



Guide to the Debi Cornwall Photographs, 2014-2016

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Summary

Collection Title:

Debi Cornwall photographs, 2014-2016

Source:

Archive of Documentary Arts (Duke University)

Abstract:

Collection contains 28 color prints from Debi Cornwall's project "Gitmo at Home, Gitmo at Play/Beyond Gitmo." The project pairs images from two series. The first, "Gitmo at Home, Gitmo at Play" was made during three visits to the base in 2014-2015. The series "Beyond Gitmo" consists of environmental portraits of 10 men once held at Gitmo who have since been cleared of charges and freed.

Extent:

1.0 Linear Feet

Language:

Materials in English

Collection ID:

RL.11259

Permalink:

<https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/m1zw32>

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Debi Cornwall Photographs, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

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Background

Scope and Content

Debi Cornwall's project "Gitmo at Home, Gitmo at Play/Beyond Gitmo" is the winner of the 2016 Archive of Documentary Arts Award for Women Documentarians. The ADA Collection Awards were established to diversify the ADA's collection in order to better reflect the multitude of viewpoints and communities from which work is being made in the documentary arts today.

Cornwall included the following abstract about her work:

My work on Guantánamo Bay, Cuba employs a new documentary language to invite a fresh look at an inaccessible American subject, as the 15th anniversary of September 11 approaches. Military authorities limit media access to the U.S. Naval Station at "Gitmo," and strictly regulate what may be photographed. This is a place where nobody has chosen to live, and where photographs of faces are prohibited. This project, in turning away from the expected imagery and instead exploring residential and leisure spaces of both detainees and those who guard them, offers a unique perspective daily life for both groups, as well as evolving notions of "American-ness."

For this submission, I pair images from the series, *Gitmo at Home*, *Gitmo at Play*, made during three visits to the base in 2014-15, with environmental portraits of 10 men once held at Gitmo, after they have been cleared and freed, from the series, *Beyond Gitmo*. Over the last year, I photographed released men in 9 countries (from Albania to Qatar), some having returned home, and others displaced to third countries where they do not speak the language. With each man, I collaborated to create photographs reflecting his experience of indefinite detention, displacement and disorientation. Each image replicates, in the free world, the military's "no faces" rule: their bodies may be free, but the trauma remains figuratively and literally embodied. Guantánamo Bay will always mark them.

My visual work is deeply informed by my 12 years working as a civil rights lawyer on behalf of innocent exonerees in the United States. As in my prior casework, this series seeks to unpack what is, essentially, invisible, in both the systemic - the peculiar institutions we have established in the wake of 9/11 - and the very personal impact those institutions have on individuals. My emphasis is dislocation. The released men I photographed have experienced years if not decades of trauma, and are having various levels of success as they struggle to rebuild their lives. From my past work as an advocate representing those cleared and freed from United States prisons, I know that the thrill of being photographed upon release too often leads to confusion and resentment when the attention fades. Thus, rather than seeking access to their most intimate moments as in classic documentary, I honor their boundaries. Now they have the agency to choose. Instead, my conceptual frame-replicating *Gitmo's* "no faces" rule, and collaborating with each released man to select meaningful locations-speaks to the emotional experience differently. At the same time, my visual strategy emphasizes the larger truth that even in freedom these men remain stigmatized, fundamentally disconnected from their social environments. By employing this distinct visual language (carried through from Guantánamo into its diaspora), my goal is to engage viewers in a manner that disrupts the typical subject/object power dynamic of documentary between those who look and those who are seen. My goal is to engender a visceral experience of the profound disorientation of Guantánamo's alumni, one that may enable viewers

to identify with, rather than distancing themselves from or merely empathizing with, these men.

Biographical/Historical

Debi Cornwall is a conceptual documentary photographer who returned to visual expression in 2014 after a 12-year career as a civil rights lawyer. She trained in photography at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) while completing a Bachelor's degree in Modern Culture and Media at Brown University. She attended Harvard Law School and practiced for more than a decade as a lawyer representing the wrongly convicted in civil suits seeking to effect systemic change in law enforcement practices.

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Arrangement

Photographs are boxed in folders. Arrangement provided by creator.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Use Restrictions

The copyright interests in this collection have not been transferred to Duke University. For more information, consult the copyright section of

the Regulations and Procedures of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

Acquisition Information

The Debi Cornwall Photographs were received by the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library as a purchase in 2016.

