

THE PILL®

THE PILL<sup>®</sup>

*DIRK BRAECKMAN*

# THE PILL®

## *Index*

Biography, p. 4

Curriculum Vitae, p. 5 - 7

Works and exhibitions, p. 8 - 53

Texts, p. 54 - 64

Dirk Braeckman's photos – we call them photos for convenience's sake – are tonal vibrations subtly ranging from the pitch blackness of soot to the dazzling whiteness of electric gleams, sunrays or throbbing flashes. From opaque blacks to shrill whites, the light's graininess is neutralized by grey or by the dusky dimming of color, setting the world's details onto a totally matte surface, encompassed in a zone where air barely circulates. Filters sift the surface of the paintings – let's call them paintings rather than photos –, with varying degrees of resistance, filters so soft they almost liquefy one's gaze. From a strictly technical standpoint, these photos are undeniably photographic, and yet they stray from the genre and are deeply tuned to the realm of painting. Dirk Braeckman started out as a painter, at first just using photography so as to document his subject matter. This initial practice would soon turn photography into the catalyst of his painterly eye. Dirk Braeckman's artwork does not produce images, for the images are surfaceless, as opposed to his works where the graininess counts as much as the brushstroke. A painting chiefly tells about the act of gazing. What we see in Dirk Braeckman's works is not the initial shot, but a particular way of gazing at the world, where things are grasped in constant relation to recollection. What is depicted is something that was seen and then partially, and sometimes even totally, forgotten. The photographic action is merely the initial capture which then gets archived, sometimes for years on end, until an image is unearthed, the way one unearths old memories. The image is taken, discarded, and then reused, rediscovered, sometimes reworked, re-shot, reframed or calibrated with different lighting – the way our memories are reshaped when we grope for them, in a wobbly authenticity, veiled by the greyish haze of memory's backwash. It is not about witnessing a snap of life, the aim is not to produce a snapshot, but to tell the story of a gaze, to show how the memory of a place can get so layered that it stops being a memory and turns into a painting in its own right, a sealed-off world retrospectively divulging its instability, its evanescence, its soft luminous hovering in shades of grey beyond memory's grasp. Dirk Braeckman's works are sprawled across the slow erosion of an image which was once seen, recollected, and then splintered into so many fragments that memory forgets itself within the work's self-enclosed body. This is perhaps what is meant by a painting.

The starting point for Dirk Braeckman's works is a photo, but the photos become paintings, their edges finely yet firmly bounded by a steel frame, an integral component of the artwork as demonstrated by the slight irregularities, the manual machining or the imperceptibly sanded corners, which imbue the artwork with an organic quality unachievable with a standard frame. These paintings have a skin-like surface and a body-like scope, revealing a painter's gaze. While it is true that these works use photography, it is literally used, deteriorated, weakened in its power of witnessing and objectively rendering reality, used to the point of being abused, overtaken by its tension towards painting. In Dirk Braeckman's work one senses that photography's naturally woven pact with reality has been breached. What I'm gazing at involves time's thickness, the surface, the exhibition of bodies haloed by a sensuality verging on eroticism, the surge of intimacy precisely where bodies are no longer present.

The surfaces of Dirk Braeckman's paintings are shaped by the compactness of a drape, by the evanescence of a translucent veil, by teeming motifs scattered across a frayed carpet, spanning the morning light slicing through a parted curtain, ambiguous gleams, hovering glimmers, wintry sun-ripples upon beds where enigmatic sensuality suffuses an ethereal hotel room. The works show things precisely as they were seen, those things we never quite look at in this way, those things that in spite of ourselves unexpectedly wind their way into our memory to weave the strange pattern of ghostly imprints that will linger on. The works show things as Dirk Braeckman saw them, things we'd never see – not like this. These things transform places – walls and doors, curtains and beds, alcoves in corridors and halls, sea-misted bays, windows that block out the world – into still-life fragments of reality, evoking the way in which our dreams and memories crystallize on seemingly trivial details fraught with feelings, memories and sensations. Framed and sifted through greyscale filters, these places have become anonymous non-places, patches of somewhere refracted by the echoes and clues that sometimes signal the photographer's presence. It is significant that several works result from re-shot photos (his own photos, found photos, or from posters and other types of documents) – and that their surface has been partially erased by the flash-triggered blind spot. The initial image is blinded by the sudden appearance of the photographer, whose sheer presence abuses the image, abuses photography, spawns a surface and infuses it with duration, tilting the photo towards a painting-in-becoming. While this primarily means taking a photo, it mainly involves rendering what was seen via a fine-tuned syntax poised between the photographic image's sublimation and the initial image's devaluation towards its pictorial becoming. The images wander, thicken and somewhat flounder in their grainy devaluation with no aim, reason or stability in sight; they become filaments of moments, sensations and collisions of personal memories, now spun into possible memories for each viewer of his artwork, and thus become paintings.

Dirk Braeckman is a graduate of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent. He has held solo exhibitions in numerous institutions: FRAC Auvergne, Clermont-Ferrand (2023), Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth (2019), Museum M, Leuven (2018 and 2011), BOZAR, Brussels (2018), Le BAL, Paris (2014), SMAK, Ghent (2014), De Appel, Amsterdam (2012). His work is included in major international private and public collections such as MoMa, New York (USA), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia (USA), De Pont Museum, Tilburg (NL), S.M.A.K., Ghent (BE), M HKA, Antwerp (BE), M - Museum, Leuven (BE), MAC's Grand-Hornu, Hornu (BE), Sammlung Goetz, Munich (DE), Kunstmuseum Den Haag, Den Haag (NL), Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris (FR), Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Strasbourg (FR), Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne (CH), Musée Niépce, Chalon-sur-Saône (FR), Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle (BE), Museum of Modern Art, Vladivostok (RU), FOMU, Fotomuseum, Antwerp (BE), Centro de Fotografía de la Universidad, Salamanca (ES), FRAC Auvergne, Clermont-Ferrand (FR), FRAC Grand Large - Hauts-de-France, Dunkerque (FR), FRAC Rhône-Alpes, Villeurbanne (FR), Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris (FR). He lives and works in Ghent, Belgium.

## DIRK BRAECKMAN

1958, Eeklo.

Lives and works in Ghent.

### Education

1981 Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Ghent, BE

### Solo Exhibitions

- 2024 Echtzeit, Foto Museum Antwerp, BE
- 2023 Dirk Braeckman, Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin, DE  
Déboires de l'Âme, Emile Verhaeren Museum, Sint-Amands, BE  
Évidences possibles, FRAC Auvergne, Clermont-Ferrand, FR
- 2022 ILuster./, GRIMM, New York, NY, USA
- 2021 FERNWEH, Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp, BE
- 2020 Dirk Braeckman – Anna Barribal, KINDL, Berlin, DE
- 2019 Dear deer, Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp, BE  
Dirk Braeckman, Gallery of Contemporary Art / House of Art, Ceské Budejovice, CZ  
FOCUS: Dirk Braeckman, The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, TX, US
- 2018 Dirk Braeckman, Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin, DE  
Dirk Braeckman, Museum M, Leuven, BE  
Dirk Braeckman, BOZAR, Brussels, BE
- 2017 Dirk Braeckman, Belgian Pavilion, 57th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia, Venice, IT
- 2016 Dirk Braeckman, Rosegallery, Santa Monica, CA, US
- 2015 Dirk Braeckman, Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin, DE  
Dirk Braeckman, Gallery Baton, Seoul, KR  
1/1, Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp, BE
- 2014 Dirk Braeckman, Le Bal, Paris, FR  
twenty.one.seven, Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp, BE  
Anonymus / Dirk Braeckman // Schwarzschild, S.M.A.K., Ghent, BE
- 2013 Dirk Braeckman, Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin, DE
- 2012 Dirk Braeckman, De Appel, Amsterdam, NL  
Dirk Braeckman, Kunsthalle Erfurt, Erfurt, DE  
Louis Vuitton – Dirk Braeckman, LV, Antwerp, BE  
Dirk Braeckman, Fotohof, Salzburg, AT
- 2011 Dirk Braeckman, Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp, BE  
Dirk Braeckman, Museum M, Leuven, BE  
S.C.E.-A.U.-11, CC Benedengalerie, Kortrijk, BE
- 2010 Black Sun, Robert Miller Gallery, New York, NY, USA  
Dirk Braeckman, A White Studio, Miami, FL, USA
- 2008 Dirk Braeckman, Robert Miller Gallery, New York, NY, USA
- 2007 Dirk Braeckman, Bernier/Eliades Gallery, Athens, GR

