



‘WHEN THEY SEARCH FOR YOUR NAME, THEY WILL FIND FLOWERS’: THE COUNTER-IMAGES OF #INGRID AND ONLINE FORMS OF RESISTANCE

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Warning: This essay
contains descriptions of femicide and
gender-based violence

Pristine landscapes and lavender sunsets, radiant flowers, rainbows and auroras unfolding across dreamlike skies; birds suspended in mid-air, captured in dance-like poses, a hand gently raised against the sky. Undulating between lush, saturated hues, glitters and sparkles, soft pastels and the low-res aesthetics of everyday snapshots, the pages of the book *#Ingrid* evoke the experience of scrolling through a casual Instagram feed. Printed on glossy paper and assembled in a 352-page publication that is thick and quite heavy, it is not the individual images but, rather, their sequencing that keeps me turning the unbound pages. Innocent and inconspicuous in their overall appearance, these photographs offer no warning of what awaits me once the final page has been turned. ‘Friends’, it says on the back cover, quoting a user named @delia in Spanish, ‘I once saw a case of femicide of a girl in the US in which images of her body were leaked and her family and friends shared photos of beautiful things so that when they searched for her name the unfortunate pictures would not appear. So, here’s spam for you’.¹

#Ingrid, compiled by Swiss artist and photographer Zoé Aubry, refers directly to Ingrid Escamilla Vargas, a 25-year-old Mexican woman who was brutally murdered by her husband in early 2020. Collective outrage broke out after

the police leaked photographs that showed graphic details of the victim's cut up body, which were subsequently printed by the local tabloids as front-page news under headlines such as 'It was Cupid's Fault'. To protest this repugnantly voyeuristic and sensationalist media coverage and call out the complicity of corrupt authorities and institutions, activists not only took to the streets, but also continued their protest movement on social media. It was the tweet of the young protestor Delia Citlalin from Mexico City, printed on the back cover of *#Ingrid*, that spurred the hashtag activist movement *#IngridEscamillaVargas* in an attempt to expunge the leaked images from the web – the traces of which I am now holding in my hands. What before seemed like an arbitrary collection of insignificant snapshots is now reframed as an act of resistance – a deliberate intervention in the politics of visibility.

Aubry, whose practice is decidedly feminist and research-driven, has been investigating gender-based violence, specifically femicides, as a structural and systemic social issue since 2017. Femicide, defined as 'an intentional killing with a gender-related motivation', is considered by the United Nations to be 'the most brutal and extreme manifestation of violence against women and girls'. Globally, every ten minutes a woman is killed by her partner or family member, with '[c]urrent and former intimate partners' identified as 'by far the most likely perpetrators of femicide, accounting for an average of 60 per cent of all intimate partner and family-related killings'.² While the term gained traction in Latin America, especially in Mexico in the early 2000s, due to the alarming number of murders connected to state complicity, femicide is undeniably global. Yet, although the term has become more common in public debate in recent years, gender-based murders are still often misrepresented as a series of isolated personal tragedies – an inaccurate perception largely perpetuated by the media.

In *Noms Inconnus* (2017–20), Aubry exposes the effects of normalisation and erasure that result from the miscategorisation of femicides as 'family dramas', 'separation dramas' or 'crimes of passion'. A meticulous analysis of the language and images used by the media to address femicide forms the basis of Aubry's critical artistic research that draws on an extensive personal archive of local (France-related) and global media reports. Refusing that such crimes be reduced to fleeting headlines or anonymous statistics, Aubry carefully reconstructs the identities of both the victim and the perpetrator, their relationship, the date and specifics of the femicide as well as the legal sentence. The excerpts from newspaper clippings which she assembles on text panels expose how the media language obfuscates systemic violence, shifts the blame or downplays the gravity of the crime. Alongside, Aubry exposes photographs which accompany such reports – like those of the police intervening at the scene in the aftermath of the crime – as systemic accomplices. Displayed as nega-

tives, they bear the same imprints of the violence that the victims have suffered: the crimes of burning, strangulation, stabbing, drowning or punching are literally re-enacted and avenged by Aubry through the gateway of photographic materiality – transforming the image of violence into a reality.

