

13 DEC THE BOOK'S SPACE

INTERVIEWS: TAKING OFF. HENRY MY NEIGHBOR

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Redazione Fotografia

Book: Taking Off. Henry my Neighbor

Photographs: Mariken Wessels

Book design: Mariken Wessels

Editor: Art Paper Editions

Date of publishing: 2015

N° of copies: 1000

Dimensions: 24x33 cm

Binding: Naked bound

THE BOOK AS A PROJECT

Which are the 5 indispensable pictures for this book?

Photographer: A good book knows no indispensable pictures, as they're all equally important as integrated parts of the story, which forms a whole.

What is the framed structure of this book?

P: The structure should feel like you're breathing, everything has to run smoothly, that's the way it's meant to be.

How did you choose your book designer?

P: I did the design for all the books I made, laying out the book in InDesign and making a dummy. I showed the dummy for Taking Off to Jurgen Maelfeyt of APE (Art Paper Editions), a graphic designer and publisher, eager to publish this book, who helped me with the finishing touch.

What was your approach to get into the photographic project?

P: I started doing extensive research, then outlined the whole story. I had all the story lines, layers and scenes tacked to my studio wall, and I did much reading related to the theme, such as about vernacular photography, amateur art, private versus public, and on people leading hermit's lives (for example Thoreau), etc.

Hence I tried to understand the characters of Henry and Martha as much as I could, then analysed them and worked them into the narrative.

How did you develop the work on the book?

P: When I work on a book I try to stay as close as possible to my intuition. I am able to do so because I include the preliminary work, such as the research phase, into the entire process. All the given or found materials as well as the initial research form the basis and make up the framework, serving as parameters in which I have the freedom to create and recreate.

THE BOOK AS A STORY

Which narrative slant did you choose for this book and why?

P: The narrative more or less alternates with the documentary material. Because it's part documentary story, I wanted to follow the protagonists' life stories as close to the truth as you can get with photographs, letters and other documents. But herein one always arrives at a point at which one needs to ask what the truth is after all.

What's the difference between the book and the photographic project slant?

P: A book necessarily fixes the narrative, it's compelling but it also intensifies the story if you follow the flow of the narrative. Leafing through a book offers an intimate experience, being perhaps even more voyeuristic than walking past such images in a gallery. Parts of the book could be in an exhibition for sure, leading to a different experience, but still fitting with what the book is about, because to a large extent it's about questions of the public and the private and tensions between the two.

THE BOOK AS AN OBJECT

How did you choose the materials and the kind of printing?

P: The type of paper and the printer I had chosen together with Jurgen. He proposed a paper, which I immediately felt was the right choice. And he knew a good printer in Bruges (Die Keure) which also worked out really well.

How the materials' choices are connected to the photographic project?

P: The type of paper had to be in harmony with the project. We were looking for a basic and slightly rough paper. And we wanted to have the part with the contact sheets, totalling about 5,500 photos, printed on a coated paper – more like the papers used in old catalogues: glossy and somewhat outdated. The loose-leafed letter was printed on a thin, semi-translucent US letter-size paper, similar to the one people used for typing in the 1970s and 80s. We had the book bound such that it falls

open easily. It proved a bit more expensive than usual binding methods, but because the book is quite heavy, it was important to do so. We strived for everything to become a unity: story, paper, printing and binding quality, lay-out, typography and so on.