

On the road... again. The Biel Photography Days at Museum Africa

## ***On the road... again: Introduction***

*On the road* is the name of the American author Jack Kerouac's legendary novel manifest on the Beat Generation published in 1957. The 9th Biel Photography Days 2005 in Switzerland goes under the title of *On the road... again* in allusion to this novel and as one of the classical motives of the history of Photography: *being underway*. In this way, they wanted to make a critical and ironical contribution on the theme of *mobility* using the aesthetic medium of photography. It is becoming more and more urgent to treat this subject with increasing globalisation and man's seemingly endless freedom of movement, whether it be out of economic, social, political or lastly, ecological reasons.

The Biel Photography Days Festival is traditionally an important platform for young contemporary Swiss photography. The exhibit here shows the work of 16 young Swiss photographers and includes some 150 images as well as two projections. This is a result of the selection at the 9th Biel Photography Days 2005 that included the work of 25 photographers. Most of the 16 projects had to be reduced in size because of space considerations. The exhibit can nevertheless claim to be the first to show young Swiss photographers in South Africa to such an extent. Some of the photographers have become well known far outside of Switzerland. These include Georg Aerni, Manuel Bauer, Yves Leresche and Jules Spinatsch.

The 16 photographic works, both varied and impressive, show to what extent *mobility* makes in its different forms, having consequences on the way of life of people throughout the world. Achievements that promise and for the most part give freedom and independence but also have their shadow sides are portrayed. Many people suffer under mobility's dictate and don't freely choose being underway. We can think of the example of millions of working people that have long daily commutes between their homes and work places for a very small salary and of refugees that have been forced into exile through war and suffering.

Each individual work tells us stories of unknown places and people with impressive and sometimes surprising images. They bring us closer to the places and the people. They respectfully portray the fate and dreams of the people. All works are told with the independent and aesthetic signature of the artist. This also manifests itself in the various techniques and formats. For the photographer it is important that content and form are in harmony so that the stories will leave a lasting impression on the viewer.

An overview of the 16 series of images – two having reference to Africa – illustrates the broad palette of the subjects having to do with *mobility*. *George Aerni (Insights)* deals with Tokyo's urbanity and the surreal-like architectural consequences of a seemingly endless urban *mobility* in this city of superlatives. *Tiziana de Silvestro (Restrictions in town and other places)* looks at the many spatial restrictions in the city and in their sense of transfer created on traffic lights, enclosures, walls and railings. *Christian Flierl (Rhine port)* documents a sector of the global merchandise traffic and makes us see how much the container system work processes have been rationalized in the Rhine port of Basel.

*Manuel Bauer (Escape from Tibet)* tells of hardship and the flight of a Tibetan father and his six year old daughter through the Himalayas that lasted many days with a B&W projection. The theme of flight is again treated by *Meinrad Schade (Loss of Home)* with his portraits of refugees in temporary refugee housing. He shows how, because of an insecure situation, they lost their homeland without being able to acquire a new one. One of the stories is about African refugees in Fuerteventura (*Spain*). *Jean-Luc Cramatte (Rwanda – Looking over the shoulder of Théodore)* travelled to Rwanda. He tried to go straight through the the country by looking over the shoulder of a taxi driver capturing the atmosphere of everyday life in a place where both survivors and perpetrators coexist.

*Markus Bühler-Rasom (Inuit «People» – Life at the edge of the world)* has been travelling in Greenland for more than ten years. He asks the question of how the Inuits, that don't live in igloos anymore, cope with tradition and modernization. *Vanessa Püntener's meticulous eye (Hotel Viktor)* is interested in the small differences within standardized room interiors in the twelve story Hotel Viktor in the Czech city of Most. The rooms were made available to a limited number of temporarily homeless persons.

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*Carmela Odoni (Harshani. Seeking her Roots)* was adopted in Sri Lanka when she was one month old and came to Switzerland with her adopted family. She tells the story of her search for her real mother in Sri Lanka in a very intimate work comprised of touching small format images.

*Geri Stocker (American Switzerland)*, *Sabine Troendle (Out of Town)* and *Yves Leresche (The Dacia)* are light and ironical works. *Stocker* shows traces of americanisation in Switzerland on large format textile prints. *Troendle* puts together collage-like impressions that she gathered together while working as a flight attendant. *Leresche* sings a lively song of praise for the multifunctionality of the Dacia, Romania's national car.

*Jules Spinatsch's (Sleep)* consists of a series of projected film sequences of B&W portraits of young people resting in their cars during the day after big rave parties in the regions of Montpellier and Paris. *Daniel Stucki (TTL – Tokyo Traffic Lights – Through the Lens)* makes spontaneous portraits of motorcycle drivers at red lights. The large format images are given life by the short and accidental meeting between subject and photographer. Finally, *Daniel Rihs (On the other side of Olten)* is on the train line between Zurich and Berne and repeats the atomic power plant Gösgen and the farm next to it in changing light and weather conditions and asks subtle background questions about controversial atomic energy that is par excellence the energy needed to enable our own mobility.

The Biel Photography Days are themselves now ironically *on the road... again* and are, after Berlin (2005) and Altdorf (Switzerland 2006), in Africa for the first time. This is the most important photo festival in Switzerland devoted mainly to young contemporary Swiss photography. It takes place each year in September and celebrates its ten year anniversary last year. We are happy that the Biel Photography Days is able to present *On the road... again* here at Museum Africa. The exhibit has already been presented at the third Photofesta Maputo (Mozambique) from October 15 to November 15, 2006.

The show is part of an intercultural project between partners in Switzerland, Mozambique and South Africa. Reciprocal exchanges and networking are the objectives. An accompanying program includes a discussion round table on the meaning of photography festivals. The Maputo workshop took place in collaboration with the Centro de Documentação e Formação Fotográfica. The presentation of the exhibit as well as the accompanying program in Johannesburg is in conjunction with the Market Photo Workshop. Bruno Z'Graggen, the project director and Barbara Zürcher, the director of the Biel Photography Days will participate in these activities with a Swiss photographer at each location: Meinrad Schade (\*1968) in Maputo and Christian Flierl (\*1974) in Johannesburg.

In return, the Biel Photography Days invited two well known photographers from Mozambique and South Africa to the 10th Festival in September of 2006: Sérgio Santimano (\*1956) und Nontsikelelo «Lolo» Veleko (\*1977). They were both, along with the Finnish photographer Elina Brotherus (\*1972), foreign guests along with the Swiss photographers. Both showed recent works. Excerpts of these works can be seen in the current festival catalogue that can be obtained in the exhibit.

Bruno Z'Graggen, project director

Websites:

- Form information on the 9th Biel Photography Days 2005 see: [www.bielerfototageinafrica.ch](http://www.bielerfototageinafrica.ch)
- Form information on the 10th Biel Photography Days 2006 see: [www.bielerfototage.ch](http://www.bielerfototage.ch)