushed into new technical, material, and aesthetic directions. Examples of both are on view in this gallery.

Rexroth was exacting about the formal and emotional characteristics of *IOWA* images and meticulous in the darkroom, often working for ten hours or more to produce a single finished photograph. While her standards limited the number of negatives she chose to print, they also point to an important characteristic of her practice: reinterpretation. The center wall of this gallery presents material relating to these aspects of Rexroth's work.

**Self-Portrait, Short Hair,
Albany, Ohio**
1974–1976

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:
Museum Purchase with funds provided
by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation
2019.27m

Porch

1970

gum bichromate print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.38

Rexroth's graduate program required students to learn at least one photographic process other than gelatin silver printing. She explored platinum and gum bichromate printing. She also made a small number of cyanotypes. Here, she laterally flipped her negative during the gum bichromate printing process to build up a composition that is both abstract and eerily evocative of the human body.

Grand Porch

1974 or 1975

Barn Side, Vanceburg, Kentucky

1975

gelatin silver prints, sulfide and gold toned

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.61 and 2019.62

These two images are examples of Rexroth's work with the wide-view Diana. In 1974, she learned from photographer Ardine Nelson (American, b. 1948) how to cut out the internal plastic frame that imposed a square border on the pictures the camera took. Without that frame, more of the circular image naturally formed by the camera's lens struck the film, introducing new compositional and expressive possibilities. Examples of a wide-view and unmodified Diana camera are on view in the case to your left.

Body Chute, Rendville, Ohio

1973

gelatin silver print, selenium toned

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund

2019.235

Many of Rexroth's photographs employ in-camera double exposure, meaning that she opened the shutter multiple times without advancing the film. Here, she explored a carefully planned version of that process. The image of a man who appears to be lying on the staircase is a cutout from another photograph. Rexroth took a picture of the cutout on the same frame of film she used to photograph the side of the house.

The model in this picture is Emmet Blackburn, a resident of Pomeroy, Ohio, with whom Rexroth worked over multiple years in the 1970s. Blackburn appears in both the 1977 and 2017 editions of *IOWA*.

Untitled Multi-Frame Diana Landscape,
acetate film positive, 1970

Unmodified Diana Camera, 1970s

Modified Wide-View Diana Camera, 1970s

**Contact Sheet Shot with Wide-View
Diana, 1974–1975**

The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase with funds provided by FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund, 2019.264; The Nancy Rexroth Papers, Mary R. Schiff Library and Archives, Cincinnati Art Museum

Rexroth explored many ways of working outside the photo-graphic convention of a single image contained in a square area. In the strip of film on the left, she attempted to create a panorama by making a sequence of separate exposures, tracking from one side of her surroundings to the other. The contact sheet on the right shows pictures Rexroth made with a wide-view Diana. Here, she has advanced the film between exposures enough to prevent them from overlapping (unlike the long strips of wide-view film on view in a previous

gallery). The boy in the pictures is Peter Mullins, Rexroth's neighbor in Albany, Ohio, from 1973 through 1977. Mullins also appears in *IOWA*.

The Dianas in this case are displayed with their back panel removed. When the photographer turns the film advance knob, the spool on the right of the camera pulls film from a roll mounted on the small posts on the left. The square plastic frame in the center of the camera crops the light entering the camera when the shutter is open. Removing the plastic frame with a hot knife allows more of the circular image formed by the lens to strike the film.

Four O'clock Sunlight, Muscatine, Iowa 1973

gelatin silver print, gold toned

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.57

Rexroth often uses the term “the *IOWA* vibration” to describe the effect of her ideal picture. From the thousands of Diana pictures she shot, more possessed that “vibration” than could be included in the book.

None of the pictures on this side of the gallery was included in the published versions of *IOWA*, but each has features that fascinated Rexroth. Composition, atmosphere, light, emotional tone, and glow are all important characteristics to her. She was also careful to omit from *IOWA* things—like cars or bellbottom jeans—that would attach the pictures to a particular era and make them feel too connected to the everyday world.



