



PHOTO
ELYSEE
DEBI
CORNWALL

MODEL CITIZENS
30.06 - 01.10.2023

WINNER OF THE PRIX ELYSÉE 2023 DEBI CORNWALL

Debi Cornwall (US, 1973) is the 2023 winner. Her project *Model Citizens* was chosen by the international Jury that met in March 2023 at Photo Elysée:

“The work is in line with current events and is an important contribution that is timely, given the effect of fake news in our societies. Through her research, the artist questions the blurred line between truth and fiction. The project, which is both a political and intellectual commitment, points to the urgency and necessity of questioning photography as a proof. The impact of fake news is not limited to the United States – the artist is telling a local story that talks about global issues. We are convinced that with the Prix Elysée, Debi Cornwall will reach a new and wider audience and that the prize will help increase her visibility in Europe.”

**La giuria internazionale su
Model Citizens.**

The jury was composed of:

- Chiara Bardelli Nonino, independent curator and visual editor, Milan
- Lewis Chaplin, co-founder of Loose Joints Publishing, Marseille-London
- Felix Hofmann, artistic director of FOTO ARSENAL, Vienna
- Fiona Rogers, Parasol Foundation curator of Women in Photography at Victoria & Albert Museum, London
- Christoph Wiesner, director of Les Rencontres de la photographie, Arles
- Michel Parmigiani, founder of Parmigiani Fleurier, Fleurier
- Nathalie Herschdorfer, director of Photo Elysée and president of the international jury

The present exhibition offers an insight into her work in progress, which will be finalized over the next year.

PRIX ELYSÉE. INTERNATIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY PRIZE

The Prix Elysée is one of the most prestigious photography prizes with an endowment of CHF 80,000. It is awarded every two years following an international call for entries, without theme or age limit, and is dedicated to mid-career photographers. The Prix Elysée makes it possible to finance an ambitious and unpublished project, and to publish it in book form.

After a first step, which consists of nominating eight artists who each receive a sum of CHF 5,000 to start a new project, an international jury meets in Lausanne to choose the winner of the Prix Elysée among the eight nominated projects. The winner then has one year to finalize her or his project and publish it.

Offering support and financial means to photographers is as important as preserving their art for future generations. It is in a shared commitment to foster creativity and support the production of new work that Photo Elysée and Parmigiani Fleurier have been founding partners of the Prix Elysée since 2014.

CASUALTY.
WWII Triage Diorama.

Camp Roberts Historical Museum
Camp Roberts, California (2018)

TRACKING SCENARIO 3.
A Border Patrol Academy trainee directs a hired roleplayer during a scenario to track, apprehend, and process “aliens” who have illegally crossed the U.S. border.

U.S. Border Patrol Academy
Artesia, New Mexico (2023)

FLAGRAISING.

“Save America” Rally
Miami, Florida (2022)

MOCK BORDER WALL 1.
A mock border wall rises 200 miles from the U.S.-Mexico border.

U.S. Border Patrol Academy
Artesia, New Mexico (2022)

NUMBER ONE.

“Save America” rally attendees raise fore-fingers during a pre-rally speech, reportedly the first time this action was taken en masse at a Trump event. The raised finger has variously been interpreted as indicating “America first” or as a QAnon sign based on the shadowy conspiracy group’s motto, “where we go one we go all” (WWG1WGA). These ralliers told me they did it to support “bringing God back” into American life, though one wears a QAnon bracelet.

“Save America” Rally
Youngstown, Ohio (2022)

CRISIS ACTOR (NOUN)

1

A professional or volunteer actor who plays a role in a staged drill in order to prepare to train first responders for a specific emergency scenario.

2

(In a false-flag conspiracy theory) a person pretending to be a victim of a hoax attack.

JUDGMENT SCENARIO 1.

A Border Patrol trainee advances toward an unknown threat during a firearms judgment training exercise.

U.S. Border Patrol Academy
Artesia, New Mexico (2022)

THE EMBRACE 2.

“Save America” Rally
Miami, Florida (2022)

AGGRESSIVE ALIEN SCENARIO.

The exercise calls for trainees to stop the attack on a fellow agent near the border wall, apprehend and take into custody the “aliens” responsible, provide first aid, and call for medical assistance.

U.S. Border Patrol Academy
Artesia, New Mexico (2022)

SEPTEMBER 11 / WORLD TRADE CENTER INSTALLATION.

JFK Special Warfare Museum
Ft. Bragg, North Carolina (2021)

WARNING.

(2022)

MODEL CITIZENS

After a career in civil-rights law, I came back to photography looking to illuminate hidden truths. What I have found in excavating American society – from the “War on Terror” prisons of United States Naval Station in Guantánamo Bay (Cuba), to military training sites and beyond – is a complicated ecosystem: institutions that stage-manage reality for public consumption, and a public increasingly willing to consume. My work seeks to understand and shed light on these powerful political, corporate, and social forces.

Photographs can be evidence, yes, but evidence of what? My project, *Model Citizens*, examines the staging of reality and the performance of citizenship in the United States, a militarized country whose citizens cannot agree on what is true. I started this inquiry in my second book, *Necessary Fictions*, (Radius Books, 2020) by photographing military wargames.

Now I’m casting a wider net, making photographs more elliptically related to my topic, from institutional staging and roleplay to the performances we play out communally, consciously or not. In museums, exhibitions, trade fairs, non-military training sites including the U.S. Border Patrol Academy, and everyday life, I make photographs designed to invite inquiry: how are fictions deployed, commodified, and embraced, alternately preparing us for and distracting us from the realities of citizenship in a society undergoing perpetual violent crisis?

Over the coming months, I will continue exploring these themes, looking to secure the thread that unites these disparate kinds of performances for what will be the last in a trilogy of photo books about the American condition.

- Debi Cornwall

GREEN SCREEN.

Citizenship as metaphor: a blank slate, an empty stage, a site for projecting one's ideals, hopes, and dreams for her society.

(2022)

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ELYSEE ELYSEE**



PARMIGIANI
1862