A photograph of a narrow, multi-story wooden building interior. The walls and ceiling are made of weathered wood. Several strings of laundry, including clothes and towels, are hanging across the space from one side to the other. The lighting is warm, with some windows showing a bright exterior. The overall atmosphere is that of a traditional, lived-in urban space.

MARIE  
BOVO

SITO

MARIE  
BOVO

SITIO

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**L'exposition présente trois séries récentes, dont une inédite, ainsi qu'une vidéo. Avant cela, plusieurs ensembles de travaux ont mis en évidence votre intérêt pour quelques motifs : la nuit et ses lumières particulières, une forme de luminisme peut-être ; ou encore le temps et les façons dont il peut être rendu visible dans ses franges en quelque sorte, la limite entre le jour et la nuit, entre ombre et clarté, ou encore par une pose longue captant la dévoration d'un morceau de papier en flammes.**

Oui, longtemps j'ai photographié la nuit. Dans mes premières séries, *Suites*, *Plages*, *Vues de Tokyo*, la nuit tenait lieu à la fois de territoire et de protocole de travail. Un territoire extensif dont les limites ne sont ni géographiques ni même matérielles. La nuit n'a pas de bords précis, elle peut se déplacer par les hasards d'un éclairage urbain, d'une lumière qui s'allume ou s'éteint quelque part. Et, au-delà des particularités évidentes qui distinguent une nuit sur une plage urbaine de Marseille ou d'Alicante d'une nuit à Tokyo, c'est lorsque le noir se referme sur lui-même qu'une limite est atteinte. J'ai donc photographié la nuit et je l'ai filmée par la suite, je ne pensais pas seulement aux qualités plastiques de la nuit, à une certaine « cinématique »<sup>1</sup>, ni même à ses dimensions sociologiques. Tout cela allait de soi. Et on peut dire qu'au début des années 2000, lorsque j'ai fait ces premières séries, du moins celles qui sont de l'ordre du paysage, il y avait un mouvement de redécouverte de la nuit. La nuit avait acquis un coefficient de fiction incroyablement élevé. Mais ce n'était pas ce qui m'intéressait. Je veux dire la nuit comme possibilité de « fictionner la réalité », « le document », la solitude de l'herbe poussant toute seule, l'exhibitionnisme des villas isolées dans les lumières électriques

crues, la part de voyeurisme qui s'y attache en retour, et la sociologie urbaine et périurbaine mise en scène par la nuit. Ce n'est pas cette scène-là qui m'intéressait, elle était en quelque sorte accessoire. C'était quelque chose de plus archaïque : la lumière. D'ailleurs, sous certaines conditions la lumière n'est pas le contraire de la nuit, elle en est une émanation. La particularité de la lumière nocturne est d'être le plus souvent artificielle. C'est une lumière fixe, sans vibrations, qui même lorsqu'elle est clignotante comme les néons japonais, transforme tout ce qu'elle touche en mausolée, en cimetière, en parc d'attractions. Une irradiation froide qui brûle, qui trouble la nuit. Mes premières séries étaient entièrement centrées sur ce luminisme-là, un luminisme de métal, de pierres précieuses. Et cela rejoignait le processus même de l'image, qu'elle soit photographie ou vidéo ; c'était la lumière qui était donnée à voir, qui était l'image et en même temps rendait possible l'image. À cette lumière d'abord exclusivement artificielle, d'autres lumières se sont jointes. Des lumières que l'on peut qualifier de naturelles, celles du crépuscule ou de la pleine lune par exemple. La raison en était simple, outre les peurs ataviques qui accompagnent la naissance du jour et sa disparition, elles engendrent une différence radicale de temporalité.

La lumière artificielle est fixe, elle produit un isolement qui confine la nature même de son espace, un espace sans temporalité, sans durée, coupé à la fois du passé et du présent. J'ajoute que, bien que fixe, la lumière artificielle peut se déplacer comme les traînées horizontales qui traversent de part en part certaines photographies de la série *Plages*, et coïncident avec la trajectoire à l'horizon des *ferries* éclairés. À l'inverse la lumière naturelle est vivante, elle implique

RÉGIS DURAND a partagé son temps entre l'enseignement et le monde de l'art. Professeur d'université, il a également beaucoup écrit sur la photographie et l'art contemporain, tout en assurant le commissariat de nombreuses expositions. Après quelques années au ministère de la Culture, il a été successivement directeur du Printemps de Cahors (1992-1996), directeur du Centre national de la photographie, à Paris (1996-2003), et directeur du Jeu de Paume, toujours à Paris (2003-2006). Aujourd'hui commissaire indépendant et consultant, il vient d'être appelé à la tête du Printemps de septembre, à Toulouse, un festival d'art contemporain. Parmi ses publications les plus récentes, citons : *L'excès et le reste – Essais sur l'expérience photographique*, éd. de La Différence, Paris, 2006 ; *La photographie n'est pas l'art – Collection Silvio Perlestein*, Musées d'Ixelles et de Strasbourg, 2010 ; « Jürgen Klauke: Energy, Signs, Metamorphoses », in *Jürgen Klauke, Aesthetische Paranoia*, Karlsruhe, ZKM, 2010 ; « Une collection de sculptures », in *Sculptures de la collection Lhoist*, Limelette, Belgique, 2010...

1. Robert Smithson, Artforum, 1971 : « Dans cette atonie filmique, ordres et groupes s'arrangent pour proliférer hors des structures de leur sens d'origine [...] Jungles luxuriantes, sentiers dérobés, passages secrets, cités perdues envahissent notre perception. Dans les films, les lieux ne sont ni réels ni fiables. Tout semble disproportionné. L'échelle, qui grandit ou rapetisse les choses, les rend malaisées à appréhender. »

des temporalités précises, contingentes, faites d'accidents mais se référant toujours à des cycles plus vastes. Du point de vue de la surface sensible, celle du paysage ou de la pellicule argentique, les deux lumières agissent distinctement, la première brûle, trouble, tandis que la seconde nappe, enrobe... Mais pour en revenir à la temporalité, ce mélange de lumières constitue, je crois, la sensibilité directe de nos paysages contemporains. Il imbrique des temps qui coexistent à des degrés divers, et qui cependant ne sont pas synchrones, des sortes de « transluminations » de l'espace.

[...] Je parlais plus haut du protocole de travail lié à la nuit. Photographier la nuit implique l'usage de la pose longue, et une des particularités de la pose longue c'est d'ajouter du temps à la mesure de la lumière. Je veux dire que ce n'est pas seulement que l'on pose longtemps, c'est également qu'au-delà de quelques secondes, il y a un processus de conversion qui fait qu'on ajoute du temps.

Vous faisiez référence à la série *Feux* réalisée en 2006/2007, dans laquelle le temps de pose a joué un rôle déterminant. Il s'agissait de brûler des quotidiens internationaux, dans le noir de l'atelier, avec pour seule lumière les flammes de la combustion. Après plusieurs essais, j'ai déterminé un temps de pose qui coïncidait avec le temps de combustion du journal. En sorte que la durée de l'acte de combustion et celle de l'acte photographique s'incluaient l'une l'autre et rendaient visible l'ensemble des temps en jeu. Passé, présent, futur, temps initial du journal, daté, référencé par une journée, une langue, une culture, temps des flammes dévorant le papier, et le temps des cendres. Une série de temps labyrinthiques, divergents, convergents, parallèles, où le journal existe et n'existe pas dans la photographie.

Dans le hors-champ des *Feux*, d'autres gestes font écho : les migrants qui, après avoir brûlé leurs papiers d'identité, prennent la mer depuis l'Afrique du Nord ou l'Afrique noire pour rejoindre les côtes andalouses, Gibraltar, la Sicile ; Nuala O'Faolain, écrivain irlandaise déclarant en 2006 que le feu est la marque de notre présent... Quant à l'éclairage par le feu, c'est celui des autodafés, intermittent, saccadé, tantôt brasier, tantôt presque clandestin. Vivant à Marseille j'avais cela à l'esprit. C'est là, dans cette ville peut-être davantage qu'ailleurs, qu'on peut ressentir cela.

**La série *Bab-el-Louk* semble marquer une certaine rupture avec le travail antérieur que nous venons d'évoquer. Non que l'intérêt pour la lumière y soit moindre, bien au contraire. Mais un élément nouveau y prend une place considérable : l'architecture. Et liée à elle, une vision complexe, en surplomb ; ou à l'inverse, dans *Cours intérieures*, en contre-plongée. Comment peut-on analyser ce rapport complexe à l'architecture urbaine dans ces deux séries ?**

L'architecture désigne, dans les deux séries auxquelles vous faites référence, le toit-terrasse dans *Bab-el-Louk* et la cour intérieure dans la série suivante. Des espaces qui me sont familiers. Enfant, j'ai vécu dans une maison où il y avait un toit-terrasse ; j'y jouissais d'une grande liberté ; c'était à Alicante, en Espagne. Il règne sur les toits une sorte d'état de bienveillance, ce n'est pas encore dehors et pourtant ce n'est plus la stricte intimité de la maison. Ce sont des espaces intermédiaires, des intercesseurs entre les diverses dimensions de la ville.

Au Caire, je séjournais dans le quartier arabe. La ville y est très dense, embouteillée, la circulation







RÉGIS DURAND has worked alternatively in the academic and in the art world. A university professor he has also written extensively on photography and contemporary art, and curated many exhibitions. After a few years at the Ministry of Arts, he was artistic director of the Printemps de Cahors (1992-1996), director of the Centre national de la photographie in Paris (1996-2003), and director of the Jeu de Paume, Paris (2003-2006). Now an independent curator and consultant, he has recently been appointed director of the Printemps de Septembre, in Toulouse, a festival of contemporary arts. Among his recent publications, *L'excès et le reste – Essais sur l'expérience photographique*, éd. de La Différence, Paris, 2006; *La photographie n'est pas l'art – Collection Silvio Perlestein, Musées d'Ixelles et de Strasbourg*, 2010; "Jürgen Klauke: Energy, Signs, Metamorphoses", in Jürgen Klauke, *Aesthetische Paranoia*, Karlsruhe, ZKM, 2010; "Une collection de sculptures", in *Sculptures de la collection Lhoist, Limelette, Belgique*, 2010...

**The exhibition presents three recent series, one of which is being shown for the first time, as well as a video. Before this, several of your collections of works have underlined your interest in certain motifs: night and its distinctive lights – a form of luminism, perhaps; or time and the ways in which it can be made visible, around its fringes, as it were – the boundary between day and night, between shadow and light – or by a long exposure capturing a piece of paper being consumed by flames.**

Yes, I have been photographing night for a long time. In my earlier series – the *Suites*, the *Plages* the views of Tokyo, night served both as a territory and a *modus operandi*; an extensive territory whose boundaries are neither geographical, nor even material. Night has no precise borders; it can be shifted around by the vagaries of city lights, by a light turned on or off somewhere. And, beyond the obvious specificities that distinguish night on an urban beach in Marseille or Alicante from night in Tokyo, it is when the darkness closes in on itself that a boundary is reached.

So I photographed night, then I filmed it, but I was not thinking merely about the sculptural qualities of night, or some "cinematic"<sup>1</sup> quality, or even about its sociological dimensions. All that came of its own accord. And it is true that at the beginning of this decade, when I made these early series – at least those that can be classed as landscapes – a movement was afoot to rediscover night. Night had acquired an incredibly high status in fiction. But that was not what interested me. By that I mean night as a possibility of "fictionalising reality", as a "document", the solitude of grass growing all alone, the exhibitionism of houses set apart by naked

electric lights, the voyeuristic aspect that goes with it and the urban and suburban sociology staged by night. That was not a scene that interested me – in many ways, it was incidental.

It was something more archaic: light. Moreover, under certain conditions, light is not the opposite of night – it emanates from it. The peculiarity of nocturnal light is that, more often than not, it is artificial. It is a fixed light, which does not shimmer, and even when it is flashing on and off like the neon lights in Japan, it transforms everything it touches into a mausoleum, a cemetery, a theme park. A cold irradiation burning, piercing the night. My first series were focused entirely on this luminism, the luminism of metal, of precious stones. And that was linked with the process of the image itself – whether it was a photograph or a video, what was being shown was light, which was the image and which at the same time made the image possible.

What was, at first, an exclusively artificial light was joined by other sorts of light. Lights that can be described as natural: those of dusk or of the full moon, for example. The reason for this was simple – besides the atavistic fears that accompany the birth of the day and its disappearance, they engender a radical temporal difference.

Artificial light is fixed – it creates an isolation that confines nature itself to its own space, a space without temporality, without duration, cut off from both the past and the present. I should add that although set, artificial light can move around, like the horizontal streaks running right across certain photographs in the *Plages* series, coinciding with the trajectory towards the horizon of the lit-up ferries. Natural light, on the contrary, is alive – it implies specific, conditional temporalities, the result of chance, but always referring to

cycles greater in scope. From the point of view of the sensitive surface, be it that of landscape or of silvered film, the two sorts of light function distinctly: the first burns, pierces, whereas the second glazes, coats... But to return to temporality, I believe that this mixture of lights makes up the immediate sensibility of our contemporary landscapes. It weaves together times that coexist to different degrees, yet which are not synchronous – rather they are sorts of "transluminations" of space.

[...] I mentioned earlier on the *modus operandi* linked to night. Photographing night involves the use of a long exposure, and one of the particularities of a long exposure is that it adds time to the measuring of light. What I mean is that it is not simply that the exposure is long – it is also that, beyond a few seconds, there is a conversion process that means that one is adding time.