8. Field Recording, 1971

*Taking photographs in a house near
Pomeroy, Ohio*

Run Time: 3 min, 35 sec

My Mother Floating, Albany, Ohio

1973–1976

Four Windows, Pomeroy, Ohio

1970

My Mother Floating, Coolville, Ohio

1971

Tree Wrapping School, Hewitt, Minnesota

1971

gelatin silver prints, variously selenium toned

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase through the generosity of
Mike and Kathy Krug, Steven and Mindy Rosen,
J.Koeller, Jamie Maldonado

2019.236

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:
Museum Purchase with funds provided
by FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund
2019.256

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:
Gift of Nancy Rexroth, Archive Transfer
2024.172

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:
Museum Purchase with funds provided
by FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund
2019.244

Three Trees, Amesville, Ohio

1976

First Day of Winter, Albany, Ohio

1974

gelatin silver prints

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided
by FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund
2019.241 and 2019.240

Although Rexroth took these pictures years apart, they share an approach to composition. In each, a central object is flanked by two forms cut through by the edges of the frame. Rexroth came to see the pictures as a pair after the fact, noting an interplay between compositional similarity and contrasting uses of negative and positive space.

Doorway, Pomeroy, Ohio

1970

gelatin silver print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided
by FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund
2019.237

Nothing in Particular, Wapello, Iowa 1973

gelatin silver print, sulfide and gold toned

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.58

This picture and the two hanging to the right and left of it illustrate Rexroth's interest in the photograph as a visual experience, which has the power to affect a viewer beyond subject matter. In all three of these works, she suppresses depiction in favor of elements such as color, value, and the arrangement of shapes within a square area.

Mist and Tree, Albany, Ohio

1976

gelatin silver print, selenium toned

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided
by FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund

2019.257

Curtains, Pomeroy, Ohio

1970

gelatin silver print, sulfide and gold toned

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase through the generosity
of the Esquire Theatre, Clifton

2021.113

(right)

Curtains, Pomeroy, Ohio

1970, printed about 2016

inkjet print

The Nancy Rexroth Papers, Mary R. Schiff Library
and Archives, Cincinnati Art Museum

In the 1970s, Rexroth added sulfide and gold to her printing chemistry to impart color to some of her prints. Images with this special toning cluster toward the end of *IOWA*, where the emotional tone of the book becomes more intense.

Rexroth was extremely exacting about the effects of the toning process, which is difficult to control. The two versions of *Curtains, Pomeroy* presented

here illustrate her ongoing pursuit of the exact colors and balance of light and detail she wanted. She made one print in the darkroom in the 1970s and the other using Photoshop, more than 40 years later.



11. In the Darkroom

*Printing a photograph with
Nancy Rexroth*

Run Time: 5 min, 50 sec

Nancy Rexroth's Darkroom Timer 1970s

gelatin silver print

The Nancy Rexroth Papers,
Mary R. Schiff Library and Archives,
Cincinnati Art Museum

Time is critical to developing and printing film in a darkroom. Like a complicated recipe, every step of the chemical development process is precisely timed. Photographers also use time—especially the duration each area of the photographic paper is exposed to light—to craft the appearance of their prints.

Rexroth's negatives were often difficult to print. She routinely spent ten or more hours in her darkroom to arrive at one finished photograph. During her

most intensive work on *IOWA*, she worked in a small darkroom she had constructed in the hall closet of her Albany, Ohio, house.



Chemical Darkroom

circa 1970

Slide cover to the left to smell.
Please close after use.

Scent created by M. Dougherty, 2026



Rexroth's darkroom,
ground floor closet,
Albany, Ohio, 1973–1976,
reproduced from gelatin
silver contact sheet, The
Nancy Rexroth Papers,
Mary R. Schiff Library
and Archives, Cincinnati
Art Museum

***IOWA*, 1977**

**Florence Rexroth with *IOWA*, Arlington,
Virginia, printed 1992**

***IOWA* order form, 1977**

The Nancy Rexroth Papers,
Mary R. Schiff Library and Archives,
Cincinnati Art Museum

Rexroth self-published *IOWA* in 1977 using funds provided by her father. Light Impressions, an organization in Rochester, New York , distributed the book as well as other important photography titles. However, in practice Rexroth's mother fulfilled many orders from the family home in Arlington, Virginia, occasionally signing books on behalf of the artist.