Processing Information

Processed by Katrina Martin, July 2016.

Accessions described in this collection guide: 2016-0164

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Names and Subjects

- Documentary Photography
- Guantanamo Bay Naval Base (Cuba)
- Archive of Documentary Arts (Duke University)

Collection Inventory

Gitmo at Home, Gitmo at Play/Beyond Gitmo, 2014-2016

Physical Description: 28 prints

Scope and Contents

28 color prints, sized 13"x19", from scans of medium-format negatives and from digital images. Printed on Hahnemühle Silk Baryta paper with Epson Ultrachrome ink. Titles and captions provided by Cornwall.

Prayer Rug with Arrow to Mecca, Camp Echo,
2015

Box 1 > Folder 1

Hussein, Yemeni, at Midday Prayer (Slovakia),
2015

Box 1 > Folder 1

Scope and Contents

Held: 12 years, 6 months, 11 days Cleared: January 12, 2009 Released:
November 20, 2014 Charges: never filed

Recreation Pen, Camp Echo, 2015 Box 1 > Folder 1

Murat, Turkish German Refugee Counselor
(Germany), 2015 Box 1 > Folder 1

Scope and Contents

Held: 4 years, 7 months, 22 days Released: August 24, 2006 Charges: never
filed

Liberty Center Band Room, 2015 Box 1 > Folder 1

Anonymous, Chinese Uighur (Albania), 2015 Box 1 > Folder 1

Scope and Contents

Held: 4 years, 7 months Released: May 5, 2006 Charges: never filed

Kiddie Pool, 2015 Box 1 > Folder 1

Sami, Sudanese Cameraman (Qatar), 2015 Box 1 > Folder 2

Scope and Contents

Held: 5 years, 4 months, 16 days Released: April 30, 2008 Charges: never
filed

Marble Head Lanes, 2015 Box 1 > Folder 2

Detainee Hospital Room, 2014 Box 1 > Folder 2

Mourad, French Algerian Muslim Youth
Counselor (France), 2015 Box 1 > Folder 2

Scope and Contents

Held: 2 years, 8 months, 1 day Transferred: July 26, 2005 Charges: never
filed in the U.S. French conviction overturned on appeal

Seaside Galley, 2014 Box 1 > Folder 2

Windmills, Barracks, 2014 Box 1 > Folder 2

Djamel, Berber (Algeria), 2015 Box 1 > Folder 2

Scope and Contents

Held: 11 years, 11 months, 18 days Cleared: October 9, 2008 & May 8, 2009
Released: December 5, 2013 Charges: never filed in U.S. Acquitted at trial in
Algeria

Comfort Items, Camp 5, 2015 Box 1 > Folder 3

Hamza, Tunisian (Slovakia), 2015 Box 1 > Folder 3

Scope and Contents

Held: 12 years, 11 months, 19 days Cleared: June 12, 2009 Released:
November 20, 2014 Charges: never filed

Lateral Hazards Driving Range, 2015 Box 1 > Folder 3

Sami with Satellites (Qatar), 2015 Box 1 > Folder 3

Tiki Bar, 2014 Box 1 > Folder 3

Moazzam, Pakistani British Activist (U.K.), 2016 Box 1 > Folder 3

Scope and Contents

Held: 2 years, 11 months, 24 days Released: January 25, 2005 Charges: never
filed

Camp X-Ray, 2014 Box 1 > Folder 3

Hussein at the National Museum (Slovakia),
2015 Box 1 > Folder 4

Cell, Camp 6, 2015 Box 1 > Folder 4

Mamdouh, Egyptian Australian (Egypt), 2015 Box 1 > Folder 4

Scope and Contents

Held: 2 years, 9 months, 1 day Released: January 27, 2005 Charges: never
filed

Compliant Detainee Media Room, Camp 5, 2015 Box 1 > Folder 4

Rustam, Uzbek (Ireland), 2016 Box 1 > Folder 4

Scope and Contents

Held: 7 years, 8 months, 7 days Released: September 27, 2009 Charges:
never filed

Barracks Mops, 2014

Box 1 > Folder 4

Smoke Break, Camp America, 2014

Box 1 > Folder 4

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