You referred to the *Feux* series, created in 2006/2007, in which the exposure time played a decisive role. It consisted of burning international daily newspapers in the darkness of the studio, with the light coming only from the flames of combustion. After several attempts, I established an exposure time that corresponded with the combustion time of the newspaper. The result was that the duration of the act of combustion and of the photographic act corresponded with each other, and rendered the total time in question visible. Past, present, future, the original time of the newspaper, dated, referring to a day, a language, a culture, the time the flames took to consume the paper and the time of ashes. A series of labyrinthine, diverging, converging, parallel times where the newspaper exists and does not exist in the photograph.

Out of shot in the *Feux* are echoes of other gestures: the migrants, who, having burned their identity papers, take to the sea from North Africa, or sub-Saharan Africa, aiming to reach the coasts of Andalusia, Gibraltar, Sicily; the Irish writer Nuala O'Faolain declared in 2006 that fire is the symbol of our era... As for using fire as lighting, that is its role in *autos-da-fé*: sporadic, fitful – sometimes an inferno, sometimes almost clandestine. Living in Marseille, that is what I had in mind. It is there, in that town, perhaps more than elsewhere, that one can feel it.

**The *Bab-el-Louk* series seems to mark a certain rupture with the previous work of yours that we have just been discussing. Not that there is any less interest in light – quite the contrary. But a new element takes up a significant place: architecture. And linked to it, a complex vision shot from above; or, on the contrary, in the *Cours intérieures*, shot from a low angle. How should we analyse the complex relationship with urban architecture in these two series?**

In the two series to which you are referring, architecture is represented in the works by the roof terrace, and in the later series by the courtyard. These are spaces that are familiar to me. As a child, I lived in a house with a roof terrace; I enjoyed a great freedom there: it was in Alicante in Spain. Roofs are reigned over by a kind of benevolent state; it is not exactly outside and yet it is no longer the strict intimacy of the house. They are intermediary spaces, intercessors between the varying dimensions of the city.

In Cairo, I stayed in the Arab quarter. There, the city is very dense, congested; the movement of cars and people is incessant, night and day. I knew

1. Robert Smithson, *Artforum*, 1971: "In this cinematic atopia orders and groupings have a way of proliferating outside their original structure of meaning. [...] Tangled jungles, blind paths, secret passages, lost cities invade our perception. The sites in films are not to be located or trusted. All is out of proportion. Scale inflates or deflates into uneasy proportions..."

I wanted to work on the rooftops – so I spent my time observing what went on up there. The roof terraces of Cairo are not restricted to traditional dwellings; newly-built blocks are similarly endowed. Neither are they limited merely to the Arab quarter; they stretch out to infinity in city of 16 million inhabitants. It is not possible to get very far by passing from one roof terrace to another – except by eye. It is also difficult to assign them a definitive use: some of them are junk graveyards, others resemble shanty towns; others still, hanging gardens – and it is impossible to be certain whether they are communal or private.

Most of the time, the roof terraces are deserted, with isolated scenes here and there: a man watering plants, another asleep or watching television, a couple flirting, two friends having a discussion, children playing, a woman passing by. The way the roofs exist in the city is paralleled by the way calls to prayer divide it up into units of time. That is why the need for a cycle of photographs became an imperative, because up high there existed another city of Cairo, superimposed on the first, and which, in its turn, evoked other cities. I was thinking of the frescoes entitled *The Effects of Good and Bad government on the Town*, painted in Sienna between 1337 and 1340 by Ambrogio Lorenzetti. Formally, there are analogies between these Egyptian rooftops and those represented in *trecento* Italy. The rooftops of Cairo do not fit in with the political schema of a moral order of architecture, and yet they echo the steeply-angled position of those utopian cities of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance – always on the horizon, always soaring upwards – for which the New Jerusalem is one of the models. By tilting the viewpoint, I excluded the sky from the composition, a gentle high-angle shot out of

which an isometric perspective emerges, the city becoming its own vanishing point.

A later series is the *Cours intérieures* – once again, it is an intermediary space between the road and the house, except that this one is at the bottom of a “well” and it is in Marseille, quai de la Joliette, in the area of port where boats leave for Algeria. The photographs were taken between the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2010, a complete cycle from one day to the next and at different hours. I got to know these courtyards before working there, and my reflex on entering was always the same: to lift my head up to sky – and that is how the series originated. I directed the camera lens upwards; I included everything in the composition, from the lower stories right up to the roof, up to the sky – in particular the network of ropes, which, by a system of pulleys, connects up the facades and from which clothes were hung. I was also reproducing an older gesture. As a small girl, I attended Sunday mass. During the abstracted boredom of the ceremony, my eye wandered up to the ceiling of the church and the angels that hovered there, until a genuflection brought it back down to the stone floor. Later on, I saw the *Pillar of Angels* in Strasburg – sculptures not intended to be seen, since they were installed at a great height, as part of an architectural design based on the viewpoint from ground level. I noticed this same state of things repeated in the courtyards: how the sky, when it is included, changes the architecture seen from down below; how the play of light, the movement of colours interact, not with angels, but with laundry hung out to dry.

W.G. Sebald, in *Austerlitz*, draws parallels between the courtyard and the prison architecture of the bourgeois era in which it was established that

blocks of cells built around a rectangular or round courtyard was the most suitable model in which to carry out punishments. The extremely dilapidated courtyards of the Haussmann-style buildings that I photographed have long since lost their bourgeois tenants – this architecture is now inhabited by the poor. A poverty that is a form of Pasolini-esque resistance to bourgeois space.

***Grisailles*, a new series still in preparation, differs quite a lot from the two preceding ones that we have just been talking about.**

**Architecture does not seem to play a role here. In fact, the title itself seems to indicate an exploration more closely related to painting. How do you go about photographing the colour grey, this shifting and yet pivotal colour, perhaps the sum of all other colours? The position of the camera and the perspective defined by it appear to have been neutralised. The narrative aspect that existed in the others series has disappeared in favour of a delicate, minimalist consideration; variations of light and colour within a strictly defined composition. Is that a fair way of describing these works, which nevertheless are not without a strong link to the place, its history and its ruination?**

I began the *Grisailles* at the end of 2009, while I was still working on the *Cours intérieures*. There is a unity of place with the previous series: the location corresponds to the same neighbourhood and the same Haussmann-style buildings that have become working-class. It is as if, through these spaces, I had envisaged Tarkovski's film *Andrei Roublev*. In the film, the images are in black and white, except for the last things to be seen – icons, which

suddenly become an explosion of colours, arriving to shatter the sadness of the black and white. At the time, the *Cours intérieures* for me represented icons, and in order to reach them, I passed through these sorts of corridors, passages with dual exits to the outside, whose walls were grey from floor to ceiling. In the past, it was customary to use this paint on the facades of palaces and houses: grey, because it stemmed from an imitation of statues made from marble and other types of stone. One can imagine that some of the layers of grey still visible are remnants of the original building, while other greys, presumably the most recent, although it is hard to judge given the state of the surface, seem to be of more recent manufacture. Dust, the dirt, small fires have added to these grey strata. That is how the project for a parallel series originated. These monochrome spaces coincided strangely with definition of “grisailles”, and this photographic project found itself immediately linked to this observation. Painted panels from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance often feature grisailles on the reverse. They served to hide the exuberant colours of altarpieces during the period of Lent. They were a sort of drained, negative reality – something existing in parallel, as if life had, for a time, turned to marble. In some ways, they were photographs well before their time, and that is also why, paradoxically, I chose to depict grey using colour: in order to rediscover grey from the perspective of colour.

Similarly, it is due to the fact that the *Grisailles* function as a parallel series that I duplicated the viewpoint from the *Cours intérieures*, with the lens pointing upwards. Some of the photographs are vertical, whereas others are horizontal, even though the composition and angle of the shot

remain unchanged. Paul Klee said of grey that it is a non-localisable, non-dimensional colour; a colour between dimensions, at their intersection, and that the exclusive use of grey adds up to the temptation of rationality and a seduction by poverty and death. What is certain is that grey is associated with ageing, loss, deterioration – it is associated with holes, gaps, the negative. But it is equally the shifting of tiny gradations, of nuance in preference to colour, and, on the other hand, of accelerated speed, a movement that sums up all the colours, as you point out.

The *Grisailles* are spaces stripped of their original social vision, and they therefore no longer inhabit the realm of architecture. The stucco, the friezes, the columns that decorate these places are punctured by electric cables, pipes, ducts of all kinds. What existed already has been added to without any attempt to make it look attractive, but in order to get the job done as quickly as possible, expediency being born of necessity.

Beyond the idea of ruination and the picture of disrepair, these places are hybrids between the present and the melancholic future; they give rise to transgressions of form, space, identity, time – and that also is why they are *grisailles*, parallel places.

**As with many artists today you use video in parallel with your purely photographic work. Yet at first glance, there is something in video, in its use of time and narrative, that seems to go against what you are seeking in photography – the condensing of numerous explorations into representation, the relationship to sculpture, drawing, painting, architecture... everything that, as Michael Fried discussed in a recent**

**book, makes photography an essential part of contemporary art.**

For me, there is no place where the contradiction between two different media can find a resolution, because it is a process and not a dividing line.

In my videos based on Dante's *Inferno*, *Chants I* and *V*, I took the voice as my starting point in the search for text and images; it consisted, primarily, of translation, of the journey from Italian to Arabic, from written to spoken text. The rhythm, structure, images were guided by the voice, its emotion, its colour. Likewise, the physical timing of the words determined the duration of the videos. Paradoxically, I had in mind the strangeness of Duane Michals' photographic work, always structured by a hand-written text, which while it dictates the sequence of the photographs, also creates a kind of out-of-shot voice, whose only equivalent is in the cinema, and which turns his works into static films.

It is slightly different for *Casida*, whose connection is with childhood and dreams, as seen from the outside. A series of four videos are freely associated in space. Four single takes, of varying duration, showing the same scene: ever-growing numbers of turtle doves peck at bunches of grapes. The image, along with the citation, refers to the legend of Zeuxis' grapes. The composition remains fixed, brought to life only by the continuous and slowed-down movement of the birds. But *Casida* is also the sound, which expands and contracts the composition – the beating wings of the turtle doves that flap the air. In my family, to celebrate the Day of the Dead, we plunged the house, usually dark anyway, into an even blacker obscurity, and we lit small tea lights all over the place. They were little wicks that floated in oil and burned all day and all

night. We spoke softly – everything was silent, so we heard the wings of pigeons and turtle doves flapping as they came and went on the uppermost terrace. Later on, I read Garcia Lorca's poem, *Casida de las palomas oscuras*, where, in a dream, birds point out to the poet where his future grave will be. The funerary association of the birds and the grave echo my direct experience: the caressing wings of the birds and the dancing flame of the dead; the grape that turns mouldy.

Setting aside the sound aspect, *Chant V of the Inferno* and *Casida* are the product of a fixed composition and a single take, which are not without analogy to photography and the long exposure. On the other hand *Subak* – the most recent of my videos – is based on a different principle. A watermelon hurtles down streets, pauses, collides, takes off again, carries on stubbornly and ends up smashed to pieces. Like all comic characters, it is funny and touching, stubbornly clumsy. It creates emotion, is tragic and pathetic. Right up until its final sacrifice, its tribulations open up a labyrinthine space activated by its movement alone. *Subak* is set in Seoul – Seoul, an ever-expanding city double or triple in scale. This is, perhaps, a unique feature of certain Asian cities: a minute scale – that of houses, streets, neighbourhoods – is interwoven with a gigantic, endless megalopolis, and thus goes from one end of the scale to the other.

In fact, *Subak* is a contradiction: it enters and exits, it re-enters, it re-exits relentlessly; it is the principle of shot and countershot. This cinematic technique involves alternating opposites: the watermelon exits the shot to one side of an image and re-enters the following shot from the opposite side. The tension of the space is heightened through this interplay of contradictions. In relation to certain

of Tony Smith's works, Jean-Pierre Criqui talks of a geometry specific to comedy; that is what I was seeking with *Subak*. A geometry that slips, evades, bounces back; a geometry without any mental or visual control over the space, as if the world was not meant to be captured. And it is funny.

I like the idea of contradiction. I should add that in photography, I am rarely satisfied by humour and comedy; I often feel it lacks something – it feels as if it is merely an illustration. Whereas the simple looping of a video, with its perpetual restarting, produces a space that is in itself a form of black comedy.

**I am tempted to ask you about your relationship to contemporary art and how you see your position within it; your references; those you admire.**

It is a question that is very difficult for me to answer. The word that immediately comes to mind, when you ask me how I see my work in the light of contemporary creativity, is 'clandestine'. In 2003, I wrote down in my notebook the following statement of Jaques Derrida's: "I will only subvert convention in a cautious, cunning and quasi-clandestine manner." And a little earlier in the same notebook: "In one of the legends of secrecy, a woman sitting next to a man's lover is believed by onlookers to be the object of his eye."

It is not that I do not believe in talking about strategy – but what I think about is looking. In my work, contemporary creativity is not the same as contemporaneity – or if it is, only in a purely coincidental way. Rather, it is connected with the question of what is entirely new: the Latin *novus*, which I will return to later on. For that reason, my answer can only be discursive, unofficial,

constrained – a form of oxymoron or possibly of the world turned upside down.

I was born in Spain, under Franco. My family comes from a village of cave-dwellings, Benamaurel, 80 kilometres from Grenada. I was schooled in France, and up until the age of twenty I moved backwards and forwards between France and Spain. In my family, Franco was shrouded in secrecy. I only heard him spoken of after his death, when I was a very young girl. But it was from that moment that the word ‘exile’ took on its full meaning. After the dictator’s death, a distant relative returned to Spain, having not set foot there for forty years, in order to die. At high-school, the Spanish Civil War was talked about, with *Guernica* as its emblem, but there was no mention of the years that followed up to nineteen seventy-five. That silence always troubled me: it was as if during all that time, Spain had been excluded from history. The first exiled artist I became interested in was Arroyo; his sad humour.

