

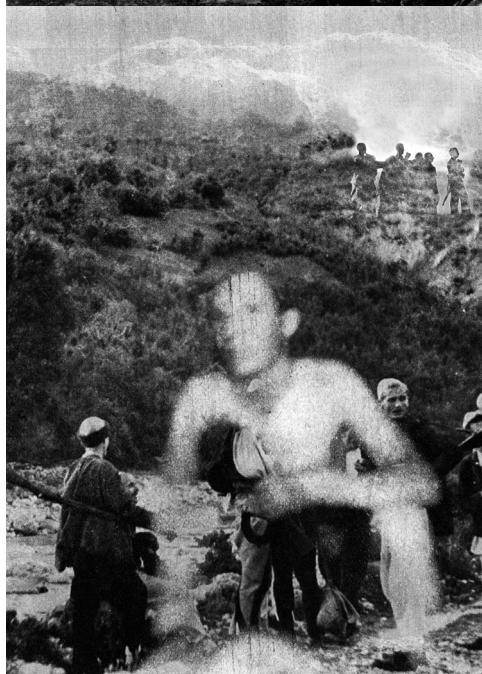
BLAISE ADILON MÉMOIRES TROUBLÉES

CURATOR

THIERRY RASPAIL

19/05 > 27/06/21

Press release



Mémoires Troublées, 2020.

The gap

There are facts and there are beliefs or, to put it another way, there is the world and then there are our thoughts about it. Blaise Adilon builds his images on the gap between the two.

That perimeter of uncertainty between the one and the other, the invisible component that unites them and divides them, while holding them hostage to each other, is what Blaise Adilon slips surreptitiously into the interstice.

Pixels

At the very beginning of the 80s, he roamed the countryside, camera in hand. But it was empty because film in those days was precious and expensive for a beginner. The light may not have registered on the film, but it did on the retina of the young learner. Today, camera and retina permeate the world in 70 million pixels.

Erasure

«For the fashion of this world passeth away.» (1 Corinthians 7:31). Photographs, history, algorithms (often) and memory (sometimes) try to hold on to some of it. But they are fragments that gradually fade away, because flow succeeds flow and the present gives way to the present. So, when the world fades away, all that is left is congestion and gaps, a confused memory.

History and memory

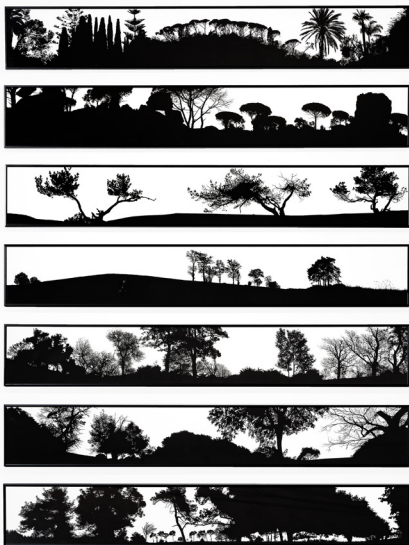
History has its Agincourts, its Berlin Walls, its Tommie Smiths with raised arm and clenched fist, its Nurembergs, its Misérables, its Divine Comedies, its invisible figures, its theatres of operations, its frontiers, and its demarcation lines. But memory blurs history. It retains only the things that stick out and there seems to be nothing in between and nothing beyond. It is in this hollow, on this inverted ridge between the two sides of the valley, between sense and nonsense, the visible and the invisible, between image and intelligibility, that Blaise Adilon's work maintains a careful equilibrium. It is the site of his first interrogation and the subject of his photography.

Confused memories

This is both the title of the exhibition and that of Blaise Adilon's most recent series (2020-21). The series is about the dotted line of history and its porous memory. It is an anti-monument built on images from the years 1937-40. The series shows what is beyond words and events because everything is seen «in between», as close as possible, but never fixed: tragedy, erasure, suggestion, the subjective, the vanishing moment, anonymity, facts that become confused and the grimed over moments that remain and that we know nothing about.

