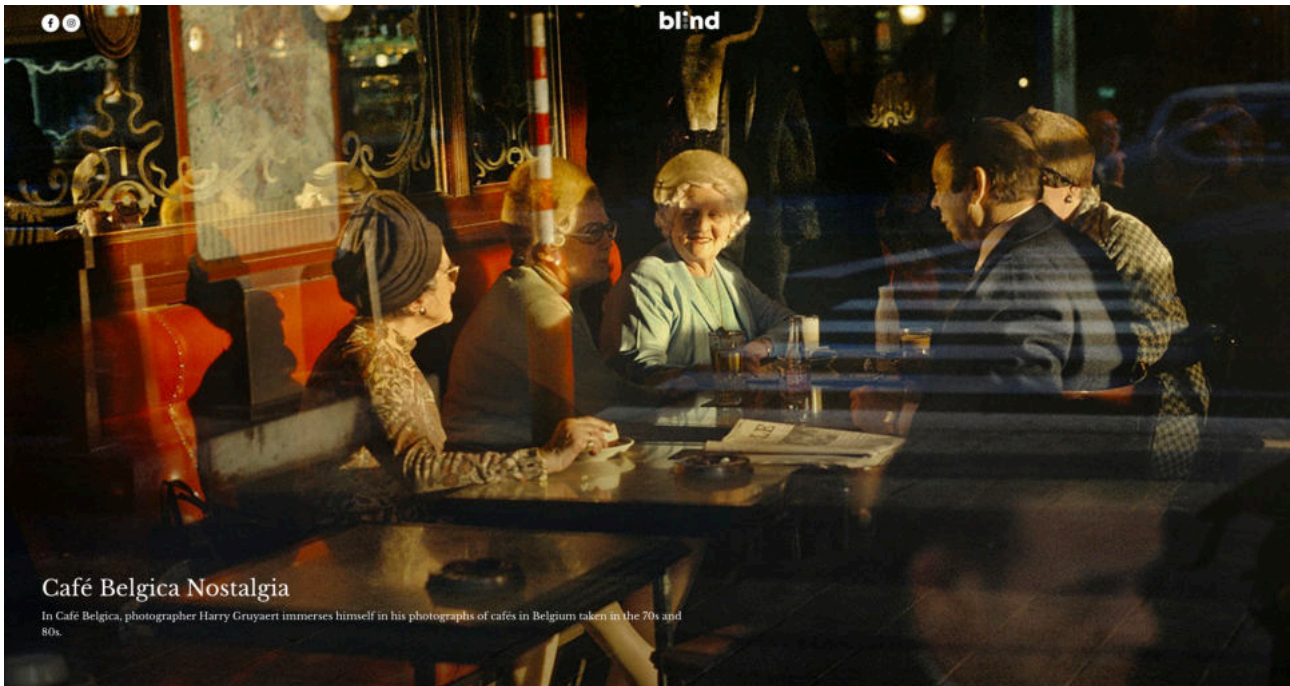


HARRY GRUYAERT – Café Belgica, *FIFTY ONE*, 2021

'Café Belgica Nostalgia' by Sabyl Ghoussoub, on April 27th 2022 on Blind Magazine



© Harry Gruyaert | Courtesy Gallery FIFTY ONE



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Harry Gruyaert, the colorist photographer, has been revisiting his colossal archives for several years now. He scans, prints small formats and compiles a series, a railway, a sequence on the wall of his studio, which eventually becomes a book or even a film. During the editing of the book/DVD *Made in Belgium* for the new collection “A sense of place” launched by Fifty One Publication, he came up with the idea of producing a book on cafés in Belgium.

The series, published in 2020, was compiled before Covid, like a sign that bars around the world would soon close for a while. The spirit of these places in Belgium is different from France, assures the photographer, “the big difference of Belgian cafés is that there is no counter. You have to sit down.” These cafés, these popular cafés, are Harry Gruyaert’s youth. “The craziest nights I have ever had were in Belgium. This bar was open till 6 am, until the last customer was there. It was the same everywhere. Serious people didn’t go out before midnight.”



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In *Café Belgica*, the photographs were mostly taken in the 70s and 80s. They show the endangered vanishing world. In the span of fifty years, 40,000 cafés in Belgium have closed and no more than about 10,000 remain. “There are much less authentic cafés,” says Harry Gruyaert, who has photographed them a good deal, especially in Brussels, Antwerp and Liège. Only one of his images is not in Belgium; it is located in Bailleul, France, near the Belgian border. The photographer describes it as “a Flemish painting,” and a Flemish painting it is, both in its composition and the colors or the faces photographed.

Billiard games till late at night, older women wrapped in oversized coats with cups of tea or pints of beer before them, steaming parties where young people end up kissing greedily in the middle of the bar, and in the middle of all that, alcohol, flowing freely. There is a certain nostalgia in Harry Gruyaert’s pictures. The nostalgia of a certain carelessness in finding and possibly of his youth is confirmed by the last photo in the book dedicated to his parents, where we see them sitting in a café in Antwerp.

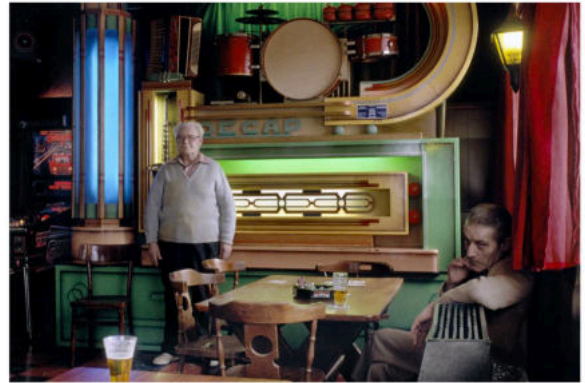
*Café Belgica* by Harry Gruyaert, published by Fifty One Publication, 101 pages, €25.



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