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Book Review: Venice Beach by Dotan Saguy

Posted on July 23rd, 2018 by Hans Durrer



Peeking from Behind the Graffiti Wall.

A little boy who came with his family to paint on the Venice Art Walls mischievously peeks at two teenage girls on roller skates posing for pictures. The walls were originally part of the Venice Pavilion – a recreation facility built in 1961 – and were often covered with illegal graffiti. In 2000, when the pavilion was torn down, a portion of the walls was preserved as a memorial to the beloved graffiti, and it became legal to paint the walls. This activity has become popular with locals and tourists alike, who flock to the Arts Walls armed with spray cans and turn the Venice Art Walls into a delightful and continuously renewed art exhibition.

Dotan Saguy has lived in Los Angeles since 2003. In 2015, he decided to focus on his lifelong passion for photography. He attended the Eddie Adams Workshop, the Missouri Photo Workshop and studied photojournalism at Santa Monica College. His book *Venice Beach. The Last Days of a Bohemian Paradise* was edited by Gail Fisher, Sr. Editor at *National Geographic* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

I've been to Venice Beach, "a residential, commercial, and recreational beachfront neighborhood within Los Angeles, California" according to *Wikipedia*, but that was almost forty years ago. I do remember similar scenes but not as spectacular as the photographs in this tome and that, I guess, has something to do with the fact that with a camera in hand one tends to look at the world differently, and especially more focused.



Handball Courts.

The Venice Beach handball courts are mainly used by working-class people who typically can't afford to live near the boardwalk anymore. Many of them still strongly identify with the neighborhood, returning on weekends to enjoy the handball courts and other community amenities. This provides hope that gentrification has not yet completely ruined the vibrant culture of the Venice Boardwalk.

Venice Beach, I'm quoting *Wikipedia* again, "is located within the urban region of western Los Angeles County known as the Westside. Venice was founded in 1905 as a seaside resort town. It was an independent city until 1926, when it merged with Los Angeles. Today, Venice is known for its canals, beaches, and the circus-like Ocean Front Walk, a two-and-a-half-mile (4.0 km) pedestrian promenade that features performers, mystics, artists and vendors." It is the performers, photographer Dotan Saguy has decided to focus on – and the result is often stunning. I'm however not always sure whether it is because of the subject matter or the photographs. I would think it is because of both because of how a subject matter in a photo is perceived depends to a large extent on how it is framed.

From the press release I learn that the future of Venice Beach is on razor's edge for luxury restorations and profit maximization threaten the lifestyle which has been the hallmark of Venice for decades. So maybe Dotan Saguy has documented a community that is bound to soon disappear.



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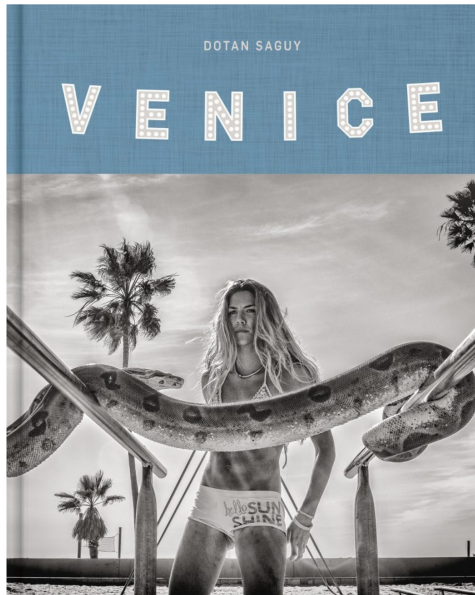


Venice Gladiator.

An oiled-up bodybuilder wearing nothing but a speedo enters the stage of the Mr. Muscle Beach contest. His silhouette resembles that of an ancient Roman gladiator entering an arena full of anticipating spectators

The captions are found at the end of the book and are, thankfully, rather elaborate. They help us understand what are eyes are looking at for we need such information because otherwise we only see what is already on our minds. Also, with the captions, the photographer lets us know that he did his homework, that he's not just a casual observer, that he knows what he's photographing and in doing that invites us to make our own discoveries.

Jamie Rose writes in his foreword, entitled "In Praise of Wonder," that the photos in this book evoke the celebration of life – and I clearly sympathise with his view – and he gives some useful advice: "I encourage you to pause before you turn the page. Take a moment to let go of any modern cynicism and judgement threatening to cloud your vision. Be open to exploring the strange and magical without prejudice. Allow yourself to be mesmerized – by this way of life, before it fades away."



Venice Beach: The Last Days of a Bohemian Paradise

by **Dotan Saguy**

Kehrer Verlag, Heidelberg

www.kehrerverlag.com

Also published on [Medium](#).

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About Hans Durrer

Hans Durrer is an author and addiction counsellor based in Switzerland. www.hansdurrer.com/, 12-step-addiction-treatment.blogspot.ch/. Two of his books are in English: *Ways of Perception*, Bangkok 2006; *Framing the World*, Houston 2011.

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