

ALEXIS CORDESSE





**ALEXIS CORDESSE
PHOTOGRAPHS**

MUNICIPAL POOL 2003

BORDERLINES 2009 - 2011

RWANDA 1996 - 2014

MUNICIPAL POOL
2003

In the summertime, the pool of the suburban town of Châtillon-Malakoff, located just outside and to the south of Paris, is one of the biggest draws of any swimming pool in the Paris area. The Olympic-sized outdoor pool and its surrounding lawns attract up to 2,500 people daily. Some come to swim, others to cool off, while yet others set out picnic spreads, flirt or doze off. The crowd is remarkably varied – socially, culturally and in terms of age group. This broad human spectrum was what initially inspired this project.

In July 2003, I set up an outdoor studio near the pool to take portraits of anonymous persons in swimsuits. There is nothing natural, neither than truth in these portraits. These photographs are the result of a long and often arduous exchange with models involved to make public their image. They reveal the singular presence to the world of each ; they move closer to individuals and propose a representation of the community which they form.



Farid



Slimane and Hakima



Hossain, Mahan and Ismaël



Louise



Tim



Nosri and Oualid

2003

La Peripherie Gallery, Malakoff, France (solo)

2004

Europa, spirit of the cities - September of photographie festival, Lyon, France (solo)



2009

French National Library collection

2013

Confluence Gallery, Nantes, France (solo)



BORDERLINES

2009 - 2011

ABOUT BORDERLINES

Michel Poivert

The work grouped under the title *Borderlines* was made during trips to Israel and the Palestinian Territories. The implementation of these images makes a fundamental appeal to digital technology; based on a montage of the panoramic format, the images maintain a descriptive and utopic connection to reality.

The scenes were all observed from a precise topography but according to different temporalities. Therefore, in the same space, the discrepancies of time are re-synchronized by the images and the seams are left exposed : the Holy Land becomes a place of possible encounters while remaining present in its topographic reality.

Reworked by successive copying, the shots function as a sketchbook and as visual notation. Digital treatment is not used for effects but to amend the real, a powerful use of digital photography which conditions the contact with the world. The world which Cordesse shows us, these places so symbolic and generally caught up in media stereotypes, is a grand scene where the daily joins the historical issues of civilisations which co-exist.

In this way, the artist puts into place a practice which, starting from the problematics of image treatment, situates itself half-way between the reflection of the responsibility of the images and its potential for the imaginary. To show, if needed, that digital art has transformed itself from a candid expressive exploration to become a veritable instrument of creative innovation.





« Green Line », limit between West Jerusalem and East Jerusalem, Israel - occupied territories, 2009



« Salah ad-Din Street », East Jerusalem, occupied territories, 2009



« Interior wall », Lod, Israël, 2010



« Unrecognized », remains of Al-Arakib, a bedouin village, Neguev, Israël, 2010

2010

Grant of research, National Center for Visual Arts, France
Ecole Spéciale d'Architecture, Month of Photography, Paris (solo)
Lucien & Rodlof Hervé Prize



2011

Arcimboldo Prize
Photo 12 Gallery, Paris
Swiss Life Collection

2012

French Instituts, Jerusalem, Gaza, Ramallah, Naplouse, Palestinians Territories (solo)
Nicéphore Niépce museum collection
Artothèque de Caen, France (solo)
Publication European Photography n° 91, Germany
Publication limited edition portfolio (150 copies, text : Michel Poivert)



2013

Khalil al Sakakini cultural center, Ramallah, Palestine (solo)
Jerusalem, Izmir, Alger, Les Douches Gallery, Paris
Sedan Photo Biennale, France (solo)
Rencontres photographiques de Lorient, France (solo)



2014

Centre Atlantique de la Photographie, Brest, France (solo)

2015

«I love panoramas.» Appropriating the world, RATH museum, Geneva, Switzerland / Mucem, Marseille, France



RWANDA 1996 - 2014

ITSEMBATSEMBA

CONFESSION

ABSENCES

ITSEMBATSEMBA

1996

“Itsembatsemba, Rwanda one genocide later”

