

The People's View [C1]

Un progetto artistico intorno a tutti coloro che hanno dato l'addio a Robert F. Kennedy, l'uomo che si è battuto per la giustizia e l'uguaglianza sociale.



A funeral train is something usually reserved for presidents. That which honoured assassinated senator Robert F. Kennedy in 1968 was a practical way to take [mourners](#) from New York to the capital, his final [resting place](#), and also to pass through working-class communities along the railway tracks. Kennedy had made a huge effort [to speak up](#) for the less fortunate in the US. Few, however, expected so many people [to show up](#) by the rails [to pay their last respects](#). Paul Fusco's famous photographs taken from the train show people of all colours and ages watching it go by; some [hold up signs](#), some [wave](#) or [salute](#), and some take photographs.

THE PROJECT

In 2014, [Dutch](#) artist Rein Jelle Terpstra was given a copy of Fusco's book. He noticed that many people were holding cameras and some even camcorders. This, said Terpstra, gave him an idea: what if he collected photographs from family albums or [stored away](#) in [shoeboxes](#) in the private domain, and put

them all together? Would that constitute an image of [loss](#), of a person or of an era? To find out more about this ongoing project, Speak Up met with Terpstra. As the artist explains, as historical societies, national archives or local libraries in the US did not collect amateur images, he had [to reach out](#) to the people themselves. **Rein Jelle Terpstra ([Dutch](#) accent): **I became a member of about five hundred Facebook groups in the neighbourhoods, the towns, the little villages of all the places where the train passed by. I went to the United States many times, I followed the train route, I [hung around](#) train stations, I [knocked](#) on doors, I tried to talk with as many people as I could and bit by bit I was able to collect [snapshots](#), home movies and stories as well.

WAITING FOR HOURS

Of the thousands of people who helped Terpstra, many told him wonderful stories. **Rein Jelle Terpstra:** In New Brunswick, in New Jersey, reporters were covering the train journey but they had to wait for hours for the train to pass by, so they asked a high school band, young kids about fifteen, sixteen years old to play high school songs again and again and again. In the months after, family members received two thousand letters from all over the United States [saying] “Thank you for playing for hours on that warm [muggy](#) day in June”.

A SNAPSHOT OF AMERICA

At first mainly white Americans from rural communities shared their memories, but then members of the Black community began [to come forward](#), too. We asked Terpstra what he had learned about America. **Rein Jelle Terpstra:** I found a very polarised United States. Sometimes I found [that] parents who were crying along the tracks and saying goodbye to Robert F. Kennedy, who stood for social justice, social equality... they now voted for Trump. There’s a [willingness](#) to believe in a story.

COLLECTIVE LOSS

The evolving project became a book and a travelling exhibition. We asked Terpstra about the role of photography in helping us come to terms with [loss](#). **Rein Jelle Terpstra:** They are often [entangled](#), the notion of photography and the notion of death, of [loss](#) maybe, or absence — when you look at a photograph you also [are aware](#) of what is not there because you see not a presence but a representation, and I think we as a human beings, we have two ways [to deal with](#) this absence thanks to photography, one way is memory and the other is imagination.

Glossary

- **wave** = salutare con la mano
- **Dutch** = olandese
- **hung around** = aggirarsi, gironzolare
- **to show up** = essere presenti
- **knocked** = chiamare
- **snapshots** = istantanee
- **to pay their last respects** = rendere omaggio
- **salute** = fare il saluto militare
- **stored away** = mettere da parte
- **loss** = perdita
- **to come forward** = farsi avanti
- **are aware** = essere consapevole
- **to reach out** = contattare
- **muggy** = umido, afoso
- **mourners** = coloro che sono in lutto
- **resting place** = luogo di riposo
- **to speak up** = alzare la voce
- **hold up** = sostenere, mostrare
- **signs** = cartelli
- **shoeboxes** = scatole per scarpe
- **willingness** = disposizione
- **entangled** = connessi, intrecciati
- **to deal with** = affrontare