The question of what was new and contemporary found a precise meaning while I was working on *Chant V*, the video based on Dante’s *Inferno* that I created in collaboration with Kadhim Jihad Hassan. He had just finished translating the *Divine Comedy* into Arabic, as well as into free verse. Kadhim is an Iraqi exile living in France; I got in touch with him because of that translation. It was following on from his contemporary version of *Inferno* that we started working together. For Dante, the number nine is a superlative or the symbol of the *novus*; it is also the number of his Beloved, of Beatrice. It is the number of the perfection of generations, of the unexpected apparition. Nine, the number 9, is absent from hell and from purgatory. There is a drawing by Paul Klee dating from 1910 whose

title is *Angelus novus*; Walter Benjamin called it the “angel of history”.

One part of my artistic training, the autodidactic part, developed through visiting churches. There, I saw paintings and sculptures before I had even identified them as such. It was there that I built up my earliest visual vocabulary: the progression from West to East, from shadows to light, the vertical spire pointing up to the sky, the horizontal body of the dead Christ, the diagonal lines of the Holy Spirit. The red wounds of Christ or the Virgin’s tears, the grey of the olive tree, the green of the fig tree, the blue of the Virgin’s cloak, the gold, the white of the linen or the lily, the water or the wine, the birds, the flowers, the numbers, life and death. It is still the vocabulary of my work, a visual vocabulary but also a sensorial, synaesthetic experience.

To return to churches, what really struck me in some of Thomas Struth’s photographs, which are important works for me, mainly because of the way in which he leads the eye into a place, and even if they presuppose a certain neutrality that I do not subscribe to, the point is that he has photographed churches as if they were museums. This is, in itself, quite obvious for some of them – but it reaches a dead end when it comes to the very specific relationship implied by the way images are used in such places. For me, as an artist, there is a relationship in Catholic, Orthodox or Coptic churches between the soul and the eye. It is not a matter of religious proselytizing, but rather of an interaction with the images. Not long ago, I found myself in an Orthodox Church and I watched people who, as they standing there on their own, kissed the icons. By the evening, the glass panel which protected these icons was greasy with

kisses and I could imagine a time when there was not even any glass panel. I had already seen this gesture, or other similar ones, in Spain or in the churches of Cairo. This gesture of touching, kissing a painting, sculpture or photograph goes beyond a simple religious fervour or superstition. There is, in the kissing of images, a continuation of seeing that involves the whole body. In my view, we are a long way from what I sometimes detect in art today as a puritanical use of seeing: a way of conforming to the collective “guilty conscience” that denies an image of its substance, of its very existence.

In an interview published in *Libération* on 6-7 August 2007, Jeff Wall makes the link between timing in photography and timing in painting: “The photographic present [...] is a perpetual present”, “What you see in the image is reproduced precisely in front of you, regardless of when you are looking at the image.” Or again “[...] we experience the same thing at the theatre, at the cinema, with poetry, with painting. The contributions of all these arts create a perpetual present, which, of course, is an illusion.” Jeff Wall makes a very one-sided use of time in his photography – just as one-sided as the eye in painting. When I see Jeff Wall’s 1978 photograph entitled *The Destroyed Room*, the reference to Delacroix appears to me to be purely factual, and it remains distanced from the painting it refers to *The Death of Sardanapalus*. I do not believe in offering a disposition of time or seeing that would find its outlet in the present, however perpetual it may be. I think that there are several directions in photographic time – that some are parallel, others contradictory – ranging from the past to the future, without ever reaching the present, which is a time that belongs perhaps uniquely to melancholy. The Japanese photographer, Ishiuchi Miyako spoke

of the traces of the future. It is also the narrator’s story in *The Invention of Morel*: he never knows if he will be able to reach the young woman with whom he is in love in the unending time in which he is intermittently present. He does not know if their eyes will ever meet.

#### One last question: why SITIO?

*Sitio* means ‘place’ in Spanish. In Native American heaven, it is the place described as a prerequisite for any initiation. It is a reference to Carlos Castaneda, who, in *The Devil’s Grass*, tells how an elderly Yaqui Native American in Mexico, known as the benefactor Don Juan, initiated him slowly and cautiously into certain forms of magic linked to hallucinogens. The first thing that has to be undertaken in this initiation is the finding of the *Sitio*: somewhere one can stand without becoming weary. The *Sitio* touches on myths of orientation.

September 2010

Translation from the French: James Curwen

# MARIE BOVO

## L'ÉCUME DES JOURS

RICHARD  
LEYDIER

Certaines œuvres d’art exercent parfois sur ceux qui les regardent un étrange empire. Lorsque, drapées dans leur éclatante simplicité de belles et néanmoins mutiques images, elles nous sembleraient avoir tout dit en quelques secondes, elles nous hantent longtemps après cette première rencontre. Semblables à des graines plantées à notre insu dans notre subconscient, elles travaillent et croissent en silence, étendant ramifications et terminaisons inattendues. Elles échappent ainsi à celui ou celle qui leur ont donné naissance et révèlent des aspects insolites; elles vivent leur propre vie. Les œuvres d’art ne sont pas des objets inanimés, et il serait incongru de se demander si elles ont une âme ou pas. Elles sont, indubitablement, des êtres vivants.

Comme les muses soufflent l’inspiration au poète, ces œuvres nous murmurent parfois de drôles de choses à l’oreille. Ces paroles inaudibles, et qu’on entend pourtant résonner en nous, racontent des histoires très anciennes. À travers des images, des lieux bien de notre époque, elles prolongent des archétypes, venus du fond des âges et appelés à se répéter invariablement jusqu’aux derniers temps de l’humanité. Elles sont les discrètes métaphores de ce qui fonde en substance un être humain.

Pour qui saurait les entendre, les œuvres de Marie Bovo « chuchotent » ce genre de choses. On peinerait néanmoins à déceler en elles une telle dimension humaniste au premier regard. En effet, la figure humaine y est presque totalement absente – elle apparaît « par accident » au petit matin sur une terrasse égyptienne, on la devine derrière les traînées incandescentes que dessinent au loin les phares de voitures dans la nuit –, mais on sait bien, au moins depuis la peinture romantique, qu’un paysage vierge de figures n’en communique pas moins des sentiments très humains, comme la solitude, ou encore le sublime, qui nous amènent à prendre conscience des espaces infinis et, du coup, de notre condition mortelle. Et si l’on perçoit

aisément cette dimension romantique dans les œuvres de Marie Bovo, on cherchera davantage du côté du mythe (et donc de la métaphore cryptée) les indices d’une intemporelle « condition humaine ». Hormis quelques incursions en Asie (Japon, Corée), ses œuvres ont principalement pour cadre les pays du bassin méditerranéen (sud de la France, Égypte, Espagne). Les origines espagnoles et italiennes de Marie Bovo ne sont sans doute pas étrangères à cette préférence géographique. C’est pourquoi, au prix de quelques digressions, il s’avère possible de fouiller ses paysages sur un mode quasi archéologique afin de faire affleurer, à la surface des images, certaines réminiscences archaïques de cette culture méditerranéenne qui est celle de l’artiste.

Dans la série *Plages*, initiée en 2003, Marie Bovo installe sa chambre photographique sur le sable, face à la mer, de nuit. Sans autre éclairage que celui de la lune et des lumières de la ville demeurée hors champ, ces images réalisées dans une quasi obscurité captent et intensifient les faibles sources lumineuses car l’artiste a pris soin de laisser l’obturateur de l’appareil ouvert. Il en résulte des compositions ambivalentes, mi-diurnes, mi-nocturnes, tout à la fois figées et en mouvement. La mer et le ciel fusionnent amoureuxment au large, gommant une ligne d’horizon que seules soulignent désormais les lumières paresseusement étirées de lointains navires. Sur le rivage, l’écume des vagues prend une consistance lactescente, brumeuse, qui tranche radicalement avec le sable net, auquel la lumière rasante confère l’apparence violemment contrastée du sol lunaire. Devant les *Plages* de Marie Bovo, la *Théogonie*, long poème d’Hésiode, nous revient en mémoire. L’auteur y relate la genèse du monde. Comment, du Chaos, surgirent la Terre Gaïa et le Ciel Ouranos. Comment ce dernier féconda la première, et comment, en raison d’un tempérament exclusif, il couvrit uniformément le corps de sa compagne

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afin que les fruits de leurs amours ne puissent voir le jour. Soucieuse de libérer sa progéniture et de s’affranchir d’un amant quelque peu étouffant, Gaïa chargea son fils Chronos-Le Temps d’accomplir avant l’heure le premier complexe d’Œdipe : « Le fils, alors, de sa cachette, étendit la main gauche; de la droite il saisit la grande, longue serpe aux crocs durs, et bondissant, les couilles de son père il les trancha ; il les rejeta vite, pour qu’elles tombent derrière lui... il les jeta, du haut de la terre ferme dans la mer aux fortes vagues. La mer les transporta pendant longtemps et une écume blanche sortit de cette chair qui ne meurt pas. Une fille en naquit... Elle sortit de l’eau, belle et pudique déesse, et l’herbe poussait sous ses pieds délicats. On l’appelle Aphrodite, déesse de l’écume... »<sup>1</sup> *Plages* n’est pas la première série de Marie Bovo, mais elle marque incontestablement une étape primordiale dans son corpus (on pourrait dire qu’elle en est le « récit fondateur ») parce qu’elle met en scène les trois « acteurs » principaux de l’œuvre à venir, qui apparaissent de manière récurrente sur un mode réel ou métaphorique : le ciel (dans ses versions diurnes et nocturnes, avec le soleil, les étoiles et la lune), la terre et le temps. Soit le ciel vu de la terre, ou la terre vue du ciel et, entre les deux, ce temps-Chronos que Marie Bovo aspire, capture par le biais du piège photographique de l’obturateur ouvert.

### Le Ciel

Dans le quartier populaire de Belzunce, à Marseille, l’artiste a investi quelques cours intérieures d’immeubles anciens. Très simplement, elle a choisi de photographier, de jour comme de nuit, ces étroits et sombres goulets, où le soleil pénètre peu, en pointant son objectif à la verticale, droit vers le ciel. Comme dans ses *Plages*, Marie Bovo a retardé la fermeture de l’obturateur, si bien que la pellicule, saturée et brûlée de lumière, imprime sur le papier un ciel immaculé le jour et bleu

pâle aux heures nocturnes ; un monochrome, en quelque sorte, qu’encadrent, dans un violent effet de perspective, les quatre façades donnant sur la cour. Les Augures, grands prêtres de la Rome royale, avaient pour coutume de tracer dans le ciel les contours d’un rectangle virtuel. Ils observaient ensuite le vol des oiseaux qui le traversaient et en tiraient des présages – au passage, je ne connais pas de plus belle métaphore de l’acte photographique. Ce rectangle était enfin soigneusement reporté sur le sol afin de tracer le plan du futur temple (d’où l’étymologie du mot « contempler », qui dérive du latin contemplare). Regardant les *Cours intérieures* (2008) de Marie Bovo, nous avons en effet la sensation d’être projeté dans un temple, et plus encore une église, dont la nef serait l’exact décalque de la portion de ciel au-dessus : « Ce qui est en haut est comme ce qui est en bas; et ce qui est en bas est comme ce qui est en haut », écrit Hermès Trismégiste dans le beau texte de *la Table d’émeraude*. Les vêtements pendus aux cordes à linge nous évoquent des anges baroques, le ciel blanc la lumière de Dieu. Nous éprouvons une sensation d’élévation qui est toutefois contredite par le basculement de la photographie sur le mur de la galerie. Nous ne savons plus dans quelle direction travaille la force de gravité, et cette dernière semble annulée, comme dans les plafonds de Giambattista Tiepolo ou les gravures de Mauritz-Cornelis Escher. Terre et ciel en auraient presque permuté car nous pourrions tout aussi bien regarder au fond d’un puits. *Cours intérieures* met le monde sens dessus dessous, imposant un curieux sentiment de désorientation.

*Grisailles* (2010) a été réalisé dans le même quartier marseillais. Selon un protocole similaire de prise de vue, l’artiste a cette fois-ci photographié le plafond de porches d’immeubles. Au vide infini du ciel se substituent ici les dures surfaces de plâtre, qu’encadrent désormais des moulures

<sup>1</sup> Hésiode, *Théogonie*, édition de Jean-Louis Backès,

« Folio classique », pp. 43-44.



# MARIE BOVO L'ÉCUME DES JOURS

RICHARD  
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Certain works of art exert, at times, a strange influence over those who look at them. They haunt us long after this first encounter when, cloaked by beautiful yet mute images in their striking simplicity, they would appear to have told us everything in a matter of seconds. Like seeds planted in our subconscious without our knowledge, they work and grow in silence, opening up unexpected ramifications and endings. They thus elude the person who has given birth to them and reveal unexpected facets; they live their own lives. Works of art are not inanimate objects, and it would be unseemly to ask oneself whether or not they have souls. They are, indubitably, living beings.

Just as muses whisper inspiration to the poet, these works at times murmur strange things into our ears. These inaudible words, which we nonetheless hear resonating within us, tell very ancient stories. Through images and places well within our own era, they continue archetypes that come from the dawn of time, and are destined to repeat themselves unchangingly until the humanity's last moments. They are discreet metaphors for that which forms the basic stuff of a human being.