A film by Alexis Cordesse & Eyal Sivan

Documentary | 1996 | 13mn | B/W | 4:3 | STEREO

VO : Kinyarwanda - Subtitles : French, English

© État d’urgence [FR] momento production [FR]

The genocide in Rwanda took place amid general indifference. On April 6th 1994, Rwandan President Juvenal Habyrimana was assassinated. The authorities immediately put into practice their extermination plan, which sought to murder all opponents of their regime as well as the totality of the Tutsi in Rwanda. In less than a hundred days, soldiers and militiamen, with the help of a section of the civilian population, killed between 800.000 and 1.000.000 people. For more than two months, the international community looked on as the slaughter continued without intervening.

“Itsembatsemba, Rwanda one genocide later” is an experimental short film produced two years after the genocide, using black and white photographs, sound recordings and archive material from Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM).

This radio station, launched in 1993 by Hutu extremists, was the most popular of the “hate media”. Mixing popular music from Congo and racist propaganda, it played a crucial role in spreading ethnic ideology, and, subsequently, coordinating and encouraging the killings.

The words of the radio provide incriminating evidence against the genocide’s perpetrators. In the film, they come to contaminate and complicate the visual representation of horror by reminding us of the specificity of the crimes. Based on the need to consider a different framework for representation and perception, this experimental essay helps reformulate the question of the “unrepresentable”.



Welcome to your free radio station



Dear listeners, good morning!



Stay alert ! Don't let one rat through.



God will be at our side



Rejoice, my friends!



The rats must have been wiped out!

L'AVEU
2004

In Rwanda, ten years after the genocide, more and more confessions were being obtained in prisons, with the incentives of sentence reduction and conditional release. In March 2004, in the province of Kibuye, I interviewed and photographed Rwandans, both male and female, who had confessed to their participation in the genocide. Some were on conditional release and others were still being detained. Most of them were still waiting for their trial.

In 1991, the population of this Western province of Rwanda was 473.920 of which there were 399.470 Hutu (84,3%) and 71.225 Tutsi (15%). Between April and June 1994, 59,050 Tutsi were exterminated. In total, in less than a hundred days, between 700.000 and 1.000.000 people were killed across the country by soldiers and militiamen, with the help of a section of the civilian population. According to the Rwandan justice, 800.000 people (roughly 10% of Rwanda's population in 1994) were condemned to have directly taken part in the murders or in the sexual violence during the genocide.

"I oversaw a group of 6 people. Installed at a barrier at the crossroads of two busy routes, we had orders to verify identity cards and to arrest the Tutsis wanting to flee the hills. We also looked at faces. You can tell a Tutsi from his nose which is longer and thinner than that of a Hutu. When we caught one, we killed him on the spot"

Last Name : Ntare
First Name : Alexis
Age : 47
Profession : unemployed, former militiaman
Arrested : September 12, 1994
Charge : crime of genocide
Date of confession : October 15, 1997
Conditional liberty : since May 5, 2003



"I lived with Balthazar, a Tutsi. After the first attack on the mountain where we were hiding, Balthazar asked me to leave in order to save our three children. After two days of walking, we managed to reach the house of my family. The next day, they told us that they did not want Tutsi children in their home and drove us out. We stayed hidden near the house for three days. It rained and we were hungry. Then, I decided to kill myself and the children. I threw them into the river and just as I was about to join them my younger brother stopped me. He said : "Why kill yourself ? You've just solved your problem with the Tutsi"."

Last Name : Ayinkamiye
First Name : Colette
Age : 48
Profession : farmer
Arrested : August 12, 1997
Charge : crime of genocide
Date of confession : May 9, 2000
Held in the central prison of Gisovu
Awaiting trial



"I did not have time to think of breaking. I did not have time to return in myself to think that you should not participate in this crime."

Last Name : Nitwa Tuyisenqe
First Name : Faustin
Age : 47
Profession : mason
Arrested : December 2nd, 1996
Charge : crime of genocide
Date of confession : 2002
Conditional liberty : since May 5, 2003



"The two children were hiding among the banana trees near my home. When Claver found them he was quite pleased with himself. He said : "Come and have a look. I've caught two little cockroaches". I killed them with a club. The first one, I hit him three times. The second one was smaller so I only had to hit him twice. Killing Tutsis was a popular thing to do, so killing those kids did not mean anything to me."

