

A Full Tonal Range

by Alex Bortkiewicz, Director of Photography, Alamy



Alamy has an impressive range of dedicated black and white photographic collections offering both contemporary and archival historical images. Black and white photography gives customers an alternative dramatic visual device, creating a less familiar and more fantastical world than colour.

For example, Sir Simon Marsden uses infrared film to imbue his images with mystery, the fantastic and the supernatural. His collection includes haunted houses, romantic ruins, Gothic graveyards, fantastic follies and grotesque gargoyles. Over the years he has tried to portray 'the unreality of the 'real' and the 'reality of the 'unreal''. His pictures tend to be particularly popular for book cover and poster usages as the images work on different conceptual levels.

Black and white images also resonate in terms of depicting the past, revealing history, the classic portraiture style and celebrity. Images that sell very well on Alamy are black and white portraits of iconic leaders in different fields such as Einstein and Mother Theresa, political figures like Churchill, scientists like Madame Curie and famous explorers. These images are sourced from collections on Alamy including Popperfoto, the World History Archive, the Liszt collection and the Royal Geographical Society. Collectively these archives provide

an extraordinary and stimulating insight into life as it was from medieval times through the Elizabethan and Victorian periods and into more modern times. They reveal and document Royalty, movie stars, iconic sporting moments, fashion through the decades and more – all brought to life in black and white. Other outstanding Alamy collections that celebrate the use of black and white photography include humorous and delightful images from Arthur Steel and the intriguing work of Homer Sykes, covering traditional British pastimes and events.

The roots of photojournalism and social documentary photography were embedded in black and white, but the advent of colour created a new expression and intensity: for example, revealing the eerie sunburnt palette of a drought-ridden terrain with evidence of a carcass or showing a startling vivid red stream of blood, indicative and symbolic of

the horror of conflicts throughout the world. In reportage and news photography there has now been a renaissance in using black and white photography over colour.

Black and white continues to be a powerful force, particularly in capturing people in dire circumstances and provoking compassionate responses from those who see the photographs. Alamy represents images from luminaries in this field like Ami Vitale, Michael Goldwater, Penny Tweedie, Terry Fincher and Judah Passow to name but a few. Abraham Menashe from the US provides a moving humanistic collection which spans the full range of human emotions.

Now that image buyers are generally equipped with Photoshop tools, they can easily transform a colour image into a black and white one. However, visually there is little that can be as powerful as an image imagined and conceived in black and white, as these collections illustrate. Black and white is a compelling visual device to increase mood and meaning in an image as well as 'up' the narrative elements in a given frame.

Some notable black and white collections on Alamy:

- Homer Sykes Archive
- Popperfoto
- Arthur Steel
- World History Archive
- Abraham Menashe
- The Print Collector
- Pictorial Press
- Marsden Archive
- Mary Evans Picture Library
- Liszt collection
- Royal Geographical Society
- Black Star
- Vintage Images
- Vosts Images

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A young Fulani girl is brought back to her village to celebrate her circumcision. Guinea Bissau, Africa
© AMI VITALE
Op Art by Victor Vasarely, 1954
© THE PRINT COLLECTOR
Southend on Sea, Essex, England 1974
© HOMER SYKES ARCHIVE
Dots and Moons: Patti Boyd and Celia Hammond, England, 1965
© JOHN FRENCH (Y & A IMAGES)
Hand Print on

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© A.T.WILLETT
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STEVE DOUBLE
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