

06/2020

John Cohen

Do Not Disturb My Waking Dream

Main description

One cold sunny morning in December 2018, Gerhard Steidl drove from New York City to see John Cohen at his rambling home in upstate Putnam Valley. The purpose of the visit was to pick up originals to be scanned for Cohen's *Look up to the Moon*, his book of photos from Morocco in 1955 and published by Steidl in 2019. But in the organized chaos of Cohen's barn-cum-studio they stumbled across another group of prints from across his 60-year career: "I didn't know what to do with them," he recalls, "They weren't a book or an exhibit, or for sale. They were not of one subject." To Cohen's surprise and delight, Steidl took the boxes under his arm, and the photos now appear for the first time here in *Do Not Disturb My Waking Dream*, Cohen's most lyrical and personal book, as well as his last.

Sequenced wholly by mood and intuition and eschewing titles and dates, the portraits, landscape and still lifes, along with some of Cohen's drawings, unify disparate subjects—his wife Penny, Roscoe Holcomb, fragments of the Parthenon, renovations to Cohen's farmhouse in the mid-sixties—into a dreamlike flow. Cohen's confessional text, recalling his intense intertwining dreams across decades, explores the line between dream and reality, and between memory and book.

Biography

Born in 1932 in New York, John Cohen (1932–2019) was a photographer, filmmaker and founding member of the New Lost City Ramblers. A masters graduate from Yale University, Cohen participated in the artistic circles of late 1950s and early '60s New York, and photographed Robert Frank's film *Pull My Daisy* (1959). He made numerous books and films, and produced recordings of traditional American musicians including Dillard Chandler and Roscoe Holcomb. The Library of Congress acquired his archive in 2011. Cohen's books with Steidl include *Past Present Peru* (2010), *The High and Lonesome Sound* (2012), *Here and Gone* (2014), *Cheap rents ... and de Kooning* (2016) and *Look up to the Moon* (2019).

Bibliography

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English

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