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Peter van Agtmael Buzzing at the Sill

Text by Peter van Agtmael

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The new book by Magnum photographer Peter van Agtmael reveals the little seen margins of the USA

Buzzing at the Sill is Peter van Agtmael's exploration of the United States in the shadow of the post 9/11 wars. A sequel to his critically acclaimed *Disco Night Sept 11*, it begins on a dusk flight over an anonymous landscape, moving unsentimentally- and sometimes surreally- into images of race, class, war, memory, torture, nationalism, family, and place. The images have a troubled beauty that avoids polemic and cliché. Short texts throughout explore the experiences that led to this distinct vision.

In the back, a text booklet folds seamlessly out to further describe the context behind the images- revealing hidden history, personal stories, and detailed background.

At a troubling historical moment when many wonder how well they know and understand America, *Buzzing at the Sill* reveals the little seen margins of the country, from coast to coast, city to country, and everything in between.

Buzzing at the Sill is included on Time's "Best Photobooks of 2016" list.

Peter van Agtmael was born in Washington DC in 1981. He received a BA in History from Yale. Peter joined Magnum Photos in 2008 and became a member in 2013.

Awards include the W. Eugene Smith Grant, the ICP Infinity Award for Young Photographer, the Lumix Freelens Award, the Aaron Siskind Grant, a Magnum Foundation Grant as well as awards from World Press Photo, American Photography Annual, POYi, The Pulitzer Center, The Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, FOAM and Photo District News.

His most recent book, *Disco Night Sept 11*, on America at war in the post-9/11 era, was shortlisted for the Aperture/Paris Photo Book Award in addition to being named a Book of the Year by The New York Times Magazine, Time Magazine, Mother Jones, Vogue, American Photo and Photo Eye.

Praise for *Disco Night Sept 11* (2014)

»It doesn't seem trite to call *Disco Night Sept. 11* an important book. It will fit perfectly on your shelf somewhere between Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977) and Gilles Peress's *Telex Iran* (1983).« – The PhotoBook Review, Aperture Foundation.

»One book that we felt stood out amongst the rest: Peter van Agtmael's *Disco Night Sept. 11* which, not only, is an incisive and searing look at the state of America, still caught in maelstroms of war and its aftershocks, but also a distinctly original presentation of documentary work.« – Time

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Barbara Karpf, barbara.karpf@kehrerverlag.com or
Rebecca Rössling, rebecca.roessling@kehrerverlag.com
Kehrer Verlag, Wieblinger Weg 21, 69123 Heidelberg, Germany
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Press images



1. Des Moines, Iowa. 2010
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At the annual Iowa GOP Ronald Reagan dinner, Sarah Palin gave the keynote speech, which was seen as testing the waters for a possible presidential run. She savaged Obama, both for his pacifism (withdrawing American troops from Iraq) and his militarism (ordering the surge in Afghanistan). She praised the armed forces while attacking the press ("people who are out there for the right of journalists to lie").



2. Hugo, Oklahoma. 2014
© Peter van Agtmael / Magnum Photos

The remnants of a Choctaw allotment after their forced expulsion to Oklahoma.

The Choctaw tribe initially had vast territories in the southeast United States. By the early 1800s, the American government had begun a systematic, legislated removal of the Natives from their land. In 1830 the Indian Removal Act was passed by Congress and led to the exodus of tens of thousands of Native Americans. The majority of the Choctaw were forced to march 800 km to modern Oklahoma, watched over by white militias.

In the last major removal, in 1838, the remaining people of the tribes were rounded into camps and then pushed west in groups of 700 during the hottest and coldest months of the year. Up to a third of them died. It became known as the "Trail of Tears."



3. New Orleans, Louisiana. 2012
© Peter van Agtmael / Magnum Photos

A Second Line parade. A local African American tradition where brass bands — known as the first line — march in the streets and are joined by members of the public — called the second liners. The Second Line parades came about after the Civil War because insurance companies wouldn't cover ex-slaves. So African Americans formed benevolent societies and clubs that helped members defray health costs.

The dues included a band for funerals and a public parade every year. Over time, their popularity evolved, and now there are parades almost every Sunday in New Orleans.



4. Louisville, Kentucky. 2015
© Peter van Agtmael / Magnum Photos

Kentucky Derby aftermath.



5. Portland, Oregon. 2015
© Peter van Agtmael / Magnum Photos

Iraqi refugees in a low income housing community in Portland. The area is home to several thousand Iraqi refugees. One of the main community organizers is Dr. Baher Butti, who fled Baghdad in 2006 after his community activism made him the target of local militias. A psychiatrist, activist, and writer, Dr. Butti spends much of his free time helping the recent immigrants adapt to life in America. Many of them don't speak much English and don't understand their rights within the web of bureaucracy. Although he is constantly overworked, he sees it as his responsibility to help his people get on their feet as fast as possible.



6. Maryland. 2015
© Peter van Agtmael / Magnum Photos

The KKK had boasted that dozens from their Klan chapter would attend the rally and cross burning, but there were only a few people when we showed up, including a British TV crew and a freelance photographer. After a few vague excuses, the six or seven Klan members changed into their robes and began a show amongst themselves. One of the leaders started his speech. He shouted that there were ISIS training camps being created by the United Nations with FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), whose fighters would then take American's guns away. This plan was allegedly hatched by Barack Obama (or Barry Soetoro as he was called by the Klan. Soetoro was the surname of Obama's step-father, and that he was briefly called Barry Soetoro in elementary school in Indonesia has been used as evidence that Obama was not born in America). After finishing, the hoarse-voiced Klan member burned the UN flag and stomped on it, to the tepid cheers from the small crowd.



7. Brooklyn, New York. 2010
© Peter van Agtmael / Magnum Photos

The Fourth of July.



8. On the outskirts of New Orleans, Louisiana. 2009
© Peter van Agtmael / Magnum Photos

Hunting rabbits with BB guns.



9. Pine Ridge, South Dakota. 2011
© Peter van Agtmael / Magnum Photos

While on a road trip with my friend Justin, we met a couple of guys and started chatting. They invited us to check out a spot where they had a rope swing, and on the way we picked up some beer. Dusk was falling and it became a little party; we lit a fire while some of their younger cousins swung over a deep chasm, with just a thin rope around their waist to secure them to the tree.

As the beer ran out and the night began to get colder, they invited us back to their home. Upon arrival, their sister (the matriarch of the family) smelled their breath and became furious. She asked us what possessed us to give them beer. She told us there was rampant alcoholism on the reservation and declared we were just another in a long line of white men exploiting the Lakota. We were filled with tremendous shame and apologized profusely. As she explained the history of the tribe she mellowed and invited us to spend the night. We awoke in the morning to a beautiful dawn and the youngest children tending to the horses.



10. Detroit, Michigan. 2012
© Peter van Agtmael / Magnum Photos

After dinner at Lyniece's house.



11. Branson, Missouri. 2015
© Peter van Agtmael / Magnum Photos

The parking lot of Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede.



12. Detroit, Michigan. 2012
© Peter van Agtmael / Magnum Photos

Outside Lyniece Nelson's house. The family was still in shock over Treasure's death. One of her sisters said, "I don't know if Treasure is asleep, or up. Because her pictures . . . every time I move around . . . they look like they are following me. She woke mama up to tell her she was leaving, she left . . . and that's it."