- 2004 Additional Photos, De Pont Museum, Tilburg, NL
- 2005 Dirk Braeckman, Zeno X Storage, Borgerhout, Antwerp, BE
- 2003 z.Z(t)., Espace Vox (Centre de diffusion de la photographie), Montréal, CA
- 2002 Dirk Braeckman, Marc Trivier, Bernier/Eliades Gallery, Athens, GR
- 2001 z.Z(t). ('94-'01), S.M.A.K., Ghent, BE  
z.Z(t). Volume II, Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp, BE
- 2000 Galerie Le Réverbère 2, Lyon, FR  
Dirk Braeckman, Marc Trivier, Maison de la Culture de Namur, Namur, BE
- 1999 z.Z(t)., Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, BE
- 1997 Dirk Braeckman, Kunsthal, Rotterdam, NL  
Dirk Braeckman, Belgium Flanders Museum, International House, Osaka, JP  
... pica en Flandes, Dirk Braeckman, Carlo Mistiaen, Galeria Carlès Poy, Barcelona, ES  
Centro de Fotografía de la Universidad de Salamanca; Palacio de Maldonado, Salamanca, ES  
Sint-Lukasgalerij, Brussels, BE
- 1996 Oeuvres récentes 1992–1996, Galerie Le Réverbère 2, Lyon, FR  
Dirk Braeckman, Kris Fierens, Galerij Patrick De Brock, Knokke, BE  
Dirk Braeckman & Jörg Czeschla, Espace photographique Contretype, Hôtel Hannon, Brussels, BE
- 1995 Tour de Paris, Villeneuve-sur-Lot, FR  
Vereniging voor het Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Ghent, BE

### Group Exhibitions

- 2023 DOKA, M Museum, Leuven, BE  
Agents of Concern, Cultureel Centrum Hasselt, BE  
Dirk Braeckman, Berlinda De Bruyckere, Woning Reyniers and church Waarschoot, BE  
Het analytische landschap, Emergent, Leuven, BE  
Dissonances Visuelles, Contretype, Brussels, BE  
Beelden van de Boekentoren, Vandenhove — Ghent University, BE  
Grace Ndiritu Reimagines the FOMU  
Collection, FOMU Collection, Antwerp, BE  
Marc De Cock: Een denkbeeldig portret in kunstwerken Uit de Collectie Matthys Colle & S.M.A.K. — Ghent, BE
- 2022 Le Promontoire du Songe, FRAC Auvergne, Clermont-Ferrand, FR  
Marie-José Van Hee architecten. A Walk, De Singel, Antwerpen, BE  
DeSign of the Times, De Spil, Roeselare, BE  
Mystiek: Rituelen. Verstillig. Extase., Limburgs Museum, Venlo, NL  
L'art dans les chapelles – 31<sup>e</sup> édition, Pontivy, FR  
Kunstmuur, in situ, UZ Brussel, Brussels, BE  
The Thinking Hand, Tatjana Pieters, Ghent, BE  
40 YEARS of Zeno X Gallery – the nineties, Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp, BE

	p.s. – SvP, Vandenhove – Ghent University, BE		The Liar's Cloth, GRIMM, Amsterdam, NL
	Intertwined. The role of the Rug in Arts, Crafts and Design, La Galleria Nazionale, Rome, IT		Works on Paper II, Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp, BE
	NADIR, Laarne Castle, Laarne, BE	2017	Ecce Homo, Museum Mayer van den Bergh, Antwerp, BE
	Penelope, BOZAR, Brussels, BE		Le divan des murmures, FRAC Auvergne, Clermont-Ferrand, FR
2021	Condition Humaine, GRIMM, New York, NY, USA		Farewell Photography. Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie, Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen, DE
	Xenia – or the virtue of hospitality, MILL (Needcompany), Brussels, BE		WeerZien, De Pont Museum, Tilburg, NL
	Though it's dark, still I sing, 34th Bienal de São Paulo, São Paulo, BR		The Still Point of the Turning World – Between Film and Photography, FOMU, Antwerp, BE
	PASS 2021, Mullem, Huise, Wannegem, Lede, BE		The Absent Museum, WIELS, Brussels, BE
	Someone said that the world's a stage, GRIMM, New York, NY, USA		Silent Stories by Jan Lauwers, BOZAR, Brussels, BE
	Drongenhofkapel, Ghent, BE	2016	From Broodthaers to Braeckman – Photography in the Visual Arts in Belgium, M HKA, Antwerp, BE
	Re-collect, FOMU, Antwerp, BE		TOUCHED – Craftsmanship in Contemporary Photography, Museum Het Schip, Amsterdam, NL
	Inaugural exhibition, GRIMM, New York, NY, USA		Museum Dirk De Wachter, Museum Dr. Guislain, Ghent, BE
	Braeckman – Fieret – Kooiker – Štrba, Be-Part, Waregem, BE		The Importance of Being..., Museum of Contemporary Art, University of São Paulo, BR
2020	Without Trace, De Pont Museum, Tilburg, NL		Global Perspectives on Photography, Design District (Pavilion Belgium & The Netherlands), Dubai, UAE
	Listen to your Eyes, Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar, NL		Capital: Debt – Territory – Utopia, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, DE
	Deceptive Images, Playing with Painting and Photography, MARTa Herford, Herford, DE		The One – The Real, Kromus + Zink, Berlin, DE
	Fotograf Festival – Social body, fluid order – fluid body, social order, Fotograf Gallery, Prague, CZ		Dirk Braeckman, Susan Hartnett, Jockum Nordström, Jack Whitten, Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp, BE
	Be Modern, From Klee to Tuymans, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels, BE		In Wonderland, Salon Dahlmann, Berlin, DE
	Vu.e de dos – Images à contre-courant, le Delta, Namur, BE		Angst Essen Seele Auf, LLS387, Antwerp, BE
2019	Sgabello Collection: In Search of the Miraculous, On The Inside, Amsterdam, NL	2015	Maarten Van Severen & Co., Over ontwerpers, kunstenaars & makers, Design Museum, Ghent, BE
	noWhere, S.M.A.K., Ghent, BE		The Importance of Being..., Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Buenos Aires, AR
	JRSLM – Paradise Lost Again, Galerie VUB, Brussels, BE		Chinese Utopias Revisited: The Elephants, BOZAR, Brussels, BE
	Who are you?, La Maison Des Arts, Brussels, BE		le Bourgmestre de Fumes, Emergent Veurne, BE
	Feast of Fools. Bruegel herontdekt, Kasteel van Gaasbeek, Gaasbeek, BE		Mijn Vlakke Land. On photography and landscape, FOMU, Antwerp, BE
	Group Show, Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp, Borgerhout, BE		PASS, Mullem, Huise, Wannegem and Lede, BE
2018	Dirk & Paolo, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille, FR		Hôtel Dunkerque, FRAC Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Calais, FR
	four times sixty – anniversary exhibition, Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp, Borgerhout, BE		The Importance of Being..., Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, CU
	Still Life, Obstinance of Things, Kunst Haus Wien, Vienna, AT		Stille is als Ademhalen (Silence out loud), Museum Kranenburgh, Bergen, NL
	The Sensation of the Sea, De Mesdag Collectie, The Hague, NL		Her First Meteorite, Volume 2, Rosegallery, Santa Monica, CA, USA
	KRASJ 4, Ninove, BE		
	Biennial of Painting: On Landscapes, Roger Raveelmuseum, Machelen-aan-de Leie, BE		
	Museum van Deinze en de Leiestreek, Deinze, BE	<b>Prizes</b>	
	Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, BE	2021	Doctor Honoris Causa (VUB Leuven)
	Iconobelge, AntwerpPhoto Festival, Het Loodswezen, Antwerp, BE	2018	Medal of Honour in the Human Sciences
	Freespace, 16th International Architecture Exhibition, Venice, IT	2006	Culture Prize 2005 of the Flemish Community (section Fine Arts)
	Glorious (?) Failure, Psychiatrisch Ziekenhuis, Duffel, BE	2003	Culture Prize of the City of Ghent

2002 Culture Prize of the K.U. Leuven (Prize Fonds Blanlin-Evart)  
 2000 Prize Vic Depauw Kiwanis, Ghent  
 1997 Prize for Photography of the Antwerp Province  
 1990 Preis für junge europäische Fotografen  
 1989 Belgian Kodak Award  
 1988 International Photo Metro Award (third prize)  
 Belgian Kodak Award (second prize)  
 1987 Prize for Plastic Arts of the City of Harelbeke – Photography (nomination)  
 1986 Prix de la Jeune Peinture Belge (nomination)  
 5ème grand Prix Victor Hasselblad, Kredietbank  
 Prize for Photography of the Antwerp Province  
 Concours de photographie INBEL (third prize)  
 Prize of the Brabant Province  
 Prix de la Jeune Peinture Belge (nomination)  
 1985 Prize of the Province of East-Flanders  
 Preis für junge europäische Fotografen (nomination)

Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne, CH  
 Musée Niépce, Chalon-sur-Saône, FR  
 Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, BE  
 Museum of Modern Art, Vladivostok, RU  
 M HKA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp, BE  
 Mu.ZEE, Ostend, BE  
 Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, USA  
 Proximus Art Collection, Brussels, BE  
 Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Brussels, BE  
 Royal Palace, Brussels, BE  
 Sammlung Goetz, Munich, DE  
 The Rachofsky Collection, Dallas, TX, USA  
 S.M.A.K., Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art, Ghent, BE  
 The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX, USA

