

Debi Cornwall: Welcome to Camp America, Inside Guantánamo Bay Exhibition

“a subtly layered study of an important chapter in American history. Intermingling investigative reporting with fine art aesthetics, her images constantly walk a knife-edge of interpretation, each a test of vantage point and state of mind, and it is this openness that makes the exhibit so thought-provoking and compelling.”

—Collector Daily (November 30, 2017)

January 11, 2021 will mark the 19th anniversary of the opening of the first “War on Terror” prison at the U.S. Naval Station in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. This exhibition, by conceptual documentary artist and former civil rights lawyer Debi Cornwall, plumbs the familiar in this state of exception, marrying empathy and dark humor with systemic critique. The U.S. exhibition debuted at the Steven Kasher Gallery (NYC); received the Charles Jing Fellowship, a juried exhibition prize, at the 2018 Fotofest Biennial; went on to the Philadelphia Photo Arts Center; and is crated for shipping. The European show tours next to the Stadthaus Ulm (Germany, 2020-21) and Musée de la Photographie Charleroi (Belgium, 2021).



This exhibition, with 31 prints (framed & crated, 150 linear feet), investigates the human experience of “Gitmo” for both prisoners and guards, through their residential and leisure spaces (*Gitmo at Home*, *Gitmo at Play* series), and gift-shop souvenirs (*Gitmo on Sale* series). In the 19 years since its prisons opened, Gitmo has housed 780 “detainees.” The vast majority has been cleared and released, returning home or transferred to third countries. In the *Beyond Gitmo* series, Cornwall collaborates with 14 former prisoners in nine countries, from Albania to Qatar, plus a former guard, to make environmental portraits as though they were still held at Gitmo, subject to the military’s “no faces” rule.

Programming: This exhibition addresses universal questions about justice, rights, security and humanity in the post-9/11 era.

Community programming may be planned in collaboration with the artist, who draws on her background as a civil rights lawyer and trained mediator to engage local audiences, alongside her network of experts with personal experience on both sides of the wire.



“Her implied criticisms are measured, mixing the biting use of understated visual satire with a more sympathetic view of the plight of the detainees. While we never witness the horrors of torture that have become synonymous with the name Guantánamo Bay, the space in Cornwall’s photographs allows the viewer to extrapolate from the available evidence and to draw their own conclusions about the implications. By choosing a more considered approach, she’s allowed us to find our own way to certain nuanced truths and contradictions, offering us a line of thinking to follow that encourages active engagement and reconsideration.”

—Collector Daily (November 30, 2017)



Also available for display:

- * The rare, acclaimed book, Welcome to Camp America: Inside Guantánamo Bay (Radius, 2017);
- * a 5-minute sound installation in collaboration with investigative poet Frank Smith;
- * a 4-minute video of Gitmo’s Windmill Beach;
- * actual gift-shop souvenirs; and
- * archival material including vintage postcards and once-classified government files



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