

PUNK PROJECT



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PHOTOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS

On a proposition by **Étienne Renzo**

in collaboration with Le Musée de l'Invisible

Exhibition and Publishing Project

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LE «PUNK PROJECT» D'ÉTIENNE RENZO

Étienne Renzo loves taking portraits of punks. He started long before the festive gatherings such as the «grosse entube», which he hosted on his airfield. Touched by the commitment, critical derision, creativity and humanity of the neo keupons, he set out to meet them in their unlikely living quarters. With the idea of carrying out «photographic interviews», which was to become a veritable artistic project.

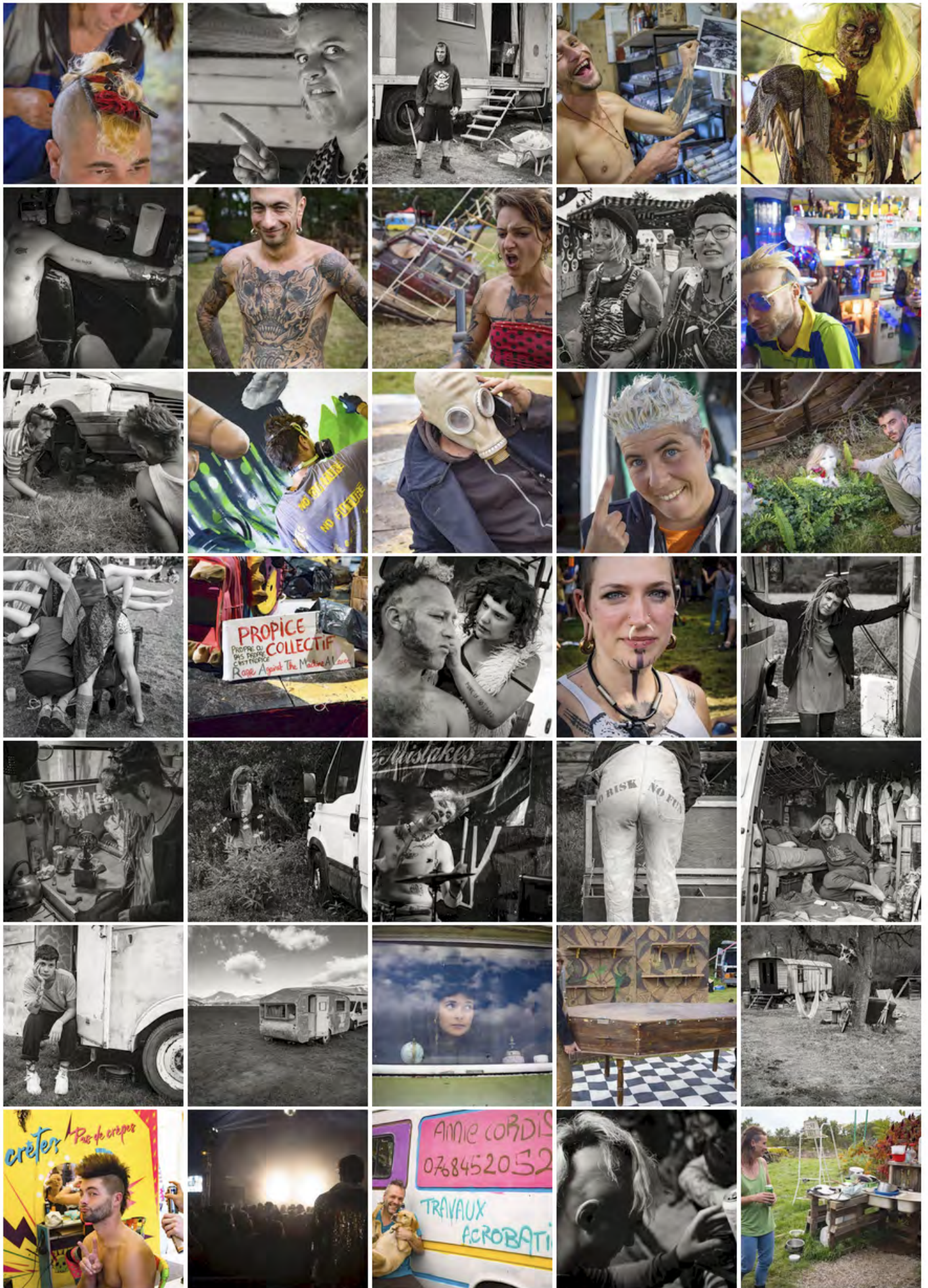
Etienne Renzo is well acquainted with the spirit and history of the punk movement, which he saw emerge in the 70s, sharing some of its revolts and values in the face of outrageous capitalism. As a self-taught photographer, he flirted with community life and grew up with punk, remaining attentive to its alternative developments. Particularly in rural areas, where he himself has chosen to live a certain relationship with the world.