#### Public Collections

AkzoNobel Art Foundation, Amsterdam, NL  
 Artothèque, Annecy, FR  
 Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, FR  
 Centraal Museum, Utrecht, NL  
 Centre National des Arts Plastiques, Paris, FR  
 Centro de Fotografía de la Universidad, Salamanca, ES  
 De Pont Museum, Tilburg, NL  
 FOMU, Fotomuseum, Antwerp, BE  
 Fondation Nationale d'Art Contemporain, Paris, FR  
 FRAC Auvergne, Clermont-Ferrand, FR  
 FRAC Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Dunkirk, FR  
 FRAC Rhône-Alpes, Villeurbanne, FR  
 Groot Gerechtsgebouw Gent, Ghent, BE  
 Kabinet Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen, Ghent, BE  
 Kunstmuseum Den Haag, The Hague, NL  
 Longlati Foundation, Shanghai, C  
 M – Museum Leuven, Leuven, BE  
 MAC's Grand-Hornu, Hornu, BE  
 Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris, FR  
 Ministère de la Communauté française, Brussels, BE  
 Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, Brussels, BE  
 MOMA, New York, NY, USA  
 Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA  
 Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Strasbourg, FR  
 Musée de la Photographie, Charleroi, BE

THE PILL<sup>®</sup>

*WORKS AND EXHIBITIONS*







Dirk Braeckman

*ECHTZEIT 138-24, 2024*

Ultrachrome inkjet print mounted on aluminium  
support in stainless steel frame

90 x 72 cm





**Dirk Braeckman**

*ECHTZEIT 117-24, 2024*

Ultrachrome inkjet print mounted on aluminium  
support in stainless steel frame

144 x 180 cm





**Dirk Braeckman**  
*ECHTZEIT 025-24, 2024*  
Ultrachrome inkjet print mounted on aluminium  
support in stainless steel frame  
90 x 72 cm







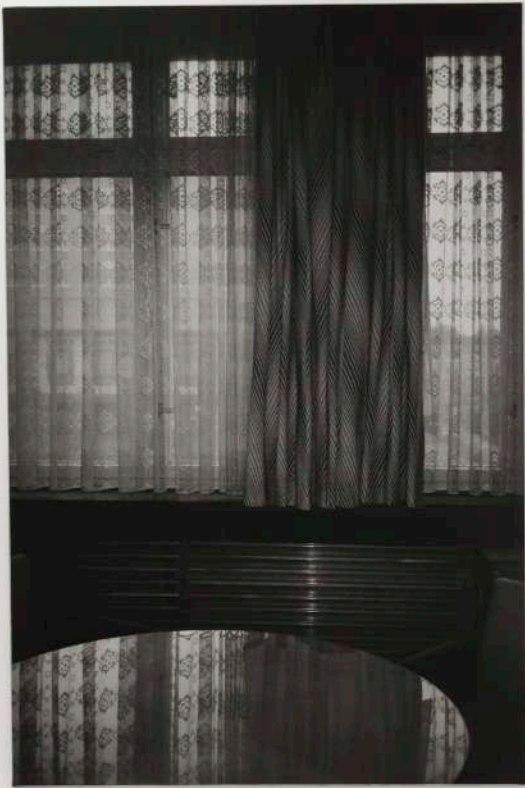


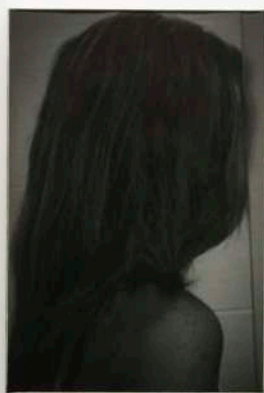
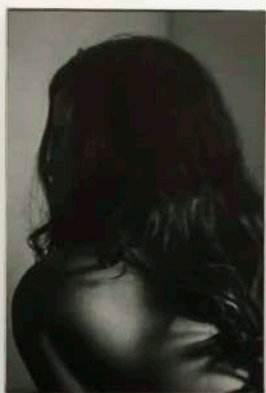
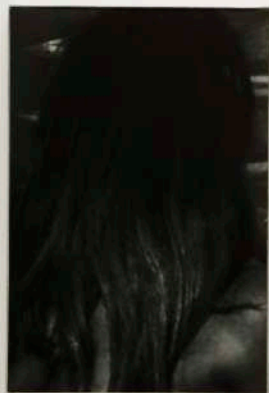
**Dirk Braeckman**

*ECHTZEIT 003-24, 2024*

Ultrachrome inkjet print mounted on aluminium  
support in stainless steel frame

90 x 72 cm





**Dirk Braeckman**  
*ECHTZEIT 045-24*, 2024  
Latinum-palladium print, aluminum frame  
30 x 24 cm











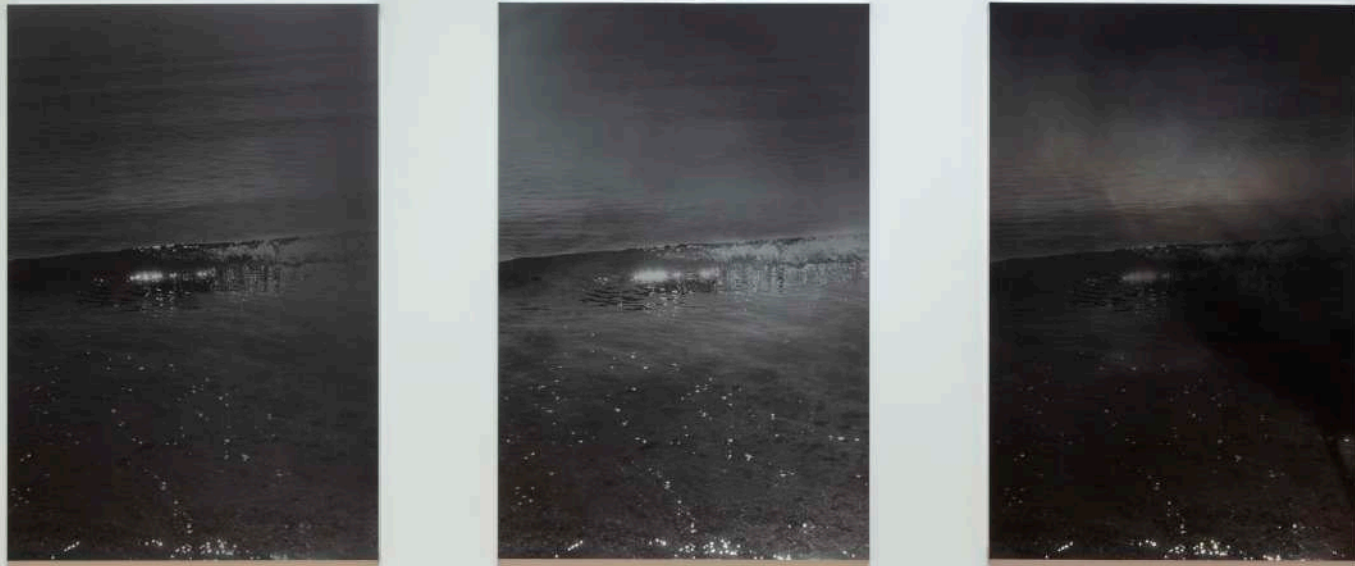
**Dirk Braeckman**

*Dear deer, Send my,* 2019

Ultrachrome inkjet print on matte paper, aluminum frame  
180 x 120 cm









**Dirk Braeckman**  
*Dear Deer, Vague Memories*, 2019  
Ultrachrome inkjet on matte paper, aluminum frame  
180 x 120 cm





Dirk Braeckman  
*B.G.-O.Z.-11*, 2011  
Gelatin silver print, aluminum frame  
120 x 80 cm

















Dirk Braeckman















**Dirk Braeckman**

*27.1 / 21.7 / 028 / 2014, 2014*

Gelatin silver print, aluminum frame

90 x 60 cm























Dirk Braeckman  
*S.L.-K.W.-11*, 2011  
Gelatin silver print, aluminum frame  
120 x 80 cm



THE PILL®

*TEXTS*

## *The Black Dew*

Dirk Lauwaert

An oeuvre about black: long, extended gradations of twilight, in which a complete climate installs itself. With this black, Dirk Braeckman assumes his unique voice, with its own specific “grain du noir” (in the way that Roland Barthes referred to “le grain de la voix”). As the lithographer works on stone or the maker of etchings on zinc plate, Dirk Braeckman works on a surface (glass or a derivative thereof). The artist of the camera is like a fresco painter who paints on wet plaster, or the watercolourist, painting on absorbent paper. His technique (the water replaced by light) allows no corrections. Photographer, fresco painter, watercolourist: all three work with and against time. The drying—of the layer of plaster, the watercolour paper, the photographic paper—is crucial to all three. The rapid touch, the brief opening, and in contrast there is the slow exposure, the slow fixing, the slowness with which it floats into view. (The Polaroid is the extreme example of this, the digital machine its extreme denial.)