For those who know how to listen to them, Marie Bovo's works "whisper" such things. Nevertheless, we would struggle to detect in them, at first glance, such a humanistic dimension. The human figure is, in fact, almost completely absent – it appears "by accident" in the early morning on an Egyptian terrace; we guess at it behind the streaks left by far away car lights at night – but we well know, at least since romantic painting, that a landscape devoid of figures is no less capable of communicating very human sentiments, such as solitude, or the sublime, which helps us become

aware of infinite space and, thereby, of our own mortal condition. And if this romantic dimension is easily noticeable in Marie Bovo's works, we shall turn even more towards the realm of myth (and this of the encrypted metaphor) to seek clues of a timeless "human condition". Apart from a few incursions into Asia (Japan, Korea), these works are set principally around the Mediterranean (the South of France Egypt, Spain). Undoubtedly, Marie Bovo's Spanish and Italian origins are not unconnected to this geographic preference. It explains why, at the price of a few digressions, it proves possible to investigate these landscapes in an almost archaeological manner, in order to bring to the surface of the images certain archaic reminiscences of the artist's Mediterranean culture.

For the *Plages* series, begun in 2003, Marie Bovo installed her photographic chamber on the sand, facing the sea, at night. Lit by nothing besides the moon and the city lights that remain out of sight, these images, made in quasi-darkness, capture and intensify the feeble light sources – for the artist has taken care to leave the camera shutter open. The result is ambivalent compositions, half-diurnal, half-nocturnal, at once frozen and in movement. Offshore, the sea and the sky merge amorously, erasing a horizon line that henceforth is demarcated only by the sluggishly stretched-out lights of distant ships. On the shore, the foam of the waves takes on a milky, foggy consistency that contrasts radically with the sharp sand, on which the low-angled light bestows the violently contrasted appearance of the lunar surface. Facing Marie Bovo's *Plages*, we are reminded of Hesiod's epic poem, *Theogony*. In it, the author describes the origin of the world. How, from Chaos, Gaia Earth and the Sky Ouranos sprang up. How the

latter inseminated the former, and how, because of an exclusive disposition, he covered the body of his companion all over so that the fruits of their lovemaking could not come into the world. Anxious to free her progeny and herself from a somewhat suffocating lover, Gaia charged her son Chronos-Time to carry out, well before its time, the first Oedipus complex: "Then the son from his ambush stretched forth his left hand and in his right took the great long sickle with jagged teeth, and swiftly lopped off his own father's members and cast them away to fall behind him... from the land into the surging sea, they were swept away over the main a long time: and a white foam spread around them from the immortal flesh, and in it there grew a maiden... an awful and lovely goddess, and grass grew up about her beneath her shapely feet. Gods and men call her Aphrodite, the goddess born of foam..."<sup>1</sup>. *Plages* are not Marie Bovo's first works, but they undoubtedly mark a primordial stage in her corpus (we could say that they are the "founding story"), because it incorporates the three principle "actors" of her future work, which reappear frequently in a real or metaphorical mode: the sky (in its diurnal and nocturnal versions, with the sun, the stars and the moon), the earth, and time. Either the sky is seen from earth or the earth is seen from the sky, and between them both, time-Chronos, which Marie Bovo draws in, captures by means of the photographic trap of the open shutter.

## The Sky

In the working-class neighbourhood of Belzunce, in Marseille, the artist has entered several courtyards of old apartment blocks. Very simply, by day and by night, she chose to photograph these dark and narrow gullies, where the sun

barely penetrates, by pointing her lens vertically, straight up at the sky. As in her *Plages*, Marie Bovo has delayed the closing of the shutter to the extent that the film, saturated and burnt by light, prints onto the paper an immaculate sky during the day and a pale blue at night; a sort of monochrome that frames, in a violent perspective effect, the four facades that overlook the courtyard. The Augurs, the great priests of royal Rome, had a custom of tracing the outline of a virtual rectangle in the sky. They then observed the flight of the birds that crossed it, from which they interpreted portents – in passing, I know of no more beautiful metaphor for the photographic act. Finally, this rectangle was carefully transferred to the ground so as to map out the plan of a future temple (whence the etymology of "contemplate", which derives from the Latin *contemplare*). Looking at Marie Bovo's *Cours intérieures* (2008), we experience, in effect, the sensation of being thrown into a temple – in particular, a church whose nave is apparently an exact copy of the portion of sky above: "That which is above is like that which is below; and that which is below is like that which is above", wrote Hermes Trismegistus, in the beautiful text of The Emerald Table. Clothes hung out on washing lines evoke baroque angels; the white sky, the Light of God. We experience a feeling of elevation which is, however, contradicted by the swivelling of the photograph onto the gallery wall. We no longer know in which direction the force of gravity acts; the latter appears to be cancelled out, as with ceilings by Giambattista Tiepolo or the engravings of Mauritz-Cornelis Escher. Earth and sky appear almost to have swapped places, since we could equally well be looking at the bottom of a well. The *Cours* turn the world upside down, imposing a curious sensation of disorientation.

<sup>1</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, Translated by H.G. Evelyn-White, pp.116-206, <http://www.greekmythology.com>

2. *Casida of the dark doves* “Through the laurel branches / I saw two doves of darkness. / The one it was the sun, / the other one was lunar. / I said ‘Little neighbours / where is my tombstone?’ / ‘In my tail-feathers,’ the sun said. / ‘In my throat,’ said the lunar. / And I who was out walking / with the earth wrapped around me, / saw two eagles made of white snow, / and a girl who was naked. / And the one was the other / and the girl, she was neither. / I said ‘Little eagles, / where is my tombstone?’ / ‘In my tail-feathers,’ the sun said. / ‘In my throat,’ said the lunar. / Through the branches of laurel, / I saw two doves, both naked. / And the one was the other / and the two of them were neither.”

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3. On the subject of doves and grapes, it is also worth mentioning the anecdote recorded by Pliny the Elder about the ancient Greek painter Zeuxis, who took on his compatriot Parrhasius in a peculiar pictorial battle, in order to determine which of the two was the most talented artist. Zeuxis unveiled a painting representing a cup of grapes so skilfully painted that birds attempted to pick at the seeds. As for Parrhasius, he “presented a curtain so realistically depicted that Zeuxis, proud of the birds’ pronouncement, at last asked for the curtain to be drawn to reveal the painting. Then, realising the illusion, he admitted defeat with modest honesty, seeing that he had only been able to fool the birds, whereas Parrhasius had fooled an artist, namely Zeuxis” (Pliny the Elder *Naturalis Historia*).

4. This Egyptian corpus can be compared with the nocturnal photographs (the *Chimères* series), which the artist produced in 2005 from the Mori Building in Tokyo.

5. Dante, *la Divine Comédie*, <http://www.online-literature.com/dante/inferno/5/>

The *Grisailles* (2010) were created in the same Marseille neighbourhood. Following a similar protocol for composing the shot, the artist has this time photographed the ceilings of porches in blocks of flats. Here, the infinite void of the sky has been substituted by hard plaster surfaces that are now framed by the cornices of bourgeois apartments. The drab, lunar appearance of the flaking paintwork, lit in a way that is reminiscent of the *Plages*, replaces the uniform brilliance of the sky. If the *Grisailles* can be interpreted as the antithesis of the *Cours*, we nevertheless observe the same effect of inversion of earth and sky: ceilings appear like sorts of carpets, which become walls when the photograph is hung in the exhibition.

The video *Casida* (2008) plays on the tensions between earth and sky in a more symbolic manner. As with the works cited previously, it distinguishes itself by the simplicity of the procedure adopted, allowing us to open up the interpretation of the work considerably. In a static shot, the camera films piled-up bunches of red grapes being pecked at by doves. The feast often turns to confrontation between the birds, so that the violence of these attempts at intimidation evokes vultures attacking a bloody cadaver. A *casida* is a short poetic form of Arab-Andalusian tradition, and Marie Bovo’s film borrows its title from a specific poem by the Spaniard Federico Garcia Lorca, the *Casida of the Dark Doves*<sup>2</sup>. This brief text, surrealist in imagination, involves two doves, named Sun and Moon (again, the sky), whom the narrator asks to tell him where his future tomb will be situated (therefore, in the ground). In Marie Bovo’s *Casida*, the doves, of course, represent the heavens, and the grapes the earth (we recall, in the Bible, the two Hebrews who bring back from Canaan a giant grape that bears witness to the fertility of the Promised Land). Finally, in palaeo-Christian art, doves eating raisins frequently symbolise the meal

at Christ’s table in the Kingdom of God – in other words, eternity and the blissful soul after death<sup>3</sup>.

### The Earth

In contrast to those works where, literally or metaphorically, the gaze turns towards the sky comes a response from groups of works where the earth appears as seen from on high. The photographic series *Bab-el-Louk* (2006) was produced from the top of a block looking out over a working-class neighbourhood of Cairo. Thus the artist has given us the same viewpoint at different times of the day and night (always by adjusting the shutter opening). Sometimes, the town appears eminently barren, as if dead, crushed under a leaden sun, emptied of its inhabitants, who have fled the heat. Sometimes, in the freshness and obscurity of the night, it comes back to life, pierced here and there by the lights from dwellings. Marie Bovo here captures the passage of time across a city which, on each occasion, is the same and yet different – the variations of luminosity revealing, in the different versions, a new facet of the tangle of narrow alleyways. *Bab-el-Louk* is in some ways like Minos’ labyrinth, which Daedalus and his son Icarus flew over at the precise moment of their escape<sup>4</sup>.

The videos of the series *Chants* (2007), in so far as they evoke hell from Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, constitute a more metaphorically terrestrial, even chthonic series (notably the video *Chant I*, which takes place in a tunnel). *Chant V* shows a static shot of a bouquet of lilies, which, speeded up, we see wither, while out of shot a voice recites a translation in literary Arabic of *Chant V* from *Inferno* (Dante was supposedly inspired to write the *Divine Comedy* by *Liber Scalae*, an Arabic work describing Muhammad’s ascension). This fifth Canto marks Dante and Virgil’s entry into the second circle, which is “a place mute of all light”<sup>5</sup>,

and where King Minos judges and sorts souls into groups according to the nature of their faults. More specifically, it concerns sinners of the flesh, forbidden lovers, unhappy followers of Aphrodite, whose ranks include Cleopatra, Helen of Troy, Tristan... The flowers open out gradually, just as, in the photographic series *Feux* (2007) – another of Marie Bovo’s chthonic series – newspapers are torn open by the flames. The lily petals necrose before our eyes and fall to the floor, just as Dante collapses in concluding the Canto: “I swooned away as if I were dying; and fell even as a dead body falls”<sup>6</sup>. *Chant V* thus adopts the tone of a *vanitas*, a *memento mori*: even love and beauty (in this case, that of flowers) are as nothing against time, which shrivels and consumes all.

### Time

Time is the subject of the recent video *Subak* (2010), without doubt the most simple in form of Marie Bovo’s projects, as well as the most comic. Through the maze of steep alleyways in a neighbourhood of Seoul hurtles a watermelon, whose mad race nothing seems able to stop. Rolling along, it knocks over a dustbin; elsewhere, it comes almost to a halt, before mischievously regaining the slope. Strangely, it seems to be alive, to be almost gifted with reason; it gives the impression of knowing where it is going, whereas it is merely subject to the laws of attraction. Until the moment when, tempted by a final jump, it crashes and explodes lamentably on the ground. Shown in a loop, the video replaces the fruit, intact, back at the top of the hill. Quite naturally, we remember the rock that Sisyphus is condemned to roll daily to the top of the mountain... It goes without saying that the watermelon is us. It constitutes a metaphor for our existence, which we spend moving hither and thither before the final crash. For Chronos, despite being imprisoned in Tartarus since the dawn of time, nonetheless

remains active, condemning our destinies to the ineluctable jaws of time. This temporal dimension is the human one, trapped, sandwiched between those of heaven and earth – in other words, between our greatest aspirations and the materialism that nails us to the ground; between our ideals and reality. We wander, disorientated, between these two opposites, through the labyrinths of everyday life. We seek love, bliss – but in the end, Chronos remains inexorably victorious. Ultimately, we can no alternative but to laugh at the absurdity of existence, at generation after generation of humans, all destined to vanish. It so happens that in Asia, watermelons are symbols of fertility and of life.