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The Road, Villa Balthazar, Valence, 2018

What is this shadow of a miller? Who are these indistinct convicts rowing? And the American in the shower? What are these scenes, Who are these figures, if not the heroes of a long forgotten moment in geopolitics? They are us and, like us, they were soon swallowed up. Is the world a matter of conviction? Of evidence? Or conspiracy?

The edge: Roads, Nests, Forests, Mountains, Borders

Each road (The Road) is contained in an 18x120 cm rectangle, each Nest in a 50x50 cm square, as are the Forests but not the Mountains, which vary. Paha Sapa, the title of these mountains, which are within walking distance, means The Sacred Black Mountains (2017-18) in the Sioux language. Each Mountain is a fixed point on an improvised itinerary, fleeting as the moment it was captured. Each mountain is highlighted with Indian ink so that the darkness, the contours and the plane, the hollows and time itself all get lost in the beholder's gaze. This weightless Magic Mountain stands on watercolour paper.

80 Roads make up a series (The Road) produced between 2015 and 2017. Each one of them is a montage. Oaks, ash, lime trees, thorns and deciduous trees are laid out, one by one like memory shadows on a thread, assembled as skyline silhouettes. Not one of these roads had been seen before the image was created, none of them had been travelled before the photograph existed, but they are all accurate, because we know for a fact that we are surrounded by lines of shadow on the horizon. The Nests, like the Forests, were captured in 60 million pixels and are entitled Impermanence 1 and 2 (2016-21). The nest is abandoned when the fledgling leaves it. And so this fragile perfection lasts no more than the time it takes to fly the nest, and then it is gone. Until then, it is a hollow, a circle, an enclosure.

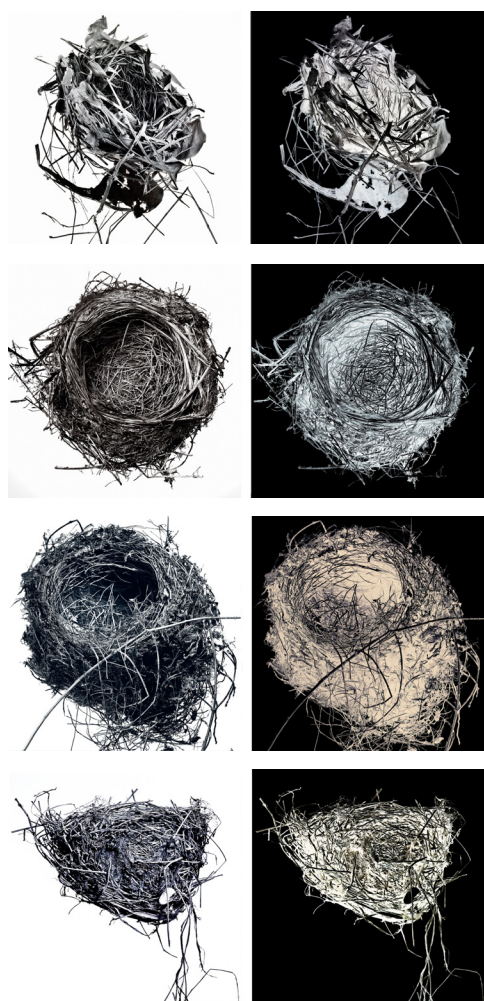
The Forest, on the other hand, is brush, it is an area in the very heart of some undetermined place. The curved outline of the landscape weaves its way and frays in the light, telling no tales, in the blink of an eye.

Cross the Borders (2020): there are four borders and they are murky, black and opaque. The black fades as a dark light envelops the borders. It is a moment of latency, hesitant and delicate, but a moment of rare precision that frees the silent, enchanted, random colours from the darkness. Colour seeps away from the black.

The strength of these borders is that they can be crossed at the fleeting moment when they dissolve under the action of defecting light. A demarcation line.

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Impermanences, 2017, diptyque.

A watchtower, wet cobblestones, red lights in the distance, waves petering out, more edges. All this might easily not exist or, worse, might not be seen.