In her memoir *Recollections of My Nonexistence*, author and historian Rebecca Solnit aptly identifies the representational dynamics at play when it comes to gender-based violence, exposing a hypervisibility of women as (erotic) objects of violence in contrast to their overall underrepresentation and silencing as individuals. 'Legions of women were being killed in movies, in songs, in novels, and in the world', writes Solnit about what she identifies as a cultural obsession with the portrayal of female death, whereby dead and suffering women are repeatedly staged as beautiful, even desirable objects:

In the arts, the torture and death of a beautiful woman or a young woman or both was forever being portrayed as erotic, exciting, satisfying, so despite the insistence by politicians and news media that the violent crimes were the acts of outliers, the desire was enshrined in the films of Alfred Hitchcock, Brian De Palma, David Lynch, Quentin Tarantino, Lars Von Trier, in so many horror movies, so many other films and novels and then video games and graphic novels where a murder in lurid detail or a dead female body was the standard plot device and an aesthetic object. Her annihilation was his realization.³

Connecting these cultural narratives with the real-world, daily threats women face, Solnit argues that precisely such imagery reflects and perpetuates a culture in which women's suffering is aestheticised and normalised – rendered invisible in plain view rather than addressed as a serious, systemic and structural issue of our patriarchal society.

The media portrayal of Ingrid Escamilla Vargas' femicide is a striking example of the formula described by Solnit and the 'desire' embedded within, as the images leaked to the press by corrupt police authorities were clearly staged to objectify and eroticise the victim. 'You can immediately recognise that these pictures were taken so that they could be commercialised later on', says Aubry. 'The cops placed the clean murder weapon, in this case a knife, on the genitals, and it's obvious that there was an intention to stage the whole thing'.⁴ Aubry also recounts how tabloids published the horrifying images next to photographs showing the young woman in a bikini on the beach, juxtaposing images of the victim 'before and after'.

What specifically caught the Swiss artist's interest, though, was the visual movement of solidarity and protest that took place online, acting as a form of (online) resistance that strongly resonates with Aubry's own artistic practice. In the last decade, social media has become an important

site for activism and protest, and hashtag movements such as #MeToo or #BlackLivesMatter have demonstrated how '[i]mages have become essential for the coordination, mobilisation and solidarity of large groups of people'.⁵ While the actual effects of hashtag activism are disputed, what these movements have undoubtedly achieved is to share counter-narratives and counter-images and thus destabilise dominant discourses, thereby functioning as correctives to the prevailing visual regimes of the 'white cis-male gaze'. Exposing and calling out everyday acts of sexism and racism as discriminatory has increasingly heightened public awareness of the fact that these are not isolated incidents, but manifestations of a deeply rooted societal problem – reinforced by the visual 'desire enshrined' in the imagery that surrounds us and the attention economy that fuels it.

With the simple yet powerful transformation – from the hashtag posts online to their chronological compilation in *#Ingrid* – Aubry captures the genuine characteristics of networked images in their ability to become images of protest. Not in the traditional sense – they neither condense visible protests to iconic images nor do they align with practices of witnessing central to image protest. Likewise, their online successors – protest selfies or protest memes – remain absent from this selection.⁶ Instead, the mundanity of the images, their familiarity and relatability, is crucial for online participation, increasing the movement's accessibility by making it easy for anyone from anywhere to contribute. Collectivism and potential virality are further amplified by the 'affective relationality' of networked systems, through which 'not only people ... feel connected through images; the images themselves are part of these affective communities. The network of relations therefore arises between people and people, people and images, and yes, even between images and images – spanning across time and space'.⁷ Crucially, the images circulating under #Ingrid are images of protest not because of what they show, but because of what they conceal. And most strikingly, because of how, in their multitude, they are made to operate within algorithmic systems that significantly contribute to the politics of visibility: they become counter-images to the dominant visual regime because they operate outside of its frame, 'inverting the logics of the attention economy'⁸ by completely withdrawing from the representation of the female body which they set out to eradicate.