Translation from the French James Curwen

MARIE  
BOVO

SITIO

# PLACES 2008









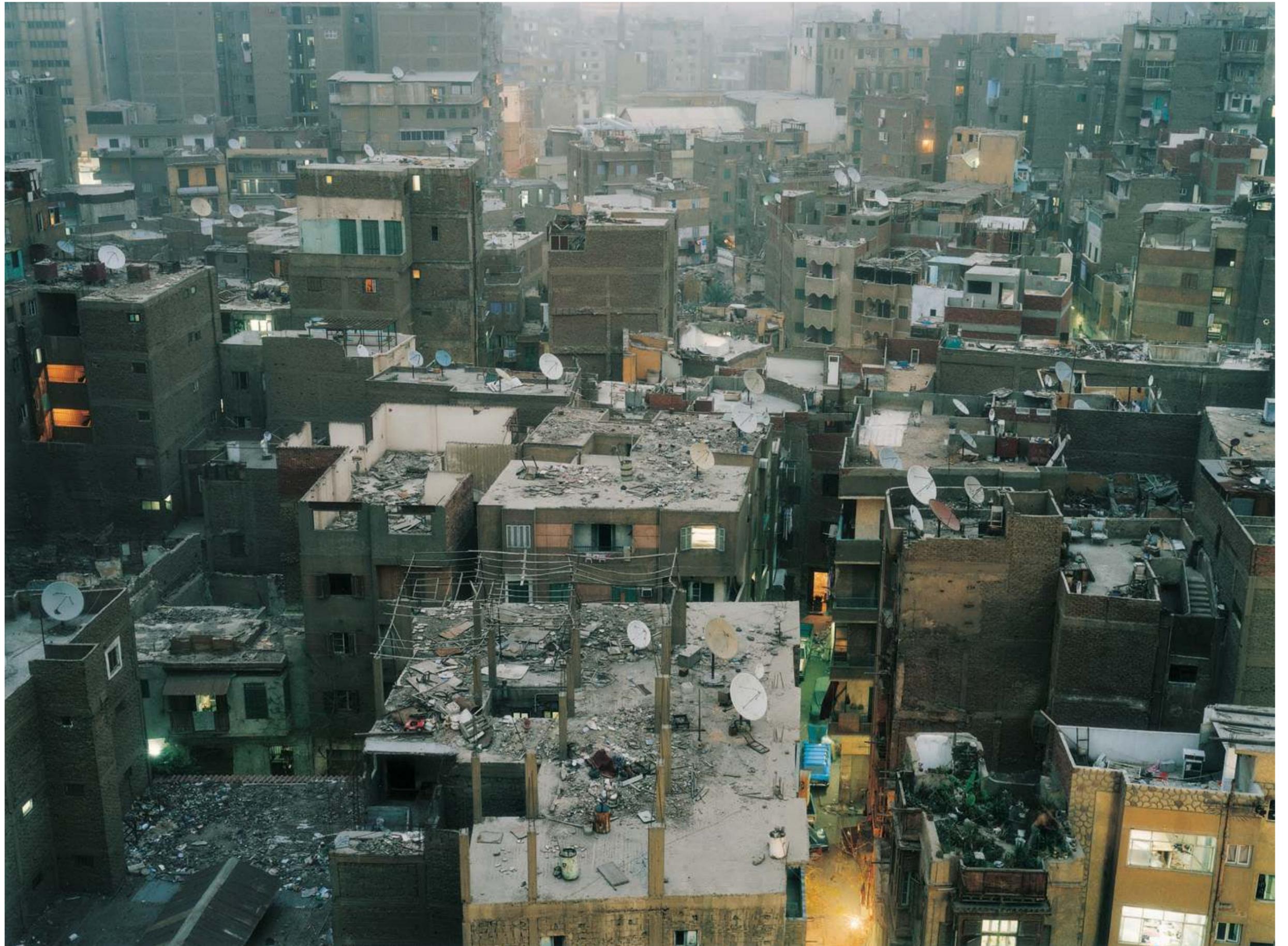
# BAB-EL-LOUK 2007









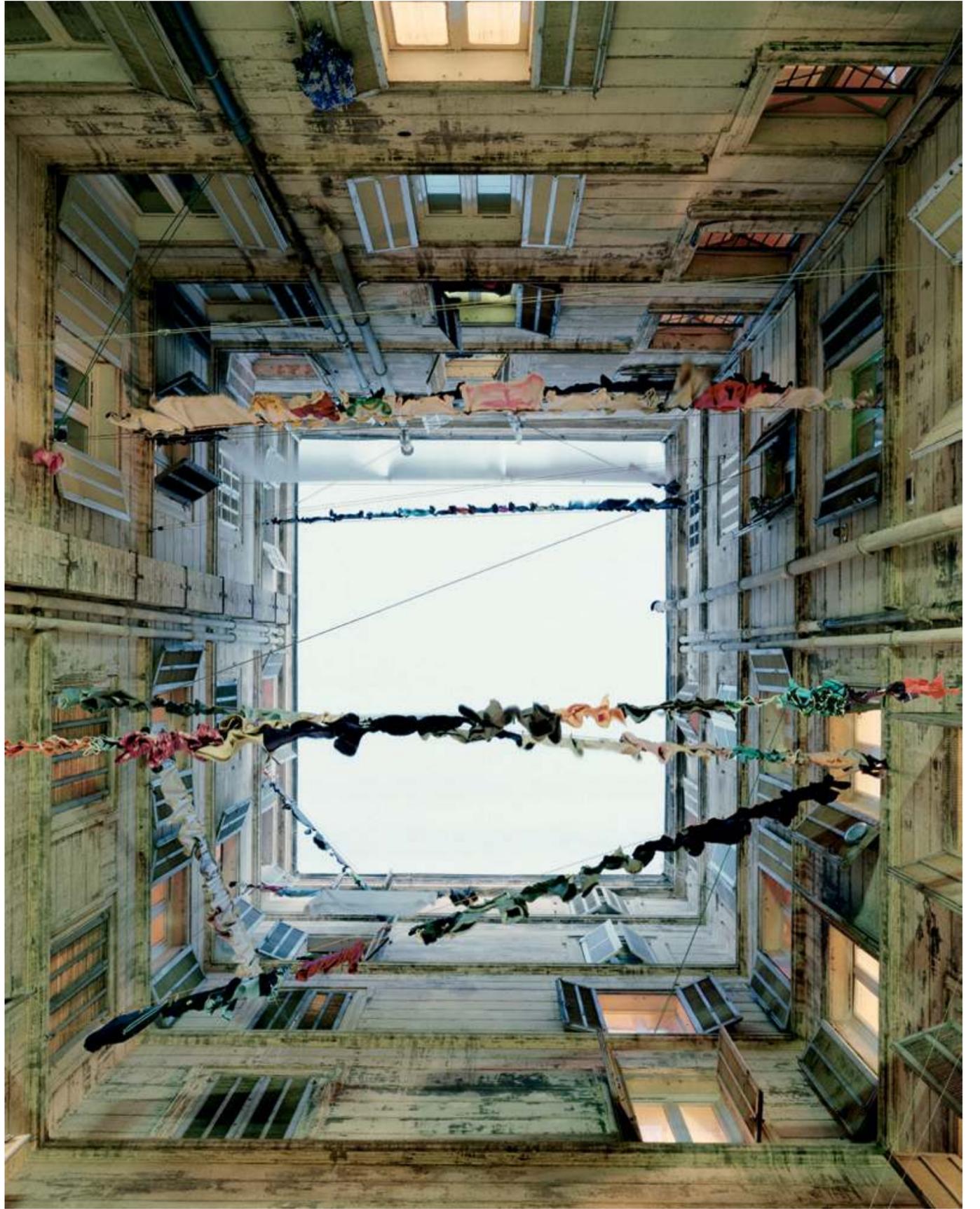


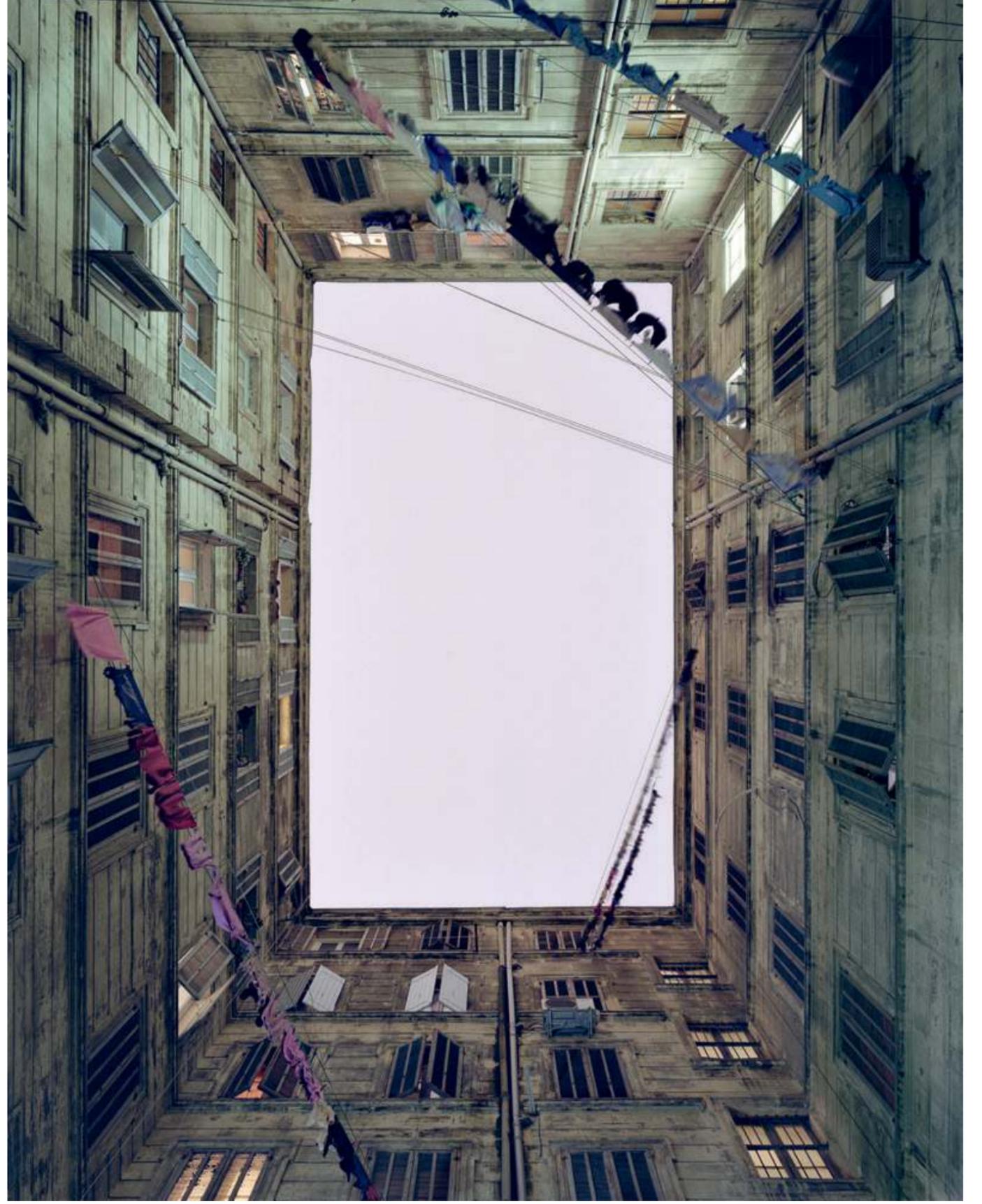




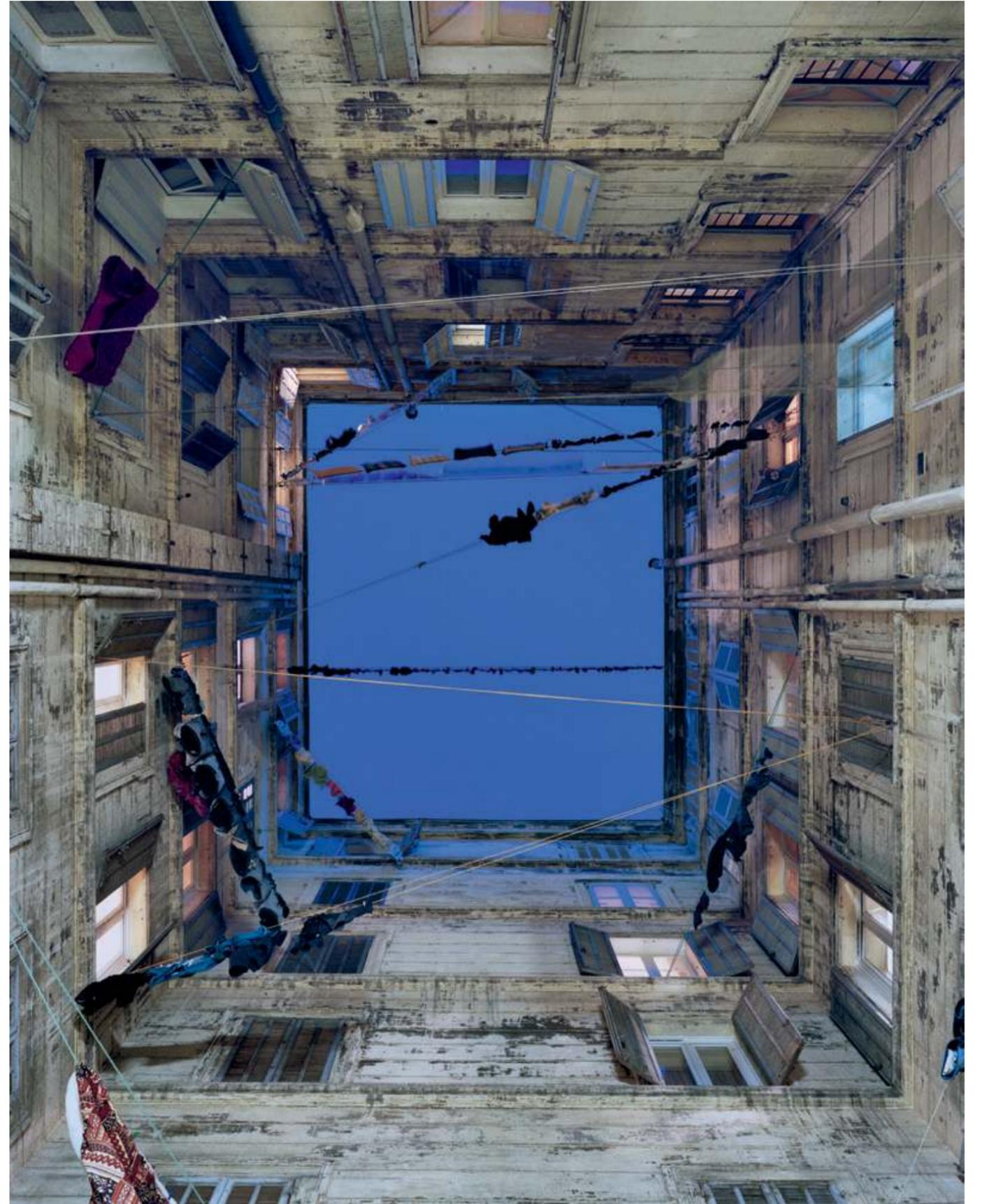


