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ə-books #2
June 28th- August 28th 2016
Martin Toft and Gareth Syvret: Atlantus
A transoceanic photography project



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A transoceanic photography project

Prompted in part by the 350th anniversary in 2014 of Sir George Carteret naming of the State of New Jersey, USA after Jersey his island home in 1664, the project asks how two places that share a name on opposite sides of the Atlantic Ocean perceive each other within archives and cultural memory? In five stories responding through image and text to the people, politics, landscapes, industries and identities of these places the Atlantus Project connects memories, archives and imagined lands on opposite side of the Atlantic World. Atlantus is a transoceanic story in which estranged lands of incomparable scale come together in poetic gestures that ask: what's in a name?

Create your own exhibition:

Take two of these newspapers and find a wall space that is 2x6 metres in size. Open out both copies, separate the pages and assemble your exhibition following the wall plan in the publication. Or, separate into five smaller sections using the divisions shown on the plan to fit your wall space.

ATLANTUS NEWSPAPERS: AN OCEAN
BETWEEN HIGH- AND LOWBROW
INDIE PUBLISHING

Conversation between paula roush, Martin Toft and Gareth Syvret; after meeting Martin at Photobook Bristol (June 2016), paula emailed the questions, at a time Atlantus (short-listed for Book Author Award) was also shown at Arles Rencontres de Photographie 2016, and the answers were received as a word. doc

pr - The first thought that came to my mind when I started unpacking the newspapers and spreading them on the floor to prepare the display was: in order to view its whole content, one needs two copies to see both recto and verso; furthermore, since our gallery is made of two spaces, literally a recto and a verso, I thought I could use this feature to visually structure the presentation of the work, with all the rectos going into the recto gallery and all the versos into the verso gallery. However this was not so easy, as the newspapers follow a different visual structure. Martin, would you like to tell us how you came to organise the material in 5 newspapers, what was the criteria for each volume and how they work together?

MT - As research developed and images were produced it became clear that we wanted to focus on telling a series of stories that would communicate in text and images different aspect of a shared heritage. In addition we had from the outset discussed the idea of producing a newspaper in different sections with our designer Kummer and Herrman. The exact number of 5 stories only really became apparent through editing the visual material. A dummy was created in February 2015 with the assistance of my old mentor and good artist friend Finn Larsen. We spent a week organizing images into sections with subheadings such as The Atlantic World, Precious Galinthia, The Transoceanic Journey etc. After further editing in collaboration with Kummer & Herrman and considering design possibilities of a 64, 80 or 96 page newspaper we settled on five sections each comprising 16 pages to communicate a narrative. Gareth wrote the accompanying texts after the 5 narrative strands and images had been decided upon.

In terms of relationships between the 5 stories, we decided that story 1 would establish a historical and contextual account on how the name was transported across the Atlantic. However, it is not essential that story 2 should follow story 1 in the way you read or engage

with the publication. Each section/story contains its own 'beginning, middle and end' but as a whole all 5 sections/stories contribute to the overarching narrative (old) Jersey vs New Jersey, both celebrating and questioning a shared heritage and its geographical and binary opposition that these two entities represent; old vs new, east vs west, small vs large, local vs global, rural vs urban, tradition vs innovation, isolation vs population.

Atlantus is consumed as an ephemeral experience similar to a weekend broadsheet newspaper with a variety of sections that can be read in one sitting or stories and images that you can dip in and out of at different points.

pr - Gareth, in your essay you wonder about the underlying research question: "The 350th anniversary of the naming of New Jersey presented itself a research question: what visual evidence is there (in the Jersey's archive) of the link to the island's namesake in the USA?" What would you say is the evidence – visual and/or textual Atlantus gathers that produces new knowledge about the places under scrutiny?

GS - Well, new photographic archives of Jersey and New Jersey were produced in 2014-

2015. Those images selected for the Atlantus Newspaper have been described through production of extended captions and they have been sequenced to illustrate the five stories within the newspaper/exhibition. These images have of course been produced, described and interpreted under certain cultural and psychological precepts. However they do produce significant new visual and textual research of the historical and contemporary relationships between these lands. After the naming of New Jersey in 1664 (Old) Jersey's attachment to it as a colonial possession of Sir George Carteret effectively ceased in 1682 soon after his death.

