

CENTRE
RÉGIONAL DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE
HAUTS-DE-FRANCE

CRP/

PRESS RELEASE

ISABELLE LE MINH NOT THE END

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Press contact

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**CRP/ Centre régional
de la photographie
Hauts-de-France**

Galerie de l'ancienne poste
 Place des Nations
 59282 Douchy-les-Mines / France

www.crp.photo

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Free admission

tuesday ... friday
 1pm ... 5pm
 saturday / sunday / public holidays
 2pm ... 6pm
 closed on december 24, 25, 31 2019
 and january 1st 2020

NOT THE END

december 7 2019. . . march 1st 2020

Press visit

friday december 6 2019 / 2pm
 in the presence of the artist and the
 curator of the exhibition.

Opening

saturday december 7 2019 /
 12.30pm
 in the presence of the artist and the
 curator of the exhibition.

Conversation

saturday january 18 2020 / 3pm
 Visit of the exhibition NOT THE END
 with the artist.
 free admission
[CRP/ Douchy-les-Mines](#)

wednesday january 29 2020 / 6pm
 Talk with Isabelle Le Minh and Sonia
 Voss, art critic, based on the exhibition
NOT THE END.
 In partnership with the Goethe-Institut
 Lille and the CAUE du Nord.
 free admission
[CAUE du Nord](#)
 98 rue des Stations
 59000 Lille

**Talk**

thursday february 13 2020 / 4pm
 with Isabelle Le Minh around her
 recent work. In partnership with the
 Master ARTS and the CEAC of the
 Université de Lille.
[Amphithéâtre du Pôle Arts Plastiques](#)
 39 rue Leverrier
 59200 Tourcoing

An engineer by training as well as a graduate of the National School of Photography in Arles, Isabelle Le Minh has from her earliest works placed the history of photography at the heart of her artistic practice: she revisits the processes and emblematic figures of the medium, while questioning its technical and theoretical evolution. Her various approaches – distortion of meaning, tautology, pseudo appropriation – testify to her erudition as well as her humor.

Recently, Le Minh visited Rochester in upstate New York. This city, historic seat of the Kodak company founded by George Eastman in 1892, was for a long time home to a flourishing industry involving the production of film for still and motion picture cameras. The celebrated Kodak trademark faced steep competition from new technologies and suffered a gradual decline, leading to the company's bankruptcy in 2012. It belongs to an era since referred to as "pre-digital." Stripped of all but a few remaining factories, Rochester bears the stigmata of this fate. But in the urban views of Le Minh's series *Traumachrome*, the phantom of the inventor continues to hover over the city: the images, initially produced with analog film in black-and-white, were charged with a spectral presence in the course of their digitalization. Saturated in color – the very colors which constituted the glory of the Kodachrome process – her images are mysteriously hatched by color bars recalling the technical accidents which, in early photography, nourished the superstitions of spiritists. Previously, those who wanted to see, in the blurry light effects caused by inadvertent double exposures or poorly cleaned photographic plates, faces and silhouettes of the dead. Here it is glitches generated by the scanner which evoke the apparition of Rochester's famous inventor.

The artist initially intended to let these views of the city – captured on Tri-X, the most popular of Kodak's films – decompose chemically and thus represent a kind of tautology: the decline of film as a medium rendered tangible by the deterioration of its substrate. The vagaries of the scanner's functioning, however – unless it was the ghost of George Eastman – did her work for her: the flamboyant tints that appeared give new life to this technology, which while obsolete remains vivid in our imagination. For Le Minh, these changes recall the discolorations that occur when photographic slides are exposed to light for too long. This led her to frame the pictures in Forex, on the model of slides.

What do we see in these images? Disused buildings, deserted streets, moot slogans, proud chimneys that still reach for the sky but no longer smoke. A dream that has been extinguished. Nevertheless, the myth endures: one can almost mistake these electric wires stretched across an intersection for the lines that once hung in dark rooms, to which strips of film were fixed with clips for drying. Or this gradation of pinks and oranges for a postcard sunset. While her point of departure is an homage to a city and a brand, Le Minh builds through layers of meaning a work on the evolution of photographic techniques and practices that includes numerous mirror-images of itself in cameo, thus evoking the way in which technologies interact, dovetailing and influencing and spilling over into each other.

The dereliction of Rochester echoes the process of de-industrialization that affected many cities in the north of France, too – as witnessed by the closing of Usinor in Trith, near Douchy-les-Mines, in 1986. The closing of the factory followed a series of restructurings caused indirectly by the oil crisis of 1974. One year after that, in 1975, another event occurred, the significance of which was not immediately apparent: the first photograph to be taken without film was accomplished, using a procedure developed by an engineer from Kodak. The company neglected to pursue this new technology.