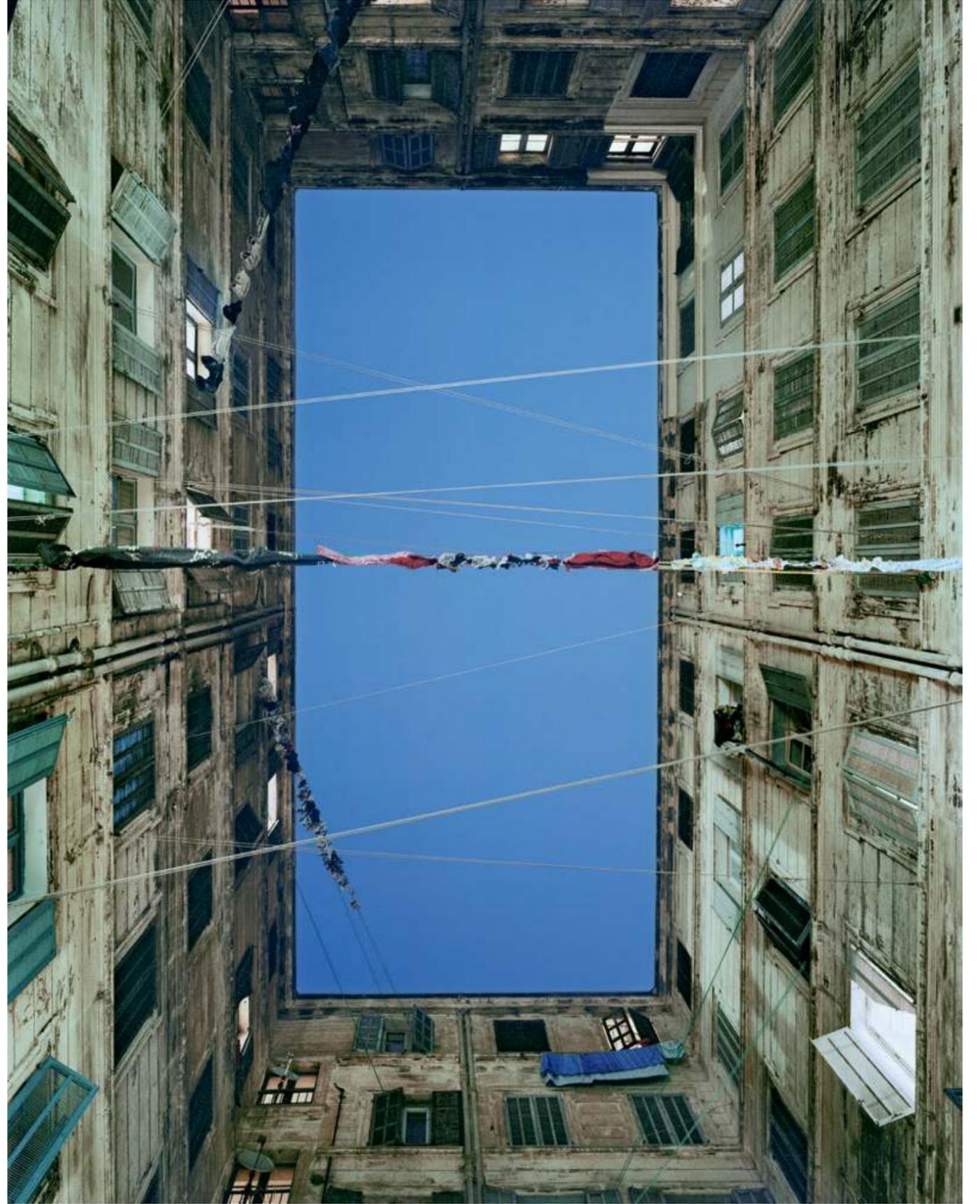
# COURS INTÉRIEURES 2008 - 2010





ci-avant : 20 juillet 2009 (gauche) - 13 décembre 2009 (droite)  
ci-contre : 29 avril 2009

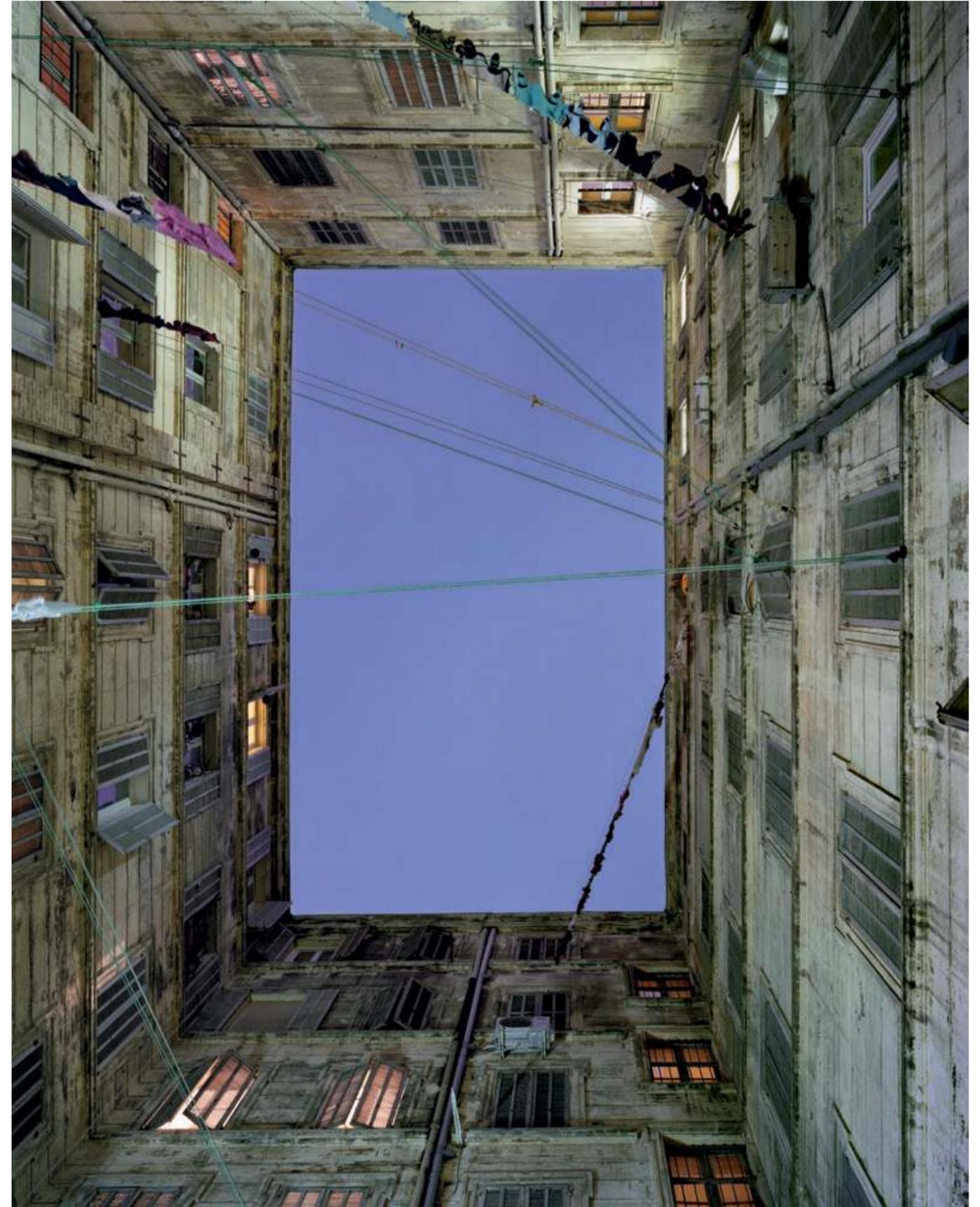


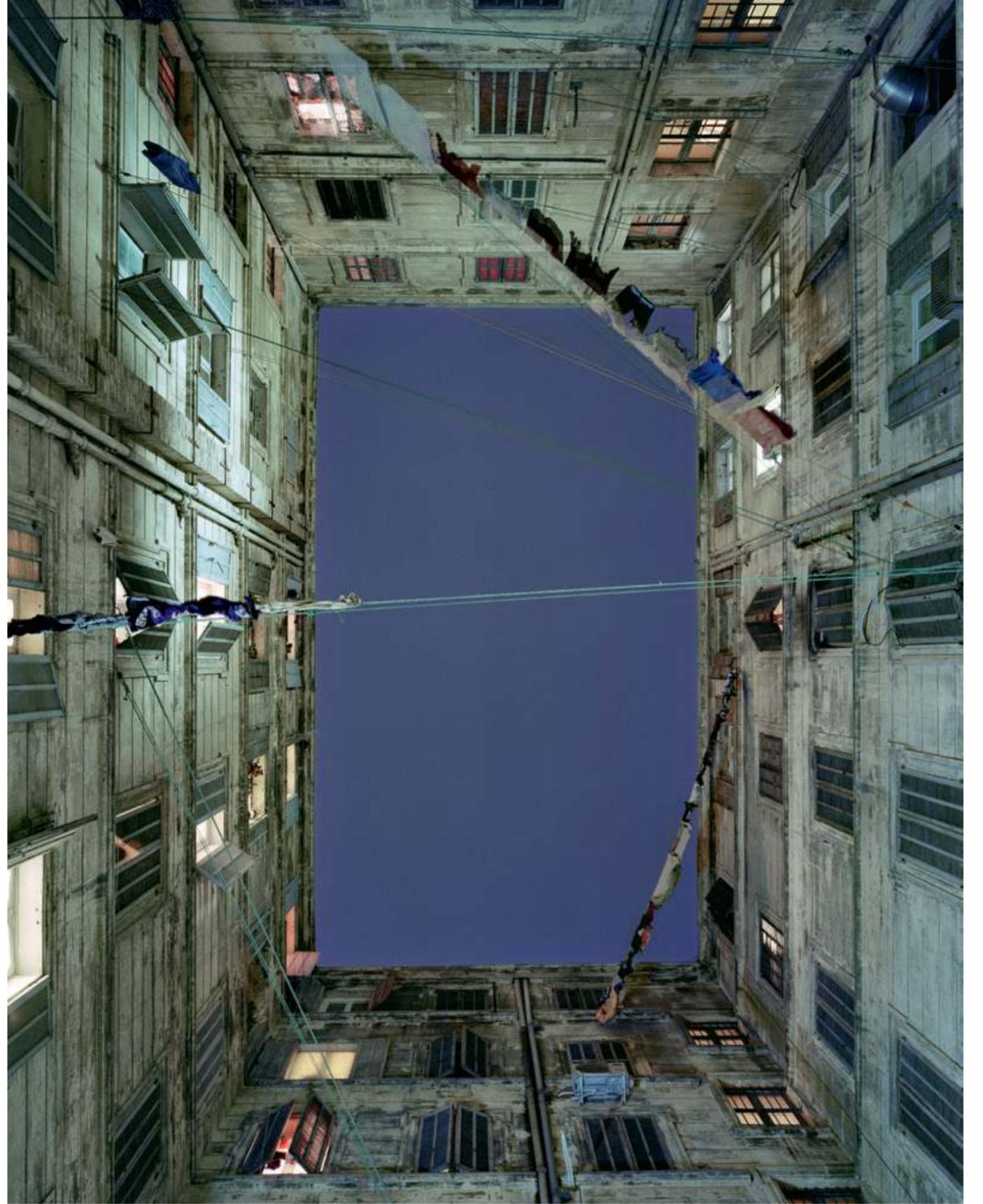
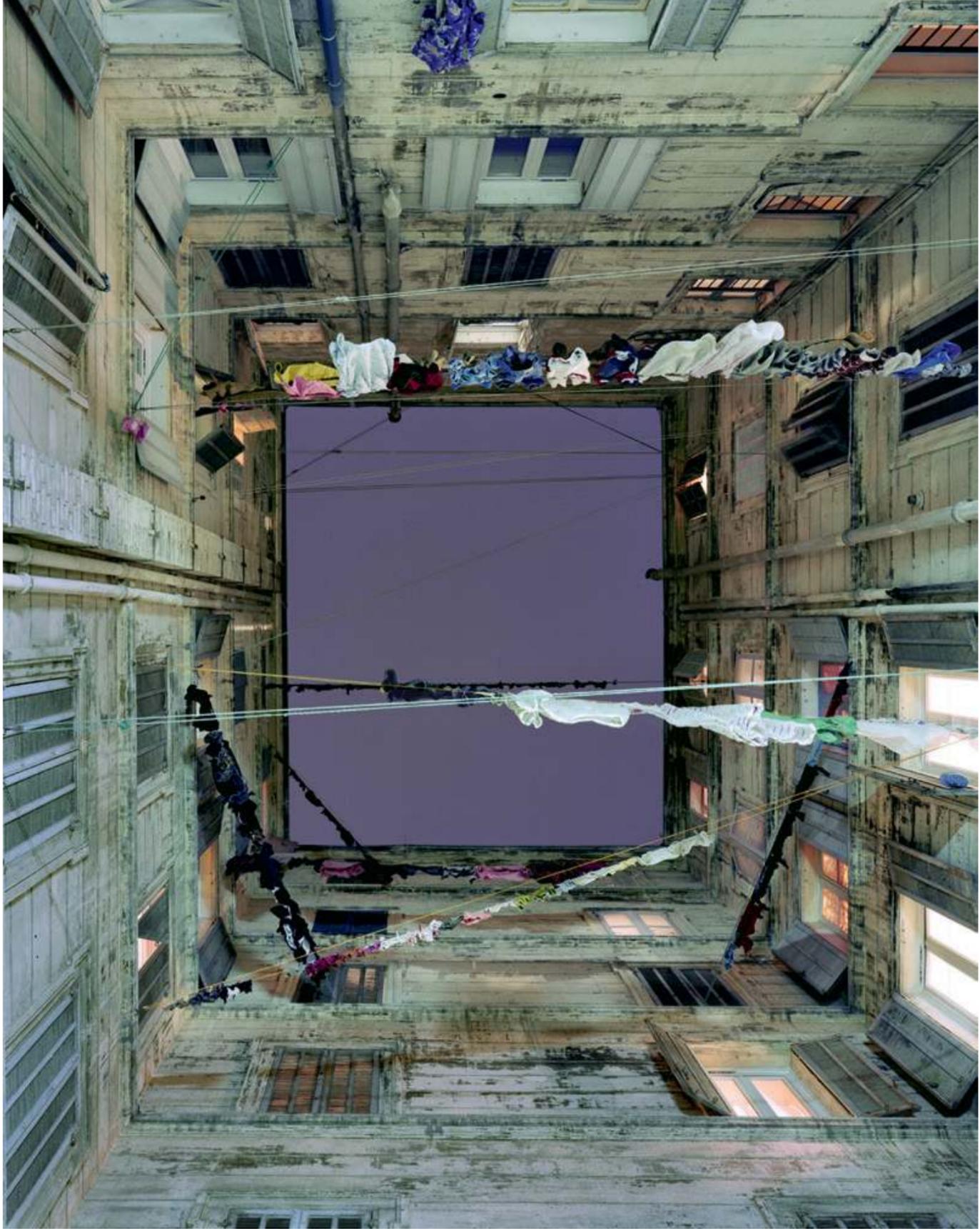