The prefix New applied to place however of course implies the existence of the Old (place). Evidence of migration from Jersey to New Jersey since the seventeenth century remains sketchy and we wait until the nineteenth century to find a clear narrative around the export of Jersey Cows to the American State. In the story of Precious Galinthia, place, animal, industry, biography and memory collide and are given increased resonance through the chance of a shared name. Despite periodic severing and reconnection of ties over three centuries, each place has continued to be powerfully imagined on either side of the Atlantic Ocean which

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functions in Atlantis as a liminal space between these lands. Fifty years on from Precious Galinthia's Tercentenary trans-Atlantic voyage as Jersey's emblem Atlantis revives, once again, what has become a poetics of name and place.

pr - Martin, there is a point in the essay where Gareth identifies the archival failure: 'With the archive failing to supply images, Martin had to make his way to his own transoceanic journey and colonial history.' In what way is this archival failure / gap an inspiration for the project? And how did you turn it around to make this absence of evidence a productive chain of actions and events that culminated with this presentation of evidence in a photobook work?

MT - What fascinated me about this project was this possibility of exploring a historical moment through photography that would use the photo-archive as a starting point for re-discovering narratives about two places that share the same name. In the absence of significant archival material the possibilities were open for a more subjective interpretation. However, we decided very early on that in terms of geography we should focus our attention on the west coast of Jersey vs the east coast of New Jersey with the vast Atlantic ocean operating both as a physical and poetic space for cultural memory, imagining connections

and producing new photographs referencing oceanic communities. Early in our research we found the personal diary of Helen Le Masurier's 1964 visit to New Jersey with her husband Sir Robert Le Masurier, Bailiff of Jersey, as members of the tercentenary delegation that provided us with perhaps the most tangible story: Precious Galinthia, a Jersey heifer presented as a gift from the island of Jersey. On my roadtrip in New Jersey I also used her diary as a journey planner and retraced several places that she and her husband, the Bailiff had visited.

In terms of how I set about making the images different methodologies were adopted between photographing in Jersey and New Jersey. Mainly due to time constraints (deadlines) and support from the States of Jersey (commission) there were a number of different factors with this project that made me work in a slightly different way to my normal practice of immersing myself in a community for long periods. Jersey is in general a closed and conservative nation of people and aspects of its society or attitude towards outsiders are not inclusive. Photographing communities and people on the west coast required a particular approach that is more anthropological rather than journalistic, and from the beginning the work developed a more formal aesthetic rather than informal.

Though the journey was slightly pre-mediated, in the sense that there was a meta-narrative (350 NJ), and a

route already mapped out from the west coast to the east coast, the idea at the outset was that the project would be composed of pictures loosely documenting the discovery of a transatlantic heritage. A journey of discovery, escape and loss mapped through a series of interconnected vignettes where the endeavour would find its cohesion from one picture to another. The photographs are not providing answers to how two places share a name, but rather ask questions about transatlantic identities, cultures and heritage.

Subject-matter on the west coast of Jersey would range from natural topography, social landscapes, farmland and fisheries, ocean views and bays, coastal plains and sea defence systems, (incl. WWII bunkers), leisure and tourism, sport and recreation, religion and faith, village and parish life, housing and vernacular architecture, home and interiors, family archives and personal objects, environmental portraits and candid observations, locals and foreign workers. In New Jersey the subject-matter would change slightly due to its different scale and geography and include petro-chemical industry and commercial retail outlets, open road and countryside, towns and cities, mountains and sea inlets, shore communities and mass tourism, seaside and boardwalks, social class and ethnic diversity.

Research also influenced greatly what and whom I photographed. In Jersey, research in this context was not only using the photo-archive as a starting point in

terms of learning and developing an understanding of the transatlantic heritage, or seeking out specific locations and people to photograph, but interviewing local historians, talking to people in the community, reading the local newspaper and follow the parish cultural calendar. With particular industries, such as farming, photographs were made as the season changed during its natural growing cycle. I also revisited particular sites over a period of time for further study and observation such as St Ouen's Manor; Chateau Plaisir; Farmer's Inn, the Parish Hall, Church communities and so on.

