

LAURA HENNO

Saturday 25 March - Saturday 6 May 2023



Untitled (cascade), 2011. Silver print from negative on satin finished Kodak paper.
© Laura Henno

For more than twenty years, Laura Henno's work has honed in on those parallel realities that are relegated to the margins of our present-day world, both in the form of photographs that are sometimes staged but always open to possible meanings and interpretations, and in films whose documentary approach circumvents the conventions of the genre. This is accomplished through the use of particularly innovative narrative and pictorial principles in the artist's approach, for instance, the posture of the bodies and the expressiveness of each individual's face, the play of light and the omnipresence of the off-screen, and the distinctly singular relationship with territory. "In my photographs, the exact geopolitical situations of the landscapes are portrayed in depth, yet they also serve as pretexts to approach a broader subject matter and interpretation of the interaction between the occupants and the occupied space. Beyond the notion of landscape, it is the question of territories and their boundaries—of people's trajectories—that lies at the heart of my photographs. The landscape is a canvas, it appears behind the clouds of dust that obscure the figures, in the blinding reflection of the lights, as well as in the wet earth that offers shelter while leaving its imprint on the photographed bodies.

Resolutely committed, the artist sheds light on identities, existences, bodies and voices traditionally shunned from view, as evidenced in the ensemble of series brought together for the first time on the occasion of her new exhibition at Galerie Nathalie Obadia in Brussels. In this way, each one of them enters into a dialogue with the other, like stages in a journey—both realistic and fictional—through today's reality, a reality that in its turn seems to have no beginning and no end. As the artist points out: "I depict a-temporal landscapes, blurring geographies and borders. [...] My images invite the eye to marvel at familiar and mysterious details, those in-between moments when time seems to have come to a standstill. The narrative is put in the hands of the viewer, left to construct the story and devise hypotheses."

Favouring a long and immersive process, Laura Henno has therefore set out to establish, from Lille to Calais, from Rome to Réunion Island, from the Comoros archipelago to California, intense and profound relationships with communities who

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find themselves in a context of clandestinity, isolation, uprootedness, migration or exile, emblematic of the ambiguous and complex tensions in which contemporary political and social issues are embedded. A particularly sensitive and humanistic approach that allows her to explore in detail, sometimes through several stages of life, or even several generations, the strategies of resistance or survival that each "character" develops, even in the most apparently inexorable or implacable contexts. The artist then goes on to translate, through her artistic approach, the struggles and hopes, the doubts and dreams of each person, if not the vivid and creative dimensions of their trajectory or experience of life. "Starting from personal journeys, I draw a collective narrative or a map composed of multiple trajectories and singular experiences, of a common destiny shared through random encounters. It is quite difficult to define the contours of this ever-changing community we have come to refer to as 'exiles', 'migrants', 'clandestines', 'illegals', invisible and intangible communities that disrupt and disturb our points of reference."

In 1967, in his lecture "Of Other Spaces"¹, Michel Foucault proposed the paradoxical concept of "heterotopia" as an actually realised utopia that engenders "a place of all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, in order to constitute a place of all times that is itself outside of time, and inaccessible to its ravages"². In this instance, it is the relational adventure between Laura Henno and each of the communities she addresses and with whom she shares a gaze, a link, a history and ultimately an "image-being" that is a heterotopia in itself, just like the photograph(s) and/or film(s) that will result from it. In other words: Laura Henno does not speak for these communities, but with them. Or, in a way, on a journey with them. In this way, this exhibition bears witness, on the one hand, to these polyphonic places of all times—of all eras, of all territories, of all existences—and, on the other, to the fact that, at the heart of both the process of the work and its outcome(s), everything exists outside of time, outside of reality, preserved and unaffected by any deterioration. To participate and become engrossed in artistic work, is to understand life by distancing oneself from the world and expanding oneself, and then to restore this life by leaving the world behind and (re)discovering oneself. It is to understand and to understand oneself, through history or memory, one's singularity and specificity, one's experiences and emotions... And this is just as relevant when it comes to the gaze of the viewer, who is constantly deconstructing and reconstructing what he or she sees, feels and understands, what he or she retains while watching.