Beyond the parallels apparent in the timelines and fates of the two cities, it was also the meta-photographic dimension of Le Minh's œuvre that led CRP/ to invite the artist to work on two photographic archives in its custody. One of them, discovered on the site of the Usinor plant after its closing, documents the factory in operation and its architecture but also, implicitly, the important role which the photographer played there; while the other furnishes evidence of everyday life at the beginning of the 20th century through the eyes of an amateur photographer. These two troves of photographs in the CRP/ archives are themselves artifacts of history by dint of both their subject matter and their nature. They also convey a slice of the history of photography through their diverse media (glass plates, stereoscopic views) and the diverse purposes they served: documenting products for internal review, communicating with the outside world, recording facts for posterity.

Le Minh mined these archives to create a new work that both addresses the specific character of the photographs and refers to the region's history of steel production. This industry, as the archives show, was closely associated with the construction of railroad tracks. Could it be that Rochester and Trith, across the great ocean, are in fact linked by railway? The railroad abetted the growth of industry in the United States, then the appearance of a society of leisure for which popularization of the medium of photography is a paradigm; it kept the steelworks in the North of France busy and accompanied the history of both photography and the cinema from their beginnings to the present day. As Le Minh points out, do not the two most emblematic films by the Lumière brothers show a train arriving at a station and workers leaving their factory? The parallels and moments of dialogue between the train and photography are innumerable.

Drawing upon the photographs of Usinor, Le Minh has created, with the playful spirit so characteristic of her, her own veritable flat-plan. This is what one calls, in the lingo of printing and publishing, the lay-out of a book, double pages aligned one after another to reveal its architecture, its editing. In French, the word is *chemin de fer* – which in reference to transportation means railway. Le Minh produces a series of images which, literally placed on a metal rail running the length of the exhibition wall, follow one after another just as train cars do – or the frames of a roll of film. This train of images, reproduced on various media – Plexiglas to reference the transparency of the original photographic substrate (the glass plate and flexible film), oxidized steel to reference the material produced by Usinor under the alteration of time, as well as brushed aluminum and mounted baryta paper – conjures up at once the materiality of analogue photography, its evolution from the copper of the daguerreotype to the nitrocellulose of 35mm film, and the industrial processes which facilitated its expansion over the course of the 20th century.

Le Minh's installation also constitutes an attempt to reconstruct a bygone era from its relics. A close-up of iron rail, a stereoscopic view of a locomotive coughing up its fumes, plans for buildings or machines, the portrait of an anonymous family – perhaps that of a factory foreman? – miscellaneous documents, photographs of prototypes... Placed end to end one after another, these visual artifacts offer us a shattered, a piece-meal but evocative vision of what, perhaps, was once Usinor. They make us reflect on the nature of archives, so often de-contextualized and riddled with lacuna, which help us rescue an immaterial form of patrimony from oblivion but always require decoding – drawing upon deductive logic or our imagination.

The archive *qua* « puzzle with missing pieces » is symbolized here by a steel plate in which she has cut out three shapes, exhibited next to three photographs. Employing hand-colored maps showing the lay-out of three Usinor's plants, Le Minh has reproduced in negative – by reversing the values of the image and by perforating the steel – forms which evoke the former location of the factories as well as their disappearance, reminiscences of their presence as well as the obliteration of whole zones of memory. Le Minh's hand, holding these found images in front of the camera, seems to say: the archive exists only in the gesture of appropriation and interpretation performed by the person who mines it, be he historian, archivist, or artist.

Across from her railroad flat-plan, Le Minh presents, using the metal frames that Kodak designed for submerging film in developing baths, various photographic details: hands, the hands of Kodak and Usinor workers, form another chain of images and appear to work together under the artist's stage direction. Invoking in turns the spirit of the inventor and the worker's hand, Le Minh renders homage to the two indispensable elements of human achievement.

Sonia Voss,
art critic

ISABELLE LE MINH

French artist born in Schötmar (Germany)

Graduated from the Ismra-Ensi Caen and from the Ecole Nationale Supérieure de la Photographie d'Arles.

With an engineering degree, Isabelle Le Minh settled in Berlin in 1989 to work as a patent examiner. She finally left behind her career to devote herself to photography. Whereas in her earlier works she was concerned by the photographic representation of the real, the digital revolution and the vagaries of life led her to then drift away from photography to reflect upon the image in a broader way and to extend her area of creation to contemporary art. She now conceives resolutely conceptual works, which take all manner of forms .