The paper. It is known that William Turner was perpetually searching for new papers, from different—native and foreign—manufacturers. In the same way that wine is bound to a region (to earth), so too are papers and textiles bound to water. Their capacity to absorb is crucial. Everyone who tried watercolours as a child remembers how the paper took in the water and how different kinds of paper did that so differently. There is a slow paper, which seems to repel the coloured water, or one that very rapidly drinks the tinted water amongst its fibres, as if it were grains of sand in a sandbox. The slower the paper, the more vain and cool the image (grains of silver, grains of sand and fibres on one side; mercury, quicksilver and mirror reflection on the other).

Papers with open pores pull the tinted water into themselves (if we had a “sound microscope”, we could hear the slurping and the sighing). Then the paper stops, to take a breath. This is how Dirk Braeckman’s paper brings light into itself, holds it fast. The (accursed) glossy paper of photography books reflects the light, smacks it back: cold and vain. “Real” paper does not bounce light back, but absorbs it, sucks it in (with the dedication of a Georges de La Tour) and gives it back to us as a glow: warm, soft, caressing and whispering.

The black in the hands of Dirk Braeckman is not that of Brassai, Eugene Smith, or Robert Frank, nor even that of Bill Brandt. Their black can tolerate glossy paper. Because, however dark it may be, black there is no more than a sign of darkness. It refers to a dark space, but is itself not black. It has neither the intensity nor the materiality of black. Braeckman’s black lies deep in the paper. It does not signify black: it is black. Black matter. Here, black is not a word, but substance, unformed, unstructured, escaping language, escaping meaning. This is no significant, figurative black (indicating that “it is dark there”), but a black that, in contrast, exists beyond every form (like coal dust, it lies black in the lungs, on the cheeks, in the sweat of the hands). Black as part of the material world, not of its language: it is not an image of black, but the smell of a coal cellar. This black is that of a charcoal drawing by

Georges Seurat, the black of Max Beckmann, of Odilon Redon, of Victor Hugo. This black is heavy. This black is lead, with the promise of poison. It is impenetrable, massive. It cuts the eye off at the pass: “To here, and no further”. The black square with the white border (Kazimir Malevich); a wall in a dead-end street that you smack into. The fatal black of Sin City (Frank Miller). Dirk Braeckman’s black is as intense as the black of a negative on a glass plate, where the silver has been scorched by light. It is deep black (one never says “deep white”). His black is falling downwards, without echo, “a voice in the void”.

But there is more. Dirk Braeckman’s black moves. It creeps cumbrous and sighing like a cripple, towards something from which the black has been removed, not panting towards that lighter place, but shuffling. This “un-blackening”: it digs a way for itself towards grey (oh so slowly, and in each successive proof, it must be even slower). There is nonetheless no liberating light in the distance. There is no promise at the end, no hope whatsoever for the eye, no gaiety for the gaze. The black becoming grey is not feeding the hungry eye (Walker Evans). On the contrary, it is ash in the throat. Thirst and hunger, starvation, a need for light, light-starved: it is only a brightening illusion.

Braeckman’s black is never sterile. His black is not the skeleton of black, no wisened caricature of black. This is no tombstone. There is motion in it. It is slow, admittedly, like a telluric movement of hundreds of thousands of years, but there is movement. The ending of the grey and the flood of the black take a long time: yes, a very long time. Through that slow and trembling, dragging yet also stubborn transition, full of pushing and pulling, like arm wrestling, nothing is ever being postulated. There is nothing affirmative or coercing in the images of Dirk Braeckman. There is, therefore, not a radical contrast (no boxing), as there is between the whites and the blacks of the Nabis (Félix Vallotton, Pierre Bonnard), or of Frans Masereel. There, even after years, the aggression still hangs in the image. There is no hesitation or nuance whatsoever, but caricature. Coercingly clear and efficient.

Braeckman is not the artist of the obvious contrasts, nor the artist of the nuance. He is the artist of ambiguity. The driving transition of grey to black, or vice versa, of black to grey, is the ultimate cornerstone of his visual language (if I may use the worn-out term). This slow looking forward, this slow shifting across the surface—this is his. It belongs to him, his work, his creation: the quiet, yet compelling tide on the broad, black beach. Holding back, breaking, from lento to lentissimo, from walking to shuffling: this is the figure of the cautious avoidance, the rejection of every dictate. There is no polarity, no discussion. There is no war, as there is in a woodcut, but the gradual rising up from the black, in a slow motion, not of an amorous, but of an aggressive nature. “Moving out of the dead” (rather than rising from): this must take place in a slow movement. Nosferatu is that slowness, unformed, without movement (because it is so slow).

That we get to see something is not unimportant—on the contrary. Dirk Braeckman is not an abstract formalist, nor is he obsessed by technique. His images are not nihilistic. There is still paper that can be blackened. There are still figures that he must show in order to direct his

blacks, thanks to which he can allow his black to shimmer. His blacks lie in the paper, but also on the shoulders of his figures (objects and backs), heavy as lead. These figures are certainly no alibi. They are not indiscriminately used. What you see stored away in the black (as if in a burka) has been determined with voyeuristic tension and super-cooled excitement. An opened door, a pleated curtain, a tiled wall: everything in an intensity that you can only read as sexual, a sexual intoxication. Not a passion for the world, but a deep sigh to the stupefying absence thereof.

The spaces, objects and details are not “chosen”. That is too active. Braeckman lets it happen. He allows the fishing line that he has thrown into the world to simply walk on. The line walks with a continuous swish along the mill. The fisherman stands still on the bank. The fish flashes away. The line follows. Braeckman’s black is always an “allowing”, a letting go, stumbling and falling, the way one must let death go, quietly let it do its work. This allowing is not an acceptance (too active), but an observing. It is without pity, but also without hardness, in the same way that one takes the light of spring, the rustle of the night, a tedious rain: as they come. It is not only because it cannot be otherwise, but because it is for this very reason an inescapable gift (in French: le donné).

The figures depicted are those of l’homme de la nuit. The night-time eye brings its own subjects— limited in number. Following the sombre debut of sex after the cassock, the artist shifts to the gaze of the night itself (the night watcher). What reveals itself in the hollow reverberation of the black? Grey, or better yet: greying subjects. They are not old, but discouragingly familiar (a swinging door, a shower stall, a painting on a wall). They are empty, immaterial, indiscriminate. They are just there, in that softly breathing black, like an ailing hound that no longer lifts its head, with a tail that does not wag. All the arguing is over, the bracing against a bed from early sex, leaving only that solitude that walks around, feeling its way in the familiar bedroom, in the toilet in a café. Or the tossing and turning alongside the opposite sex in bed: a black that opens its eyes after a long illness and closes them again, that wins back its breath, lets it go again and sinks away, then again undulates in waves, in a glorious off and on, up and down, floating towards the depths and rearing to the surface, the alternating succession of splendid breathing out and majestic breathing in, allowing the filling up with black salt (those magical, microscopic little grains of silver).

This black is not sombre, negative or provocative. On the contrary, everything is rich in glow, in ardour. These blackened figures are so intensely present. If I inquire of an image of Dirk Braeckman’s if there is something there, then something replies to me, “Present”! It may be a back, shoulders, tiles on the shower wall—“Present”! It is a relief, this black that assails the eye and body (here, the eye is body). It proves indeed to carry something, able to carry something, able to bear. It is not a ghost-body, but it bears, with determination, sometimes as a thing enveloped in skin, sometimes a thing with a surface. Am I making a leap here? Braeckman creates a black with many, many skins (so many layers!).

The skin of the paper is as dry as the surface of a stick of charcoal. So too is the body, the

body of the things and figures. They should be polished, rubbed with oil. That beautiful skin yearns more for the rub than the cuddle. If the things (figures and objects) were turned towards us, we would see the moisture of the eyes, reflecting, carriers of facial expression. But that face is not there, because in this work, we see everything (people and things) from the back (a tergo). What should I be able to perceive in that verso world? I fear a crushed mask, the mocking of the longing of the viewer (Hieronymus Bosch’s mocking of Christ).

In a comparison with Craigie Horsfield, there are beautiful blacks there, too. But with his blacks, Horsfield brings no uncertainty into the picture, no risk for the viewer, no threatening restlessness. There, it is a black that comforts. The face in his case is a “you” that calls on your capacities, that brings responsibility into the world, and also into the body, now as the junction for that responsibility. The face of Dirk Braeckman is ambiguity, absent yet fully present. It is in the negative, like a mould. A black mould, automobile tyre black, it is a black that gets under my feet, makes the earth shake, cuts off my breath. There are more metaphors: jerking on the gallows, choking in passion.

