

## Ex Libris

From the Epic of Gilgamesh, the oldest known work of literature, to contemporary political publications, the book in its various forms serving multiple, often contradictory purposes, has also been valued differently over the thousands of years of its history.

An important part of Western traditions, the book has found in the United States the particularly favorable conditions for its development thanks to the economic and cultural potential of this country. A principal support of its culture and civilization, having famous names as authors and editors, a source of knowledge so diverse and pleasures so complex, it encompasses in itself by its creation, production and use so many constitutive elements for the American spirit that it can serve as one of the particularly significant symbols of this country. Considering its role and world renown, the book has become one of the major subjects of "The Frontier", my vast photographic monograph designed to interpret through photographic images the key values and norms of American culture and civilization exemplified in my city: New York.

All the images in this portfolio entitled "Ex Libris" represent old, damaged, dusty, used and often closed books. The Past, my real subject, is thus irrefutably evoked. The Past of this activity and through it a materialization of history: mysteries, knowledge, study, memory, story etc. And more generally: the Past of culture and civilization. Then, the Past understood as "Tempus Fugit", as a theme of human fragility and meditation on death. Finally, the 'Photographic Past', essential to the nature of photography inscribed in the past, made in and by the past.

In fact, "The Past" is the real subject of this series: essentially autobiographical, the past of a European, despite my new American life. The past of someone who has always considered the book as a true "philosopher's stone" (information, friendship, pleasure, "salvation", "guide"... ) and whose images reflect his "romantic" and "expressionist" sensitivity, his bookish culture, and his "philosophical" thinking (skepticism, pessimism...). Inspired by the pictorial tradition of "vanitas", this series illustrates everything that is fundamental in our Western world, and that I feel with such admiration and anguish: such a rich heritage, a "divine" refinement, a decline and an end impossible to admit. So pessimistic, these photographs, homage and



complaint simultaneously, wants despite its appearances to be also the quest for hope, study, research and the panegyric of creation: bookish and intellectual first, artistic too, obviously.

This tribute to Book took place in various prestigious but also unknown places: in various American libraries, museums, bookstores, and at second-hand booksellers. Everywhere and always, I have been helped, guided and instructed by all those thanks to whom the book can live, librarians, curators, sellers... To these anonymous people is dedicated my "Ex Libris".

**Andrew Aitch**

New York City, 2000 – 2025