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ARTS & CULTURE ENTERTAINMENT

At Venice Beach, a photographer's 'Last Days of a Bohemian Paradise'

By LIESL BRADNER AUG 01, 2018 | 7:00 AM



In a detail from Dotan Saguy's photo "Jingles' Blessing," a man who preaches for animal rights and vegan living gives a young pregnant woman a paper flower. The image is from Saguy's new book, "Venice Beach: The Last Days of a Bohemian Paradise." (Dotan Saguy)

In 1890 tobacco tycoon Abbot Kinney set out to transform marshland about 14 miles west of downtown Los Angeles into the Coney Island of the Pacific. He imagined a resort with amusement piers, casinos, Venetian-style canals and blue lagoons dotted with gondolas.

In the decades that followed, the oceanfront boardwalk in the community of Venice Beach has seen an oil boom, raging pier fires and more, eventually earning its reputation for a circus-like atmosphere of performers, mystics, artists, vendors and tourists.



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Street photographer Dotan Saguy has been documenting it all for three years, capturing what he sees as the final vestiges of a dying society. With skyrocketing rents changing the neighborhood's culture and character, Saguy has compiled images of transient hippies, tattooed skaters, body builders, surfers and vagabonds for the forthcoming book, "Venice

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"Body Bender": A couple from Spain makes final preparations to go on stage while struggling to stay cool in the summer heat. The photographer said he was intrigued by the wife's muscles juxtaposed against the delicate fanning gesture of her husband. (Dotan Saguy)



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"Fake News": Dogs on an afternoon stroll encounter a local street artist's work in Venice. (Dotan Saguy)



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"Clothespins": A performer in the Venice Beach Freakshow protested the closing of the attraction following Snapchat's purchase of the building. (Dotan Saguy)



"I felt more connected to Venice's inclusiveness and its opened-minded, free-spirited people," said the Israeli-born former tech entrepreneur, who added that his goal has been to find insight in the beautiful, eclectic chaos.

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The book's cover shows Jenna, a blond, bikini-clad snake tamer in something of a classic, surreal Venice scene. Later in the book, though, Saguy's photos show Jenna and her 6-year-old son fighting an eviction notice. Other images capture lighter moments, such as when a man named Jingles in a mohawk hat preaches the vegan lifestyle to a pregnant young woman.

"Everyone comes to Venice to be seen and entertained, which made it easier to approach and hang out with the hippies and homeless," Saguy said. "I was able to create relationships, which helped me get beyond the circus."

Saguy has a presentation scheduled for noon-2 p.m. Sunday at [Leica Gallery](#) in West Hollywood. A reception and book signing are slated for 5 p.m. Aug. 11 at [Venice Arts](#) in Marina del Rey.

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"Flying": A couple visiting Venice Beach from Europe play in the sand as police behind them monitor a nearby drum circle. (Dotan Saguy)



"Kama Kosmic Krusader": For more than 40 years, Harry Perry has played his guitar while skating along the boardwalk. (Dotan Saguy)





"Boy and Snake": Jackson watches a boa constrictor, one of two snakes entrusted to him while a street performer took a quick break. The image is one of the happier moments for Jackson and his mom, Jenna, who is on the book's cover. (Dotan Saguy)



9:30 a.m.: This article was updated with a new time for the Leica Gallery event on Sunday.



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