The artist is also a curator and an archivist specialized in contemporary art. She teaches photography at the Esadhar - Le havre-Rouen Highschool of Art & Design.

She is represented by the Christophe Gaillard Gallery in Paris.
www.galeriegaillard.com

Works presented at the CRP/ :

For all the works:
© Isabelle Le Minh / Adagp
Courtesy Galerie Christophe Gaillard, Paris.

Les Miroirs qui se souviennent, 2019
Perforated brass plates covered with silver
30 x 160 x 4 cm
5 plates, 28,5 x 28,5 cm

Selection from the *Traumachrome* series, 2018
Pigment printing on silk, white expanded pvc frame
135 x 135 cm

Installation from the collection of the CRP/, 2019, work in progress



First page /

Isabelle Le Minh

From the *Traumachrome* series, 2018

© Isabelle Le Minh / Adagp / Courtesy Galerie
Christophe Gaillard, Paris.



Isabelle Le Minh,
Kodak headquarters,

from the *Traumachrome* series, 2018

© Isabelle Le Minh / Adagp / Courtesy Galerie
Christophe Gaillard, Paris.

Photo credit: Rebecca Fanuele



Isabelle Le Minh,

For our nation,
from the *Traumachrome* series, 2018

© Isabelle Le Minh / Adagp / Courtesy Galerie
Christophe Gaillard, Paris.

Photo credit: Rebecca Fanuele





Isabelle Le Minh,
Kodak Tower - red,
 from the *Traumachrome* series, 2018
 © Isabelle Le Minh / Adagp / Courtesy Galerie
 Christophe Gaillard, Paris.
 Photo credit: Rebecca Fanuele



Isabelle Le Minh,
Kodak headquarters,
 from the *Traumachrome* series, 2018
 © Isabelle Le Minh / Adagp / Courtesy Galerie
 Christophe Gaillard, Paris.
 Photo credit: Rebecca Fanuele





Isabelle Le Minh,
Kodak center
from the *Traumachrome* series, 2018
© Isabelle Le Minh / Adagp / Courtesy Galerie
Christophe Gaillard, Paris.
Photo credit: Rebecca Fanuele



Isabelle Le Minh,
Silver,
from the *Traumachrome* series, 2018
© Isabelle Le Minh / Adagp / Courtesy Galerie
Christophe Gaillard, Paris.
Photo credit: Rebecca Fanuele





Isabelle Le Minh,
Chimney,
 from the *Traumachrome* series, 2018
 © Isabelle Le Minh / Adagp / Courtesy Galerie
 Christophe Gaillard, Paris.
 Photo credit: Rebecca Fanuele



Isabelle Le Minh,
Les Miroirs qui se souviennent, 2019
 © Isabelle Le Minh / Adagp / Courtesy Galerie
 Christophe Gaillard, Paris.
 Photo credit: Rebecca Fanuele



The CRP/

The CRP/ Centre régional de la photographie based in Douchy-les-Mines develops art centre missions in the field of photography and contemporary images.

Founded in 1982, the CRP/ grew out of a collective of photographers who came from the photo club of the Usinor Denain Work Council. As a mobile association at the time, the CRP spent four years developing exhibitions and organising photography competitions. In 1983, in connection with its photographic commissions and its production of works, the Ministry of Culture recognised the CRP/'s art library, which became the first of its kind in France in the field of photography. In 1986, the CRP/ moved in to a former post office made available by the town of Douchy-les-Mines, and in 1991 the Ministry of Culture recognised it as a national art centre.

As a centre that supports creativity, at the outset it developed a project to commission works linked with its territory: the Mission Photographique Transmanche (1988 to 2006), which lay the foundations of its collection. This has since been supplemented through the art centre's programme and productions. The CRP/ is one of the few art centres endowed with a collection directly linked to its own production activity. The CRP/ collection currently contains 9,000 works, with an art library offering the public over 300 works that may be borrowed. Linked to its significant publication activity, it also has a document collection of over 8000 books.

The CRP/'s activities include creative support, research, production, distribution and mediation, all of which is developed in a region that is marked by its industrial past, an area that showed a very early commitment to culture. Today the CRP/ is a place of experience transmission, awareness-raising, mediation and training in the field of images, with a trans-regional and national reputation.

The CRP/'s artistic and cultural vision, championed by its current director Muriel Enjalran, endeavours to be forward-looking, encouraging young artists through its research and support mission, keeping in mind the regional history of images to which its collection testifies. It is regionally rooted while also giving attention to other art scenes abroad, through invitations to artists who come and shift or renew visitors' perceptions of their history and region, and provide access to other cultural and societal issues in the world.

CRP/

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Partner of the exhibition:



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