

Unpredictable meanings Lieven Lefere

During my studies I attended a lecture by the illustrious Belgian photographer Marc Trivier (Namur, °1960) at the art school. This opinionated image maker is best known for his portraits of psychiatric patients and historical artists, writers and philosophers. Without a subtitle, these two groups can hardly be distinguished from each other due to the leveling gaze of the photographer. In addition, Trivier also makes landscape photography. He told with fascination how he once noticed two photos in his archive; one a grassy landscape and the other an old roof construction covered with slate. Both photos were created separately with an interval of several years and had no connection whatsoever in terms of place or content. Yet they had almost the same composition and both photos showed a horizon line with a very similar kink. He then placed both prints side by side on a table in the classroom. He grinned with pleasure after noticing our surprised looks. Can we interpret this as a mere coincidence or does it indicate an unconscious focus during shooting? Anyway; this unexpected dip had an impact. I still vividly remember this moment, although it has been almost a quarter of a century now.

The process of photographing does not only consist of choosing a subject and a visual language. It concerns a long sequence of choices that ultimately lead to a selected series of photos. These link a certain content and aesthetic approach to each other to form a network of meanings. Conducted from start to finish by the author; the photographer. These choices are often substantively linked around a clearly legible subject. Another approach is based on bringing together a group of photos that cannot be interpreted unambiguously. They complete each other on the basis of decisions that do not necessarily remain faithful to the directly readable content of the individual image.

Photographer Luc Rabaey applies this latter strategy in his recent work *Unpredictable Meanings*. He allows photographic images to 'connect' with each other within a series of sophisticated diptychs. These diptychs come about through a process that can best be defined as 'a confluence of circumstances'. The author conducts himself through his photo archive without looking for causal connections. He links the concepts of 'coincidence' and 'destiny' to the development process of his series.

Each individual photo is taken at a specific time and place. Entangled in the present, most photo images later end up in a digital folder or in a bound stack of prints somewhere in a drawer. The photographer can interpret these various photo moments in innumerable combinations, whereby the images establish mutual relationships regardless of time, place or the original intentions of the photographer.

From the chaos of every day, Rabaey produces images that are associated with each other long after shooting. His *modus operandi* changes here; sometimes the connection is based on formal aspects, sometimes on content. Although they have arisen independently of each other in time and space; the author forces them to compose a mutual relationship. Even more; this link makes their meaning unpredictable. This shift throws the viewer back on himself. Is this about what the photographer wants to show us or about what the attentive viewer can notice?

Most people now recognize the photographic image as a construction; a conspiracy between the author and the world in which he moves. Rabaey agrees and doesn't want to create typical photographic images that tell us something about a specific moment. He uses this method precisely to escape this compelling connection.