

M + B

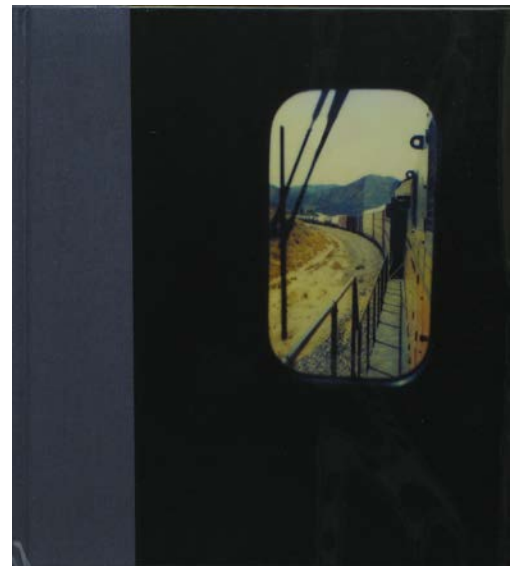


Book Review: Tones of Dirt and Bone

By Sarah Bradley
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Tones of Dirt and Bone is the second monograph from Twin Palms and Mike Brodie, and despite its later release, the photographs were made prior to the work of the 2013 release, *A Period of Juvenile Prosperity*. These are the Mike Brodie images that first floated around the internet, a series of Polaroid photographs made with an SX-70, the work that provided his moniker, The Polaroid Kidd. It is composed mostly of portraits and still-lives, though perhaps they'd be more satisfactorily described as details or small moments — instincts honed with a Polaroid camera that make some of what's in *A Period of Juvenile Prosperity* so distinct. But they are different books; *Tones of Dirt and Bone* is quieter, softer.

In a short interview in *i-D*, Brodie mentioned that his camera kept him in the role of observer, but it seems likely that the camera was also a connector, a tool that gave him permission to remain a step back but with the potential to forge a point of entry. There is a palpable vulnerability and urge to connect that make Brodie's images striking — tender and human. The tiny baby boot cradled by the large ones, the slender neck pock-marked with finger-tip bruises, the corner of parted lips just visible in the upper right. There are a number of beautiful pairings of people and animals — the young woman with the parakeet, the man with the white beard and the pigeon, the toothy girl and the rabbit. The color pallet is cool with a slight greenish hue provided by those strange yet distinctive Polaroid colors, accented by the occasional texture of unpredictable emulsion. The printing is gorgeous.



Tones of Dirt and Bone
Photographs by Mike Brodie
Twin Palms Publishers, Santa Fe, 2014. 84 pp.,
49 color illustrations, 10x11"



Tones of Dirt and Bone reproduces just the images themselves, cropping out the characteristic white Polaroid borders. Given that the photographs traveled with Brodie as he made his way across the United States, part of me wonders what the actual prints look like, but reproducing them as full objects would be an entirely different book, one perhaps informed by art book presentations of vernacular photography. There's clearly a market instinct to distance Brodie's work from this kind of thing, but removing the borders also allows the photographs to be reproduced at a larger scale. Despite being presented in this fine volume, the images still feel slightly worn, still like Polaroids — which may be annoying to some, but to me is a good thing. Too much cleaning and you lose something. It's a fine balance.

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I can understand why some may prefer this book to the last, but for me, *Tones of Dirt and Bone* doesn't catch me in the same way. I expect that part of the reason can be traced to the differences between the mediums used to shoot. In my limited experience, shooting with Polaroid requires a special deliberateness on the part of both photographer and sitter, which carries through to the images of *Tones of Dirt and Bone*. It is a slower pace. If the rolling rhythm of the train can be felt in the images in *A Period of Juvenile Prosperity*, that stillness — the deep breath inwards as the shutter button is pressed — can be felt in *Tones of Dirt and Bone*. There are virtues to both, and I expect few will have difficulty picking a favorite.