What is the black of the black? What is the black as substantive and the black as adjective? What is the essence of black and what is black as a relative phenomenon? You see the essential black in the light outside the cave—it is revelation. The relative black, in contrast, darkens. Dirk Braeckman lays the essential black onto my worktable, a black that shows the world. It is a black epiphany.

Every revelation calls for parables, just as every deity unavoidably sets metamorphoses in motion. Black is the mantle of a king, en route.

*Dirk Braeckman*, Roma Publications, 2011, 384 pp, hardcover, 28,5 × 24,5 cm, Edition: 2500.



## *Remaining Absent*

Jean-Charles Vergne

This tiny and irrefutable block of black abyss defying my comprehension.

Dirk Braeckman's photos – we call them photos for convenience's sake – are tonal vibrations subtly ranging from the pitch blackness of soot to the dazzling whiteness of electric gleams, sunrays or throbbing flashes. From opaque blacks to shrill whites, the light's graininess is neutralized by grey or by the dusky dimming of color, setting the world's details onto a totally matte surface, encompassed in a zone where air barely circulates. Filters sift the surface of the paintings – let's call them paintings rather than photos –, with varying degrees of resistance, filters so soft they almost liquefy one's gaze. From a strictly technical standpoint, these photos are undeniably photographic, and yet they stray from the genre and are deeply tuned to the realm of painting. Dirk Braeckman started out as a painter, at first just using photography so as to document his subject matter. This initial practice would soon turn photography into the catalyst of his painterly eye. Dirk Braeckman's artwork does not produce images, for the images are surfaceless, as opposed to his works where the graininess counts as much as the brushstroke. A painting chiefly tells about the act of gazing. What we see in Dirk Braeckman's works is not the initial shot, but a particular way of gazing at the world, where things are grasped in constant relation to recollection. What is depicted is something that was seen and then partially, and sometimes even totally, forgotten. The photographic action is merely the initial capture which then gets archived, sometimes for years on end, until an image is unearthed, the way one unearths old memories. The image is taken, discarded, and then reused, rediscovered, sometimes reworked, re-shot, reframed or calibrated with different lighting – the way our memories are reshaped when we grope for them, in a wobbly authenticity, veiled by the greyish haze of memory's backwash. In the words of Éric Suchère, there is "évidence possible", possible clues about what was seen, a set of clues that indicate a faintly plausible reality, its clarity and vividness altered and warped by forgetting, by the dimming of images, by the opalescence of veils, the matte thickness of curtains or the ruffle of parasitic gleams. These clues are deceptive, and by no means evidence in the sense of proof.

It is not about witnessing a snap of life, the aim is not to produce a snapshot, but to tell the story of a gaze, to show how the memory of a place can get so layered that it stops being a memory and turns into a painting in its own right, a sealed-off world retrospectively divulging its instability, its evanescence, its soft luminous hovering in shades of grey beyond memory's grasp. Dirk Braeckman's works are sprawled across the slow erosion of an image which was once seen, recollected, and then splintered into so many fragments that memory forgets itself within the work's self-enclosed body. This is perhaps what is meant by a painting.

Looking at the world, photographing the world and looking at photos of the world are three separate actions, and it is worth recalling that a photo is always a framing of a broader context, and enacts a subtraction and piercing of reality. Photography extracts a segment of what is

seen, literally expressed in the French term for shot, *prise de vue* (view-taking), and differs from painting which ultimately creates a world out of nothing (blank canvas or other support), a world that is precisely bounded by its edges, with no out-of-frame, with nothing beyond. The starting point for Dirk Braeckman's works is a photo, but the photos become paintings, their edges finely yet firmly bounded by a steel frame, an integral component of the artwork as demonstrated by the slight irregularities, the manual machining or the imperceptibly sanded corners, which imbue the artwork with an organic quality unachievable with a standard frame.

These paintings have a skin-like surface and a body-like scope, revealing a painter's gaze. While it is true that these works use photography, it is literally used, deteriorated, weakened in its power of witnessing and objectively rendering reality, used to the point of being abused, overtaken by its tension towards painting. To cite the film director Albert Serra, "using entails an economic exchange, a pact, whereas for abusing there must first be bodies, gazes, exhibitionism." How true this is, and in Dirk Braeckman's work one senses that photography's naturally woven pact with reality has been breached. What I'm gazing at involves time's thickness, the surface, the exhibition of bodies haloed by a sensuality verging on eroticism, the surge of intimacy precisely where bodies are no longer present.

A.D.F.-S.B.1-03 – 2003

The paper of this book is inadequate, no paper or medium can aptly convey the surface of this or any other of Dirk Braeckman's paintings. Its body (its scale) and its skin (its texture) remain inaccessible. The image is photographic in name only. Its eerie physical presence likens it to a painting or drawing made with intensely jet black charcoal. The curtain and its reflection on the tabletop in what seems like a hotel room evoke Wilhelm Hammershøi's astounding paintings, as if their somewhat faded hues were subtly filtered through grainy blacks and greys. Dirk Braeckman's photographs are bodies and these bodies divulge the rare quality of their skin. It is a skin of nakedness and erotic half-shadows, a skin whose ashy texture imbues the images with a sensuality conveyed by tiny details embedded in powdery shades of grey. Eroticism has seeped through the pores of this image-derma: the cross-window evaporates into the whiteness of veils, the curtain and its oblique motifs are entangled like hair, the faint reflection merging with the table edge and barely revealing the fabric's underside in a ripple of light cloth. However, we wish to point out that the image is not the oeuvre, and one's eye has to graze the photo's soft surface in order to gauge the mood of this lust-tinged scene.

The surfaces of Dirk Braeckman's paintings are shaped by the compactness of a drape, by the evanescence of a translucent veil, by teeming motifs scattered across a frayed carpet, spanning the morning light slicing through a parted curtain, ambiguous gleams, hovering glimmers, wintry sun-ripples upon beds where enigmatic sensuality suffuses an ethereal hotel room. The works show things precisely as they were seen, those things we never quite look at in this way, those things that in spite of ourselves unexpectedly wind their way into our memory to weave the strange pattern of ghostly imprints that will linger on. The works show things as Dirk Braeckman saw them, things we'd never see – not like this. These things transform places – walls and doors, curtains and beds, alcoves in corridors and halls, sea-

misted bays, windows that block out the world – into still-life fragments of reality, evoking the way in which our dreams and memories crystallize on seemingly trivial details fraught with feelings, memories and sensations. Framed and sifted through greyscale filters, these places have become anonymous non-places, patches of somewhere refracted by the echoes and clues that sometimes signal the photographer's presence. It is significant that several works result from re-shot photos (his own photos, found photos, or from posters and other types of documents) – and that their surface has been partially erased by the flash-triggered blind spot. The initial image is blinded by the sudden appearance of the photographer, whose sheer presence abuses the image, abuses photography, spawns a surface and infuses it with duration, tilting the photo towards a painting-in-becoming.

B.O.-D.U.-00 – 2000 A row of rooms, similar to those found in 17th-century Dutch paintings, such as the renowned work – for its lack of human presence – Samuel van Hoogstraten's *View of an Interior* (ca. 1655-1662), held at the Louvre museum. In a similar vein, B.O.-D.U.-00 offers a discreet glimpse of a broom leaning against a wall, suggesting a domestic scene inhabited by those who are absent. Remaining absent, a contradiction at the core of Dirk Braeckman's works: being bound to a place, taking part in its duration despite no longer being there; or to the contrary, being markedly absent from a place and its timespan despite being present (as conveyed by the present/absent women in his works). Nobody in Samuel van Hoogstraten's works other than the painter, nobody in B.O.-D.U.-00 other than the photographer, whose presence is hinted at by the flash-diffraction from foreground to background on the walls and doors. However, there is no brightness to the light brutally throbbing on the surface of things, for the matte print of the image has muted its dazzle. The sudden flash has entered a time warp, the white light has coalesced like a memory's slow unfurling. The light wanders from room to room, banging against the doorway, hushed in the curtains' thick velvet folds, tracing its chalky hues on the opposite wall, instilling the bland subject matter with surface and vibration, splintering the photographer's presence into an utter instability of things, into a remaining absence.

Each of Dirk Braeckman's paintings is an unsettling nod of assent to a place's ineluctable disintegration into a different space. The place is the sole event of these paintings, and simultaneously a non-event which slowly crumbles. Dirk Braeckman's places aren't real places and yet they're very real, existing without quite existing. They vibrate with nostalgia and faded beauty, igniting an oscillation into an illusory becoming while remaining frozen in an absence of duration. Their ambiguity recalls Stéphane Mallarmé's free-verse poem "Rien n'aura eu lieu que le lieu" (Nothing will have taken place but the place) with its double negative, its unsettling future perfect tense and its range of potential interpretations: nothing has taken place, nothing will take place, only the place takes place, the place is nothing... The flow of time has frozen over and crystallized in the place. The places and times merge into a zone of indiscernibility where nothing is named, other than by a few mysterious letters that give the works their titles (with just a few exceptions), where nothing sheds light on the artist's personal chronology – for the date doesn't refer to the year the photo was made but to when the painting was completed. Following the initial shot, the image lies buried for days,

months or years, until it's extracted from the archives where it had been carefully inventoried so as to be developed, the way one develops a memory that has been refashioned to fit the context, assembling disjointed fragments to reconfigure an image, and one will never know whether this image corresponds to a real memory. Dirk Braeckman's images, in their primitive state, are pictorial embryos awaiting activation.