The de Carteret family is historically linked to the west coast with its ancestral home of St Ouen's Manor located in the parish and this area is very much part of the folklore and myth surrounding this extraordinary family and its legacy. The parish of St Ouen is also perceived as being the islands' most traditional in terms of lifestyles such as farming and fishing and it is a community known for its fierce independence. Unless you live in the parish and are active within the community very few get to see beneath that veneer of sun, sand and sea. I was interested in looking more closely at what type of people live out west, what they do at work, leisure and at home including community events and other local traditions.

It seems most people who are born on the west coast stay out west and never want to live anywhere

else. This sense of belonging to a place and strong connection to the land, sea and the different communities it foster fascinated me a great deal. Jersey has its own class system of certain families whose genealogy and heritage dates back several centuries. With time these families become small enclaves who have acquired wealth and assets and are living in a specific area and own a certain amount of land, property and industry. This constitutes a kind of feudal system, which in the past is how this island was governed.

There is a certain romanticism about St Ouen Bay too, not only the physical landscape of nature reserves, sand dunes, wild seas, WW II coastal defences, rocky headlands and fields of potatoes, but for many it is a romantic place where locals and visitors alike gather at the water's edge to watch the sunset setting in the horizon across the Atlantic Ocean. Within my work I wanted to reflect upon this cultural heritage but avoid the clichés. The challenge was not to photograph the obvious but still look for something that would represent the uniqueness of a landscape and the people who call the west coast of Jersey their home.

The methodology of photographing stateside was different due to the constant transience of being on the road and moving through landscapes, towns and communities. Certain places along the road had been earmarked prior to travel due to particular significance

as part of our research into the wider narrative, for example places such as Elizabeth (the first settlement), county of Carteret (named after Sir George Carteret), Asbury Park (images in the Photo-Archive) and Hunterdon County (Spann family and Precious Galinthia). Other areas along the route were discovered by chance and where I felt a certain connection or where I felt that there was work to be done. In some places, I would stay for a few days, spending more time getting to know the area and its people living there.

Before I began this work I had to some extent pre-visualised the way it should look and feel. I wanted the project to be expansive, showing the identity, geography and history of both places through a combination of portraits, interiors and landscapes. The way I constructed my photographs was with precise composition and framing of subjects, working slowly and systematically, similarly to using a large-format camera (using a combination of 5x4 and 6x12 format contribute to a particular way of looking.) My approach is to remain open to serendipity and improvisation when seeking out subjects and let the project develop its own pace and aesthetic. The work that ensued began as a kind of ambitious stream-of-consciousness scavenger hunt for clues that could connect both places together. It attempts to look at the otherworldliness of unique ocean communities on both sides of the Atlantic, the blurring of the simple documentary into a kind of invented fictional.

pr - Gareth, in your text you write: “ The New Jersey phase of Atlantus embraces the idea of an American road trip as a mode of practice,” with the evoking of photobook publishers such as Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Alec Soth and ‘ the gaze of the road-tripper.’ With this mention of American photobooks, is your intention to inscribe Atlantus within a tradition of documentary photobook publishing? What do you see as a commonality to these road-tripper photobooks that is also apparent in Atlantus? Do you see your writing as collaboration with Martin, in a photo-text genealogy such as Walker Evans & James Agee 1941 ‘Let us Now Praise Famous Men’?