With *#Ingrid*, whose concept Aubry developed in conversations with both Delia Citlalin and the family of Bianca Devins – who had initiated a similar hashtag in 2019 after Devins was murdered and graphic images of her body were circulated online – Aubry appropriates online images with both an activist urgency and archivist impulse. In doing so, she collects and she curates – 'not ... as simply an act of selection, but as caretaking – a purposeful act of preservation'.⁹ By transforming a fleeting moment of online resistance into a tangible object that is meant to be touched, experi-

enced and ultimately safeguarded by libraries and museum collections, Aubry pushes the hashtag movement beyond the digital realm to include us, the spectators of now and of the future. As we hold the book in our hands, our own reflection appears softly mirrored and slightly distorted in the metallic silver of the book's cover. How do we position ourselves within these politics of representation? Are we willing to question and deconstruct our ways of seeing? Our fingerprints remain as stains on the cover – a powerful reminder that even as mere spectators, we might still be complicit.

[1] The original phrasing of the post printed on the back cover of the book reads: 'Amigas, una vez vi un caso de un feminicidio a una chica de EEUU en el que filtraron las imágenes de su cuerpo y sus familiares y amigos compartieron fotos de cosas bonitas para que cuando buscaran su nombre no apreciaran las desafortunadas fotos. Así que aquí les va un spam.'

[2] UN Women, 'Five Essential Facts to Know About Femicide', 25 November 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/arti->

[cles/explainer/five-essential-facts-to-know-about-femicide](https://www.unwomen.org/en/arti-) (all URLs accessed 15 March 2025).

[3] Rebecca Solnit, *Recollections of My Non-Existence* (New York: Viking, 2020), 50–51.

[4] NNS02: #Ingrid, *Nicht Nur Schön Podcast* by Laura Breitschmid and Jonas Wandeler, 17 May 2023, <https://nichtnurschoen.podigee.io/3-nns-02-ingrid>.

[5] Kerstin Schankweiler, *Bildproteste: Widerstand im Netz* (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 2019), 12; translated by the author.

[6] See Schwankweiler's *Bildproteste* for all forms of image protests, both traditional and online.

[7] *Ibid.*, 60.

[8] Zoé Aubry, as part of her artistic statement on <https://z-aubry.com/About>.

[9] Joanne McNeil, 'Endless Archive', in *Collect the WWWorld: The Artist as Archivist in the Internet Age*, ed. Domenico Quaranta (Brescia: Link Editions, 2011), 38–47, here: 42–43.



‘TO ADDRESS COMPLEXITY IS TO PROPOSE CONVERSATION’

A Conversation Between Zoé Aubry
and León Muñoz Santini / Gato Negro Ediciones

In this conversation, Swiss artist Zoé Aubry and editorial designer León Muñoz Santini from Gato Negro Ediciones in Mexico City discuss the complexity of the publication *#Ingrid* and the power of the book as a tool for preservation and resistance.

[Zoé Aubry]

For *#Ingrid*, it was important for me to work with a Mexican publishing house alongside my Parisian publisher, RVB Books. I was collaborating with Delia, who is based in Mexico City and spurred the hashtag movement around the femicide on social media. It was always my intention to find a way to return the images I had assembled in the book to the place where the collective act of resistance began. To me, this book isn't just an object – it's a visualisation of how images can become collective weapons.

[León Muñoz Santini]

For us, *#Ingrid* fit into a practice that we've been developing for years. Gato Negro started as an experimental publishing project. Rooted in learning from the possibilities and limits of printed matter, we've shaped our publishing as an artistic practice. Over time, we've earned a reputation for publishing radical material, but at first, it was simply an organic response to the increasing violence in our country and a sense of responsibility regarding what was happening before our

eyes. We learned that, at the very least, we could reflect on these horrible things around us with some degree of immediacy and create, through books, a space for reflection and remembrance. Zoé's project fits into this programme, addressing complexity in a way that resists easy classification, because it has many layers and readings. Circulating such a book requires an awareness of its role within a broader cultural, artistic, political and social environment.

[ZA]

Indeed, I wasn't looking for a traditional photographic publisher but wanted to work with people who are politically engaged and have a sharp and critical perspective. When I came across Gato Negro's work, I immediately sensed a convergence in our approaches to counter-narratives. Their editorial line is radical, critical and deeply questioning of power structures, with an anti-authoritarian stance that resonated with me. Since my work focuses on exposing the mechanisms of in/visibility within dominant media narratives, this collaboration felt essential. *#Ingrid* emerged from popular culture as a means of resisting and subverting the global visual economy, and I was looking for like-minded individuals who actively resist the capitalist, neoliberal and patriarchal structures that shape our society. But just as importantly, I wanted to engage with people who would also engage in a critical conversation about my work.