That's why the Punk Project is more the extension of a commitment than the product of a report. Even if the images and words collected reveal new facets of a movement that is still alive and well, and more topical than ever. Both ontologically and anthropologically, when affects, existences, ways of being and surviving are at stake above all else.

So much so that punk culture, which celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this decade, takes on a special meaning and significance here. First of all, it appears as a historical evidence, through its relevance, which prefigures current environmental and societal awareness. Like a prophetic and visionary warning against the excesses of the neoliberalism born of the Thatcherism of the late 70s, which is now a global phenomenon. To such an extent that this deregulated civilization today embodies the «No Future» that denounced it, in a lasting threat to the very habitability of this world.

Seeing and re-seeing punk with Étienne Renzo is something of an exorcism, an antidote and a cure. For the «Punk Project» also tackles the subtle dimensions of the punk soul and spirit, with its cultural and psychosocial realities. If only to thwart the deleterious collusion between consumerist individualism and digital narcissism, which is becoming the norm to the detriment of collective and environmentalist empathy. The Punk Project also takes the liberty of exploring esoteric and spiritual dimensions that are rarely mentioned, yet which count for so many of its protagonists. This is where the dive into punk cosmology takes on the aspect of a quest rather than an investigation. An initiatory quest into the heart of a damaged humanity. But all the better to find ourselves.

Pascal Pique, Le Musée de l'Invisible



EXHIBITION AND PUBLICATION

Values still relevant today

From its very beginnings in 1976-1980, punk feigned stupidity and claimed a certain «cultural illiteracy» that contrasted with the power of action it concealed. Identified in the collective imagination with the aesthetics of an iconoclastic musical genre, punk is also a protest movement, embodying political and social values ranging from anti-authoritarianism to «do-It-Yourself». As punk evolved, so did the social fractures it constantly denounced. That's why it's still relevant today, and a critical force to be reckoned with in an age of generalized individualism and neglect of collective causes.

City punk, country punk

Although the punk movement is largely urban in origin, it is far from having disappeared from the landscape. Particularly in the rural world, where punk culture seems to have taken a lasting hold. Not far from the ZAD phenomenon and other forms of alternative action. Even in retreat, punks are still in the vanguard, with a double face that Etienne Renzo captures so well. On the one hand, there's a jovial, benevolent, even fun dimension, as the party obliges! The party as a ritual instance of subversion of signs and collective fraternity. And on the other, a commitment to radical lifestyle choices. Visionary choices in terms of degrowth, anti-consumerism and solidarity. And let's not forget the nomadic dimension of punk, which can nevertheless become sedentary in the city as well as in the country, setting up its truck in a wasteland, a squat, a wood or a farm backyard.

Invisibilization and subversion

Étienne Renzo's approach is to show the humanity and topicality of these individual and collective experiences. It is also a way of conveying their message by bearing witness to a cultural and social reality whose invisibilization, for most of them, is both desired and assumed. Their disappearance from society's radar seems a radical and subversive option, given the existential modes and codes of identification of our time. This voluntary erasure, which limits the possibility of photographing collectives and the places where they live to a handful of familiar people, makes these images all the more precious and significant.

Photographic interviews

Étienne Renzo's approach is first and foremost to give back a presence and a voice to the original actors of punk culture. His project extends the exchanges he has always had with them, through the images and text of what he calls «photo-interviews». The modus operandi consists first and foremost in taking photographic portraits of the people in situation, in the conditions in which they live or work. In the same movement, the words are collected in the form of a flash interview, based on a few questions drawn at random from a deck of cards specially designed for the project. Just like a good fortune. Images and words are captured during the exchange, then transcribed. By mutual agreement with the protagonists, these images and texts are treated in such a way as to be exhibited and published. They may or may not be associated, depending on the publication and exhibition arrangements.

