

About *Absences*, by Nathan Réra

In May 2013, Alexis Cordesse returned to Rwanda to photograph nature in which all human presence is absent. These photos take us on a journey from the rolling hills of Kibuye, to the Nyungwe rainforest, via the marshy plains of Bugesera and muddy waters of the Nyabarongo. The images dialogue with landscape painting (from Friedrich's fluffy mountains to Douanier Rousseau's teeming jungles), all the while readily playing with colonialist clichés portraying Rwanda as an « Eden of a thousand hills ». The landscapes, in extreme contrast to the horrors of genocide, seem to have regained the peace and quiet that once characterised them.

Absences borrows from earlier photographs (images from *Itsembatsemba* as well as from the press) to make us uncomfortably aware that, twenty years earlier, these places of original beauty were home to such horror. Confronted with the ambivalence these landscapes reveal, it is not so much about admiring their irrepressible beauty than probing the cracks, the invisible mark that history has left behind on them. They are trompe-l'œil, traps not refuges, open graves where luxuriant nature is shown stubbornly going about its job of living. Nature that, in appearance, is deaf to man's story.

This body of work is completed by two photos of memorial stones, in Ntarama and Gishwati, with victims' names engraved on them, as well as witness accounts from three survivors and a «righteous» Hutu collected by the photographer while in the country. This combination of words and images opens a new space for perception where viewers will have to use their imagination, their ability to picture the event by measuring the discrepancy between these silent landscapes and the accounts of what people lived through.

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