

04/2021

## **Michael von Graffenried**

### ***Our Town***

#### **Main description**

*Our Town* is Michael von Graffenried's photographic portrait of New Bern, a small city in North Carolina with a population of 30,000, conspicuously composed of 55% white and 33% black citizens. It was here in 1710 that Christoph von Graffenried of Bern, Switzerland, first began building houses at the confluence of the Neuse and Trent rivers; the fledgling town took on the name of his home city. Taken over a period of 15 years, Michael von Graffenried's photos are neither overly formal compositions nor fleeting snapshots, but patient images of everyday life showing understanding and no judgment of his subjects: a black church congregation, young white girls at rifle practice; black men exchanging cash on the street, a white couple displaying their collection of firearms with the trophy of the hunt—a great stuffed bear—looking on; a black female stripper performing for a white man.

In June 2020, following the killing of George Floyd, the largest demonstration New Bern had ever seen took place, parallel to many Black Lives Matter protests throughout the country and marking the first time the issue of black-white race relations had been thus proclaimed in the city. Von Graffenried's *Our Town* is a both a proud document of a community and an empathetic call for increased integration and understanding at a decisive moment in American history.

---

#### **Biography**

Born in Bern in 1957, Michael von Graffenried, the founder and manager of the Swiss Press Award, began his career as an international photojournalist in 1978, and today concentrates on long-term projects in multiple media including billboards and film. His documentary film *War without Images*, produced with Mohammed Soudani, first screened at the Locarno Film Festival in 2002. Von Graffenried has exhibited widely and his photographs are held in many permanent collections. His awards include a World Press Photo Award (1989), Chevalier des Arts et Lettres in the French Legion d'Honneur (2006) and the Dr. Erich Salomon Prize from the German Society of Photography (2010)—the third Swiss to obtain the award after René Burri and Robert Frank. Steidl published von Graffenried's *Bierfest* (2014) in 2014.

## **Bibliography**

Michael von Graffenried

*Our Town*

English

Book design: Michael von Graffenried, Holger Feroudj / Steidl Design

240 pages

120 photographs

30.5 x 24 cm

Clothbound hardcover with dust jacket

€ 45.00

ISBN 78-3-95829-883-5