

German Photo Book Award
Laudations for the award ceremony German Photo Book Prize 19|20 Gold award winner
LA DRIVE-BY

Laudator: Karima Klasen
Category: Self Publishing
German Photo Book Prize 19|20 Laudation
LA DRIVE-BY, Michael Lange

From the winner of the Self-Publishing category we received a black, hand-bound artist book in the hardcover with a Swiss binding, which at first sight with 17.5 x 22.5 cm rather looks small. But the book has a big surprise. It wants to be unfolded - horizontally and vertically in different variations - up to eight times of the original page size.

Starting with the three-fold Swiss binding - it unfolds into a huge panorama, showing the silhouette and skyline the city of angels from the moving car - Los Angeles in 55 cm total length. Everything is bigger in America. There are places, passages that unfold into posters who draw the viewer into a journey of discovery into the picture, the material, into the play with the possibilities of format. Since on each page a new unfolding can open, I am captivated by the experience of opening, of turning page by page in all directions.

It is not at all the like city maps, that unfold and then deny their original shape. No, the paper magically finds its way to the poster, the panorama and then back to the original with ease. Everything is perfect. The quality, the manufacture, the edges that fit together, the different folds, the way into large format and back again to the single page. The viewer learns, that a complex design concept does not need any compromises in the function. This is craftsmanship, design and art in a flowing exchange, ending in a convincing complete work. The hand binding was executed by Witze Fopma, the design was created by Sybren Kuiper (SYB).

The Hamburg based photographer Michael Lange has shot the old industrial quarters in the east and south of downtown Los Angeles in the 90s. In the five years between 1996 and 2001 he went on several wanderings through the L.A. suburbs. Neighborhoods, in which a tourist or even a resident of the fancy centers would never get lost. From the black and white, or rather black and blue coloured pictures, a cold emanates, although at the same time it is the heat that says it all, a blackness that comes from the grainy image as a shadow over the dreary outskirts. An abandonment that is there, despite the 14 million inhabitants, seems immeasurable.

In addition to the diffuse, the coarse grain, the uncontrolled reflections, which are seen on the photographs, the texture of the edges catch the eye. Sometimes with perforation, sometimes with residues, traces, reactions of heat or chemical solutions on the film. A surface, as imperfect, raw and fragile as the city's borders, as the subject of the publication.

It is the deserted streets, lonely dogs wandering alone in the suburbs, it is the periphery, the no-man's land of the metropolis, the deserted street corner, extinct alley, blurred neon signs, the relentless hard edge, a look into the hidden corners of civilization.

In the book Andreas Kilb states: „I looked for the desert. Lange, (...) slung the camera around his neck and let himself drift away from the Freeways, the main roads, the safe zones; he deliberately got lost in the black holes of the car city.“

Congratulations Michael Lange.

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