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Books: Martine Fougeron's "World with Two Sons"

By David Schonauer Tuesday February 11, 2020



When does adulthood begin?

This question is at the heart of photographer [Martine Fougeron's](#) longterm series focusing on her two sons, Nicolas and Adrien. After leaving behind a career as a creative director in the corporate world in the late 1990s, Fougeron began studying at the International Center of Photography in New York. "I decided to change my life after 9/11," she says. "That really shook me, as it did most New Yorkers. I realized I wasn't paying attention to my own creativity because I was managing others' creativity," she [told PPD](#) in 2016.

Her project on her sons began, she says, simply as a way for her to learn how to work with lights and a 4x5 camera. It became something much more than an exercise, however: Fougeron's images intimately captured the lives of the boys as they became adolescents — what Fougeron called the "liminal state between childhood and adulthood, between the feminine and the masculine, and between innocence and a burgeoning self-identity."

The work was published by Steidl as the book *Teen Tribe*. But Fougeron wasn't done. She continued photographing her sons as they journeyed into their 20s.

"I'd been reading articles on how in modern western societies, adolescence had more or less been extended — that the differentiation between adolescence and adulthood wasn't as abrupt as it used to be, so I thought that would be something interesting to explore," she says.

Now the two projects, "Teen Tribe: 2005-2010" and "The Twenties: 2010 to 2018," are collected in a new Steidl book titled [Nicolas et Adrien. A World with Two Sons](#).

From *Teen Tribe*:

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Many photographers struggle with the idea of photographing strangers, but as Fougeron found out, photographing those closest to you can also be difficult.

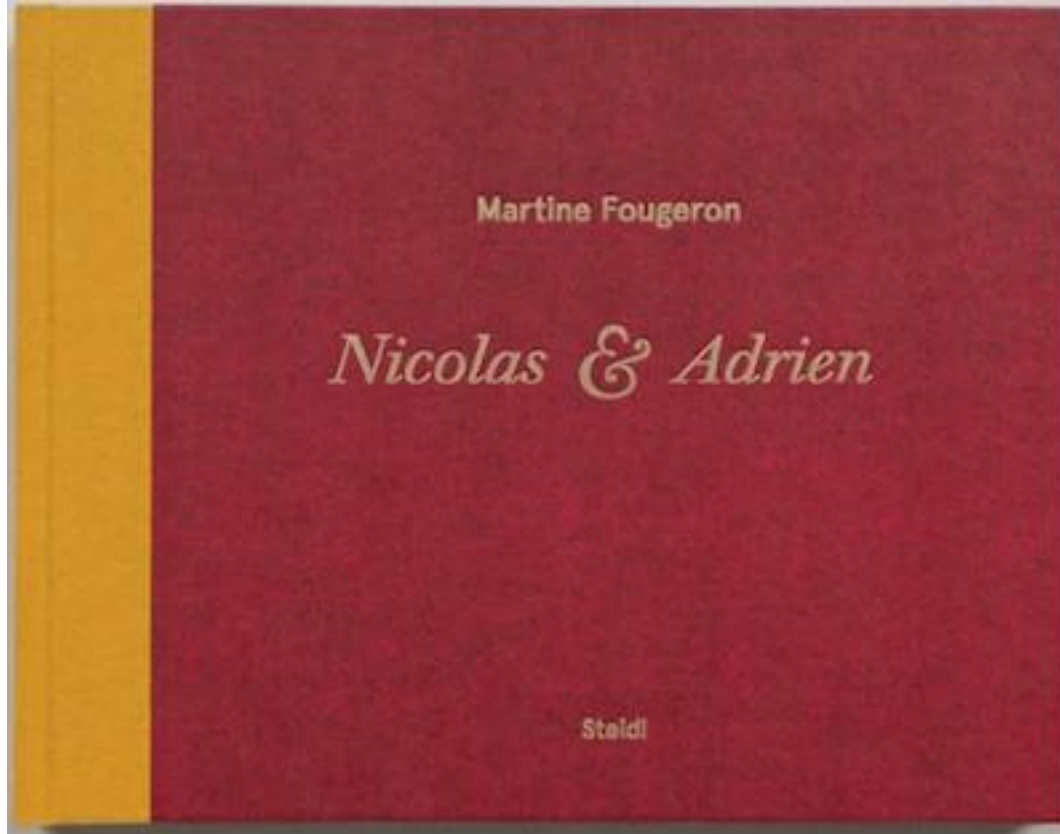
"I established a series of practices that enabled trust to build. First, I respected the moments when they absolutely did not want me around. Sometimes it was very difficult with my elder son Nicolas because when I started the project, he was in full revolt against me. And it later became difficult with my younger son Adrien for the same reason: typical adolescent rejection of authority. At times, they exercised their power over me by refusing to be photographed. I understood that but it was not always easy," she writes in the new book.

From *The Twenties*:





This series follows Nicolas and Adrien through their college years, as they find vocations and work, new friends and lovers, and their return home after college. In the new book, Fougeron refers to the terms “emerging adulthood” to describe this period — a time, she notes, when young people are not yet married, have not finished their educations, and have not yet settled into longterm jobs.



“By combining the two series, the new book shows an evolution and becomes a kind of novel — a visual novel — in which characters develop and change,” Fougeron says. The story she ends up telling is one of literature’s classic themes — the rite of passage.

And the work, says Fougeron, is continuing as the two boys, launched on careers of their own, continue evolving. Meanwhile, she is also working as an educator at ICP and has launched The Photography Master Retreat, a weeklong workshop that takes place in the south of France each summer, following the Arles photography festival. At the workshop she tutors a select group of photographers along with Elisabeth Biondi, the esteemed former visuals editor of The New Yorker, and critic, curator, and educator Lyle Rexer. [Go here](#) for details.



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