IOWA, 2017

Please Touch.

In addition to working and reworking individual images in the darkroom in the 1970s, Rexroth recently reconsidered *IOWA* as a whole, publishing a second edition of the book in 2017. In the second edition, she replaced plates in the original *IOWA* with 23 new images selected from her negatives, including the framed pictures hanging to the left and right. She also revised the scale and order of some images in the 2017 edition.



10. Field Recording, 1971

*Taking photographs with a
girl and her pony*

Run Time: 2 min, 25 sec

Two Windows, Coolville, Ohio

1971

gelatin silver print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Gift of the 1988 Rexroth Family Trust

2021.185

Rexroth printed this photograph in the 1970s but did not include it in *IOWA* until 2017. Many images of windows and doors appear in the final section of both editions of the book. Among other changes, in 2017, Rexroth added a pair of evocative, close-range portraits of Emmet Blackburn (on view in the previous gallery), and included more pictures of windows and beds—subjects that she has returned to throughout her career. One way to understand her attraction to these subjects is that they allow her to speak about the dual physical and emotional life of the body—sexuality, mortality, weariness, and rest that seem bound by time, as well as dreaming, imagining, remembering, and feeling that seem outside of it.

Contact Sheet for *End of Day, Sugar Creek, Ohio*

1976

gelatin silver print

The Nancy Rexroth Papers,
Mary R. Schiff Library and Archives,
Cincinnati Art Museum

Rexroth learned how to use Adobe Photoshop to create new reproduction files for the 2017 version of *IOWA*. In almost all instances, she used digital means to realize nuances from her original negatives that were impossible to express in the darkroom. In one instance, *End of Day, Sugar Creek, Ohio*, she digitally combined elements from two separate negatives to create a new picture. You can find the combined picture in the browsable copy of *IOWA* on view nearby.

Look closely at the contact sheet. Can you find the two frames Rexroth used to make the finished picture?



9. Group Portrait, Albany Ohio, 1974

Memories of making the picture

Run Time: 1 min, 45 sec

Group Portrait, Albany, Ohio 1974

Boy and St. Bernard, Shawnee, Ohio 1974

gelatin silver prints

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Gift of the 1988 Rexroth Family Trust

2021.183 and 2021.180

Rexroth printed these photographs in the 1970s but omitted them from the 1977 edition of *IOWA*. *Group Portrait, Albany* and appears in the 2017 version of the book. The print of *Boy and St. Bernard, Shawnee* on view here is a slight variant of an image by the same title that Rexroth added to the book in 2017.

Rexroth included more pictures of children in the 2017 edition than she had in the original book. She even considered changing the book's title to reflect this shift in emphasis.

After *IOWA* (1970–1976)

From winter 1970 through fall 1976, Rexroth shot 980 rolls of film with the Diana camera, producing over 15,000 negatives. She published 71 pictures in the original edition of *IOWA*. Alongside that now iconic selection, Rexroth printed from a handful of negatives that are part of the *IOWA* body of work but did not appear in the book. She also made Diana photographs connected to *IOWA*, but that pushed into new technical, material, and aesthetic directions. Examples of both are on view in this gallery.

Rexroth was exacting about the formal and emotional characteristics of *IOWA* images and meticulous in the darkroom, often working for ten hours or more to produce a single finished photograph. While her standards limited the number of negatives she chose to print, they also point to an important characteristic of her practice: reinterpretation. The center wall of this gallery presents material relating to these aspects of Rexroth's work.

