

Lockdown: 100 Days in San Francisco Facing Covid-19, Protests, and an Uncertain Future

Conor Mitchell

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As disturbing as it is beautiful, Lockdown is a photographic trek through a city in the midst of a global crisis.

The photographs collected in Conor Mitchell's *Lockdown* chronicle one hundred days of uncertainty and unrest in San Francisco because of Covid-19.

Mitchell had lived in San Francisco for eighteen months when Covid-19 turned the city into a virtual ghost town. Cabin fever pushed him outdoors, where he found buildings "locked or even boarded up ... there was a silence that remains in my memory to this day." He took one hundred thousand photographs across the city: of streets and neighborhoods that seemed devoid of life; of protests, too. Crisp and clear, these black-and-white-images have an eerie dystopian quality. They feature cold, empty streets, parks, and buildings.

All of the photographs, which range from famous landmarks to neighborhood dives, are clearly identified; the text covers bits of the history and the significance of each. On occasion, a car or a lone, masked pedestrian is featured, heightening the collection's sense of loss and foreboding. The city, as seen in these photographs, seems to be a beautiful, if dying, place—one that's been stripped of its vitality, and that is viewed under mostly grey and threatening skies.

Accompanying the photographs are heartfelt journal entries covering the emotions that the lockdown provoked: concern about Mitchell's job and how he would pay his bills; questions of what the long-term effects of the lockdown would be; fear that he might contract the illness. A sense of disorientation directs the entries, as does curiosity about the future of San Francisco's people and businesses. And there is grief as vibrant celebrations are cancelled, leaving voids in residents' calendars: "It honestly felt like the end of the world." Dramatic evocations of "distant legends of worlds long forgotten," as with the fall of Rome and the Civil War, come in; everyone wonders what it would be like to live through dark historical days, Mitchell says, and the book suggests that the Covid-19 shutdowns were such events.

The book's layout and design are visually appealing. Still, although the black background used throughout provides a sense of unity and cohesiveness, it means that the text—which is printed in capital letters, in white, and in a font that fades out parts of the letters—inhibits easy reading.

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KRISTINE MORRIS (November 18, 2021)

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