

It's not about cars

by Harry Gruyaert

Opening: Saturday February 11th from 2 to 6 pm in the presence of the artist

Show: Feb 11th - April 8th 2017

FIFTY ONE

GALLERY FIFTY ONE is proud to present its first solo exhibition by Paris based photographer Harry Gruyaert (Belgium, 1941), including several images that are presented to the public for the first time. As the title states, this exposition is not about cars. The automobiles only function as a leitmotif to guide the viewer through Gruyaert's varied oeuvre, which is characterised by a cinematographic way of framing and an sensitive treatment of colour, form and light.

Originally dreaming of becoming a film director, Gruyaert studied at the School of Film and Photography in Brussels from 1959 to 1962. After his studies he left Belgium at the age of 21, fleeing the strict catholic environment in which he was brought up. The world was his oyster, traveling extensively across Europe, North Africa, Asia and the United States and living in cities with a vibrant movie and photography scene like Paris and London. During his first trip to New York in 1968 Gruyaert discovered Pop artists like Roy Lichtenstein (US, 1923 - 29.09.1997) and Robert Rauschenberg (US, 1925 - 12.05.2008). This encounter made him appreciate the creative potential of colour and encouraged him to search for beauty in, everyday elements for the rest of his career. At this time Gruyaert also became friends with the American artists Richard Nonas (US, 1936) and Gordon Matta-Clark (US, 1943 - 27.08.1978) and photographed their work.

Further inspired by the visual impulses he received during his first trip to Morocco in 1969, Gruyaert decided in the second half of the 1970s as one of the first photographers in Europe to commit himself entirely to colour photography. After visiting the William Eggleston's (US, 1939) exhibition in the MoMA in 1976, he realised that he was on the same tracks.

Gruyaert's passion for movies and his devotion to colour were at the basis of his unique visual language. His cinematographic background inflicted on him an aesthetic conception of photography. Gruyaert's images are simply snapshots of magical moments in which different visual elements, primarily colour, form, light and movement, spontaneously come together in front of his lens. His bold, saturated tonalities are autonomous elements that grant structure and depth to the composition. This becomes clear looking at the brightly coloured automobiles in the pictures on show that often form monotone areas that occupy a part of the image. After using the cibachrome technique for many years, Gruyaert decided to switch to digital printing to exploit the maximum of image potential, thanks to its ability of control.

In his search for strong graphical compositions Gruyaert focuses his camera on objects as much as on people. These are often reduced to silhouettes or rendered to plain colour fields. Gruyaert is neither interested in psychology, nor in telling stories or documenting the world. Unsurprisingly the countries he photographs are mostly revealed by means of the subtle differences in colour palette and light, inherent to the atmosphere, culture and climate of each place, more than by the depicted subjects or scenes. In this overview exposition the viewer gets the chance to compare the bright and energetic colours and strong contrasts that dominate Gruyaert's images of the US, with the softer tonalities and romantic sphere he captured in India and the grey and greenish colour palette of Belgium, land of rain and concrete.

Gruyaert's work has previously been featured in solo exhibitions at among others in the Botanique in Brussels (2012), The FOMU in Antwerp (2000), the Carlos de Amberes Foundation in Madrid (2002) and at the the Rencontres de la photographie d'Arles in France of 2004 and the Moscow Photobiennale of 2012. His work was included in group exhibitions in the Museum Dr. Guislain in Ghent (2011), Somerset House in London (2012), the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna (2013), the Museum für Gestaltung in Zürich (2009) and at the Deauville Photography Festival in 2013. In 2015 the Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris organised a retrospective about his oeuvre. A retrospective of his work will be shown at the FOMU in Antwerp in 2018. Gruyaert's work is included in the collections of museums like the Musée de la Photographie in Charleroi, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, the David Roberts Foundation in London, the Howard Stein collection in New York and the Metropolitan Museum in Tokyo. In 1976 Gruyaert received the Kodak price for photo critique. In 1981 he joined the legendary photographic cooperative Magnum Photos.

Gruyaert is represented by GALLERY FIFTY ONE since September 2015. Previously his work has been shown by the gallery on fairs as AIPAD 2016, Photo London 2016, Paris Photo 2015 and 2016 and in the group exhibitions 'Backstory' and 'The Pistil's waltz'. For the occasion of this exposition the gallery will release a new eponymous FIFTY ONE publication: 'Harry Gruyaert: It's not about cars'.