Dirk Braeckman is a painter who uses the photographic medium as a tool, without resorting to elaborate technology: a simple camera rather than a field camera, no staging but instead a scrutiny of reality's commonplace details. He photographs what he sees, which is what we don't see although we might if we could measure the invisible weight of things upon our future memories. The images that ensue from his paintings reveal the dregs of a world subtly streaming through reality's poetic crevices. His works capture beauty by focusing on the silent listless details coiled at the edges of memory. We've all experienced this: what we retain from things that matter to us is sometimes not the things or events in themselves, but rather their trivial fringes, their feeble grammar sparked off solely by punctuation, a semicolon which, in a sort of sublimation, emits a word's melancholy breath or lights up a sentence in the middle of a text. Dirk Braeckman's paintings are indeed punctuation marks of reality, intonations aimed at shifting the perception of things. While this primarily means taking a photo, it mainly involves rendering what was seen via a fine-tuned syntax poised between the photographic image's sublimation and the initial image's devaluation towards its pictorial becoming. The images wander, thicken and somewhat flounder in their grainy devaluation with no aim, reason or stability in sight; they become filaments of moments, sensations and collisions of personal memories, now spun into possible memories for each viewer of his artwork, and thus become paintings.

Dear deer – 2019 Did you get – As I lie – As soon as – Once we – As I recall – Yesterday we – Vague memories – I remember – I hope – Send my – Some recent – I heard – Enjoyed – How long – I read – When we walked – Haven't – No wonder – Constant – When shall – It's been.

The names of the twenty or so works comprising the series *Dear deer* offer a pointillist glimpse of an intimacy which had previously been encrypted by the code name typically used for titles. They form a cluster of syntax-fragments that merely give an illusory description in how they're pieced together. These titles form the poetic cartilage of a secret gap-filled text, implying the impossible match between meaning and reality. They give voice to a stammering with fragile seams, conveying the inability of words to capture what has been seen and experienced. Rather than unleashing meaning, the words prompt a densification of what is depicted, and bring about a depersonalization. In other words, the clipped language and recurrent use of "I" paradoxically yield impossible clues (evidence): the author remains absent and at the same time, his absence remains, fraught, palpable in his ghostly presence deep within the works. The series title *Dear deer* alludes to a personal factor (the period of time when the artist moved from the city to the countryside setting of his youth) as well as to stuttering and to language's futile attempt at describing anything. *Dear deer* brings to mind the title of Michael Palmer's poem *Dearest Reader* and its "photograph of nothing but"

("successive halls, flowered carpets and doors / or the photograph of nothing but pigeons / and grackles by the shadow of a fountain"). At the end of the day, it is a photograph of nothing but: nothing but eaves, fringes at the edge of vision, the ungraspable duration grasped in a painting, the immeasurable distance between beings, nostalgia, lingering absence... Dear deer: artificial flowers cropping out of the wallpaper, flecks on a wall, the opaque black screen of a fake vernacular painting, the crumpled image of a naked body that might have been real or dreamed up, a landscape that feels familiar but doesn't exist.

a seeming road here, endless  
rain pearly light  
chamber after chamber  
of dust-weighted air  
the project of seeing things  
so to speak, or things seen

## *Demeurer Absent*

Jean-Charles Vergne

Ce minuscule et irréfugable bloc d'abîme noir déifiant mon entendement.

Les photographies de Dirk Braeckman – nommons-les photographies par commodité – sont des vibrations de tons délicatement contenus entre la noirceur absolue d'un poudroiment charbonneux et la blancheur irradiante d'éclats de lampes, de rayons solaires ou d'éblouissements de flashes pulsés. Des noirs les plus opaques aux blancs les plus stridents, la granulosité de la lumière neutralisée par le gris ou par l'extinction crépusculaire de la couleur fait reposer les détails du monde sur une surface d'une matité totale, contenue sur une aire où l'air ne circule qu'à peine. Des filtres tamisent la surface des tableaux – appelons-les tableaux plutôt que photographies -, selon des degrés de résistance variables, des filtres dont la douceur rend presque aqueuse la circulation du regard. Sur un plan strictement technique, ces photographies sont photographiques, c'est indéniable, mais elles s'échappent pourtant du genre et s'imprègnent d'une intonation qui est celle de la peinture. Dirk Braeckman a d'abord été peintre, n'employant la photographie qu'en tant que moyen pour documenter ses sujets. Cette pratique initiale de la peinture fut déterminante dans la manière dont la photographie devint ensuite le catalyseur d'un regard de peintre. L'art de Dirk Braeckman ne produit pas d'images car les images n'ont aucune surface, contrairement à ses œuvres dont la granulation importe autant qu'importe la touche d'un peintre. Une peinture est d'abord le récit d'un regard. Ce que nous voyons des œuvres de Dirk Braeckman n'est pas la prise de vue initiale mais un regard particulier sur le monde où les choses sont appréhendées dans une relation constante avec la remémoration. Ce qui est montré est ce qui a été vu puis, partiellement, voire totalement, oublié. L'acte photographique ne constitue qu'un premier geste de captation destiné à être archivé, parfois durant des années, avant qu'une image ne soit exhumée, comme on exhume un souvenir ancien. L'image est prise, laissée, puis reprise, redécouverte, parfois reprise, rephotographiée, recadrée ou étalonnée selon une lumière différente – comme se refabrique nos souvenirs lorsque nous les appelons à nous, dans une authenticité vacillante, voilée par le trouble grisâtre d'une mémoire en ressac. Pour reprendre l'expression d'Éric Suchère, il y a une évidence possible de ce qui a été vu, une somme d'évidences dont l'existence n'est que plausible, dont la clarté et la fragrance sont infléchies et contrariées par l'oubli, par la mise en jachère des images, par l'opalescence de voilages, l'épaisseur mate de rideaux ou la perturbation de reflets parasites. Ces évidences sont trompeuses, elles ne sont en aucun cas des preuves (evidence, en anglais). Il ne s'agit pas de rendre compte d'un instant vécu, il ne s'agit pas de produire des instantanés, mais de produire le récit d'un regard, de restituer la façon dont le souvenir d'un lieu sédimente jusqu'à n'être plus un souvenir mais un tableau en soi, un monde refermé sur lui-même se livrant rétrospectivement dans son instabilité, dans son évanescence, dans le léger flottement d'une lumière grise dont les tons demeurent impossibles à fixer dans la mémoire. Les œuvres de Dirk Braeckman gisent sur l'étiement progressif d'une image vue, remémorée et peu à peu désagrégée, jusqu'à parvenir à une fragmentation telle que le souvenir s'oublie lui-même dans le corps autonome de l'œuvre. Ce serait peut-être cela, un tableau.

Regarder le monde, photographier le monde et regarder des photographies du monde sont trois actions distinctes et il ne faut pas oublier qu'une photographie est toujours le cadrage d'un ensemble plus vaste, opérant par soustraction et par ponction dans le réel. La photographie est le prélèvement d'une parcelle de ce qui est vu. Cette prise de vue s'oppose à la peinture dans la mesure où peindre consiste avant tout à créer un monde là où il n'y avait rien (la toile ou le support vierges), un monde précisément limité par ses bords, sans hors-champ, sans au-delà. Les œuvres de Dirk Braeckman ont pour point d'origine une photographie mais elles deviennent des tableaux dont les bords sont finement mais fermement plombés par un cadre d'acier dont il faut garder à l'esprit qu'il est un élément à part entière de la création comme en attestent les légères irrégularités, l'usinage manuel ou l'imperceptible ponçage des angles qui font vibrer l'ensemble vers une organicité que ne pourrait pas produire un encadrement standard. Ce sont des tableaux dont la surface est une peau et dont l'aire est un corps, des tableaux qui témoignent d'un regard de peintre. S'il est exact que ces œuvres usent de la photographie, la photographie est littéralement usée, détériorée, affaiblie dans sa puissance de témoignage et de compte-rendu objectif de la réalité, usée jusqu'à être abusée, usurpée par sa tension ultime vers la peinture. Comme l'énonce le réalisateur Albert Serra, "user relève plutôt d'un échange économique, un pacte, alors que pour abuser, il faut qu'il y ait d'abord des corps, des regards, de l'exhibitionnisme." C'est tout à fait cela et l'on sent dans les œuvres de Dirk Braeckman que le pacte noué naturellement par la photographie avec le réel a été enfreint. Ce que je regarde concerne l'épaisseur du temps, la surface, l'exhibition des corps nimbés d'une sensualité affleurant l'érotisme, l'épanchement de l'intimité là même où les corps ne sont plus présents.

