

Exhibition

September 7 - October 12 2019

Opening on Saturday September 7

Isabelle LE MINH Before Something New



In this month of September, the Galerie Christophe Gaillard is pleased to present a solo exhibition by Isabelle Le Minh, the third since embarking on its collaboration with the artist in 2009.

For over a decade now, Isabelle Le Minh has questioned the nature of images, their subjects, habitual practices, theoretical fundamentals, founding myths, and history. The development of digital photography and the presumed obsolescence of film have raised further questions as to the very essence of photography.

Through her multifaceted and polysemic work, not devoid of humour, Isabelle Le Minh probes the most diverse fields pertaining to photogra-

phy: its subjects, practices, techniques, history, and theoretical underpinnings. Drawing on citation or reappropriation, her artworks play with words, symbols, and cultural codes in a resolutely conceptual and polysemic vein. Homages and references to artists and art theorists, to chemical procedures, shooting equipment, and new technological media all serve as milestones punctuating this photographic exploration.

The exhibition reveals a collection whose title, *After Photography*, refers to the post-modern practices of citation that were developed in the 1980s mainly by American artists, as well as to the array of recent exhibitions and publications, implying that we have entered a “post” era of photography.

The series in which Isabelle Le Minh appropriates the work of major photographers to question the medium and its ghosts is exhibited in the front section of the gallery: *Série trop tôt, trop tard*, *After Henri Cartier-Bresson* (2007), *A Copy of The Liar*, the *Copy of The Liar*, *After Francis Alÿs & WikiHow* (2011), *Darkroomscapes*, *After Hiroshi Sugimoto* (2012), *Lointain si proche*, *After Alighiero e Boetti* (*Camera Body, Made in China*, 2012), *Objektiv*, *After Bernd & Hilla Becher* (2015).

In the main space of the gallery, a collection of original works is presented. *Life Time*, *After Robert Heinecken* (2019) repeats and revisits the principle of the series *Are You Real* initiated in the 1960s by American artist Robert Heinecken. Magazine pages are substituted by those of the legendary *Time-Life* encyclopaedia for photography. The pages selected give us a few clues through their titles: “Make don’t take a photo”; “Fundamental lighting techniques”; “Old Techniques, avant-garde proofs”. But here, the photogram is digital. It comes from a scan inkjet printed on photographic paper, then exposed and developed completely or partially, like a chemigram. The



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process is experimental and brings both silver and digital techniques into play within a single support. The title - which reverses that of Time-Life - highlights the distance separating the late 1960s from our present day.

With Silver, After Alfred Ehrhardt (2019), Isabelle Le Minh emphasises the German photographer's artistic and scientific approach as well as the influence of Bauhaus teachings on his work. The artwork comprises a reproduction on glass of the negative of a photograph by Alfred Ehrhardt representing native silver, with the image printed on plexiglass and the background of the frame covered in silver leaf.

In the atrium, the artist has chosen to bring several contemporary series into conversation, three of which were devised after a trip to the United States in 2018 to the city of Rochester, where George Eastman founded the famous Kodak Company. She updates her approach to the medium and opens up new fields of investigation.

Deliberately absurd, the device Vie de formes de vie, forme de vies des formes (2019) confronts two different conceptions of art, the one described by Henri Faucillon in Vie des formes and the one offered by Nicolas Bourriaud in his book Formes de vie. These two texts, only the beginnings of which feature here, are articulated in the twist of a strip of paper that repeats the infinite torsion of a Möbius strip, with its front printed on silver paper and its back in negative.

As for the series of printings on silk Traumachrome (2019), it emerges as a project of a metaphorical nature. On legendary Tri-X black-and-white film produced in Rochester by the Kodak Company, the artist recorded cityscapes and the economic decline of the firm. But during the scanning of the negatives, an accident damaged the images: the machine randomly introduced noise and colours, the brand's renowned yellows and reds. Some of these colourful fogs recall the appearance of slides exposed to light, so the artist decided to enlarge the images and present them in the form of screen-sized slides. Altered in their very process of creation, confronting film and digital technologies, the Traumachromes document an emblematic site in the history of photography and contain all the memory of the medium.

In line with her work on Kodak and its inventor, Isabelle Le Minh also devised a series combining two primitive recording procedures, consisting of polished copper plates covered by a thin layer of silver using daguerreotype technique, which she then perforated like a pianola scroll. She was inspired here by one of the many passions of George Eastman, a big fan of the player piano, who owned many such scrolls (now exhibited at his home in Rochester). Invented in the late nineteenth century, these supports were the first to be produced industrially to enable music to be quickly and easily disseminated. They are the ancestors of MIDI digital files. While the perforations are analog signals, it is nevertheless impossible to reconstruct any semblance of a melody based on this visual information. Unlike the daguerreotypes - "mirrors of memory" - these works confront us with oblivion and the inexorable loss of understanding of data produced by recording technologies that very rapidly become obsolete.



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In a final act of reappropriation, Isabelle Le Minh placed a player piano in the centre of the gallery, another playful reference to the Aeolian mechanical organ found in George Eastman's home. The musical notes that emerge from it are those of the original soundtrack of the film *A Place in the Sun* (which tells the story of another George Eastman!), composed by Franz Waxman and retranscribed by the artist for solo piano on a MIDI file.

In the 1990s, Isabelle Le Minh left her job as a patent engineer in Berlin to devote herself to photography. A graduate of the Ecole Nationale Supérieure de la Photographie d'Arles, she now teaches at the Haute école des arts du Rhin of Strasbourg. Winner of the artist's book revelation prize awarded by the ADAGP in 2016 and a resident of the Villa Kujoyama in 2019, she has notably shown her work at Le Mois de la Photo in Montreal, Les Rencontres d'Arles, Paris Photo, the Centre photographique d'île de France, La Maison Rouge, FRAC Normandie Rouen, the Musée des beaux arts de Mulhouse, MOCAK in Krakow, and the Goethe Institute in Paris.

Her work is present in numerous public and private collections including those of the Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, FRAC Normandie Rouen, FRAC Grand Large - Hauts de France, Neuflyze OBC in France, the Andra Spallart Collection in Vienna, the DZ Bank in Frankfurt, the 21c Museum in Louisville, and Dorfman Projects in New York.



*The exhibition will provide the occasion to discover the first monograph by the artist, entitled *After Photography & Beyond*, with texts by Julie Jones (photography historian), Joan Fontcuberta (artist and author of many theoretical texts on photography), Florian Ebner (chief curator of the photography department of the Centre Pompidou), and Véronique Sou-*

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