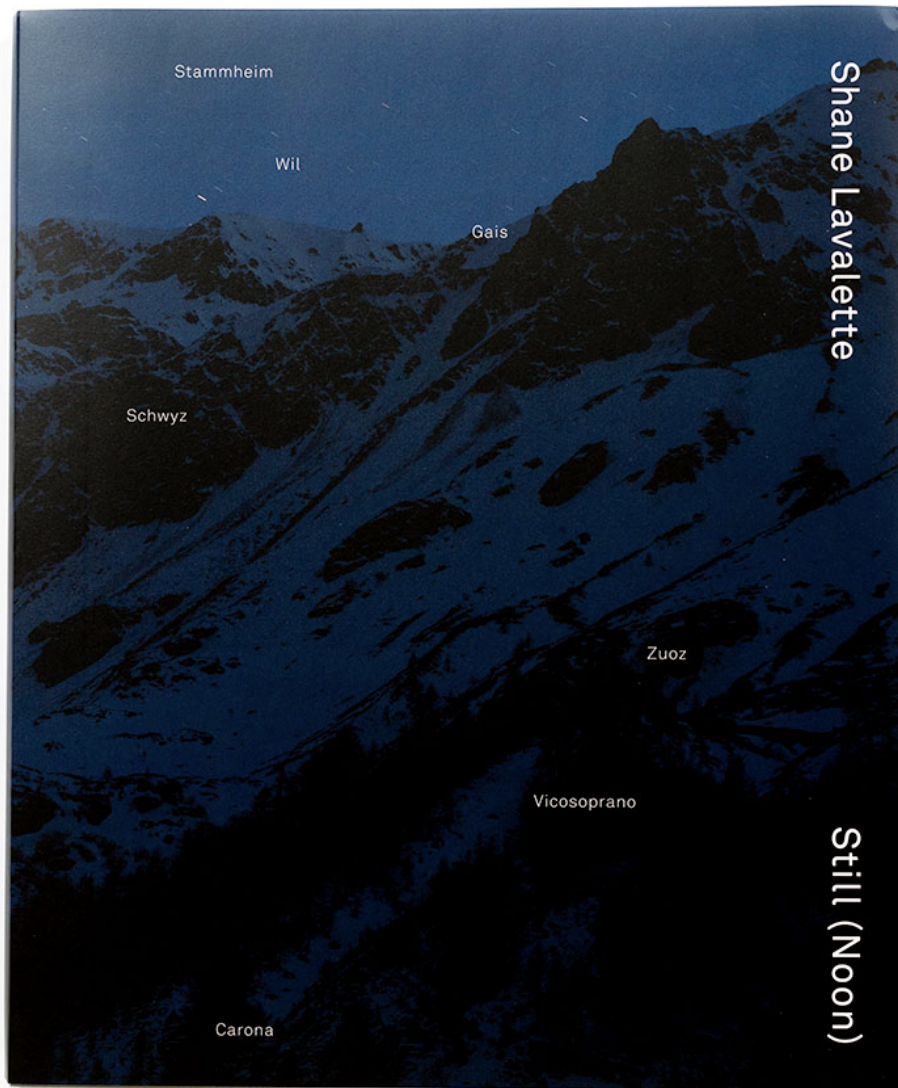


PhotoBook Journal

The Contemporary Photobook Magazine

Shane Lavalette – Still (Noon)



Review by Douglas Stockdale •

Shane Lavalette was commissioned to follow the footsteps of the Swiss photographer Theo Frey (1908–1997), one of the leading Swiss photojournalists of his day, who had set out in 1939 to photograph the Swiss landscape in for the Swiss National Exhibition. Lavalette investigated the same twelve Swiss villages as did Frey in 1939; Carona, Gais, Ruderswill, Saignelegier, Saint-Saphorin, Sainte-Croix, Schwyz, Stammheim, Vicosoprano, Visperterminen, Wil and Zuoz. An interesting collection of rural villages that encircle the country of Switzerland, each location appearing to be under the influence of the its neighboring adjacent country; France, Italy, Germany, Austria and Liechtenstein.

To provide some historical context about Frey's 1939 Swiss National Exhibition the book has interweaved a series of Frey's black & white contact sheets, glued along one edge into the interior of the book, for each village depicted. The book does not overtly include captions and the reader is left to speculate as to where each photograph was created with the underlying assumption that it was in one of the fore mentioned villages somewhere within Switzerland. There are sly hints of the potential locations; underneath the loose edge of the aforementioned contact sheet is printed the name of the associated village. The photographs that follow the contact sheet could be related to that same village, an unanswered question that draws the reader into the body of work seeking visual clues.

This monograph is a mash-up of grand Swiss landscapes, casual portraits, and minor details that are non-monumental moments which appear "non-photogenic". Lavalette's resulting body of work is an investigation and provide a pulse on contemporary Switzerland, weaving together the picture postcard landscapes we frequently associate with Switzerland with the in-between moments of daily life. This is a momentary aspect that is related to the book's title; a *still* being a frame taken from a movie film, thus a photograph that is an extracted slice of life, freezing a momentary glimpse that in turn questions the content of a photograph.

I was intrigued by the other aspect of the book's title: (*Noon*). It has potential many meaning, the most obvious is to a time of day, but also repenting the essence of time which indirectly hints at the passing of eighty years between the two bodies of work. Noon also representing the number 12 that correlates to the dozen subjects of this book. I find the book's title as an intriguing preview of what lies ahead; a complex and layered narrative.

Much has changed in the ensuing eighty years spanning the investigations of Frey and Lavalette. The mountains and broad landscape vistas appear unchanged while many of the man-built urban structures that Frey photographed have been supplemented and added to. The profound changes have occurred to the individuals that Frey photographed, most of whom are no longer among us today, while potentially their grandchildren may have interacted with Lavalette. Likewise, the vehicles are very different as are the individual's clothing perhaps with only subtle changes to the military uniforms.

In closing, having been on numerous assignments that have taken me near some of the villages in this monograph, I realize that Lavalette's photographs provide a very unique examination of the many aspects of the Swiss landscape that for me might only result in only a passing glance. Thus, my double-takes; to look at these photographs and then find myself looking again.

The book was published in conjunction with the exhibition *Unfamiliar Familiarities* at Fotostiftung Schweiz in partnership with Musee de l'Elysée, Lausanne, Switzerland.

Other books by Shane Lavalette which have been previously featured on PhotoBook Journal include: *One Sun, One Shadow*

Still (Noon) – Shane Lavalette

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Short introduction

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