



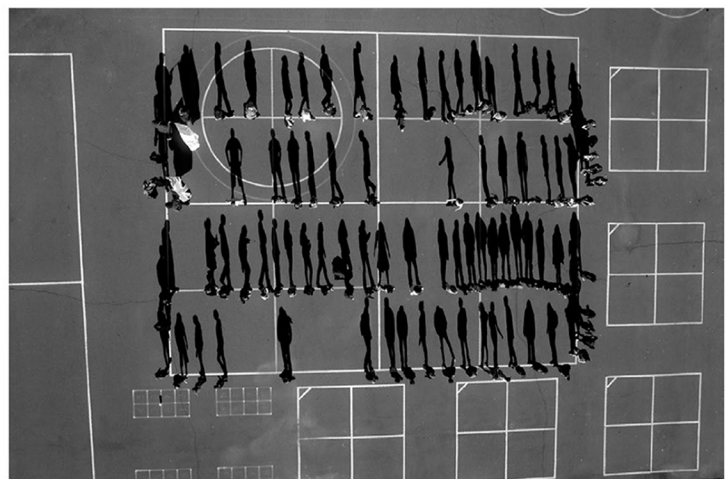
TOMAS VAN HOUTRYVE
BLUE SKY DAYS : A DRONE'S-EYE VIEW
CONTACT PHOTOGRAPHY FESTIVAL
OPENING MAY 14, 2-5PM

I. STATEMENT

In October 2012, a drone strike in northeast Pakistan killed a 67-year-old woman picking okra outside her home. At a U.S. Congressional hearing held in Washington in October 2013, the woman's 13-year-old grandson, Zubair Rehman, spoke to a group of lawmakers. **"I no longer love blue skies,"** said Rehman, who was injured by shrapnel in the attack. **"In fact, I now prefer gray skies. The drones do not fly when the skies are gray."**

According to strike reports compiled by investigative journalists, Zubair Rehman's grandmother is one of several thousand people killed by covert U.S. drone strikes since 2004. Although we live in the most media-connected age in history, the public has scant visual record of the drone war and its casualties.

In response, I decided to attach my camera to a small drone and travel across America to photograph the very sorts of gatherings mentioned in strike reports from Pakistan and Yemen -



School yard, 2013

groups of people praying or exercising. I made a list of “targets” to observe from the sky by reading hundreds of these reports. I also flew my camera over settings in which drones are used over America to less lethal effect, such as prisons, oil fields, and the U.S.-Mexico border.

By creating these images, I aim to draw attention to the changing nature of personal privacy, surveillance, and contemporary warfare. Underpinning my work is a belief that human activity becomes increasingly absurd and dangerous when it loses empathy. I agree with Albert Camus when he said, “By definition, a government has no conscience. Sometimes it has a policy, but nothing more.”



Wreath laying, 2013

In many ways, drones, particularly those used by the military, are the ultimate representation of delivering a policy without conscience, without empathy.

As more drones fill the sky, we should consider how this technology will be used and experienced. Will the sight of drones overhead eventually seem as ordinary as an airplane or bird? Or will people start wishing for gray skies like Zubair Rehman?

II. ARTIST BIO

Tomas van Houtryve is a photographer, artist and author who engages critical contemporary issues around the world.

Initially a student in philosophy, Tomas developed a passion for photography while enrolled in an overseas university program in Nepal. Immediately after graduation in 1999, he devoted himself to photojournalism, starting out with the Associated Press in Latin America. He was the first AP photographer to cover the military prison in Guantánamo Bay.

In 2004, Tomas began *Behind the Curtains*, a seven-year-long personal project about life in the last countries where the Communist Party remains in power: North Korea, Cuba, China, Nepal, Moldova, Vietnam, and Laos. The completed work was published as Tomas' first monograph in 2012.

Prompted by the scarce visual record of America's rapidly expanding drone wars, Tomas' work took a conceptual turn for the *Blue Sky Days* project in 2013. Drawing inspiration from detailed drone strike reports abroad, he chose targets to view from a drone's-eye view across the United States. Images from the project were first published in *Harper's* as the largest photo portfolio in the magazine's 164-year history. The series has subsequently been honored with five major awards and exhibitions in New York, Barcelona, France, Italy and the Netherlands.

Tomas is frequently interviewed on radio and television and has appeared on the BBC, CNN, MSNBC, NPR, ARTE and France 24. He became a member of the prestigious VII Photo collective in 2010.

III. RECOGNITION

AWARDS & GRANTS FOR BLUE SKY DAYS

- ICP Infinity Award
- World Press Photo, Second Prize
- Photographic Museum of Humanity, First Prize
- White House News Photographers Association, First Prize
- POYi Award of Excellence
- TIME's Top 10 Photos of 2014
- Aaron Siskind Fellowship Grant
- Pulitzer Center Grant
- Getty Grant

AWARDS & GRANTS FOR PREVIOUS WORKS

- POYi World Understanding Award
- POYi Photographer of the Year 2010
- Visa Pour l'Image Rémi Ochlik Award
- Bayeux-Calvados War Correspondents Prize
- Amnesty International Human Rights Award
- Leica Oskar Barnack Prize, Finalist
- Days Japan Jury Prize
- Alicia Patterson Fellowship Grant
- Saint Brieuc Festival Grant
- Magnum Foundation Grant

"Blue Sky Days is one of the most important photo essays done in the last few years. It tackles issues that are very difficult to photograph but central to modern existence – privacy, government intrusion and modern antiseptic warfare."

