

foto8

Reviews



Coney Island
Peter Granser
Published by Hatje Cantz
www.hatjecantz.com
€35
(100pp Hardback)

[Email this page](#)

Coney Island

The words in neon, "Wonder Wheel and Thrills" on an arrow pointed sideways grace the front cover of photographer Peter Granser's new book paying homage to that time-worn American dream, Coney Island.

Many a photographer, from Weegee to Diane Arbus, has been drawn to the "democratic paradise" to document the mechanical treats, beach freaks and hordes escaping the New York cram. At the beginning of the 21st century the Coney Island that Granser frames, however, is one washed and faded by the ebb and flow of almost one hundred years of pleasure seekers. A few of the classic rides remain, hanging on by their mechanical teeth, whirring round, and hotdogs (invented here) are still offering their juicy rewards.

But what is most prevalent in Granser's pictures is the wire mesh and corrugated fencing that surrounds the beach and attractions. Notices are tacked up which seem to hail from a bygone era: "Keep Off Jetty", "Police Lines Do Not Cross", and some more humorous, hand-painted in orange and white: "Don't Piss Here!". This is the melancholic backdrop to the human life that Granser finds making the most of the treasures; some day-trippers are here in a modern ironic way, to take their own pictures of the lost playground, while others, children still find genuine delight in running through sand, and an old man enjoys the feel of the sun on his bare shoulders.

On the strips of hot concrete floor, bejewelled exhibitionists can be spotted posing for pictures. Young women dressed in 1950s swimsuits look the part, with a streak of scarlet lipstick and high pony tails. We meet throwbacks from the 1970s New York gay scene, moustachioed and attired in tight shorts and baseball caps, also taking in the sea air. These are all allusions to times past.

It is no surprise to learn that Granser was strongly influenced by Martin Parr, and indeed switched from black and white to colour after meeting him in 1997. The colours are quite different though, with Granser's taking a more bleached finish, compared with Parr's penchant for garish glory. In the square format, the book has a solid quality that resists easy judgment. There is space for a page of seagulls in flight, and a grainy ocean where two small swimmers struggle away from the horizon; there is space for a close-up of two young boys grinning in shark masks and for an empty corner advertising "Shoot Sadam [sic] Paint Ball Mania". Coney Island's anachronistic, yet enduring appeal, is given a subtle rendering in Granser's portrait and sits well with its history of photographic devotees. **RH**

All Rights Reserved © foto8 2006