

SPOTLIGHT: FESTIVAL

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As It Was Give(n) to Me

written by **Sarah Roberts**

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West Columbia, West Virginia 2013, from the series Appalachia © Stacy Kranitz

Stacy Kranitz reflects on the legacy of representations of poverty in one of the poorest areas of the US

Stacy Kranitz has spent the last ten years photographing Appalachia, US, an area devastated by the coal industry, which took valuable resources from the

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land and left its inhabitants impoverished. By the 1960s, the War on Poverty was declared by the US government, and Appalachia was its poster child. “The region has this history of photographers coming in and dramatising the poverty,” explains Kranitz, “photography has created this open wound in the area”.

The publicity afforded to the area and the image it perpetuated became what Kranitz describes as ‘poverty porn’, and its effects have continued to haunt the Appalachian people. “Documentary photography is a slippery slope,” says Kranitz. “You go from doing good to perpetuating stereotypes and dramatising or fetishising the problems.”



From the series Appalachia © Stacy Kranitz

During her time shooting *As It Was Give(n) to Me*, Kranitz has become aware of her role as a photographer working along this slope. “One of the things I tussled with was subjectivity and objectivity,” she explains. “There were times when it felt more honest to reveal myself as a person with a fantasy of Appalachia, because my idea of the region had also been based on these past representations.” She has endeavoured to negotiate this by dividing the work into sections, which acknowledge Appalachia’s colonial past. In this way, Kranitz recognises that history itself is subjective. “In every culture we have histories that are repressed and buried,” she says. “The one we know is not often the real history.”

Over the last ten years, the photographer’s perception of Appalachia and her photographic approach to the area has metamorphosed. “I have a much deeper awareness of the limitations of photography and the failure of the documentary tradition,” she reflects. While making the work, Kranitz has increasingly begun to see herself as part of a legacy of photographers utilising a medium that has contributed to a problem. “How can the photographer represent a region where the medium has failed the people?” she laments.





Sunshine and Sophia. Hot Springs, North Carolina 2019, from the series Appalachia © Stacy Kranitz

Finding no solution, Kranitz now perceives her work as a reflection and examination of the legacy of representations of poverty. “I don’t pretend to solve the problem of ‘poverty porn’ with a specific strategy,” she explains. “Instead, I make work that acknowledges the failure of representation to ever be able to communicate the other.”

Kranitz now lives in Appalachia and creates images from her perspective as a participant-observer, immersing herself in the lives of the individuals depicted. She knows them intimately: doing drugs, partying together, becoming friends, and even lending them her camera. The photographs themselves, of which there are over 200, are peppered with many aspects of life in Appalachia, from the region’s rolling hills and smoky mountains, to Native American tourism and rural family life, but they also lend themselves to the poverty, drug and alcohol abuse that is prevalent in the region. This speaks of the limitations of photography; while the photographs reflect on the beauty of the place and the banality of everyday life, the shocking and confrontational images take over.

As It Was Give(n) to Me is shortlisted for the Louis Roederer Discovery Award 2019, and is on display at Ground Control throughout Les Rencontres d’Arles 2019.

stacykranitz.com



From the series Appalachia © Stacy Kranitz



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From the series Appalachia © Stacy Kranitz



Gatlinburg, Tennessee 2015, from the series Appalachia © Stacy Kranitz



From the series Appalachia © Stacy Kranitz



Stacy as Christy 2012, from the series Appalachia © Stacy Kranitz



From the series Appalachia © Stacy Kranitz



Pressed flower 2015,
from the series Ap-
palachia © Stacy
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