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CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED: 75 EXPERTS NAME THE TOP
PHOTOBOOKS OF 2017

December 11, 017



Photobooks continue to be one of the most exciting and popular ways to appreciate contemporary photography. This year—like the last, and the one before—was a wonderful time to be passionate about the medium. Thanks to such abundance, it's hard to even see and review all the great publications that are released annually. So, we reached out to 75 experts from countries around the world to share their favorites with us, and asked them for a few words about what made each book special. This is a list of the top 11 that were chosen by numerous individuals—a global, critically acclaimed consensus.

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In 2017, the primacy of ideas is evident. Whether exploring the mysteries of color, the crimes of Monsanto, the status of masculinity, the fate of America, the role of religion in the 21st century, the intricacies of memory, or Human Nature itself, none of these publications could be faulted for their lack of ambition. Indeed, many of these books caught our attention this year specifically because of their scope and breadth. These books remind us of the enduring power of the medium thanks to their willingness to take on something vast and ultimately embody it between two covers.

The immortal Henri Cartier-Bresson once wrote, “Magazines end up wrapping French fries—books remain.” It is a safe bet that many of these publications will remain on our shelves and in our minds not because of a concept or a gimmick, but rather because they tackle some of the most pressing issues and complex questions of our time.

—Alexander Strecker, Managing Editor

When the Guantanamo Bay detention camp was opened in 2002, no one could have foreseen the 15 years that would follow. Much like the nebulous and ongoing “War on Terror” which was used to justify the creation of this extralegal American prison camp, Guantanamo itself resisted definition, clarity, and, finally, closure. As a presidential candidate, one of Barack Obama’s central campaign promises in 2008 was to shut it down. Eight years in the White House came in went, yet the prison remained open. And now under President Trump, its fate seems secure for at least a while longer...

Given this difficult subject, photographer Debi Cornwall must first be applauded for her persistence and courage in showing the world this important, and purposefully obscured, place. The result of her labor, *Welcome to Camp America, Inside Guantánamo Bay*, is “one of the smartest artist-made photobooks of this year,” in the words of curator Anne Havinga.

Cornwall had to wait a long time to obtain the proper permissions to even visit and begin photographing at Guantánamo. Thanks to her patience and drive, she was permitted to visit on three separate occasions. The results that we hold are, in the words of Jim Casper, “like a dossier: a file of criminal evidence, interviews, interrogations, testimonies, reports, photos.” The amount of material incorporated in the book paints a powerfully complete picture—though in many cases, this completeness is marked by the absence of what could not be shown. As Casper says, “We are given incomplete, government-censored pieces of an elaborate puzzle, one piece at a time. As vague stories begin to clarify, emerging from the fog, they suddenly become frightfully real.”

Besides the vast array of visual data, the words should be attended to carefully for the awful import of what they say. Casper wrote, “The language of the declassified documents is often cold, clinical, removed from any sense of humanity or any acknowledgment of human suffering.” And as Karen Haas put it, this is “one of the most successful compilations of text and image and design that I have seen in a long time.”

But lest they be overlooked (which can happen when a book conveys such a density of information), the pictures themselves are searing and powerful. As Haas wrote, “several are forever etched in my memory.” In the end, this is a book that needs to be looked at and grappled with, each page considered with the sobriety and attention that went into producing it.

Picked by:

Karen Haas, Lane Curator of Photographs, Museum of Fine Arts Boston

Jim Casper, Editor-in-Chief, LensCulture

Anne Havinga, Senior Photography Curator, Museum of Fine Arts Boston