

## MAGNIFICENT “BRUSSELS...?”

### WOUTER DERUYTTER: THE UGLINESS OF BRUSSELS IS ITS MOST BEAUTIFUL ASPECT

By Bo Mandeville

People often think that the charm of cities can be found in the beauty of its architecture, its museums, what it has to offer culturally. That is part of its splendor indeed. What should be added to it, though, is the social aspect. Wouter Deruytter observed the life of people in Brussels for two years. Accompanied by his camera. A view on the real Brussels – its ugliness, its underdogs, dazzling in pictures.

Photographers are usually very busy taking pictures of the perfection of the female body, for example. Others get carried away by pictures of old buildings, industrial architecture, scenery, and so on. A third category of photographers defies the quicksand of reality.

The world as it is: ugly, moments of beauty,... In photography, there are two aspects that co-exist, side by side and through each other. The duality of reality and interpretation. The reproduction of what is there and what the photographer sees, observes and interprets from his own perspective. That is how Wouter Deruytter tries to show reality in his pictures, in which his personal view on the world becomes obvious immediately. For two years, he followed the Brussels population, say the man in the street, and recorded them with his camera. His conclusion: the most beautiful about Brussels is its ugliness!

### Photo book

In this context, he will publish a book called “Brussels...?” in June. It is a collection of pictures of people – real people – in bars, alleys and slums, and of nightlife. It is clear that movements in the night scene of a city are for a great part significant of what the city is like. Transvestites, old men and women, mongrels, ... they are all subjects of his work. The protagonists are real. This means that all the work has been shot without staging, “wherever I

arrived, they knew me. These people knew what I was doing, what the subject was, and they saw my camera. They knew it wasn't fake!” That is exactly why a bond has grown between these people and Wouter.

Looking at his work, one thinks of the unforgettable photographs of Brassai and Henri Cartier-Bresson immediately, which is quite a value judgment. These are works of exceptionally high quality. The shadows, the impressions, the instantaneous exposure, the color (also in black and white), etc., all aspects show craftsmanship. Henri Miller described Brassai as “il est un oeil vivant” (he is a living eye), which is as applicable to Wouter. His curiosity about reality and the cerebral processing of it have developed into an extension of his lens. His camera has become an organ of his body and soul. “Wouter Deruytter loves the ugliness of Brussels to the point that he wants to show it in all colors, in the sharpness of black and white, which emphasizes the grayness of nightlife even more in a witty and relentless way,” says César Bracke, one of his very good friends who follows him in his work. He probably knows that and he is right.

### Maurice Béjart

One day, Wouter asked Béjart if he could take a picture of him. Stuff like that happens, and there's not much about it. Upon Wouter's insistence, the master of ballet wanted to see his work. He wanted to see if this young man (22) had something to say. Béjart's intuition is his intelligence, but his is kind of wary. Upon seeing a couple of photographs, he fell in love with them. As a result, Maurice Béjart consented for Wouter to take pictures of him and to follow his Lausanne ballet troop. End result: a series of magnificent movement shots, the preparation and the brainwork. Portraits in which you get the impression to get more information than from a person's profile. In gratitude, this great master of dance wrote the introduction to the photo book. Initially, Béjart refused to have Wouter take color photographs of the rehearsals and the

performances. He thought this would only take away from the force of the moment. Wouter insisted, and the choreographer eventually gave in.

“Wouter Deruytter's photography is not only the recording of moments, images or faces: each portrait, each photograph tells a story of life, of being, of living, encompassed by his own existence”, César Bracke continues. This gives the artist a philosophic function, which he fulfills with subtle seriousness, maybe without realizing this himself. Each snapshot is the description of an underlying philosophy. That's why he loves ugliness.

### Keith Haring

Wouter met Keith Haring a couple of years ago. They became friends like in a fairy tale, and they worked together. Wouter took photographs of the painter in “De Draak” (the Dragon House) in Knokke, after which Keith Haring painted the pictures in his signature style. This would be nothing special, were not it for the fact that these works developed into totally new creations. They are neither photographs nor paintings; they are collages of photographic paper, images, ideas, paint and almost a still-life of movements. This paradox can be seen in the playfulness with which the artists worked. They didn't feel like making a great masterpiece, but at the same time, it occupied their minds constantly. A moving moment of deep friendship and emotion.

Roger Nupie of the Contact J. Center, Bresstraat in Antwerp, is delighted to have the opportunity to include the works of Wouter Deruytter, with the photographs from the book, during the coming Summer of Photography event. “This is high quality work. It amazed me from the beginning on. Not only is it emotional. In his works about Brussels, Wouter shows something underlying.”

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