- James Estrin

The New York Times Photo Editor &
Jury member for the Photographic
Museum of Humanity

IV. EXHIBITIONS & COLLECTIONS

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, USA
Open Society Foundations, New York City, USA
MoCP - Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, USA

SOLO EXHIBITIONS (SELECTION)

2015 - Blue Sky Days, Prix Bayeux-Calvados, Bayeux, France
2015 - Blue Sky Days, Cortona on the Move, Cortona, Italy
2015 - Blue Sky Days, Artes Santa Monica, Barcelona, Spain
2013 - Borderline North Korea, FotoWeek, Washington, USA
2012 - Marshall Islands, Festival Photoreporter, St. Brieuc, France
2012 - Behind the Curtains, VII Gallery, New York City, USA
2010 - Behind the Curtains, Visa pour l'Image, Perpignan, France
2009 - Behind the Curtain, Artes Santa Monica, Barcelona, Spain
2009 - Behind the Curtain, Talent Latent, Tarragona, Spain
2009 - Nepal | Rituels et Révolution, In My Room Galerie, Paris, France
2008 - La Caduta Di Un Re Che Si Credeva Dio, Artèfoto, Ancona, Italy
2007 - Rebellion au Népal, Prix Bayeux-Calvados, Bayeux, France
2006 - The Fall of the God King, Visa pour l'Image, Perpignan, France

GROUP EXHIBITIONS (SELECTION)

2015 - Surveillance.02, East Wing Gallery, Dubai, UAE
2015 - [No]privacy, FotoDok, Utrecht, Netherlands
2015 - North Korean Perspectives, MoCP, Chicago, USA
2015 - North Korean Perspectives, Drents Museum, Assen, Netherlands

V. PUBLICATIONS & LINKS

SELECTED PRINT PRESS

"The Unquiet Sky," The New York Times Magazine (USA), review by critic Teju Cole, July 22, 2015
<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/magazine/the-unquiet-sky.html>

"The view from above," Seven, Sunday Telegraph Magazine (UK), cover story, July 24, 2014
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/photography/10980683/Drone-photography-exploring-views-from-whole-new-heights.html>

"La guerre des drones vue par le photographe Tomas van Houtryve," L'Express (FR), Sept. 16, 2015
http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/art/la-guerre-des-drones-vue-par-le-photographe-tomas-van-houtryve_1716838.html

"Blue Sky Days" Harper's Magazine (USA), 16-page spread, April, 2014
<http://harpers.org/archive/2014/04/blue-sky-days/>

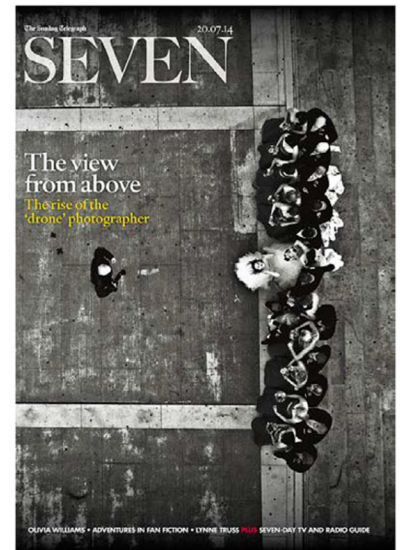
"Drone Country," TIME Magazine (USA), 10-page spread, Dec. 19, 2014
<http://time.com/3627980/drone-country-see-america-from-above/>

"A Sky Full of Cameras," National Geographic (USA), PROOF blog, Aug. 15, 2014
<http://proof.nationalgeographic.com/2014/08/15/tomas-van-houtryve-a-sky-full-of-cameras/>

"La guerre tue du ciel," M Le Magazine du Monde (FR), portfolio, Nov. 29, 2014
(print only)

"Mit dem Auge der Drohne," Neue Zürcher Zeitung (CH), cover, Nov. 21, 2014
<http://www.nzz.ch/meinung/foto-tableau/tomas-van-houtryve-drohne-1.18501655>

"Eye in the Sky," The Guardian Weekend (UK), Art & Design, June 7, 2014
<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/jun/07/drones-eye-in-the-sky>



SELECTED TELEVISION AND VIDEO

"Blue Sky Days," MediaStorm (USA), short film & interview (15 mins), May. 1, 2015
<https://vimeo.com/128202299>

"Tomas van Houtryve, quand la photographie prend de la hauteur," France 24, interview (12 mins), Sept. 4, 2015
<http://www.france24.com/fr/20150904-affiche-tomas-van-houtryve-drone-militaire-world-press-photo-aylan-kurdi>

"Télé Matin," France 2, interview (2 mins), Sept. 15, 2015
http://www.france2.fr/emissions/telematin/videos/regions_-_world_press_photo_-_20150915_15-09-2015_921828

"NOW with Alex Wagner," MSNBC (USA), interview (8 mins), March 21, 2014
(broadcast only)

"Quand le ciel est bleu," Prix Bayeux-Calvados (FR), interview (2 mins), Oct. 10 2015
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8-4Gf-gJWg>