

PHOTOGRAPHY BOOKS OF 2008

WITH THE FALL PUBLISHING SEASON IN FULL SWING AND 2009 FAST APPROACHING, PDN GATHERED TOGETHER SOME OF OUR FAVORITE BOOKS FOR A LOOK AT THE PUBLISHING YEAR THAT WAS.



Till The Cows Come Home: County Fair Portraits

Photographs by Dan Nelken

Essay by Roy Flukinger

120 pages/68 images/\$50 (hardcover)

Kehrer

Dan Nelken's charming and insightful book shows that documentary photography doesn't always have to uncover the darker side of human nature. It also demonstrates that compelling subjects for documentation can appear right in one's backyard. Nelken, a committed urbanite, left his New York City studio one summer day in 1998 and headed upstate to the town of Walton. There he came across a county fair and from that moment he was hooked, repeatedly returning to fairs over a nine-year period, shooting both portraits and still lifes. The county fair is a very (white) American tradition where farmers and their families "share and celebrate the results of their industry and labor," writes University of Texas curator Roy Flukinger in the introduction to the book. Nelken's photographs are indeed a celebration of the county fair in all its very local and low-key glory. Nelken neither over-sentimentalizes his subjects—many of them children with their beloved animals—nor does he take the more obvious irony route. W. Eugene Smith was a friend and mentor to Nelken and occasionally, like Smith, he poses his subjects; but that aside, Nelken deservedly comes home with the prize.

—Reuel Golden

Look for more "Photography Books of 2008" at PDNOnline in November, including new titles from Eugene Richards and Richard Avedon. Our feature "Bookstores That Book People Like" will also be on PDNOnline this month.