A tour of Punk France for a traveling exhibition

Étienne Renzo's integration into the Punk milieu gives him access to a large number of individualities and communities built up in rather non-city networks. This could be extended to the urban context through various squats or communities he also plans to visit in the Drôme, Massif Central, Brittany or the South-West. Étienne Renzo began his quest nearly three years ago, and will continue it by visiting the four main regions of France.

The exhibition

The aim is to present a series of color and black & white photographs. The plan is to hold the first exhibitions in 2025, with a view to securing partnerships to publish a book. Post-production of photos and texts will be carried out as the interviews progress. New interviews may also be carried out within the regional perimeter of the exhibition venues. The presentations will combine different types of print, framing and hanging, depending on the exhibition space. In this way, the scenography of the exhibitions will respond to the configuration of the venues.

The publication

The publication will take up the main themes of the series, with portraits, scenes of life and context, as well as artistic and festive creativity often indissociable. In particular, the «grosse entube» event, one of the origins of this project. The publication will give pride of place to punk habitus and its various levels of material and immaterial reality. The words will be rendered with a minimum of standardization. Even if they are critical and rebellious, or even approximate to the rules of syntax and spelling. The book may be supplemented by outside contributions that reflect the full breadth and diversity of the punk phenomenon.

For a punk photo!

The publication of a collective work entitled «Penser avec le Punk»* (Thinking with Punk), coordinated by music critic and philosopher Catherine Guesde, convinced Étienne Renzo that he needed to develop and showcase his project. As with this publication, his aim is not «to convert this subversive subculture into a philosophical system», but rather to show «punk's fertile links with animal ethics, deep ecology, feminism and, more unexpectedly, spirituality». More precisely, Étienne Renzo's photographic interviews aim to extend the scope of punk into the realm of photography itself. With a view, why not, to a convergence of their respective commitments within a punk photography yet to be invented.

**Penser avec le Punk» Catherine Guesde - PUF 2022*

PORTRAITS



Cha: «Being human isn't eco-responsible».



Jojo: «The punk movement, as it may have existed, is dead. Dead and buried. But there's a continuity in the ideals, which are profoundly humanist, of mutual aid, solidarity, or making do and fiddling. But also to feel rejected, or to see ourselves as rejected, by a system that doesn't suit us».



Ilona: «What explains the continuity of punk and this movement is that there are always things that aren't right in our society and that make us rebel and go against them. And we like being against things.»



César: «In fact, if we get too smashed in the end, we no longer have an ideology because we no longer have a brain.»



Ketura: «There's a proverb I love that says: it's not a sign of good mental health to survive in a sick society.»



Marido: «I was born a woman, with female genitalia. And I'm fine with that. Is it lucky to be a woman? I think it is. But it's hard. It's very, very, very, very hard.»



JBM: «Punk's not dead, because puritanism, authoritarianism, capitalism, Judeo-Christian society and consumerism are still with us, and even more so. Judeo-Christian society and consumerism are still with us, and even more so. And as a result, punk reacts in a way that's with new generations».



Annie Cordiste:

«They're making beautiful glittery pirate flags now at Jennifer's.»



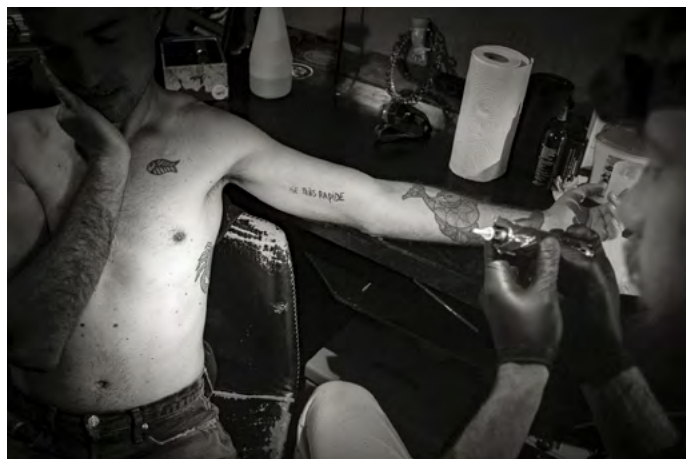
Johnny: «I'm not really into rebellion. Demonstrations, placards and all that. I don't really give a damn, but hey. It's a mess all over the world».



Bertille: «It's obvious to me that punk can have a spiritual, even esoteric dimension. Quite frankly, I'm a medium, so it's obvious to me... But in fact, they just don't know it. But it's fun to know the future».