In the face of tragedies, disasters, ruptures, mutations or current challenges, art is more necessary than ever; and Laura Henno's work is part of this necessity. As Roland Barthes points out, "[It] exerts no pressure on the other; its power is the truth of affects, not of ideas: hence it is never arrogant, terrorist: according to Nietzschean typology, it aligns itself with Art, not with Priesthood"³. As such, there is, in Laura Henno's work, no exposition, no message, no moral, no injection to be sought. Only experiences of space and time, of the human and the tangible, if not of that "instant perception of this long and visible journey of humanity" of which Charles Péguy spoke.

Marc Donnadiou

¹ Lecture at the Cercle d'études architecturales on 14 March 1967, published in "Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité" n°5, October 1984, pp. 46-49, later republished in "Dits et écrits".

² Michel Foucault in this statement referred more precisely to the heterotopia of the museum, but this seems to me to be just as relevant in the context of the work.

³ Roland Barthes, « Œuvres Complètes », dir. Éric Marty, Paris, Le Seuil, 2002, pp. 469-470.

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Born in 1976 in Croix (France). Lives and works in Paris (France)

After studying photography at the ENSAV in La Cambre, Laura Henno went on to study film at Le Fresnoy. Winner of the Prix Découverte des Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie d'Arles in 2007, the artist has since held numerous solo exhibitions in France and abroad, such as her exhibition *Ge Ouryao! Porque tienes miedo?!* at the Wilfredo Lam Centre (Cuba) in 2023, *Ge Ouryao! Pourquoi t'as peur?* at the Palais de Tokyo (Paris, France) in 2022, *Radical Devotion* at the Institut pour la Photographie de Lille (France) in 2019, *M'Tsambaro* at the Ryerson Image Center (Toronto, Canada) in 2019, *Redemption* at the Rencontres de la photographie d'Arles (France) in 2018, *M'Tsambaro* at the BBB Centre d'Art in Toulouse (France) in 2017, as well as her exhibition at the Finnish Museum of Photography (Helsinki, Finland) in 2011.

Selected for the Villa Albertine, Laura Henno inaugurates the first selection of the new French artist residency in the USA. The artist has also participated in numerous group exhibitions such as *COLLECTION: 150 photographies de la collection Bachelot*, at the Villa Medici (Rome, Italy) in 2022, *Diaspora at Home* at the Centre for Contemporary Art (Lagos, Nigeria) in 2020, *Eldorama* at Tri Postal (Lille, France) in 2018, *Persona Grata* at the Mac Val and at the Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, (Paris, France) in 2018, as well as at The Martha and Robert Fogelman Galleries of Contemporary Art (Memphis, USA) in 2017.

Laura Henno is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Prix du Jury at the Festival des Champs Elysées 2019 for her film *Djo*, which also won the Prix Camira at the International Film Festival Entrevues Belfort in 2018. Her film *Koropa* was awarded the Equality Diversity Prize at the Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival in 2017, the Librarians' Prize at the Angers Premiers Plans Festival 2016 and the Grand Prize at the Entrevues Belfort International Film Festival 2016.

Laura Henno's work can be found in a number of important private and public collections such as the Abattoirs (Toulouse, France), the Fonds Régionaux d'Art Contemporain PACA (France) and the Fonds Régionaux d'Art Contemporain de Saint Denis (Réunion, France), MacVal, Musée d'Art Contemporain du Val-de-Marne (France), BPS22 (Charleroi, Belgium), and the Fondation Kadist (Paris, France).

Laura Henno is represented since 2021 by Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels.

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Galerie Nathalie Obadia

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Charles Decoster

Fiona Rae

January 19 - March 18, 2023

Laura Henno

March 25 - May 6, 2023

15 ans Bruxelles

May 25 - July 8, 2023

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Paris

Cloître Saint-Merri I et II

Josep Grau-Garriga

Grau-Garriga. L'expérience imaginée

February 24 - April 15, 2023

Rodrigo Matheus

L'Antichambre

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Saint-Honoré

Collin Sekajugo

WE COME IN PEACE

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