

Roots

by Harry Gruyaert

Opening: Saturday, September 8th 2018 from 2 until 6 pm

In the presence of the artist and with a reading by Dimitri Verhulst!

Show: September 11th - November 3rd 2018

FIFTY ONE

After a critically-acclaimed retrospective at the FOMU in Antwerp, Harry Gruyaert (Belgium, 1941) returns to his stomping ground for his second solo show at Gallery FIFTY ONE. *Roots* involves both exhibition spaces, with a presentation of colour images in FIFTY ONE and black-and-white work in FIFTY ONE TOO.

Roots originates from Gruyaert's complicated relationship with Belgium. Already in 1962, Gruyaert left his native country for his new home town Paris. He was driven by a longing to be freed from the catholic and strict environment in which he was brought up, and by an urge to discover new, culturally exciting horizons. In the early 1970s, after living abroad for several years and traveling the world extensively, Gruyaert had acquired enough distance to look at Belgium as an outsider, with a fresh eye. To his surprise, what he saw was a visually interesting place, one he started to travel to regularly to photograph.

Gruyaert often emphasises that he is not a journalistic photographer. His approach to the medium is strictly formal and pictorial. He is constantly on the lookout for the moment in which colour, form, light and movement accidentally come together to create the perfect storm in front of his lens. During the shooting of the images for *Roots*, he wanted to avoid any sentimentality or documentary pitfalls. Nevertheless, this series captures perfectly the Belgian Zeitgeist of the 1970s and 1980s. Watching these village festivities, carnival parades and processions, today's spectators may be filled with melancholic feelings. Belgium, characterised by a lack of true national sentiment, was portrayed by Gruyaert in all its diversity: from silent country side views and catholic rituals and devotions to expressions of the Burgundian nature of its inhabitants in wild parties and alcohol-drenched evenings spent at the local café until the break of dawn. Belgian surrealism is never far away in these humorous images that show Gruyaert's skill in perfectly capturing the specific atmosphere of a given space and time.

Over the course of the ten years (1970-1980) in which the photographs of this series were taken, Gruyaert's feelings towards his native country, and the way he approached it, changed. At that time he was already photographing almost exclusively in colour, a.o. during his trips to Morocco and India. Even so, in the beginning he could only experience Belgium in shades of grey. After a few years of rediscovering his country through his lens, and deeply influenced by Pop Art and the philosophy to see beauty in the banality of everyday life, colour finally found its way into his Belgian impressions. In Gruyaert's colour images, people are consciously put on the same plane as other visual elements. All things become equal parts of this universe of light, form, movement and colour. In the black-and-white images, on the other hand, there is less distraction, which allows human subjects to be more present. This exhibition offers the opportunity to also discover this lesser-known side of Gruyaert's oeuvre.

The exhibition follows the recent launch of the newly revised edition of the book *Roots* (initially published in 2012 and quickly out of print). This autumn also marks the re-edition of the celebrated book *Rivages/Edges*.

Harry Gruyaert, photographe, the long awaited documentary on Gruyaert's artistic practice, infused with so far unrevealed personal anecdotes, will be broadcasted for the first time on RTBF this summer. There will be a public display at Cinema Zuid in Antwerp in October 2018.

The gallery is proud to announce the presence of the artist at the opening. Dimitri Verhulst, who wrote an essay for the book *Roots*, will do a reading. Especially for the occasion, Gallery FIFTY ONE will launch a new 51 edition by Harry Gruyaert.