

Hannes Couvreur - Artist statement

Every shape, from the largest mountain to the tiniest microorganism, tells a story of how life has made its way through time. In my work I make life stories and forms visible that escape our attention. Whether it is those of the ingenious and extremely strong biotic communities of lichens, the drawings of wood grains, of algae, (former) residents of a poor neighborhood in a hip metropolis, pigs or flowers that have already passed their glory days.

So the conch shell carries the snail's prochronism — its record of how, in its own past, it successively solved a formal problem in pattern formation.” — Gregory Bateson

The plane tree of Brassai

A photograph of a plane tree in the streets of Paris, taken by Brassai, made me realize that it is always worth looking again and again at what surrounds us. Even when it comes to the simplest things. Hence my fascination for, for example, a classic art form such as floral still lifes.

Neuro-a-typical

My work is strongly influenced by my neuro-a-typical look (I have autism and ADD). The fundamentally different way I observe and experience everyday reality allows me to be attentive to details that escape most people's attention. What has often hindered me in the first thirty-five years of my life is an advantage for my photographic and other artistic work.

Unwelcome Flowers

Flower still lifes were particularly popular around the end of the 17th and during the 18th century. They were a status symbol because flowers were a luxury product back then. The paintings were a way to immortalize the beauty of the flowers. Photoshop-avant-la-lettre was often used when making those paintings. A painter could freely paint flowers together that could not possibly bloom together and as such could never appear together in a bouquet.

The *Unwelcome Flowers* series is a contemporary commentary on our excessive focus on bloom, beauty and perfection. The flowers that are portrayed are past their peak. These are flowers that were sometimes literally taken from a rubbish dump, or that were no longer wanted by their previous owners. Unlike classical flower paintings, these pictures celebrate the beauty of decay.

In this series I work in a more realistic and naturalistic way than the 18th century painters. Everything that can be seen in the photos was photographed live. Nothing has been added digitally. The vast majority of my still lifes are shot from above, which allows me to let elements float freely, and to show flowers that would otherwise hang limp, proudly upright again.

Unwelcome Flowers illustrates the main themes in my work. The story of form, hubris and vanitas, the bumbling human being, the beauty of imperfection, the strangeness of the everyday. How well do we know what we think we know? And how much does our knowledge limit or broaden our view?

Approach

When I shoot, I try to plan as little as possible, because I prefer to work with who and what presents itself there and then. Every image, even a still life, is therefore a testimony of an event, of a unique encounter. This approach allows me to stay focused and connected to whoever and whatever is in front of my camera.

Influences

I am influenced by a wide range of authors, photographers and other artists. As a self-taught artist, I mainly trained myself by photographing very intensively and by looking at the work of others. In recent years I have also taken lessons from, among others, Matt Stuart, Maciek Nabrdalik, Bieke Depoorter, Renée Jacobs, Tim Fox, Yann Bertrand, Jeroen Brejou and Filip Claus.

Expos

In 2018 I showed my work for the first time in public. Since then, I have continued to show my work in solo and group shows. In the spring of 2023 I will participate with eight photos from *Unwelcome Flowers* in a group exhibition curated by artist

Koen Broucke. This show will also include work by Léon Spilliaert, Jan Vanriet, Jean Brusselmans, Sofie Muller, Constant Permeke, Karin Pierloot, William Ploegaert, Reniere & Depla, Léon Spilliaert, Xavier Tricot, Nico Vaerewijck, Bart Vandevijvere, Jan Vanriet, Yves Velter, Gerrit Vermeiren, Werner Watty, Karel Wouters, and others.

Next to my artistic work, I work on social artistic projects and I have done several commercial assignments to improve my experience and technique (portraits, event photography, reportage).

Before I turned to photography

Before coming out as a photographer, I worked as a teacher, journalist, copywriter, process facilitator and coach. At the core of my work was working appreciatively with people, highlighting their life wisdom and experience and cultivating a respectful view of humanity.