[LMS]

When we were approached about this project, we had extensive discussions. Reactions were mixed – both enthusiastic and critical – particularly given that the project originates in Switzerland. While the most extreme critique was 'What is a *white* girl with a red passport doing here, explaining our reality to us?', we discussed the importance of effective distribution and selling the book here in Mexico. Actually, in the immediate aftermath of this horrific event, we had considered making this very book ourselves. Witnessing what was happening online, we recognised its relevance and that it was something that needed to be captured. Yet very quickly, we also felt that for us, it wasn't the right time to do so. There's a fine line between a kind of civic duty to address such systemic violence and the risk of capitalising on another's suffering. Ultimately, we chose not to pursue it. The fact that someone elsewhere in the world felt compelled to make the book only underscores the urgency and significance of this phenomenon, and maybe it was necessary that it was being done from somewhere else.

These considerations all tie into the broader issue of whose voice is part of the narrative and how it's distributed, which is a complex conversation. Personally, I've come to accept that I won't resolve this contradiction. Even as we confront this contradiction, it's important not to become cynical. Yes, you can build both economic and cultural capital by cir-

culating the suffering of others, but there's also a responsibility to address this complexity within society. And the way to process these things is to address it through complexity, and to address complexity is to propose conversation. For me, the place of this conversation is the place and the culture of the book.

[ZA]

Constantly reflecting on my position and my role as an artist was a key challenge in this project. Creating the book's dummy felt uncomfortable until I understood my position – as someone assembling and preserving a collective act of resistance. My training as a photographer allows me to read images critically, exposing the capitalist and corrupt forces at play. And while the hashtag campaign began in Mexico – one of the countries most affected by femicides – my research into how the media portrays femicides started years earlier in Europe. That background helped me see how the newspapers framed Ingrid's murder. But what's most striking to me about the hashtag is how the collective movement transcends borders. The choice to title it simply *#Ingrid*, rather than the full hashtag of the original movement, connects it to a global protest. The poor quality of the images in the book reflects how they circulated online, mirroring the collectivism of this issue. While Ingrid was a Mexican woman, femicide isn't confined to one place; this hashtag resonates across countries.

[LMS]

From a more local perspective, we made some requests that were crucial for us before committing to the project. One was ensuring an open dialogue about the project. Another was the book's title – we felt it was important not to use Ingrid Escamilla's full name, as that would risk adding another layer of victimisation to her story. Another key step was reaching out to Ingrid Escamilla's family, ensuring they were aware of the project. Ultimately, they chose to avoid public engagement, but from their lawyer we received implicit confirmation that they did not oppose the project and would not want to withhold something potentially positive coming from this horrific tragedy.

Finally, if we would have made this book ourselves, it would have manifested in something completely different. I suppose you likely chose this glossy, heavy, colourful version to reflect the photographic condition itself. To highlight how photography circulates and is consumed today. While this approach is certainly interesting, it comes with drawbacks that in this case can detach it from its subject matter: the book has become heavy and expensive, which limits its accessibility. It's not easy to circulate or use as a tool in the places it's needed. But I understand that with a project so layered in meaning and purpose, it's challenging to capture it all in a single object.

[ZA]

I envisioned the book printed on high-quality paper to highlight those pixelated images of protest, but also to create a meaningful homage to the victims of femicide that preserves this moment of protest for long-term impact. Also, I wanted to make the book accessible even for people who don't have the means to buy an art book, and so I've made it available online for download. Finally, as both an artist and an activist, I also wanted the book to serve another purpose, that of the redistribution of social funds. I wanted to use the privileges of my Swiss citizenship to raise funds and to ensure that Gato Negro was already compensated, allowing for a price that made sense for local distribution.

[LMS]

I'd like to reinforce one aspect you've mentioned, as it's easy to lose sight of this perspective in today's crazy and fast-paced world. For me, the idea that what we create with books could last forever is powerful. That somehow, we're working to preserve memories for eternity. The materiality of a book can remind us of this idea. By freezing time, *#Ingrid* elevates those seemingly fleeting and poor images that circulate on the internet and that pass by unnoticed in our everyday doomscrolling. The book disrupts this logic of the networked attention economy. It says 'stay here' – demonstrating that even something as simple as a cheesy sunset can hold significance.