A.D.F.-S.B.1-03 – 2003

Le papier de ce livre ne convient pas, aucun papier ni aucun support ne pourrait convenir pour rendre compte de la surface de cette œuvre ou de tout autre tableau de Dirk Braeckman. Son corps (son échelle) et sa peau (sa texture) demeureront inaccessibles. Cette image n'a de photographique que le nom. Sa présence physique troublante la place indubitablement du côté de la peinture ou d'un dessin exécuté avec le noir fuligineux d'un charbon intensément profond. Le rideau, son reflet à la surface d'une table dans ce que l'on imagine être une chambre d'hôtel, évoquent les merveilleuses peintures de Wilhelm Hammershøi dont les tons déjà passablement éteints auraient été passés par le poudroiment d'un filtre de noirs et de gris d'une granulosité et d'une subtilité infinies. Les photographies de Dirk Braeckman sont des corps et ces corps donnent à voir la singularité de leur peau. C'est une peau de dénudement et de pénombre érotique, une peau dont la texture cendrée instille à ses images une sensualité exprimée par d'infimes détails encadrés par les dégradés pulvérulents de gris. L'érotisme s'est immiscé par les pores de cette image derme : la croix de la fenêtre s'évaporant dans la blancheur du voilage, le rideau et ses motifs obliques entremêlés comme une chevelure, le reflet à peine visible épousant la bordure du guéridon et dévoilant à peine les dessous de l'étoffe dans une ondulation de robe légère. Mais, insistons sur ce point, l'image n'est pas l'œuvre et il faut avoir touché du regard la surface douce de cette photographie qui, seule, peut attester du tempérament de cette scène affleurant la lascivité.

Les surfaces des tableaux de Dirk Braeckman naissent de la compacité d'une tenture, de l'évanescence d'un voile translucide, du pullulement de motifs épars sur une moquette élimée, depuis un rideau entrebâillé par le tranchant émoussé d'une lueur matinale, depuis les reflets ambigus et les ondulations flottantes, les éclats solaires hivernaux sur des lits où s'épanche la sensualité à peine imaginable d'une chambre d'hôtel pourtant désincarnée. Les œuvres montrent les choses telles qu'elles sont vues, ces choses que l'on ne regarde jamais ainsi, ou à peine, ces choses qui malgré nous se fixent d'une manière impromptue dans la mémoire pour fomenter la trame étrange dessurvivances fantomatiques qui habitent nos mémoires. Les œuvres montrent les choses telles que Dirk Braeckman les a vues, ces choses que nous ne verrions pas – pas ainsi. Ces choses font des lieux – des murs et des portes, des rideaux et des lits, des recoins ouverts sur des couloirs et des halls, des baies océaniques troublées, des fenêtres fermées sur le monde –, des fragments de réel affleurant la nature morte, touchant à la façon dont nos rêves et nos mémoires cristallisent sur des détails de peu d'intérêt mais par lesquels percole la complexité de sentiments, de souvenirs, de sensations. Cadrés et passés par le crible de filtres en grisaille, ces lieux sont devenus des non-lieux, sans identification, parcelles de quelque part réfractées par les échos et les indices signalant parfois la présence du photographe. Il est notable que nombre d'œuvres soient issues de photographies rephotographiées (qu'il s'agisse de celles de Dirk Braeckman lui-même ou de photographies trouvées, d'affiches ou de documents divers) – dont la surface est partiellement oblitérée par le point aveugle d'un flash. L'image première est aveuglée par l'irruption du photographe qui, par la manifestation de sa présence, abuse de l'image, abuse la photographie, trame une surface et lui insuffle de la durée, basculant la photographie vers son devenir tableau.

B.O.-D.U.-00 – 2000 Une enfilade de pièces, analogue à celles que l'on voit dans la peinture hollandaise du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle dont l'une des plus fameuses – parce que vide de toute présence humaine – est Intérieur hollandais, peinte par Samuel van Hoogstraten (vers 1655-1662), conservée au Louvre. À l'identique, B.O.-D.U.-00 laisse – très discrètement – entrevoir un balai posé contre un mur, indiquant la domesticité du lieu et son occupation par celles et ceux qui demeurent absents de la scène. Demeurer absent, cette contradiction sied aux œuvres de Dirk Braeckman : rester en un lieu, participer de sa durée, bien que n'étant plus là ; ou à l'inverse, être résolument absent au lieu et à son temps bien qu'étant présent (ce que produisent notamment les femmes présentes/absentes de ses œuvres). Personne dans le tableau de Samuel van Hoogstraten sinon le peintre, personne dans B.O.-D.U.-00 sinon le photographe dont la présence est rendue indicielle par l'éclat d'un flash diffracté du premier au dernier plan sur les parois et les portes. Rien d'éclatant, pourtant, dans cette lumière brutalement pulsée à la surface des choses à laquelle le tirage mat de l'image aura enlevé la fulgurance. Le flash instantané s'est mué en temps étal, la lumière blanche s'est fixée telle l'épanchement lent d'un souvenir. La lumière erre de pièce en pièce, se heurte à l'embrasement, s'étouffe dans les plis épais du velours des rideaux et ruisselle ses tons crayeux sur le mur du fond, donne une surface et une vibration à l'indifférence du sujet, fragmente la présence du photographe en une instabilité totale des choses, en une absence demeurée.

Chaque tableau de Dirk Braeckman est l'affirmation troublante d'un assentiment accordé au lieu tendu vers son inéluctable dissolution en un espace autre. Le lieu est l'unique événement de ces tableaux et il est simultanément l'événement nul, en pulvérisation lente. Les lieux de Dirk Braeckman ne sont pas les lieux du réel tout en étant bien réels, ils existent sans exister. Ils vibrent de nostalgie et de beauté fanée, impulsent simultanément une oscillation vers un devenir illusoire tout en demeurant figés dans une absence de durée. L'ambiguïté évoque celle du vers libre de Stéphane Mallarmé, "Rien n'aura eu lieu que le lieu", avec sa double négation, le trouble instauré par le futur antérieur et les multiples interprétations induites : rien n'a eu lieu, rien n'aura lieu, seul le lieu a lieu, le lieu est rien... En gelant son flux, le temps s'est cristallisé dans le lieu. Les lieux et le temps se fondent dans une zone d'indiscernabilité où rien n'est nommé, sinon par quelques lettres mystérieuses qui donnent leurs titres aux œuvres (à de rares exceptions près), où rien n'est destiné à se fixer dans la chronologie personnelle de l'artiste – puisque la datation ne correspond pas à l'année de la prise de vue mais à celle de la finalisation du tableau. Après la prise de vue, l'image s'enfuit pendant des jours, des mois, des années, avant de s'extraire de l'archive où elle a été précisément inventoriée pour être développée comme l'on développe un souvenir refabriqué en certaines circonstances, dont on assemblerait les bribes désolidarisées pour refaire une image, une image dont on ne pourrait jamais savoir si elle correspond à un souvenir véritable. Les images de Dirk Braeckman, dans leur état primitif, ne sont encore que des embryons picturaux en attente d'activation.

Dirk Braeckman est un peintre utilisant le médium photographique comme outil, en évacuant toute forme de technologie élaborée : pas de chambre photographique mais un simple appareil, pas de mise en scène mais un arpentage méticuleux du réel dans ses détails les plus communs. Ce qu'il photographie, c'est ce qu'il voit et que nous ne voyons pas alors que nous pourrions le voir si nous étions capables de mesurer l'invisible poids des choses sur nos souvenirs futurs. Ce qu'il fait de ses images lorsqu'il réalise des tableaux donne à voir les scories d'un monde où ruissellent discrètement les anfractuosités poétiques du réel. Ses œuvres saisissent la beauté en se fixant sur les détails silencieux et atones lovés en marge des souvenirs eux-mêmes. Nous en avons tous fait l'expérience : ce que nous retenons des choses qui nous importent ne sont parfois pas les choses ou les événements en tant que tels mais leurs à-côtés indifférents, leur grammaire faible s'élevant soudainement par le seul fait d'une ponctuation, d'un point-virgule qui, dans une forme de sublimation, apporte la respiration mélancolique d'un mot ou fait s'épancher une phrase au milieu d'un texte. Les tableaux de Dirk Braeckman sont tout à fait cela, des ponctuations particulières de la réalité, des intonations destinées à infléchir la perception des choses. S'il s'agit en premier lieu de prendre une photographie, il est surtout question de rendre ce qui a été vu à l'aide d'une syntaxe finement réglée entre la dévaluation de l'image photographique et la sublimation de l'image initiale vers son devenir pictural. Les images errent, s'épaississent, se noient partiellement dans leur dévaluation granuleuse sans parvenir à trouver une fin, une raison, une stabilité, deviennent des filaments de moments, de sensations, des collisions de souvenirs personnels désormais déployés pour être les possibles souvenirs de chacun des spectateurs de ses œuvres, deviennent des tableaux.