DAILY PUNK





Jojo

«There are a lot of us who don't have any money and who like to tinker too. As a result, this ecological awareness goes hand in hand with it. In other words, we try to repair rather than break.

Annie Cordiste

«I think I'm going to slowly take up animal communication because my dog brings me so much».

César

«The alternative is to work together, it's the collective and all that stuff. Today, we're taught to do the opposite. We're in a completely individualistic society. Punk is always about people, and even today, it still has the strength of the collective.»

Cha

«Maybe it's not a counter-culture, in other words, it's a counter-system, but not especially anti-system. anti-system»

Johnny

«If we're eco-responsible? Well yeah, because we don't really have a choice. Our lifestyle means we don't consume a lot, we make do with what we've got. We do a lot of salvaging and recycling. We don't buy billions of things at the consumer fair.

Jan

«In rural areas, there's really very little mixing. So there's a kind of thing like that going on. People also don't realize the extent to which ordinary racism is conveyed, which makes it very unpleasant for people who are concerned and racialized».

Ilona

«I believe in elves and nature's little fairies. So I'm not going to say that I don't have an esoteric or spiritual dimension to my life. I believe that we'll never understand everything and that there are inevitably things at play in spirituality and the non-visible or non-touchable. Yes, for me, there are people who have gifts, gifts of listening, gifts of well-being that do you good in a way you don't understand.»

Marido

«I don't have a dog anymore, he died two years ago. I had a dog for 15 years called Souka. Souka is a Hindu word meaning happiness. I adopted my dog from the SPA when I was 23. He's one of the most extraordinary people I've ever met in my life. He made me grow up. At the time, I'd just been through something really bad. And I started to meditate».

Bertille

«I met an energy therapist who offered to train me to channel my gift and everything. And then I learned how to use it in an open or closed way. Because before, it was open bar and then it wasn't easy. Now it's square. My speciality is reading the unconscious for everything that's unspoken».

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ART AND FESTIVITIES





Marido

«My punk culture started with my techno culture, and mixing when I was 17 or organizing underground events. Of course there was spirituality, because in fact, the musical journey you offer people for several days, even though it's illegal, and you put yourself in danger for it, is obviously spiritual. For me, at the time, the world of techno culture was a form of punk».

Niko

«What I like about anything, like a big festival or a big free party, is that everyone's drugged up and throwing themselves on the floor. That it's such a mess, well there's always something beautiful behind it. Either love or friendship. When you're really high on drugs or really drunk, and you hug each other, you purify yourself and solve problems together.»

Margaux

«And now I have my puppet company where I do several shows. I have a music group, I do street theater, I'm a showman. I'm also a trained herbalist and naturopath. Otherwise, I do a lot of erotic performances. And the fact of undressing on stage and talking about something that has nothing to do with eroticism, I find very interesting as a political tool. I'm preventing sexist and sexual violence by being naked. And it actually works.

Ketura

«I want to invent something new, either in my head, or in painting, or in music, or in the act of living. There have to be beings among others who branch off. Who branch off and say, no, I don't agree. And that's not normal.

Margaux

«What seems like a lot of nonsense in punk culture is a strong artistic sense. Is it also about being against society as it is? So to do anything at all would also be to be against society as it is. Yes, I think that's quite true».

Cha

«With or without glitter? With, clearly, because there's still plenty of oil on the planet, so we really need to exploit all the oil that's left to make plastic micro-particles and spread them on our faces. That's very important, it's true. We're fighting for it. We need diesel and glitter!»

Marido

«When you build villages, like the Grosse Entube, for example, or other events. And when you stand back and look at it, you say to yourself, 'That's magic! It's magic to be able to put that out and be even more of a kid than when we were a kid. And then to see people meeting, talking to each other... Yeah, that's it, it's looking back on everything we're able to create together, that totally amazes me.

For me, it's meeting people».

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Entretien avec Étienne Renzo

Photographing bodies and souls

Interview with Etienne Renzo

par Pascal PIQUE - *Le Musée de l'Invisible*

Pascal Pique: Etienne Renzo, your career in photography and your life is both atypical and varied. It's that of someone who has a very fine and sensitive artistic and poetic approach to images and the world, but who hasn't exhibited much. Have you finally decided to come out of the woodwork?

