

# BOOKFORUM

## ART BOOKS

# ARTFUL VOLUMES

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Of all the photographs in Dorothea Lange's recent survey at the Museum of Modern Art, the one that has stayed with me the most was, most likely, not taken by Lange: a small, black-and-white image of a man's liver-spotted hands clasping someone's back. That back was Lange's, the hands those of her husband. When the young photographer Sam Contis discovered that Lange had included the intimate composition in a 1966 retrospective at MoMA under her own name, Contis decided to adopt a similar approach; her *DAY SLEEPER* (Mack, \$35) appropriates images from the documentarian's archive, sequencing rarely or never-before-seen photographs into an ingenious new monograph, plumbing the unconscious of Lange's oeuvre to dream her work anew. Consult the meditative captions by Lange found in the book's appendix, and *Day Sleeper* unfolds as a memoir, sparsely interleaved with blank spreads: lulls that remind us of how canons are shaped, and unshaped, by omission. From the cover shot—Lange's son dozing with a shirt over his eyes, one of many nap time portraits—to southwestern landscapes, domestic tableaux, and street reportage, these pictures arrive to us today with a new immediacy, not least of all Lange's records of economic injustice. But the volume impresses most in the unlikely relationships Contis builds between subjects, as when a mountainous Californian vista—a two-page bleed—precedes a small, half-shadowed hand, or how an eagle crucified on a barbed-wire fence is followed by a gentle, gauzy photograph of Japanese American internees weaving camouflage nets for the US military—an image both beautiful and appalling. There are endless ways to see something, *Day Sleeper* quietly insists. And to see how others saw, too. —ZACK HATFIELD



Dorothea Lange, *A very blue eagle. Along California highway, 1936.* Library of Congress