



Aurélie Pétre Interview & Exhibition Ceysson & Bénétière – Paris

Aurélie Pétre Interview – IRK





Aurélie Pétre is a french photographer, multi-media artist, and teacher. She studied at l'École des Beaux-Arts of Lyon, and developed a unique and powerful photography style, throughout her years studying and working as an artist. Pétre utilizes space, unconventional mediums, and other unique methods to completely transform her photographs. Pétre's powerful style sets her apart as one of the most innovative artists of our time. Her work has been featured in dozens of galleries and institutions, IRK Magazine was lucky enough to catch up with the artist and gain some insight into her powerful work...

- **Foremost do you consider yourself a photographer or a sculptor?**

This is indeed a recurring question, a distinction made for various reasons, inherent to my creative process as well as to the place given to photography in institutions. There are scholarships, awards, or acquisition committees dedicated to photography, all of which automatically participate in supporting the photographic scenes. Photography is a specific medium, which stands at the crossroads of several stages. I define myself as an "artist, photographer and author". In English, these multiple porosities are easier to formulate than in French, one would say "visual artist".

- **Why is it even a question you want to answer?**

It is a natural question because as I said, there are multiple levels to my work, the definitions get blurred. There was a time when it was important for me to find my place in the contemporary scene, especially when some people said to me "you are not a photographer, after all". Questioning the boundaries of a medium is part of the DNA of my work: getting to know from where one is talking, to whom, and how; I create a variety of grids that are many proposals and can be perceived differently by certain viewers.



- Your placement in spaces of your imagery is a process of abstraction that undermines their representative aspect. Can you tell us what you want the viewer to take away from your work?

The idea behind these stagings was to work with the whole body. I consider the body in its entirety. Moving within the installations reveals my proposals, the physical or sound space participate in the conception of the work.





For example, in "Desaparecidos", a monumental installation composed of a single image over 2.5 meters high, the print is presented in its crystallized form. At the back of a large space, a part of the image is hidden by a white wall, in an invitation to enter the space and further discover the proposal, to understand what is the scale of the landscape that is being shown – thus the invisible is revealed. The work is originating from 20-years of research by a group of women in the Chilean desert. In search of their missing relatives, they crossed the desert following a mapped grid. I wanted the viewers to physically perceive this 20-year pursuit, in a real physical sense and not just in an intellectual or metaphorical understanding.

- **Do you have a favorite work of art and why?**

It would be difficult to choose a work in particular. But there are artists who have really affected me, like Tatiana Trouvé, an artist who works on image and installation. Tatiana Trouvé was a teacher at the Beaux-Arts de Lyon when I was a student there, and I established a special dialogue with her. The work of Claire Chevrier and Valérie Jouve is also important to me. I could also mention architects from the 1950s and 1970s when radical architecture pushed the limits of the architectural medium to the point of breaking away from the injunction to build. These are reference figures who have nourished my thinking and have bequeathed me their conceptual heritage.



- How has going through covid isolation changed your work?

Covid has brought about changes of various kinds, and certainly awareness, the real effects of which are yet to come.

As far as I am concerned, covid did not immediately change my life. I had already been in a form of slowdown for a few years, despite going back and forth between France and Switzerland, where I teach.

At the time of the first lockdown in France, I was in Japan at the Kujoyama villa. The project that my artistic partner Vincent Roumagnac and I were working on was already very advanced. We were starting to work in the studio, without having to shoot outside anymore. I was able to continue this work, and we could even show the works in an exhibition in January at the Valeria Cetraro gallery.

- **Ceysson & Bénétière have chosen to show your work as a moment of renewal after Covid. Does that mean something to you and do you have hope for the future and is it reflected in your work?**

I have hope in the future, otherwise, I think I would be somewhere else. When we decided, with the Ceysson & Bénétière gallery, to anticipate the exhibition initially planned for September, it coincided with a key moment: the publication of a monograph embracing fifteen years of my work, from 2003 to 2018. This monograph was conceived independently of this exhibition and vice versa, yet there is a synchronicity here, in the retrieval of the primary image, the source image, the latent shot, given to us raw, as it is.



This crisis will influence my practice, it is too early to say more. The "PVL" proposal spans almost 20 years of photography, this exhibition is the result of an observation made three or four years ago. I remember that at that time I was already talking to Etienne Hatt, art critic and curator of the exhibition, about a possible saturation of forms, a specialization of the image made too quickly, a visual overflow.

Certainly today, covid has accentuated this impression. We have been confronted with a saturation of screens, static images, moving images. All this inevitably influences the perception of the exhibition, which although silent, lets us hear a powerful hubbub emanating from all the investigations and reports carried out, from this notion of continuous displacements, with 8 visible geographies in the latent shots on display. I can't wait to see how we will perceive all this in a few years, with the necessary hindsight.





- The photos in this exhibition span 20 years. Is this show a kind of retrospective?

I wouldn't say that, even though the exhibition does indeed feature photographs taken since 2002. A retrospective would cover more proposals and would include my works in volume. This is rather my first exhibition which, as Etienne Hatt says, shows the view of a photographer, whereas until now I was more on the side of crypto-photography.

- Now that your career is launched and that major institutions and acquisitions have sanctioned your work do you feel freer or more constrained?

Much freer. I do not have an artistic background. I also think that as a woman, it was not as easy to get here. The fact that my work is sanctioned legitimizes me, both in my practice and in my position. Especially since I was one of the first people in France to conduct specialized research from a photographic practice. I have persevered in this direction without letting myself be redirected, without giving in to the need to belong to one scene rather than another.



- **What can you tell aspiring artists to help them succeed?**

This is a double-edged question. Of course, we must believe in what drives us and give ourselves the means to do so. I would be more nuanced than before, even if it seems to me that it is up to each person to find his or her own modes of existence, it is certain that covid is reconfiguring our models and structures by which an artist can ensure his or her subsistence, a process that does not simplify anything and that will require us to imagine other modes of operation.