Etienne Renzo: I've had several jobs, including photographer, farmer, pilot, aircraft mechanic and company director. So I haven't been able to devote myself exclusively to photography. But it's been with me since childhood. Up until now, I've done photography mainly for myself, and indeed, today I'm going to try to present what I do. I want to know if I can show something, if my gaze meets with an echo. My images have always had a strong connection with the human envelope, nudity and skin. Even more so today than before. But it's increasingly difficult to show images in which the nude is present. There's a fatal, almost causal relationship between the nude and controversy. Today, the risk of critical reactions to nude photographs has increased considerably. This reveals the danger of trying to interpret works by projecting onto the creator the mental schemas of the photographs' observers. By the way, there are nude photography festivals quite distinct from those of «Art Majeur»... And in general, they only show the outrageous absence of clothing.

PP: It's true that with the new religious and cultural impregnations, the field of freedoms is considerably restricted. Particularly for images and photography. And not just nude photography. How do you explain and deal with this?

ER : The problem is that these new prohibitions tend to be validated by a kind of zeitgeist and soft consensus maintained by certain cultural players who, in effect, flirt with petty commerce. Everything ends up looking the same, for a satisfaction levelled by the generally correct. Some postulate that they only want to show photos from a particular community, caste or genre, in order to claim the right to show these works. In the same way, they don't hesitate to create festivals of images of war or suffering! When will we see trophies for images of voluptuousness? Are we so misguided as not to realize that a man's foot is more worthy than his shoe? That's why I've shown so little to date...

PP: One of your first images shows two figures lost in the immensity of a minimal landscape, with a woman with a squared-off shopping bag as a target. How did this image come about?



ER: I got my first camera in 1970 at the age of 14. And I started developing it myself in my parents' bathroom. This image is one of the very first I made when I had just got that camera. I kept it because it's the only one with my grandmother and uncle together. They always took me for a walk after Sunday lunch, at the foot of the Valensole plateau in the Alpes de Haute-Provence. It's winter, because there's snow deep in the mountains.

We see my grandmother looking at her hands. She often walked with her hands outstretched,

palm down, to feel the earth. My uncle, who was a saddler, was also a bit of a dowser and felt things. He's further back in the picture. He remained a bachelor all his life in the small village of Oraison. We're probably standing on the banks of the Durance river in the middle of the fields.

PP: I see this image as a key to what you're going to develop next. What do you see as the seeds of this image?

ER : There's a lot to be said for this photo. If anything, it's the fact that it's inhabited. Cat I'm more attracted to people than landscapes. My main subject turned out to be Homo sapiens, with all its excesses. Otherwise, there's not much sky. I don't really like skies in pictures because I don't really know what to do with that space. I prefer more enclosed spaces where you can see things. And then there's the grass.

PP: It may seem strange to say, but you make a hairy photograph. A photograph with a form of hairiness. Not only in the nudes, but also with landscapes and your renderings of nature. Grass, for example, becomes hair. We also notice the hair on your models.

ER : I do like grass a lot. I don't know why exactly. They're both the hairs of the earth and a forest for insects. That's also why most of my models have hair. Men or women, even under the arms. Perhaps so that the image can breathe or perspire. Grasses are the underarm moisture regulators in my photos.

PP: You brought back some magnificent images from your trip to China in 1975, which I don't think have been seen very often. They come from another world and another era. And yet, seeing them again today, they're both timeless and very topical. Like the family portrait. Why is that?

ER : These images have never been shown. At the time, I was a Maoist sympathizer, and as a photographer I accompanied a group of doctors on a trip to study acupuncture anesthesia. I took a lot of photos in Chinese hospitals, but many of them were badly processed.

The one of the family was taken in Beijing. We were always accompanied by a guide who kept an eye on our every move. For this picture, I had asked to see how families lived in their environment. The guide took us into a building and asked a family to receive me. There's a portrait of Mao on the wall. There's also a calendar with a Russian fighter plane. I also remember the crowd following me down the street because I had red hair. To look at the foreigner. There is indeed a timeless dimension to this image, which is very close to the one of my neighbor Marguerite taken in 1997, 25 years later. What amazed me in China was that there was no great differentiation between men and women in terms of activities and professions. Everyone was in the same boat.



PP: You've also done press and show photography, as well as professional aerial photography for archaeology. You also made more «aesthetic» images long before your time.

ER : I got into aerial photography when I had a repair shop on the aerodrome I'd set up. At the time, I lived next to a village with buried Roman ruins that I used to fly over. At certain times of