GS - One reason for referencing the history and tradition of photographing the American Road Trip is to consciously acknowledge the fallibility of the road-tripper’s gaze and to recognize the conflation of two bodies of work produced via distinct modes of practice: firstly images of Jersey made over two years by an islander and, secondly, images made intensively, every day for a period of two months on a summer road trip. Atlantus is a process of making images and texts conceived simultaneously through artistic discourse and collaboration. It is part of a continuum of visual

research projects between Martin Toft and Gareth Syvret.

pr - Martin, in our first conversation about Atlantus, you told me: with the money we spent in this project we could have printed a hardcover book. Do you feel there is a prejudice against newspaper as if it is a lowbrow form of publishing and if there is a hierarchy of publishing, with the newspaper format as the lowbrow and the hardcover as the highbrow? Tell us in what way your choice of printing format (newspaper) has to do with the way you want to tell your story and/ or reach your public? In the A4 insert provided with the newspapers set, you invite the reader to use two newspaper sets to create their own exhibition; to do that one needs to pull apart the sequence and in a way de-structure the story. Does this come from the same impulse to democratise the consumption of photo publishing? To move the reader to transform the sequence, and let it take another form?

MT - The funding for Atlantus came about as a result of lobbying the Treasury Minister of Jersey who at the time was keen to build new relations with the State of New Jersey in 2014 celebrating the 350th anniversary. Prior to a





meeting at the Treasury we had learned that the two states were planning to have pop-up stalls promoting local produce in towns and communities across New Jersey and to fit in with this concept we proposed to produce a newspaper that also could function as a pop-up exhibition to be distributed alongside. The funding would not have happened without the dual functioning newspaper/ exhibition publication. In fact halfway through the production I suggested we should change our original plans and make a hardcover book, but there was no support for this.

At that time my concern was that the novelty of a newspaper as photobook was exhausted but in hindsight I think that we would not have had the same success with Atlantus had we chosen a more traditional form of a hardcover printing/binding unit. Examining this year's photo book festivals and awards the majority of photobooks made still favor the hardback model but there is also a lot of experimentation with newsprint both folded, bound and with a cover. For example, in Arles this year I collected at least 8 newspapers and at Cosmos Books we handed out 100 free copies of Atlantus. Prejudice against newspaper is mostly from commercial publishers who do not see it as a viable economical model. Within self-publishing

or independent publishers you will find a lot more risk and experimentation with the book form – often using newspaper as a way of bringing attention to a long-form project that will lead to producing a hard cover book at a later stage. Originally we wanted to use Atlantus newspaper as a cheap and easy way to bring attention to our project and the Archisle programme, and as such it has been very successful. Our second phase of our long-term island project is Masterplan (masterplan.je) about Jersey's offshore finance industry where we are planning to make five annual thematic photobooks, each edition forming a set at the conclusion of the project (2016-2020)

We had also studied the success of the Sochi Project in great detail and their DIY concepts of self-publishing, crowdfunding and taking full control of production from page to wall, from design to distribution. In fact, I wrote an email to Rob Hornstra in the early stages of our production. His advise was to work with a good designer and from the beginning we had our minds on approaching Kummer and Herrman who was the design partner behind the Sochi project in collaboration with Hornstra/ van Bruggen.

It is not inconceivable that images from Atlantus that have not been published in the newspaper

may end up in one of those 5 publications. Or, that a re-designed/ re-conceptualised hardcover photobook of Atlantus may appear at some point in the future. Funding will determine limitations on creative possibilities.

The concept of producing a newspaper, which in popular culture is a mass produced print object consumed daily by a broad demographic was a conscious decision to reach out to different audiences beyond the photobook bubble. The newspaper/ pop-up exhibition has appeared in a variety of different places and contexts from a local parish fête, mobile street gallery, outdoor night projection, hoarding on a building site, secondary school, 432 libraries statewide, New Jersey State Building to Unseen Photo, Paris Photo, various photobook festivals/ fairs/ galleries, including recently in Arles.

The multi-functionality of the publication with a choice of reading it as a newspaper or, with two copies, pull it apart and create your own wall exhibition following instructions (enclosed) or not was conceived as a way of opening up possibilities for people with different intentions to engage with the story of Jersey- New Jersey. From a design perspective it was a difficult challenge to make it work in both ways in terms of layout, sequencing and correlation between

image and text. It was here that the experience and expertise of Kummer and Herrman came to the fore and it is fair to say that it would not have worked without their creative solution to design problems. In the enclosed instructions we encourage people to engage with the publication and create an exhibition that can take different forms depending on wall dimensions.

