



Village explores a complex web of language politics of Canada and the very format of a photobook. The project was conceived during a three-month stay in a residency in Quebec, when photographers Klara Källström and Thobias Fäldt were repeatedly confronted with Canadian language politics.

No tongue is truly neutral. Words we choose to express ourselves have meaning besides the obvious definition of sentences constructed. “Motherland” or “patrie” may expound a markedly different connotation. Language is both means for communication and a platform for politics in Canada. Especially in Quebec, where despite its memorable motto – “*je me souviens*” (“I remember”) – exists a sadly forgotten layer of linguistic history. It is the remnants of languages of the once-proud indigenous inhabitants, who, despite losing to the process of colonization, left a strong, if hardly visible, cultural mark in the geographical names of the region.

Village

Photographs by Klara Källström & Thobias Fäldt

Design by 1:2:3

Texts by Alexis Desgagnés,

Richard Desjardins and Natasha Kanapé Fontaine

Edited by KK+TF

256 pages with 121 color plates

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Källström and Fäldt undertook this exploration with rigour and touch of lightness that borders on poetry. The former is manifested in a traditionalist photobook agenda and a strict set of rules followed in the process of making pictures. Photographs taken at various sites were “pinned” geographically with a help of mobile devices. The native names of these sites were later unearthed with a help from institution VU in Quebec. These names were then translated into English and French and used as photographs’ captions. This presents a backbone and structure of the book. Yet, lightness is prevalent and humour abounds. A place may be called “A gathering place” in indigenous Mikmaq, but when there is a supermarket there now, as stoically noted by the photographers’ camera, one is left with a sense that History, perhaps, has a profoundly delicate sense of humour. Alongside local exotica, the well-known visual signifiers of Canada mark the book. The flag, ice-hockey, food. The Swedish duo has cloaked themselves with a position of strangers in the land, presenting a visual index of their journey.

In its core *Village* is a document of certain time and place, thus by extension a project of documentary photography, but one with concept and attitude. Layers of politics, history and culture are revealed to a curious viewer (who should approach this book as a journey of her own), as she gets deeper into the narrative presented in the book’s pages. Sensitive irony and lightness of touch is succeeded by a politically charged attention to language, while the history of photography and duo’s own inspiration is suddenly made clear as one flips through the pages. One in particular is worth mentioning. A Swiss in America – mirrored by the relationship of photographers own foreignness in Canada – Robert Frank undertook a journey subjectively documenting the country. It resulted in a highly-influential *The Americans* (1958), which is now considered a classic example of photography book. Källström and Fäldt employ Frank’s poetic licence to document Canadian culture and people. *Village*’s uncompromised print quality, dust jacket and cloth cover are all signifiers of the photobook and suggests a sense of the medium’s history at play. Källström and Fäldt even take a step further. It is done through a conceptual use of the tool that is concomitant with the very idea of photography book – a caption. Captions traditionally pin down images, geographically and historically.

To caption something is akin to making an utterance – staking a claim of a link between a photograph and a certain place which spawned it. This indexical connection is of paramount importance for the history of photography theory. It is significantly different – say the photographers – to lay a photograph’s claim to Canada or Kanata, latter being the aboriginal name for “village” from which the country now hails its name. By staking claim with their photographs to the indigenous names of lands, the photographers both reflect the problematic language politics in Canada today and highlight the sense of history, by which certain languages get to be forgotten and overtaken by others. The dissonance between what the caption says in *Village*, and what the photo elicits is quite striking and presents the very politics of captioning itself.

This double adventure, into a territory of a foreign land and the history of photobook, is something that probably could not be defined as glamorous within the market of today’s art photography. Shying away from the more fashionable themes, such as materiality or distributive-potential of a networked image, Källström and Fäldt root their practice in a contemporary reading of the historical construct of documentary photography, especially the belief that deeper truths can be revealed by a camera of a sensitive spectator. Photographers succeed in as much as viewers are attentive to details, multiple suggestions to uncover various layers of the book. As every true explorer, the photographers ask meaningful questions rather than offer ready-made answers. By doing this, they remind us that powerful questions can be asked in any language, even if it’s a tongue of a curious kind of documentary photography. Between the politics of language and acuteness of vision, *Village* presents a narrative of a photographic exploration, suggesting layers of conflicting meanings on its apparently two-dimensional surface.

Paul Paper, 2015

Village has been granted distribution support from the Swedish Arts Council which has made it available at all Swedish Public Libraries. It was nominated at the Swedish Photobook Award 2015 and at the Photobook Award at Les Rencontres d’Arles in France 2015.