

**OUR TOWN**  
**Michael von Graffenried**

ESPACE MVG  
36 rue Falguière, 75015 Paris  
September 27, 2024 – March 1, 2025  
Thursday, Friday, Saturday 2 – 6 pm



*In the house where Camille Claudel had her studio and not far from the one belonging to William Klein, the studio of photographer Michael von Graffenried opens to the public. ESPACE MVG is a platform for photography that will realize exhibitions independent of location. The opening exhibition "OUR TOWN - a view of today's America" can be seen starting September 27, 2024.*

For almost 20 years, photographer Michael von Graffenried (\*1957) has been capturing the every-day life in the small US town of New Bern in North Carolina. The series "Our Town" focuses on the people of the town and shows their lives, their culture, their successes and difficulties. The photographs are direct and blunt, revealing the ethnic and economic differences of the community. "Our Town" "presents a reality that polarizes and is not welcomed by all of the city's residents."

The whole world is currently watching the USA. Every day, the news is dominated by headlines about the American presidential campaign. The lively coverage of the Republican and Democrats is revealing the significant split within the country. The American reality is being scrutinized without embellishment and the USA has long ceased to be seen as the "Land of Dreams and Opportunity" from a political and social perspective. This impression is shared by the photographs of "Our Town." The photographs show the perception of the small town through the eyes of an outsider and question its social dynamics.

In 2015, Michael von Graffenried photographed the city founded by his ancestor Christoph von Graffenried in 1710. However, the photographs were not met with enthusiasm by the visitors, when they were first shown in New Bern in 2006. Critics argued that the photographs did not present their city properly and that not all its facets were revealed. Nevertheless, von Graffenried continued to pursue the project. A year ago, he made a second attempt at an exhibition in New Bern. In the fall of 2023, "Our Town" was displayed in two exhibitions: a selection of works was shown in a gallery and others could be viewed in an open-air exhibition. As with their first presentation, the photographs were met with criticism and were discussed in the local and international press. But why do the photos in New Bern polarize so strongly? Are Michael von Graffenried's photographs too striking, too direct, too unsparing? They portray a reality that people don't like to see and which they tend to ignore. They are snapshots that show individual situations and are therefore undoubtedly incomplete. Viewers project their own experiences and fears into these blank spaces, which influence the effect and interpretation of the photographs. "Our Town" provides the basis for an intercultural debate, whether within New Bern or beyond the city limits: where would we position ourselves if our everyday lives were critically portrayed? How is our community seen by outsiders? What do we try not to perceive?

In addition to the series "OUR TOWN", the exhibition consists of two other sectors: A selection of Photographs of Washington DC during the inauguration of President Donald Trump in 2017, the Women's March on Washington with Kamala Harris in 2017 and the day of the presidential election in November 2020, as well as original photographs by ROBERT FRANK (1924–2019), a friend of Graffenried.

The exhibition is curated by Alessa Widmer and is accompanied by the book "Our Town" published by Steidl, Göttingen, 2021.