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From Uncertain To Blue (Bill And Alice Wright Photography Series)



Synopsis

"In the beginning, there was no real plan, just a road trip that became a journey." In the years 1986 and 1987, Keith Carter and his wife, Patricia, visited one hundred small Texas towns with intriguing names like Diddy Waw Diddy, Elysian Fields, and Poetry. He says, "I tried to make my working method simple and practical: one town, one photograph. I would take several rolls of film but select only one image to represent that dot on my now-tattered map. The titles of the photographs are the actual names of the small towns. . . ." Carter created a body of work that evoked the essence of small-town life for many people, including renowned playwright and fellow Texan, Horton Foote. In 1988, Carter published his one town/one picture collection in *From Uncertain to Blue*, a landmark book that won acclaim both nationally and internationally for the artistry, timelessness, and universal appeal of its images—and established Carter as one of America's most promising fine art photographers. Now a quarter century after the book's publication, *From Uncertain to Blue* has been completely re-envisioned and includes a new essay in which Carter describes how the search for photographic subjects in small towns gradually evolved into his first significant work as an artist. He also offers additional insight into his creative process by including some of his original contact sheets. And Patricia Carter gives her own perspective on their journey in her amplified notes about many of the places they visited as they discovered the world of possibilities from *Uncertain to Blue*.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Keith Carter holds the endowed Walles Chair of Visual and Performing Arts at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas, and is the recipient of a 2009 Texas Medal of Arts Award and the Lange-Taylor Prize from the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University. He is the author of eleven previous books, including *Fireflies*, *A Certain Alchemy*, *Holding Venus*, *Keith Carter Photographs: Twenty-Five Years*, *Heaven of Animals*, *Mojo*, *The Blue Man*, and *From Uncertain to Blue*.

Carter's work is included in the collections of the National Gallery of Art; the Art Institute of Chicago; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the J. Paul Getty Museum; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the George Eastman House; and the Wittliff Collections at Southwestern & Mexican Photography Collection.

Uncertain and Blue are the names of just two of the one hundred small Texas towns having quaint and unusual names which Keith and Pat Carter visited in the late 1980's. This curious photo expedition produced the 80 works depicted in this fine book. The photographs are straightforward B&W images of people, places and animals which are poignant and evocative. The book's introduction was written by Carter's friend and admirer, the late Oscar-winning screenwriter and playwright Horton Foote (*The Trip to Bountiful*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Tender Mercies*.) Carter has published many wonderful photography monographs. I have them all, and still look forward to more.

There's is plenty of good work in the book and the introductions by Carter and Horton Foote are both interesting reads. Unfortunately, this is one of the worst printed books I've seen in a long, long time. I'm uncertain if it's just a few isolated copies or if the entire run is like this, but it pretty much ruins the viewing experience.

In 1986, Keith Carter suggested to his wife Pat that they commemorate their tenth wedding anniversary by driving all around Texas, leaving the interstates, "and messing around the back roads and taking pictures." They got out their maps, and for the next summer and over weekends of the following year they visited scads of Texas towns whose names intrigued them, with Pat taking notes and Keith taking pictures of whatever interested them. For this book of photographs shot during their travels, Keith selected, for each of eighty towns, one photograph that for him personified that town. The result is a classic of Americana (or, if you prefer, Texana). The photographs are all square-format (about 9 x 9 inches). They are sepia-tinged black-and-white. Keith Carter has a

marvelous eye. And both he and Pat must have a wonderful way with people to elicit the humanity that is revealed in the twenty-five or so photographs that have people in them. Among the pictures: chickens strutting under a clothes-line on which a sheet is billowing in the wind; two ancient gas pumps in the middle of weeds in front of an apparently abandoned building in the middle of nowhere; a lushly blooming white morning glory vine completely covering the window of a little frame house; a thin, speckled hunting dog in the foreground, staring at the camera from the middle of a dirt road that stretches back into Kudzu-draped trees; straw bales stacked up in the middle of a field with a bullet-pocked deer target attached to the side of the pile; two sixty-somethings propped against the tailgate of their pick-up truck loaded with melons they have driven fifty miles to sell at this particular country crossroad; about twenty people -- young and old, black and white, men and women -- whitewashing a wooden clapboard church; and a small cemetery with about a dozen tombstones, all inclined in different directions at different angles. And the names of those Texas towns! Birthright, Bleakwood, Blessing (where I once had a tremendous buffet lunch in a wooden hotel built in 1907), Cut 'N Shoot, Diddy Waw Diddy, Dime Box, Elysian Fields, Frognot, Grit, Old Glory, Pointblank, Sweet Home, Tuxedo, Welcome. And, of course, Uncertain and Blue. (For a few of the "towns", even in 1986 only the name remained. One wonders how many other of these towns have disappeared over the past three decades.) Enhancing the photographs is a splendid introduction by Horton Foote and equally splendid notes from Pat Carter. The notes are printed at the back of the volume so as not to interfere with viewing the photographs themselves (which are printed one per two-page spread). For about half of the photographs, the only information provided is the name of the town and the county in which it is located. For the other half, Pat Carter adds notes (some stretching to three or four paragraphs) about the town itself or her and Keith's visit there. For example, here is what she writes about Noonday: "The school is defunct and now serves as a community center. Just across the road the Baptist and Methodist churches sit side by side, and it appears that every living soul in Noonday is inside one or the other on this Sunday morning at 10:45 a.m. Keeping score by number of cars it's Baptists 12; Methodists, 8."

FROM UNCERTAIN TO BLUE was the first book of photographs that Keith Carter published (around ten more have followed). It has become a semi-landmark book of photographs. What I have is the original 1988 edition. This second edition was issued by Texas Monthly Press in 2011. From the description provided by , it appears that both Keith and Pat have contributed additional text to this second edition. People who treasure either small town America or fine photography (or both) should not miss it.

This is a remake of Keith's first book, but even better. D J Stout redesigned it, and Pat and Keith added more descriptions about the images and details about how the project got started. An added feature I really like was the printed contact sheets in the book. You can see that Keith doesn't belabor the shooting, but seems to know exactly what he wants. No 20 rolls of film to get one shot! Also, the printing is beautiful. I read another review posted here, and the person said it was printed terribly, but it is not true. Keith tones and split tones his images, and they are reproduced very close to the originals. I think maybe the reviewer thought these tones were unintentional. Keith has made maybe a dozen books, and has been very experimental. This book shows us again, in a refreshing way, where he started. The book is inspiring because it shows a good idea completed, a photographer who can make art out of any subject, as well as a love story between a man and his wife.

Carter's first collection is a pretty good collection. I wasn't overly fond of this work (he has done much better), but there were some pieces that reach out and grab you, plus Carter's skill as an artist makes this book worth buying.

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