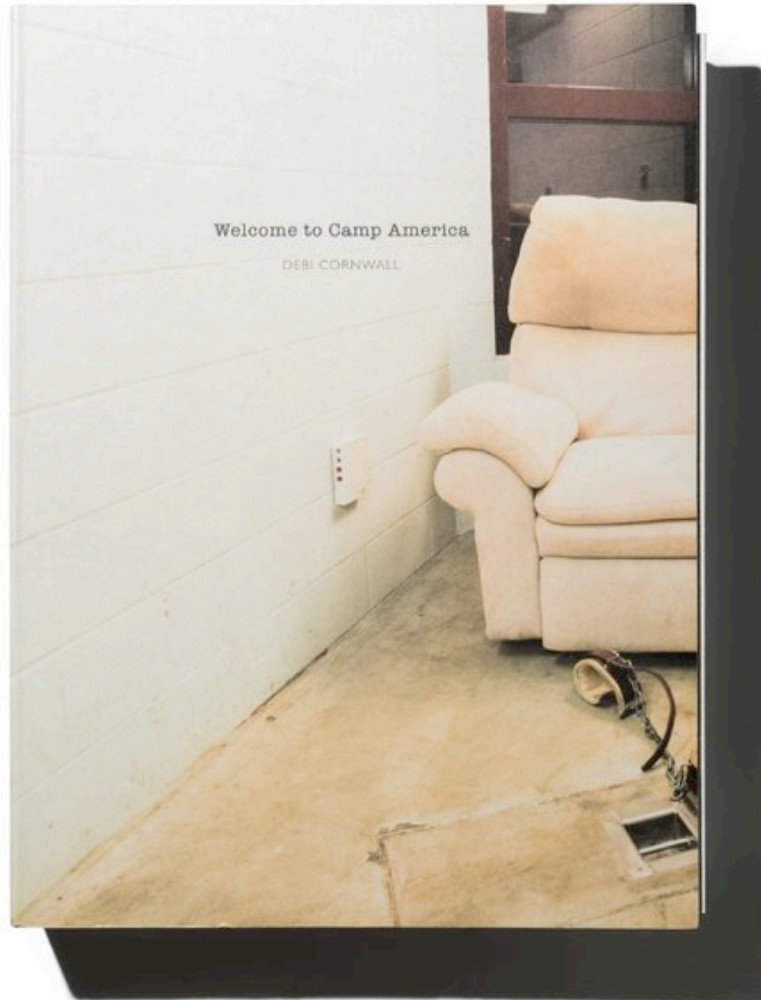


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The New York Times

THE BEST PHOTOBOOKS OF 2017

By Teju Cole, December 30, 2017



There are great photo books every year, and 2017 was no exception. But something about the strained times intensified my feelings about the work I saw this year. The role of art felt more urgent, both as a response to the general political disorder and as a refuge from it. I didn't merely like or appreciate the best work I saw; I needed it. The photo books that made my list range from large scholarly catalogs to poetic little volumes. They were published in seven different countries. Some were more conceptual in approach, while others were freer and more visceral. These winners all had in common the special qualities of great photo books: the pleasure of turning pages, the precision of thoughtful book design, the tactility of paper and the glow of the afterimages in the mind long after the book is set down.

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Debi Cornwall, "Welcome to Camp America." Radius Books, 160 pages, 70 images.

The civil rights lawyer turned artist Debi Cornwall knew she would not be allowed to take undeveloped negatives out of the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay. So she came to the notorious detention facility with her own color developing kit. Her photographs of the "Gitmo" facilities and of some of the oddities she found in the gift shop (items like key chains, lip balm and plush toys) are presented in "Welcome to Camp America." She interleaves these images with portraits made elsewhere, depicting some of the detainees who have been released — photographed from behind, a nod to their unresolved traumas — and she includes fragments of their testimony or their communication with her. The book also contains official documents, sometimes redacted, about the torture of detainees. "Welcome to Camp America" is a sustained look at a shameful and ongoing violation of human decency by the U.S. government.