Dear deer – 2019 Did you get – As I lie – As soon as – Once we – As I recall – Yesterday we – Vague memories – I remember – I hope – Send my – Some recent – I heard – Enjoyed – How long – I read – When we walked – Haven't – No wonder – Constant – When shall – It's been.

Les noms de la vingtaine d'œuvres qui constituent la série Dear deer dévoilent en pointillés une intimité jusqu'alors cryptée par la dénomination codée généralement d'usage pour les titres. Ils forment une somme de fragments de syntaxe qui, dans leur assemblage de bribes, ne donnent pourtant qu'une description illusoire. Ces titres forment le cartilage poétique d'un texte secret dont la nature lacunaire montre l'impossible coïncidence entre le sens et la réalité. Ils font entendre un balbutiement dont les articulations fragiles sont l'expression d'une impossible transmission par les mots de ce qui a été vu et vécu. Au lieu de procéder à une libération du sens, les mots obéissent à une dynamique de densification de ce qui est donné à voir et participent d'une dépersonnalisation. En d'autres termes, les amorces de langage et l'emploi récurrent du "je" mènent paradoxalement à l'impossible preuve (evidence) : l'auteur demeure absent et, simultanément, son absence demeure, prégnante, palpable dans sa présence fantomatique au cœur des œuvres.

Le titre de la série Dear deer – littéralement "Cher cerf" –, renvoie autant à un événement personnel (la période durant laquelle l'artiste quitta son environnement citadin pour rejoindre la campagne où il vécut plus jeune) qu'au bégaiement et à une langue inopérante à tenter de décrire quoi que ce soit. Dear deer m'évoque le titre du poème Dearest Reader de Michael Palmer et sa "photographie de rien sauf" ("des salles successives, des tapis et des portes fleuris / ou la photographie de rien sauf des pigeons / et des grillons à l'ombre d'une fontaine"). Il s'agit de cela : une photographie de rien sauf : de rien sauf des débords, des lisières en marge de la vision, de l'insaisissable durée saisie en tableau, de l'incommensurable distance entre les êtres, de la nostalgie, de l'absence demeurée... Dear deer : des fleurs artificielles affleurant à la surface d'un papier peint, des macules sur un mur, l'écran noir opaque d'un simulacre de tableau vernaculaire, l'image froissée d'un corps nu dont on ne sait plus s'il fut connu ou fantasmé, un paysage que l'on pensait connaître mais qui n'existe pas.

un semblant de route ici, une pluie  
sans fin perlant la lumière  
chambre après chambre  
de l'air lourd de poussière  
le projet de voir les choses  
pour ainsi dire, ou les choses vues

## *Dirk Braeckman: Melanographer*

Steven Humblet

Photographer of the darkening, of the vanishing: this is how one might describe Dirk Braeckman (b. 1958). His photographs have no intention of clearly illuminating the world, but douse it in a kind of twilight. They are hazy, blurred, highly suggestive. They are not here to show us something. They offer no spectacle, no new insight, no revelation. What appears quickly disappears again. These – at least at first – shy images nonetheless have great presence. In any case, the images manifesting themselves on the flawless white walls of Museum M in Louvain are not frail.

The power of these photographs is not gleaned from their size. Although they are not actually small, the format is usually relatively modest – certainly in the generous Museum M galleries. When his images are in fact enlarged to giant proportions, as in the final gallery on the top floor of the museum, Dirk Braeckman has manipulated them in such a way that what strikes us is their delicacy, not their format. He has printed them on light, fragile paper and attached them to the wall without reinforcement, support or framing. The intangibility of these images, which seem connected to nothing else (not even the paper on which they are printed, or the wall on which they are hung) leaves viewers dumbfounded.

We lack, it seems, the right words to describe these photographic images. One might even ask oneself if these are in fact still photographs. Indeed, they are undoubtedly photographs, because they have been produced with photographic techniques and remain recognizable as photographic images (impossible to confuse with photorealistic paintings, for example). They do not disguise their technical origins: they are not ashamed of being just photographs. They do not function as photographs do, however, or at least they do not do what people have come to expect from photographic images. To begin, these are not transparent windows onto the world, even though they show recognizable places, situations or bodies. We see, amongst other things, a portal, a waiting room, a bedspread, a window, a curtain, a blind wall with a few vague scratches, a corridor, or a nude body, but all refuse to let whatever is there be a decisive presence. What humbly moves forward in the picture is no more than a shadow, a phantom image that we cannot get a grip on.

Could we read these images differently, as mirrors that allow the appearance of something of the inner world of a maker of images, thus as images that visualize a unique vision and relationship to the world? Although there are striking similarities between the different images – Braeckman clearly has a preference for desolate, dark and shabby spaces –, they simply will not pull together into a unified and legible reflection. The viewer never has the feeling that he comes any closer to the photographer, that he is allowed a glimpse into his character, however briefly.

There is something fundamentally wrong with these images. They refuse to communicate. They tell us nothing at all about what they depict and equally little about their maker. Let loose,

out on their own, they stubbornly follow their own inimitable trajectory. Eye to eye with them, what we most experience is a shimmering stubbornness. Old, accepted power relationships are turned in on themselves: it is not we who have sovereignty over the images, but the images that hold us captive (they drink us into their blackness).

In the crisp white galleries of the museum, these images hang like silent, dark spots. Titles and informative data are missing. Nowhere do the images cluster together or engage in interaction with one another. There is no apparent trajectory, no clear system that binds them. Each image retains all possible autonomy. Together, they are nothing more than a loose collection of images. Here too, the photographer – a title that we apply to this maker of images only with great reservation – has broken free from the laws that govern photographic exhibitions. Braeckman refuses to allow his images to work together, refuses to line them up into a series with a complex or multilayered message. They do not function as a powerful visual argument, but as muffled, insular manifestations. They have no agenda of their own. They have no wish to announce anything, have nothing to defend or to protest (just like that naked body folded in on itself, the young woman we descry in one of the images: resting within oneself is enough).

These images are silent, but there is something – a great deal, in fact – brewing beneath the surface. The images are layered, not in the figurative sense of the word, but literally: they have been built up in different layers. Take, for example, the picture with the partially drawn curtain. Behind the curtain, we see a blind wall intended to be removed from view. The interplay between open and closed and the suggestion of unveiling that this implies, in fact results in disappointment. Again and again, there are inevitably those contrary materials that will not move out of the way, that cut off our investigation, our searching gaze (in another image, one of the few in which there is a window, a tulle curtain hangs in front of the glass, so that even here, we are given no opportunity for a clear look through). Time and again, we hit the flat wall of the image.

To achieve this impenetrability, Dirk Braeckman frequently makes use of flash. Again, there is the paradox: that which should open up the space for us is in fact that which closes it off. The ball of light that he causes to explode in the dark turns everything opaque. Just see how the mercilessly hard light of the flash brings forward the background of a painted mountain landscape, burning away the central mountain motif (the portrayal). It is as if an acid were eating away the depiction, until all we have left is its physical support. These violent, iconoclastic images are not about the fleeting world of the representations, but about reality being solidified into matter, about the unfathomable quality of the material (the ding-an-sich) against which we are constantly banging our heads.

Photography is writing with light, or so the etymology of the word suggests. What people sometimes forget is that in photographic emulsions, light originally manifests itself as a blackening (it is for exactly this reason that Raoul Hausmann once christened photography as 'melanography'). The sunlight streaming in is blinding. It erases, destroys. The capturing

of light creates darkness (it makes that which should be light dark, and vice versa). It is only when this negative image is subjected to subsequent manipulation that the new inversion of light values takes place, and an image arises, which appears to be a recognizable impression of reality: the positive, the Phoenix rising out of its own ashes. In the case of Braeckman, we see images that seem to have never completed the whole conversion process, as if they had become hung up somewhere along the way. The images continue to waver, balancing on the threshold of appearance. They wrestle (hopelessly?) with the darkness in which they had originally seen the light.

In his work, Dirk Braeckman explores the difficult – if not impossible – transformation of world into image. The fact that he wishes to evoke this confrontation with obstinate reality with the help of a medium specifically intended to conquer, as much as possible, the resistance of objects and bodies, immediately reveals the immense ambition of this creator of images. While photography usually reduces its subject to a light, manageable picture that can change its support with no significant loss of meaning, which can circulate on a massive scale and with unanticipated speed, a Dirk Braeckman photograph is a heavy, laboriously hard to decipher, unmanageable and unique 'object' (an anti-photographic image). The frivolous manoeuvrability of the photographic image must here make way for the unwieldy toughness of the material itself: blackness pushes away lightness, slowness takes over from speed, and the disconcerting directness of palpable touch replaces detached, disengaged looking.



THE PILL®

*For more information  
contact@thepill.co*

+90 212 533 1000 | thepill.co

Mürselpaşa Caddesi No:181 34087 Balat-İstanbul