Here the 5 stories/sections also provide versatility in putting together a display. In reality very few people who purchased copies of Atlantus did actually create a pop-up display although we had created a unique Facebook page where images of DIY exhibitions could be posted and shared. In the instructions we even included a QR code for easy upload and #atlantus for twitter. We are very happy for people to de-construct the Atlantus newspaper to re-construct a new narrative sequence. The newspaper design also provide other creative options to display the photographs in different sizes, for example the publication has two large (A2) size images that are spread across 8 pages. In a traditional hardcover book this would not be possible.

pr - Martin, you present yourself as photobook collector. Do you want to talk

about how this collecting shapes your work as a photographer and photobook author?

MT - The photobook as object, as language, as self-expression is embedded deeply within my practice. As a photographer I am autodidact. My education in photography was heavily shaped by meeting photographer and artist Finn Larsen in 1995. He was, and still is a serious photobook collector and photobook maker (actually he has also produced 3 newspapers). I would visit him once a week and he would bring out a big box and throw in photobooks and tell me to go home and study them. A week later I would bring them back and discuss with Finn what I had seen and learned. As the years progressed our conversation would involve fierce debates around history/theory of photography/ art, economics/politics, anthropology/ philosophy etc. This approach to understanding photography and how it operates in visual culture in general – in particular its capacity for storytelling shaped the way my practice developed as an image-maker. It also inspired me to begin my own collection of photobooks.

Collecting photobooks is a very serious, and obsessive business. But, it is a activity that you constantly learn from in terms of understanding photography and its possibility for storytelling

such as form, subject-matter, how images work, narrative structures, sequencing, use of archival/ found material and presentation (printing and binding). Ideas and concepts for projects and new photobook flows from this elixir of visceral experience of turning a page that raises more questions than answers.

As a teacher of photography I use the photobook as a primary resource in showing students these possibilities too in the hope that it may inspire them to challenge themselves in their own development as future image-makers.

Martin Toft is a photographer and educator who works on commissions and long-term independent projects. He was born in Aarhus, Denmark in 1970. He completed his MA in Fine Art at University of Portsmouth in 2000 and currently lives and works in Jersey, Channel Islands. Toft combines documentary and fine art practice to explore social, anthropological and cultural themes, often immersing himself in communities for months or years in order to understand the language, traditions and heritage of his subjects.

Gareth Syvret is Photographic Archivist at the Société Jersiaise, St Helier, Jersey and Project Leader for Archisle: The Jersey Contemporary Photography Programme. He researches photographic history in island cultures and curates photography exhibitions that connect contemporary practice with photographic archives.

Atlantus
A Transoceanic Journey
Photographs: Martin Toft

Text: Gareth Syvret

Multi-functional newspaper & DIY
exhibition

Self-published in collaboration with
Archisle: The Jersey Contemporary
Photography Programme

Design by Kummer & Herrman

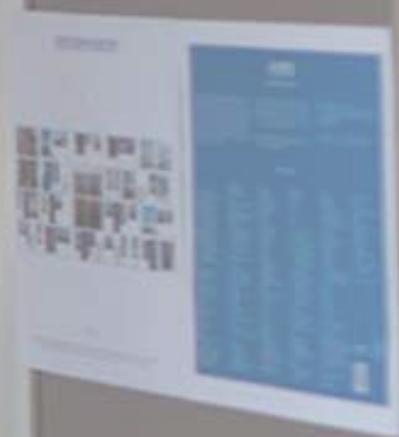
80 pages
56 colour and 5 monochrome ill.
5 stories

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designed by paula roush

ə/uh/-books
a project space for material publishing
is a year-long programme exploring paper-
based photobook publishing as photographic
research

curated by: paula roush
photographer, publisher (msdm
publications) and lecturer (photobook
publishing)
at the
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ə-books is located in two galleries: recto & verso
recto gallery: free access via Borough Rd
verso gallery: request access in the reception (it is in Kell street)
open: monday through friday 9am–9pm

e:roushp@lsbu.ac.uk w:uh-books.tumblr.com

v e r s o