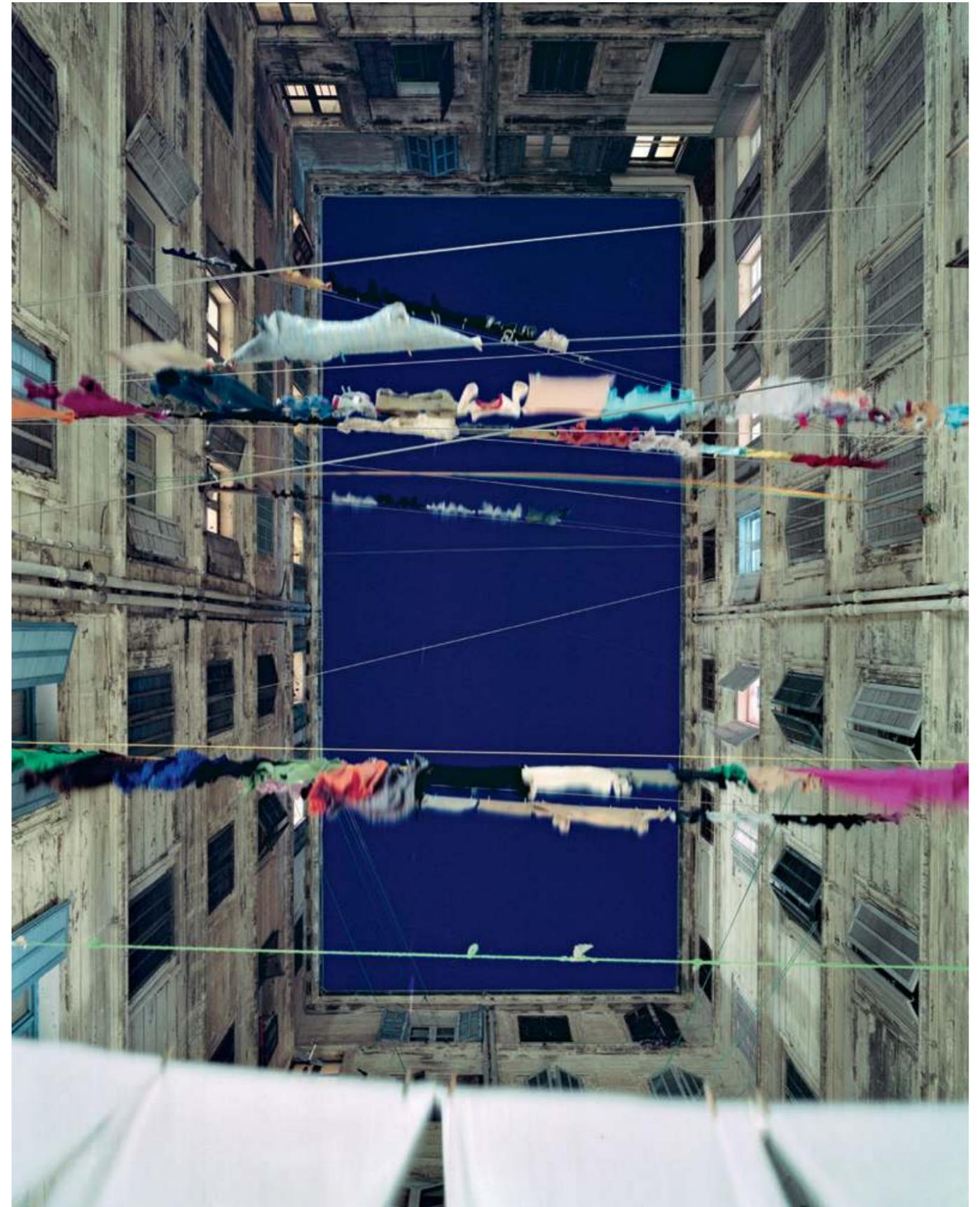




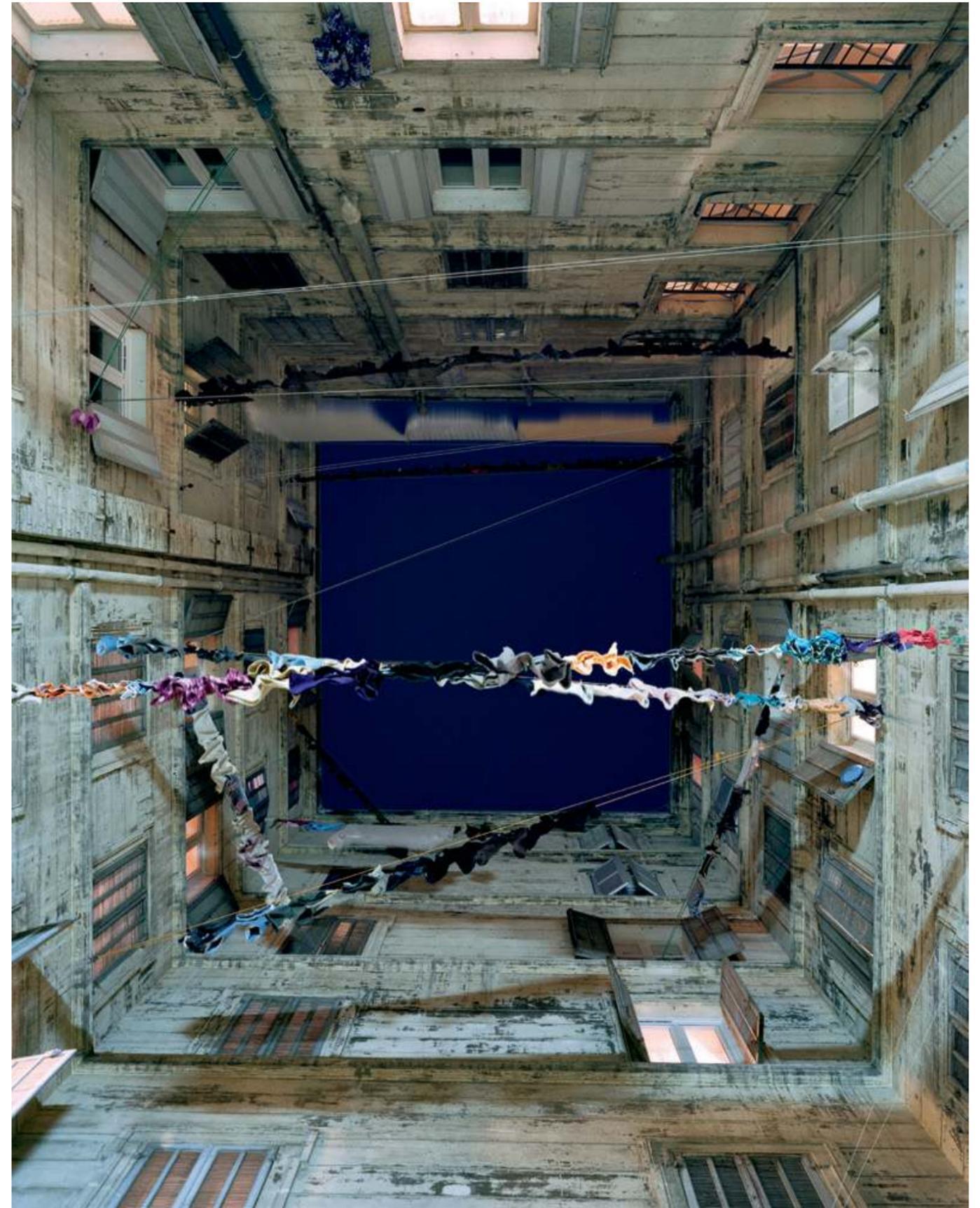
ci-avant : 6 mai 2009 (gauche) - 19 février 2009 (droite)  
ci-contre : 11 septembre 2008

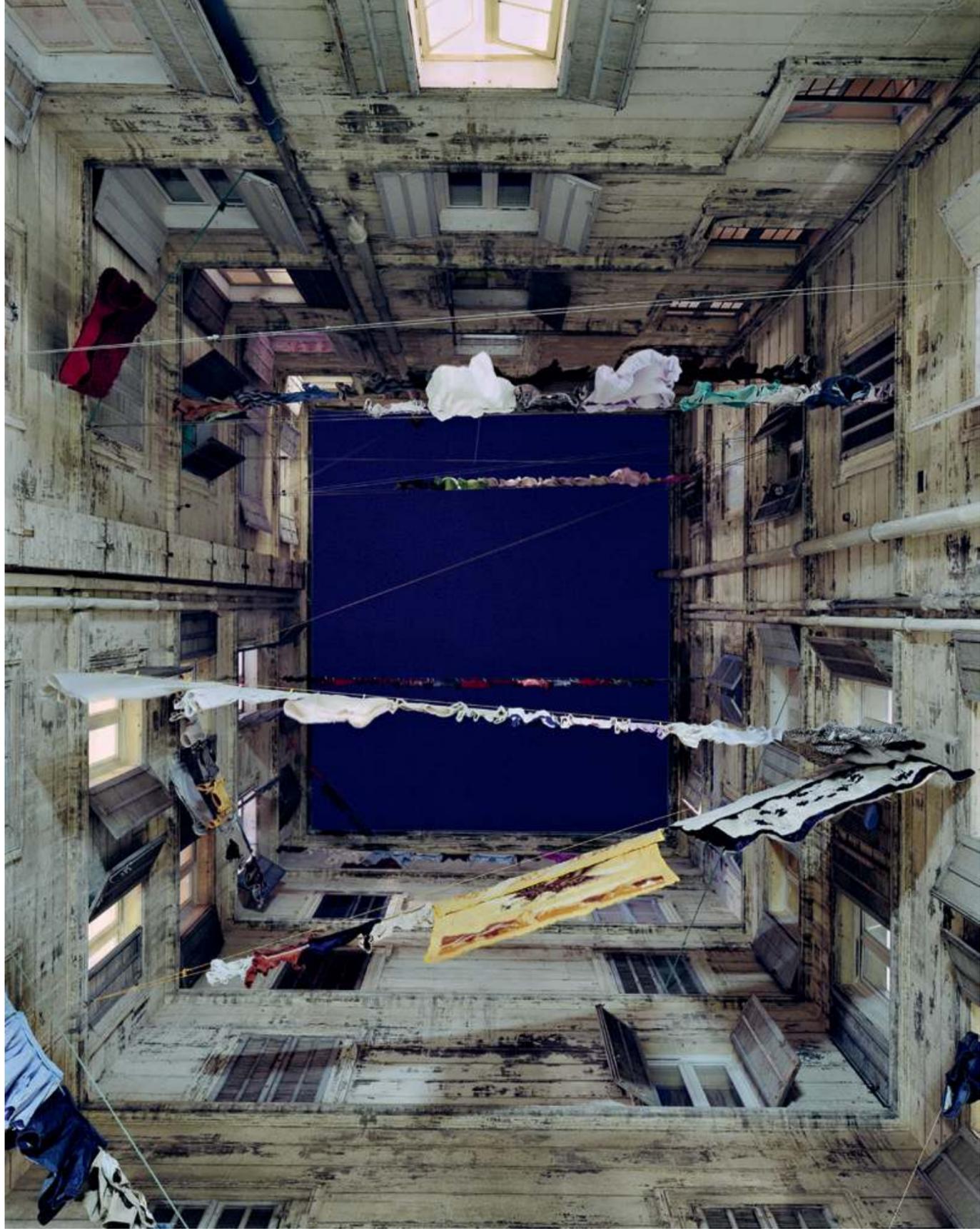
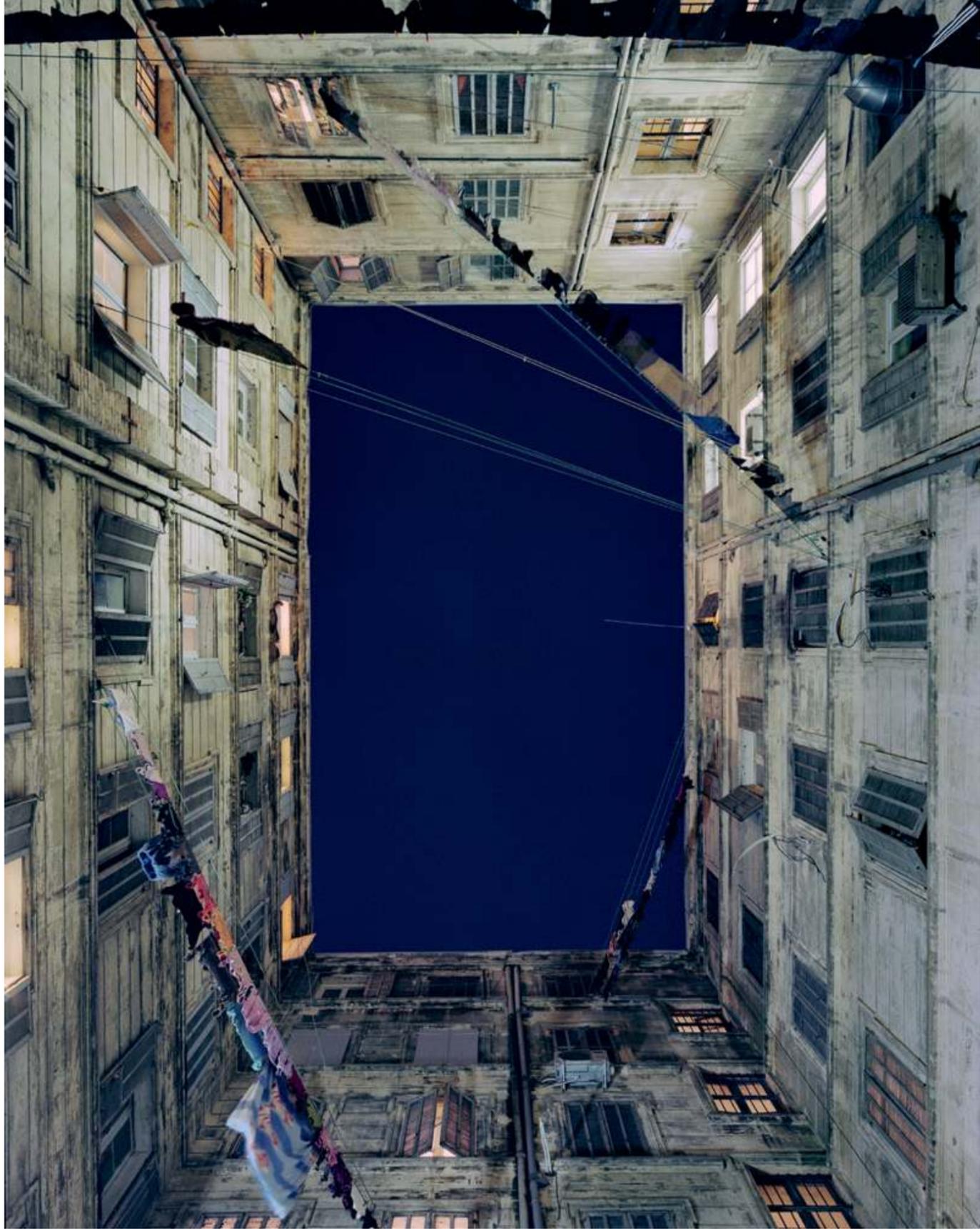






