



A spread from Carolyn Drake's *Wild Pigeon*, which includes collages of her work by her subjects

## Anamorphosis Prize

**Carolyn Drake has won \$10,000 in the first edition of a new prize aimed at self-publishers**

A genre-busting look at life in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China has won the inaugural Anamorphosis Prize.

Carolyn Drake's book *Wild Pigeon* shows the people and landscapes of the remote, rapidly changing province, 2000 miles from Beijing. Alongside the images, shot between 2007 and 2013, are also collages and drawings made by local people, and references to the story *Wild Pigeon* by Uyghur author Nurmuhemmet Yasin, who was sentenced to 10 years in prison by the Chinese authorities for 'inciting separatism'.

Drake has described the problems she had in shooting in Uyghur Autonomous Region, which is viewed with suspicion by the Chinese government. "Uyghurs who carry on extended conversations with foreigners risk police interrogation," she writes on her website, "and foreign journalists are routinely followed; meanwhile, some Uyghurs are opposed to artwork (including photography) depicting living creatures, since only Allah has the power to give life".

In response she started to "look for meaning at the intersection of our views, and find ways to

bring the people I was meeting into the creative process", travelling with a box of prints, coloured pencils and a sketchbook, asking volunteers to draw on and reassemble her images. She also looked to music and literature "for inspiration in Uyghur approaches to storytelling".

"I wasn't initially thinking of it as a project, but I returned to Xinjiang over a span of seven years, and as I learned more about the situation there, I began to see there was a complicated story to tell, not only because of the changes that were happening, and the surprising ways I saw archetypes of Islam, traditional culture, and frontiers playing out, but also because of the questions it raised for me as a photographer and artist," she tells *BJP*.

"It was the first time I tried that [handing over some of the creative control to her subjects]," she continues. "It was liberating. Also sometimes quite awkward."

The book was designed by Dutch photobook specialist SYB, and self-published in an edition of 950, plus 50 special editions. Drake won \$10,000 by scooping the first place in The Anamorphosis Prize, which is devoted to self-published books. *Wild Pigeon* and the 19 other shortlisted books will now also be added to the MoMA library.

"A lot of the books we appreciate and collect are the self-published ones," says photographer Anouk Kruithof, who set up the prize along with John A Phelan, a US-based photobook collector.

"We wanted to help stimulate that. Usually these guys wouldn't get their books into the MOMA library [the New York museum is accepting them as part of the prize], so to do that helps bring attention to everyone. It is not just about the winner."

Kruithof, who is herself a prolific bookmaker, judged the prize, along with Phelan and with curator and critic Charlotte Cotton. They plan to run the award for two more years, hopefully with the same jury. "After that it will either stop or not, we'll see how it feels," says Kruithof.

"We felt *Wild Pigeon* is super-relevant and political. It's an enormous project Carolyn has worked on for years over very long periods," she continues. "I really liked her engagement with the community – she wasn't just picking out a group as a subject matter and observing them, she went to them with her photographs. It's a very refreshing approach to documentary and socially engaged photography. The way the book was designed is interesting too – it's designed and printed and made as an interesting object, but it also suits the subject. In my opinion a book is good when reason and content and design and object all enforce each other; this book is a very magical mix of that."

The other books shortlisted for the 2015 Anamorphosis Prize can be found on the competition website. *BJP*

[www.anamorphosisprize.com](http://www.anamorphosisprize.com)

MARCH 2016