Last Name : Ndangamira
First Name : François
Age : 39
Profession : farmer
Arrested : February 10, 1996
Charge : crime of genocide
Date of confession : June 5, 1997
Conditional liberty : since May 5, 2003



ABSENCES

2013

ABOUT ABSENCES

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. Faceless portraits reduced to a mere audio presence, these recorded accounts will be available to listen to at the exhibition itself. This set-up 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.



Tea plantations, Cytabi hills

Next pages : Nyungwe rain forest



"(...) What I remember is I would eat sorghum. I would chew the unripe grain and swallow the sap. Or else, I would eat guava as it was in season. And when I thought I was going to die of starvation, I went and asked other people for food. I tried my luck at night at people's homes who I thought would be particularly merciful, especially those who we used to pray with. If you were lucky, you'd get someone who'd give you food. If you were unlucky, you could be denounced and the following day they'd come and get you (...)"

Mukantabana Marthe, grower





Ntarama memorial, Bugesera district



Wetlands, Bugesera district

1996

International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam

1997

Human Rights Watch International Film Festival

Festival Cinéma du Réel, Paris

GOLDEN GATE AWARD San Francisco International Film Festival

1998

Amnesty International Film Festival, Amsterdam

2000

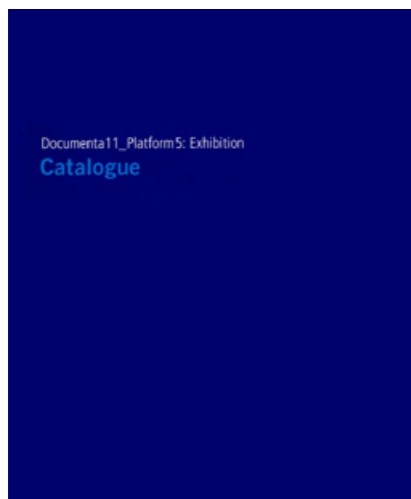
International Human Rights Film Festival, Ramallah-Tel-Aviv

2001

Publication Neue Zürcher Zeitung (CH) n°46, Feb 24, 2001

2002

Documenta XI, Cassel, Germany



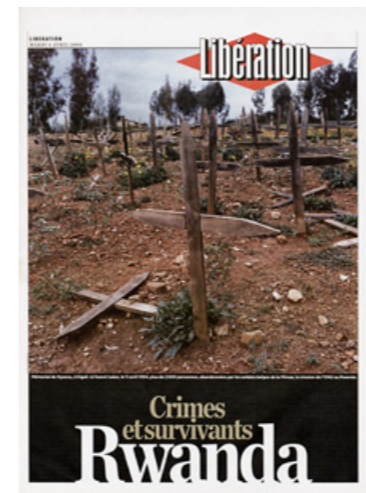
2003

Strangers, Triennial of Photography and Video, ICP, New York, USA



2004

Publication Libération (FR) April 6, 2004, special issue 20th anniversary of the rwandan genocide



2005

Prisonniers de l'image, Centre d'histoire de la résistance et de la déportation, Lyon, France

2014

Collections : Fond national d'art contemporain / Neuflyze-Vie Collection/ Nicéphore Niépce Museum

Rwanda, wounded vision, Kazerne Dossin Museum, Mechelen, Belgium (solo)

L'Aveu / Absences, Galerie Ikono, Brussels, Belgium (solo)

Rwanda, blessures d'images, Armenian Heritage Centre, Valence, France (solo)

Rwanda, Les Douches Gallery, Paris (solo)

In the decay of the world, the grateful photography, H2M, Centre of contemporary art, Bourg-en-Bresse, France



2015

A brief history of the futur, Louvre museum, Paris.

Tous azimuts, Nicéphore Niépce museum, Chalon-sur-Saône, France

À fendre le cœur le plus dur, Témoigner la guerre / regards sur une archive, Frac Alsace, Sélestat / Centre photographique d'Ile-de-France, Pontault-Combault

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