



## **Off his trolley? The author who won 'oddest book' award**

**By Geneviève Roberts**

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Julian Montague spent six years roaming the streets of America, photographing an integral element of the industrialised world: the stray shopping trolley.

Although dismissed by the majority as a blight on the urban landscape, Mr Montague has created a field guide so any trolley-spotter can identify specimens in canals, parks and back gardens. The taxonomy of "false" and "true" "strays", the "simply vandalised" and "bus-stop discarded" is for the first time detailed in the guide.

Montague's book *The Stray Shopping Carts of Eastern North America: A Guide to Field Identification* received its first award this week. It has been named the oddest book title of the year by *The Bookseller* magazine.

Montague, 34, an artist and photographer living in New York, said: "It started when I noticed stray shopping carts lying around. There's an intersection where I live and there are shopping carts everywhere - in strange positions in people's lawns, abandoned in bushes. So I created a language to illuminate this peripheral phenomenon. People who have read the book tell me they now notice shopping carts where they never would have done previously."

He said that his work began as an art project, then became an exhibition at the Black and White Gallery in New York and a postcard collection, before finally being turned into a book. "I didn't spend every day for six years working on shopping trolleys," he said. "But it's not a niche book. It casts new light on this mundane part of the world."

Montague said he was surprised to have coined the oddest book title of the year. "I was so deeply into the project I was a little numb to the fact that the title could surprise other people."

More than 5,500 people voted through the *Bookseller.com* for this year's Diagram Prize, and Montague's title gained 1,866 votes. The second most obscure title was *Tattooed Mountain Women and Spoon Boxes of Daghestan*, with 1,365 votes. Third was *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming Into Existence* with 685 votes.

Joel Rickett, deputy editor of *The Bookseller*, said: "We are delighted to reward a brilliant piece of niche publishing again this year. For everyone who has ever seen an abandoned supermarket trolley and wondered how it got there, *The Stray Shopping Carts of Eastern North America* is an indispensable guide."

The prize is not based on content, Rickett said. However, reviews of the guide on Amazon have been favourable, with one post describing it as, "One of the most complete and well thought-out works I have ever encountered." It goes on, "Montague's language coupled with his beautiful photography give the lowly carts individual personalities. Refreshing, for an art piece, it never takes itself too seriously. It will change the way you look at the urban environment, and most importantly it's endlessly fun."

Deborah Aaronson, editor of Montague's book, said: "I think the book is unique because it is, at once, incredibly rigorous and totally absurd. Not only does it contain this extraordinarily detailed system of the ways that stray shopping carts can be classified, but it practically humanises them. You find yourself looking at images of carts that have been abandoned by the side of the road, pushed into rivers, or damaged and tossed into piles and you can't help but feel bad for them. It's really strange."

Montague, who continues to add photographs of "recently documented specimens" found near his home in Buffalo to his website [www.strayshoppingcart.com](http://www.strayshoppingcart.com) is starting work on a new project. "It will be indoors," he said. "And will involve spiders."

The Stray Shopping Carts of Eastern North America: A Guide to Field Identification by Julian Montague, published by Abrams Image, priced £9.95