Platinum Printing Research Notes,
summer 1971

Night Tree, printed 1971–1972,
platinum proof print

Self-Portrait, Athens, Ohio,
printed 1971, platinum test print

The Platinotype 1977, published 1977

The Nancy Rexroth Papers, Mary R. Schiff Library
and Archives, Cincinnati Art Museum

Most gelatin silver prints are made using commercially produced, coated papers. Silver-based light-sensitive material sits on top of the coating, so the paper fiber is not visible in the image. In platinum printing, a platinum-based light-sensitive solution is applied directly to writing or drawing paper. Resulting images appear soft and slightly textured.

Platinum printing was one of several nineteenth-century processes that photographers revived in the 1960s, relying on grassroots research and information sharing. In 1971, Rexroth used a post-graduate internship at the Smithsonian Institution,

Washington, D.C., to make a major contribution to this effort. She self-published her research in a pamphlet, on view above, providing a detailed how-to based on historical sources and her own experimentation.

Rexroth used her *Self-Portrait, Athens* negative for all test prints associated with her internship. In the test on view here, she used two different kinds of paper to see how they responded to the same printing chemistry. The carefully seamed pieces are taped together on the back. She also used the platinum process to print new pictures (such as the two very small photographs on view to your right), and to reinterpret negatives she had previously printed using the gelatin silver process (such as *Night Tree*, an early Diana picture).

Tony Dressing, Washington, D.C.

Self-Portrait, Washington, D.C.

1972

platinum prints

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.71 and 2019.18

Self-Portrait, Yellow Springs, Ohio 1978

palladium print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Gift of Nancy Rexroth, Archive Transfer

2024.165

The publication of *IOWA* helped Rexroth secure her first fulltime faculty position, at Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio. Rexroth moved to the college town in the southwest part of the state and began teaching in the fall of 1977. As she had in her Athens, Ohio, apartment (1969–1971) and her Albany, Ohio, house (1973–1977), she kept a 4×5 camera set up on a tripod and made a picture of herself whenever she had the urge to do so.

In the mid-to-late 1970s Rexroth's approach to self-portraiture changed, shifting away from her body to tightly framed images of her head, neck, and shoulders. Unlike earlier images in which she faced the camera with a neutral expression, she is often emotive in the later images.

(clockwise from top left)

**Wynell Jones – Southern
Beauty, Yellow Springs, Ohio**

**Janis as Amelia Earhart,
Yellow Springs, Ohio**

**Marianne & Moya,
Yellow Springs, Ohio**

**Evelyn Milligan with Eyes Closed,
Yellow Springs, Ohio**

from the series

Women of Yellow Springs
1978

platinum prints

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Purchase with funds provided by

FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund, 2019.260,

and Collection of Fern M. Schad

In 1978, Rexroth started a new body of work called *Women of Yellow Springs*, for which she photographed models at very close range in a studio she set up inside her Yellow Springs home. She wrote that the goal

of the series was “to show the strength of women, instead of their vulnerability, as is usually the case with portraiture of women.”

Rexroth abandoned the series before she felt finished with it, citing the pressures of teaching. The comparatively less pleasurable process of making the photographs—scheduled, static, and interpersonally uncomfortable—may also have been a factor. Nevertheless, the pictures she finished show a tension between compositional compression and emotional reach that is related to *IOWA*.

**Self-Portrait,
Yellow Springs, Ohio
1978**

palladium print
Collection of Fern M. Schad

Nancy Rexroth's Nagaoka Seisakusho 4×5 Camera and Telephoto Lens, 1970s

Private Collection and Collection of the Artist

Nancy Rexroth's Printing Frame, 1970s

Collection of the Artist

The light, folding Nagaoka 4×5 camera Rexroth used to photograph the *Women of Yellow Springs* is well suited to work in the field. However, Rexroth used it indoors, set on a tripod and positioned very close to her models. While the telephoto lens she put on the camera helped reduce distortion, it could also be intimidating to sit in front of.

Platinum prints are usually made using a technique called contact printing, in which a negative is placed directly on top of sensitized paper and exposed to light. Photographers use a printing frame to hold the negative still and flat against the paper during exposure. The negative Rexroth was working with the last time she used her printing frame—probably in 1978—is still inside it.



