



Henk van Rensbergen No Man's Land

Dates: 15 January 2021 – 27 February 2021
Address: Bldg 105, 199 Hengshan Road
Opening Hours: 11:00-19:00, Tuesday to Saturday

Galerie DUMONTEIL is pleased to present Belgium photographer Henk van Rensbergen's solo project, featuring a representative selection of the artist's two renowned series, "Abandoned Places" and "No Man's Land".

"Abandoned Places", a series that grew out of the "Urban Exploration" movement that Van Rensbergen and his friends started in the 1990s, focus on the silent beauty and macabre decay of these places. Following the principle of "take nothing but photos and leave nothing but footprints"¹, they explored the unoccupied buildings of our time. As a Boeing 787 pilot, Van Rensbergen has ventured in most countries in Europe, as well as the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Japan and several countries in Africa.

These deserted territories are full of unknowns, every exploration is an adventure, and each photograph unfolds a fascinating story. In "Adams Theater" (2009) in New Jersey, the fire ladder beneath Van Rensbergen's feet rattles; in Żeliszów in southwestern Poland, the "Rays of Sun" (2012) beam into the theater-like church, convincing one that an empty church is never forsaken by God; and "The Burnt Library" (2011) of a town hospital in Italy allegedly held important information about the Mafia. For the artist, his photographs are not meant to document the appearance of these ruins, but rather to "reproduce the atmosphere: the tension, the complexity, the emotion, the surprise and the feeling."²

With the three publications of the "Abandoned Places" series, Van Rensbergen began his search for a new entry point, which led to the project "No Man's Land", in which he creates an imaginary anthropomorphic world where animals live in our abandoned buildings after the demise of mankind, showing undeniable human behavior.

In order to give these animals a tangible presence in varied man-made structures, Van Rensbergen chooses to go to zoos or suburban farms in the early morning or at dusk to photograph the "protagonists" in his works, capturing the required light angles and then selecting the most suitable "dwelling" for each of them, resulting in this seemingly "natural" effect.

These "occupants" have added a touch of poetry and poignancy to these abandoned buildings. "No Man's Land" is a lament like that of the French philosopher and sociologist Bruno Latour in his book "Où atterrir? (Where to Land?). Through the gaze of surviving animals, we see the global ecological crisis triggered by human development, which ultimately pushes us, the mankind, to our own extinction.

Neither of the two series has human figures; yet the human presence is everywhere. This concurs with the concept of the "Anthropocene", in which the human imprint on the global environment has now become so large and active that it rivals some of the great forces of Nature in its impact on the functioning of the Earth system³. Henk van Rensbergen's works are a closer look at the decay and drastic changes that have taken place behind the rapid urbanization over the past century, offering an alternative perspective on the times we currently live in.

About the Artist

Henk van Rensbergen (Brussels, 1968) is a Boeing 787 airplane pilot and a photographer. His work and his devotion to photography have been widely covered by various medias around the globe, including broadcasts, newspapers, magazines, web pages. His works have been exhibited at Galerie DUMONTEIL, Paris, France (2019); the Concert Hall Bruges, Bruges, Belgium (2017); Musée de la Poste, Paris, France (2013); the M Museum in Leuven, Belgium (2013); the Museum of photography, Aalst, Belgium (2009); the MIAT Museum, Ghent, Belgium (2007), etc. Seven publications have been published for his two series so far.

¹ Henk van Rensbergen, "Abandoned Places", 2016, Lannoo, page 7

² Henk van Rensbergen, "Abandoned Places", 2016, Lannoo, page 6

³ Will Steffen, Jacques Grinevald, Paul Crutzen and John McNeill, "The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives", the Royal Society Publishing, 13/03/2011