Worlds

Blaise Adilon looks for the silent zones (Foucault) of the world, i.e., moments of transition, edges once again. He constructs singular images from sites that can be identified but which, like unique common nouns used in the plural (Suns, Earths), become both familiar and unfamiliar and, at the same time, generic. So we have not a forest but all forests, not an enclosure but all enclosures and all nests, every fleeting moment, every border and every mountain. And all the confused memories that come with them. Adilon's singular 'mountain', like 'man' and 'mankind', references 'mountainkind'. Blaise Adilon erases all celebrations, anniversaries, heroism and fuss.

Grammar

But, just as in literature meaning does not exist until the sentence has been set down, in Adilonia the image is nothing until the grammar has structured it. Each image, or rather each series, has its own grammar, which he invents as he goes along without any path ahead of him. Without that grammar, the photograph is no more than an intuition; it has potential and nothing else. Without a grammar to set it down and give it meaning, there is no image.

As a consequence, the work comes into being through the positive-negative experience of the Nests and Forests, in the evanescence of the colours in the black of the Borders, in the ink of the peaks and Mountains, in the digital lettering of the silhouetted trees of the Roads and in the tarmacked superimpositions of Confused Memories. It follows from that, but from that alone, that every forest has its edge, every field its bounds, every mind its limit, every mountain its beyond, and every nest its outside. That is the meaning of things. And implicit demarcation lines shape these things and their meanings.

Can we know what lies at the end of the road, outside the nest, over the border, beyond the mountain, between the confusion and the memory, between the history and the reality of the images?

Thierry Raspail

Translated by Jeremy Harrison



Atelier de l'artiste © Blaise Adilon

Blaise Adilon was born in 1960. He learnt photography in 1980 at the experimental photography course run by Claudine and Jean-Pierre Sudre.

In 1981, he set up his first photography studio, then a film studio. Working closely with the art world, he has become a specialist; he devotes a large part of his life to making photo and film documentaries of major contemporary art events in France and Europe. Blaise Adilon decided at the outset to strike the right balance between a professional career and one of artistic creation through photography.

His close contact with contemporary art soon led him away from his early influences, Cartier-Bresson and the decisive moment. «It was difficult to do better and I had the feeling that continuing along that line would lead me towards plagiarism, to a kind of repetition which is the primary danger in photography. So I became interested in the process, in editing, in thought, in poetry, in cinema, in Jean-Luc Godard.»

Blaise's use of several images in dialogue with each other has been a constant since he started making art photography. These images take the form of series that involve sequence, juxtaposition, superimposition, and gelatin silver or digital montages.

«The image is an ambiguous surface, which circulates between its limits and an immense reverse side that intersects with my imagination. I like it to circulate between several states and to transpose the real rather than represent it.

Whereas for many photographers the moment of releasing the shutter is a kind of culmination, that moment is just the beginning for me, an embryo with a potentiality that I need to understand, to develop, and to work on.

That shift from observing objective reality to looking at a subjective, photographic reality in the form of a gelatin silver negative or a digital file, is the core of my work. While that is happening, and it can last a long time, the image becomes art through the treatment that is applied to it; it is also the moment when it reveals its meaning.»



Thierry Raspail © Blaise Adilon

Thierry Raspail is an art historian and independent curator. He was director of the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon from its creation in 1984 until 2018. During his tenure, he built up a collection of large-scale artworks created specifically for the museum – a collection unique of its kind in Europe. He exhibited many major artists including Pierre Soulages, Bernar Venet, Andy Warhol, Keith Haring and Yoko Ono, as well as hosting Louise Bourgeois's first retrospective in France.

He was the founder of the Biennale de Lyon in 1991 and its artistic director until the 14th edition.

Thierry Raspail was the curator of the exhibition «Philippe Favier, All Over», which extended across 3000m² in 40 rooms at the Musée de Valence (Drome) until 29 August 2021.

For the Henri Chartier gallery, he has chosen to exhibit the work of Blaise Adilon.