

DES ARBRES

Eric Dupont Gallery is pleased to present an extract of Claude's Iverné ongoing work

Des Arbres is a warning in the form of a tribute to what is to be lost among the most precious things we have, there, right before our eyes. A gallery of portraits taken in very large format. A poetic survey to ask us about the fate of our trees, our landscapes, what is played with low noise in forests as in plains and here at home as elsewhere. A silent document, an ode and invitation to the slowness, the murmur that embodies the figure of the tree in the face of acceleration. An invitation to feel the fragility under the bark.

Think like a tree. Like the mountain, the tree remains a monument of our natural and psychic environment. It's by observing its architecture that we can translate the vital diaphragm of a tree. Since I was a child I have loved their presence. I keep preciously my first sketch of a tree, drawn in winter 1981 during a history-geography class. Nothing exceptional here. Historically, trees have been admired by humans. Venerated and celebrated, they are willing to lend them powers. I speak to them mentally, as I speak to the animals, and to the stones, in silence, from presence to presence.

It was in Sudan twenty years ago that I slowed down and took my first photographs of trees. Then others in Cambodia, Senegal, South Africa and everywhere, without any ulterior motive or project, without looking for them. The Baobab of Kordofan, the one that seems to be planted upside down on the steppe, roots towards the sky, rooted for good the effect of the relationship to time, which had so seduced me in Sudan. Slowness remains a primary virtue of my mental, physical, psychic, vital space. A Remedy to the ambient acceleration 2. What can speed be the guarantee of? I still catch myself sometimes walking fast for no reason.

A first modest and informal corpus of images was thus slowly constituted almost without my knowledge. A sort of precise and flexible protocol emerged, which projected me further. The meeting of passionate people sharpened my eye and incited me to cross the threshold. I equipped myself with a very large format equipment, to reach levels of details able to restore the impressions of materials, to reach the photographic model characteristic of the old prints and to envisage restorations with the measurement of the subject.

Every tree deserves a portrait. Without excluding the so-called remarkable trees, I collect portraits of trees that are both common and singular, whose criteria I would struggle to define. They are not systematically huge, magnificent, old or strong. They often deviate from the encyclopedic cliché. Each one in its port tells an individual, collective and landscape epic and betrays many stigmas of the anthropocene. I am thus fond of the Trognés, otherwise called Tadpole Trees, which crown them with our irrepressible hold on nature.

In this way, a collection of silhouettes punctuated by rare landscapes, details and leaves is created which, although nourished, documented and amended by experts, unfolds like an ode, a tribute rather than a scientific publication.

A tribute to the long time, to the patience, to the maturing from which we silently contemplate these beings of peaceful appearance. They do not care about our policies and projects. We pass, they remain, unless they are carried away by our haste. A tribute then, but one that I want to be dynamic, an invitation to think. Because behind this quiet curtain, under the bark, other issues are at stake.

The tree that I cut down remains calm. As I search, my accomplices reveal to me the peril in progress. The disturbances accelerate. The hydric stresses multiply and with shorter and shorter frequencies. Innumerable trees die alone or in legions.

The one we see will disappear. Its congeners like mine have been warning for decades about their respective reprieves. The signals are there, for whoever wants to see them, and beyond, in rural and urban areas and even in the heart of Paris. Global warming, our economy, our policies and their combined reactions in a chain, too fast to their scale, leave them only a tiny chance of adaptation, and therefore of survival. Engineers are already planning their replacements, which although late will tend to limit the deforestation of our territories. Other species or cousins of the same family, more resistant and experienced in the south for thousands of years to living conditions similar to those to come, will take over. The species of the Mediterranean basin will redraw the landscapes of our children, in Limousin as in

Morvan. The pubescent oak, more resistant than its cousins the sessile and the pedunculate, will become common.

The landscapes count their wise men. Their changes are already visible to us, catching up with the earliest warnings. Many interactions that we can no longer control are now acting here and now. The tree is a victim of a brutal and radical transformation of its environment. The very symbol of wisdom, of long time, of maturation undergoes the assault in first line.

The reality is, it does not increase. To represent it one militates it, at best imitates it. The tree is one thing, its image is another. All that it contains, conveys and shares are totally foreign to it. The tree does not explain. It gives to think without thinking itself. Like the pyramids, from the top of their peaks, centuries contemplate us. So let us contemplate the portrait of a tree, if not the original. To let ourselves be soothed by its calmness despite the storm. To let oneself contemplate it as a privilege, but on purpose, to experience the extreme fragility of what is to be lost and to act. Because the pain of the lack always occurs too late.

To combine the form and the content. It is this silent fragility that I try to translate. To make it apparent in filigrees of the image lure of indestructibility that the tree conveys; to restore it by extremely fragile prints. To approach this notion of giant with feet of clay, I act by metaphor. The prints float barely pinned to the wall, as sensitive to the public's behavior as the trees they represent. A breath would be enough to unhook them. They are not protected, left to our behavior. The slightest pressure marks the paper and any intervention on the surface of the image, would alter it with an indelible scar. The prints are exposed to human danger as are the originals.

Papers. The papers, extremely light with apparent fibers with a very marked texture amplifies the modeling of the photographs. It increases the impression of matter. The tree represented seems to merge with it. In addition to their plastic and mechanical particularities, I chose these papers also for their link with slowness and the hand that thinks and shapes them. These papers are not manufactured in factories, but by hand by craftsmen. Each sheet is the fruit of the thought of a particular woman or man. Its elaboration and manufacture refer to the long time, to the link that these craftsmen maintain with the tree, as much by a reasoned management as by their application to shape them. I use these same papers to draw with ink, which corresponds to their traditional use

Charcoal. I usually produce silver prints myself, according to a traditional protocol that has been elaborated and refined over many years, in order to obtain very wide ranges of gray. Here, the prints are carbon prints, made in Piezography with Christophe Batifoulier, to remain on the same demanding line. In addition to its aesthetic qualities to extend my quest for infinite gray, and its conservation properties, coal, the second largest source of energy in the world after oil, refers to the origins. Without coming exclusively from wood, they are organic and distant. Anthracite gave its name to its color, a particular gray, as warm and deep as that produced by forest fires.

Monumental. A size that commands respect for the original. Although the size of the Grisard poplar print is still much smaller than the actual tree, it must be much larger than a human. A monumental print in several layers, almost four meters high, is hanging. We look up. The photographic original measures 20x25cm. This size of negative gives the print a quality of detail and modeling that does not fear monumental enlargement. It is still a question, this time on the same mental scale but in other proportions, of Stopping the gaze and questioning 3.

Anonymous. One does not know anything of what one sees, As all the restitutions, exhibitions like books, I like to let the public Wander, seek, ask (wonder). Unlike botanical gardens, the captions do not influence the reading of the images and their space of representation. The imagination is put to work.

¹ Laurent Tillon, *Être un chêne*, Actes Sud, 2021

² Hartmut Rosa, *Remède à l'accélération*, Flammarion, Champs essais, 2021

³ Quentin Bajac, *Bilad es Sudan, Arrêter le regard et interroger*, Ed Xaver Barral, 2017

