

Joseph Sterling, nuée d'un monde

Le méconnu photographe américain (1936 - 2010) a laissé une œuvre délicate où il enregistre avec tendresse les mouvements des passants et la matière des villes. La galerie Stephen Daiter expose son travail à Chicago.

Comme s'il avait une prédilection pour les pas, les gens qui marchent, le mouvement que font les jambes qui s'agitent dans les rues... Joseph Sterling aimait visiblement saisir le chemin des citadins des grandes villes, les chaussures qui pivotent sur le trottoir auprès d'un pigeon désœuvré, des enfants courant et s'engouffrant dans le renfoncement d'un immeuble. Ses photographies alternent entre le flou d'un passage et la netteté d'un visage.

Dès le début de son adolescence, Sterling, qui est né au Texas, découvre la photographie. C'est grâce à un unique cliché d'Harry Callahan qu'il se prend de passion pour le médium et décide d'aller dans une école d'art à Chicago pour suivre justement des cours donnés par son mentor. Il bénéficiera aussi de l'enseignement de deux autres grandes figures de la photographie de ces années-là : Aaron Siskind et Frederick Sommer.

Ces professeurs vont sûrement l'influencer. Comme eux, il est sensible à la matière du monde, aime déclencher son appareil quand il voit des surfaces abîmées, des corps fragiles, des lumières franches se refléter sur la vitrine d'un magasin. Comme eux, il tente de donner une image du bal quotidien des villes américaines, à ces flots de passants qui peuplent les rues.

Joseph Sterling rencontrera aussi de futurs grands noms de la photographie dans cette école, notamment Ray Metzker qui partage cette esthétique d'un noir et blanc profond et vif, jouant volontiers avec les formes qu'il rencontre. Le photographe restera discret, presque secret, jusqu'à la fin de sa vie et laissera une œuvre fidèle à son image : silencieuse, énigmatique et sensible.

Par Jean-Baptiste Gauvin

Joseph Sterling

Stephen Daiter Gallery

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230 W Superior St, Chicago, IL 60654, United States

Jérémie Villet: in search of the wolf

The photographer corrals a nice little gallery of animals going all the way back to his childhood. Aged 22, Jérémie Villet is preparing his first book publication.

Jérémie Villet talks about his adventures with contagious good humor. He is constantly joking as he narrates, with his usual playfulness and wit, his time spent with eagles in the arctic cold of Alaska. The temperatures dipped to minus 40°F and bears prowled in the distance. It is only when he talks about the bears that Jérémie turns serious. You have to stay clear of them because bears have been known to attack humans and even devour them alive. But besides that, Jérémie Villet seems undaunted. And what about the wolves, aren't they scary? Maybe a little, when he camps on his own, but even then... Above all, what captures his attention is the beauty of the moment. "The wolf is a formidable presence: when there is one around, you can feel it immediately," observes Villet. He recalls how other animals behave in the presence of wolves, how they move to avoid running into the predator.

The arctic fox

On occasion, Jérémie Villet prowls just like a predator. He explains that from time to time he had to track a prey in order to capture the predator. This is how he approached the arctic fox, having long followed its trail. He has also chased after rabbits to catch the fox in the act. But it was only when he left some of food outside his tent that he finally managed to catch a glimpse. "He was really sly. I deliberately gave him a wide berth to avoid scaring him off." The animals he chases after often slip away. "I have a lot of missed shots," Villet admits. But those that succeed are all the more powerful for being rare. These images are the culmination of a long journey and of an extraordinary personal story. "This photo, that's six months of my life," says Jérémie Villet, astonished by the realization.

Act one

The photographs represent a life devoted to the passion of photographing animals. It all began when he was a child, and his parents kept a farm outside Paris, near the Forest of Rambouillet. "At night, I could hear stags roaring," recalls Jérémie. "One day, my brother and I asked our parents if we could spend the night in the woods to see the stags." And so they did. At school, no one would believe them when they described their adventure. "So we went back with a camera, to prove we really did see them!," says Jérémie, laughing. They went back to school with blurry photos in which one would be hard-pressed to discern the animal if not for the antlers outlined in the haze. This encounter marked act one in a future career, the moment when Villet made a silent pact with himself: to become an animal photographer. The harsh reality of the job made him first enroll in a literature program, but his passion caught up with him. He won a photography contest and took off for faraway lands.

Snow

Jérémie prefers to keep his exact destinations secret out of concern that these isolated places will soon swarm with tourists, who may have little respect for the environment. He will never go back to the Himalayas where he traveled to get a shot of the snow leopard: there are too many visitors now who spoil the peace and quiet sought by the photographer. It must be noted, however, that Jérémie Villet specializes in portraying white expanses, revealing the compelling splendor of snow banks. In many of his photographs, the animals seem to emerge as if from a dream world, their paws blurred by the winter glare, like specters in the snow. It is little wonder that Jérémie often refers to the animals he tracks as "ghosts." For instance, the lynx he has been chasing for years: "I am yet to take a good photo of a lynx. I've seen them, but they're gone as soon as you spot them." This is one more reason to

continue traveling around the world, to ever-colder, more distant regions. These landscapes and animals are the protagonists of Jérémie Villet's first book, entitled *Première neige* [*The First Snow*].

Although very young, Jérémie Villet has already accumulated a wealth of rare moments that are an eloquent testimony to the importance and beauty of wildlife. A single image of an animal is enough to reawaken the child within.

By Jean-Baptiste Gauvin