Diane Ritterscamp, with Jewelry, Yellow Springs, Ohio, from the series Women of Yellow Springs, 1978, platinum print, The Nancy Rexroth Collection: Museum Purchase with funds provided by FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund, 2019.259



12. Delicious and Delicate Stuff

Nancy Rexroth on the SX-70 transfer

Run Time: 5 min

Yellow Springs, Ohio #2

1979

emulsion lift from internal dye diffusion prints
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston,
The Allan Chasanoff Photographic Collection
91.1030

In 1979, Rexroth learned from photographer Ardine Nelson (American, b. 1948) how to remove the photographic emulsion from Polaroid instant film and transfer it to a piece of paper. She used this process, commonly known as SX-70 transfer, with great enthusiasm through 1982, while teaching at Wright State University. Rexroth describes the process in the film **Delicious and Delicate Stuff**, available via the QR code above.

Rexroth's earliest efforts with SX-70 transfer show her returning to a physically active, solitary, and spontaneous practice. Here, she has used

multiple SX-70 exposures to portray her panoramic experience of place, much like she had used the Diana to create multi-frame images earlier in the 1970s.

Untitled, Yellow Springs, Ohio

1979

emulsion lift from internal

dye diffusion print

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Gift of Nancy Rexroth, Archive Transfer

2024.193

This early SX-70 transfer illustrates Rexroth's enduring interest in visual and expressive possibilities presented by tangles and tracteries of vines and branches, which she refers to as "complexities." The "complexity" is a recurring subject in *IOWA*. Here, the swirling, thrusting compositional force of the underbrush plays against the dematerializing effects of light. By her own account, Rexroth understood her SX-70 photographs to be pictures of light.

(top, right, bottom)

Untitled, Yellow Springs, Ohio, #72,
from the **Cut Paper Series**

Untitled, Yellow Springs, Ohio, #99,
from the **Winter Weed Series**

Untitled, Yellow Springs, Ohio, #87,
from the **Cut Paper Series**
1981

emulsion lifts from internal dye diffusion prints

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided
by FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided
by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2021.59, 2019.65, 2019.66

Rexroth developed several series within her SX-70 work, each with its own methods. In addition to photographing aspects of the landscape in and around Yellow Springs, she used paper and other scrap material to build assemblages in her home studio or on a card table in her backyard. This practice allowed her

to create nuanced compositions in which light is an almost sculptural element. Rexroth also modulated light by placing colored filters over the camera lens.

**Untitled, Yellow Springs, Ohio, #59, from
the Bedroom Womb Series**
1980

emulsion lift from internal dye diffusion prints
The Nancy Rexroth Collection:
Museum Purchase through the generosity
of Ann Segal and Jerry Malsh
2019.267

One series within Rexroth's SX-70 work focuses solely on the play of light inside her Yellow Springs bedroom. The title Rexroth gave the series—*Bedroom Womb*—suggests feelings ranging from safety to a sense of claustrophobia. Her imagining of a room as the inside of a woman's body also recalls of the final chapter of *IOWA*.

**Brown Sunshine, Yellow Springs, Ohio,
#103, from the Cut Paper Series**

**Untitled, Yellow Springs, Ohio, #106,
from the Cut Paper Series
1981**

emulsion lifts from internal dye diffusion prints

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided by FotoFocus

Art Purchase Fund

2021.62, 2021.64

(left, top, bottom)

Maze, Yellow Springs, Ohio, #112

Maze, Yellow Springs, Ohio, #109

Maze, Yellow Springs, Ohio, #110

from the **Cut Paper Series**

1982

emulsion lifts from internal dye diffusion prints

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.67

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund

2021.68, 2021.69

In her *Maze* pictures, Rexroth combined table-top paper constructions with pen drawings. The intricate, labyrinth-like lines and forms in these pictures create compositional tensions similar to a "complexity" (as Rexroth called her *Diana* images of vines and tree branches). *Maze* pictures can also appear architectural, calling to mind the dynamic interlocking geometries in *IOWA* photographs like *Folding House, Lexington, Ohio*.

Untitled, Yellow Springs, Ohio, #94,
from the **Green Series**
1981

emulsion lift from internal dye diffusion print
The Nancy Rexroth Collection:
Museum Purchase through the generosity of
Judy Lucas in Memory of Dr. Stanley J. Lucas
2021.53

Untitled, Yellow Springs, Ohio, #113,
from the **Cut Paper Series**
1982

emulsion lift from internal dye diffusion print
The Nancy Rexroth Collection:
Museum Purchase with funds provided
by FotoFocus Art Purchase Fund
2021.67

Do you see a relationship between this picture
and the final images in *IOWA*, in which Rexroth
figuratively opens an exit hatch in the world she
has created?

Nancy Rexroth's Polaroid SX-70 camera,
1979–1983

Private collection

Transfer Items, 1979–1983

SX-70 in Progress and Photographing
SX-70, process documentation, 1979–1983

Untitled SX-70 Polaroid, an untransferred
internal dye diffusion print, 1979–1983

#32 – No Filter,
process documentation, 1980

Bedroom, internal dye diffusion print,
1979–1983

The Nancy Rexroth Papers,
Mary R. Schiff Library and Archives,
Cincinnati Art Museum

The SX-70 Polaroid instant camera was introduced to the general consumer market in 1972. Artists quickly adopted it to experiment with color photography. Some also explored ways to manipulate the camera's characteristic film, which produces what are properly called internal dye

diffusion prints. From 1979 through 1982, Rexroth used a technique by which the photographic emulsion inside the film could be physically transferred to a sheet of paper. She describes the process in the film **Delicious and Delicate Stuff**, available via the nearby QR code.

In 1980, the Polaroid company changed the formulation of SX-70 film. Rexroth found that she could not satisfactorily transfer the new emulsion to paper. Although she stockpiled pre-1980 film, the change in materials along with pressures in her personal life soon brought her SX-70 work to an end.

Most of the objects in this case are drawn from process documentation Rexroth produced with the SX-70. While recording her tools and materials, she paused to photograph light playing over her rumpled bed. Does this image or the way it was made in the flow of taking other pictures remind you of something from her earlier work?

(clockwise from left)

Red Bookcase

Lascaux Cave Wall, Door

Lascaux Cave Wall

Bookcase in Twilight

Windows

from the **House Series**

2000-2003

inkjet prints

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by the Carl M. Jacobs Foundation

2019.72, 2019.75, 2019.69, 2019.73, 2019.68

In 1983 Rexroth retired from teaching and moved to Cincinnati, taking a 10-year hiatus from photography. She returned to the art form in the mid-1990s. Buoyed by renewed gallery representation, she explored possibilities afforded by contemporary—though still nontraditional—tools. From 2000 through 2004, she used low-resolution, consumer-level digital cameras to produce two finished bodies of work.

Rexroth made the *House Series* in East Walnut Hills, inside her neighbors' elaborately painted home. What similarities and differences do you notice between these photographs and her prior work?

(clockwise from top left)

Chalkboard and Table

Easel/Frame

Pink Wall

Paper/Ruler

Air Movement in Red

from the series

Empty Art Rooms

2000–2004

inkjet prints

The Nancy Rexroth Collection:

Museum Purchase with funds provided

by the Carl M. Jacobs Collection

2019.82, 2019.84, 2019.86, 2019.78, 2019.83

Rexroth photographed the *Empty Art Rooms* series primarily in the classrooms and studios of the Art Academy of Cincinnati, when that school was in the part of this building that currently houses the museum's administrative offices and library. These pictures are deceptively simple, even appearing spare. Yet, in them—using her tool according to her own instincts—Rexroth distills fundamental elements of her work across five decades:

114 composition, atmosphere, and light.



Media Station

All video and audio content related to the exhibition is available here. Select the desired item from the playlist on the touchscreen.

- Please use the provided headphones.
- Modify volume using the dial on the desk in front of you.
- Adjust headphone size as needed.

Please return tools here.
Fidgets and earplugs may be kept.



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