ci-avant : 29 septembre 2008 (gauche) - 15 février 2009 (droite)  
ci-contre : 15 juin 2008







ci-avant : 19 novembre 2009 (gauche) - 17 février 2009 (droite)  
ci-contre : 1<sup>er</sup> décembre 2009





ci-avant : 16 janvier 2009 (gauche) - 11 décembre 2009 (droite)  
ci-contre : 23 avril 2009

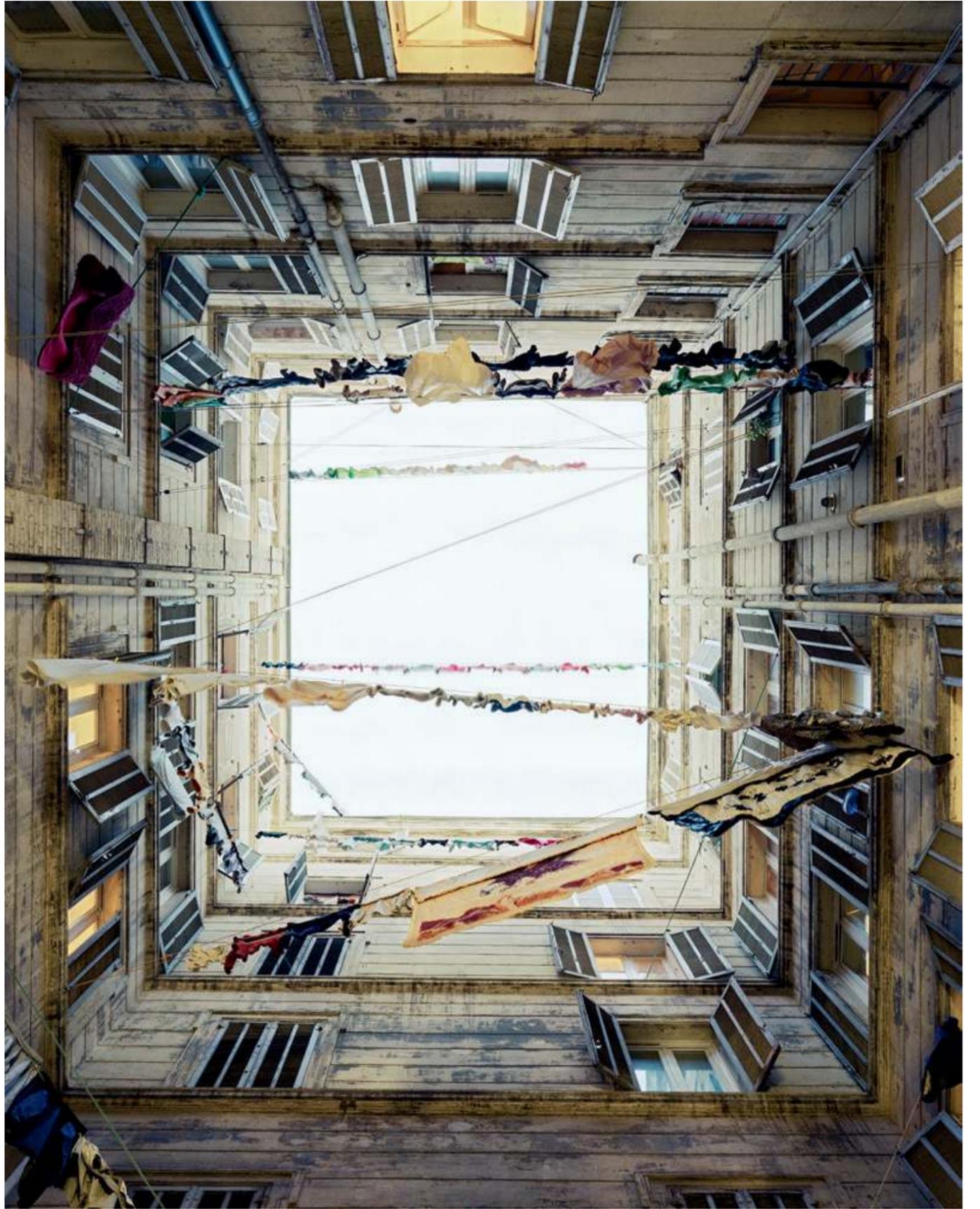






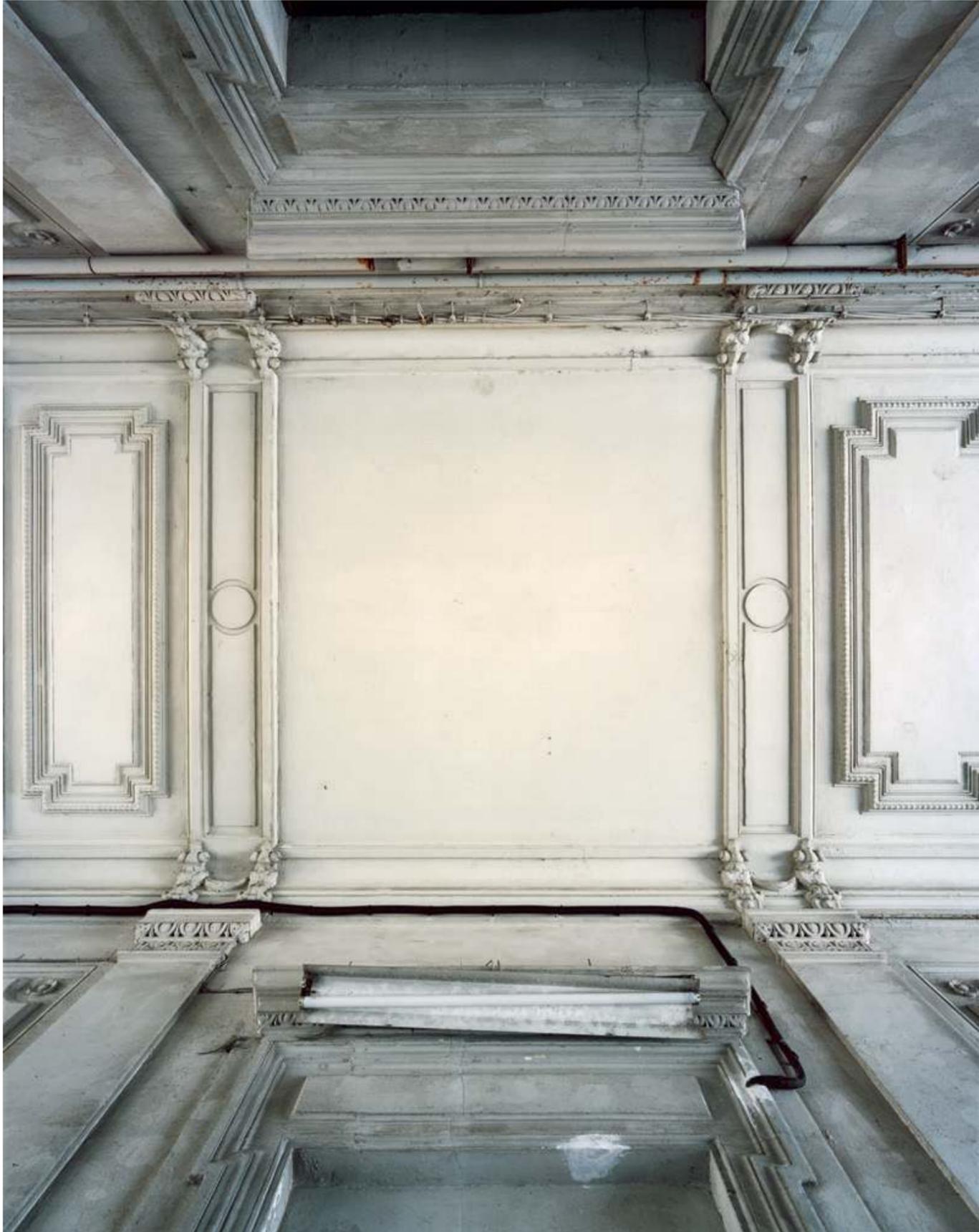


ci-avant : 27 septembre 2008 (gauche) - 30 août 2008 (droite)  
ci-contre : 13 février 2009



# GRISAILLES 2010

























# CASIDA 2008

Série de 4 vidéos couleur  
Vidéo 1 : 39 min 37 s  
Vidéo 2 : 8 min 53 s  
Vidéo 3 : 13 min 17 s  
Vidéo 4 : 38 min 20 s









# SUBAK 2010

Vidéo couleur  
5 min





- 1967 Naissance à Alicante en Espagne. Émigre à l'âge de 4 ans avec sa mère Dolores Reche Bovo, en France. Études d'Arts Plastiques à l'Université d'Aix-en-Provence.
- 1999 Fondation de la revue TROU, avec A. Céard, N. Gilly et L. Le Forban.
- 2000 « **4<sup>e</sup> rencontre des femmes autour de la Méditerranée** », MMSH, Aix-en-Provence.
- 2003 « **Marie Bovo** », galerie Roger Pailhas, Marseille.
- 2004 « **Borderline** », kamel mennour, Paris.  
« **Photographies** », Maison de la photographie, Toulon.
- 2006 « **Night drippings** », Collections d'art contemporain, Saint-Cyprien.
- 2007 « **Nox** », Ateliers de la ville de Marseille.  
« **Roger Pailhas, l'art d'une vie** », [mac] musée d'art contemporain de Marseille, Marseille.
- 2008 « **O Fascinio de Ulisses** », avec Michèle Sylvander. Luis Serpa Projectos, Lisbonne.  
« **Bab-el-Louk** », kamel mennour, Paris.
- 2009 « **Une journée** », CCC - Centre de Création Contemporaine, Tours.  
« **Inferno** », Caszuidas Screen, Amsterdam.  
« **Feux et Chimères** », Maison de la Photographie, Toulon.  
« **Mare nostrum** », installation pérenne, commande publique 1% Maison des Services Publics de Sainte Musse, Toulon.  
« **DM145, légendes** », CCC - Centre de Création Contemporaine, Tours.  
« **La collection de la MEP, acquisitions et donations récentes** », Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris.
- 2010 « **Sitio** », Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris.  
« **100% Paris** », Nuit Blanche 2010, Tel-Aviv.  
« **Places & spaces 2** », Arendt&Medernach, Luxembourg.

- 1967 Born in Alicante, Spain. Emigrated to France at the age of 4 with her mother Dolores Reche Bovo. Studied Fine Art at the University of Aix-en-Provence.
- 1999 Founded the magazine TROU, with A. Céard, N. Gilly and L. Le Forban.
- 2000 “**4<sup>th</sup> meeting of women on the Mediterranean**”, MMSH, Aix-en-Provence.
- 2003 “**Marie Bovo**”, galerie Roger Pailhas, Marseille.
- 2004 “**Borderline**”, kamel mennour, Paris.  
“**Photographies**”, Maison de la photographie, Toulon.
- 2006 “**Night drippings**”, Collections d'art contemporain, Saint-Cyprien.
- 2007 “**Nox**”, City of Marseille artists' studios.  
“**Roger Pailhas, l'art d'une vie**”, [mac] musée d'art contemporain de Marseille, Marseille.
- 2008 “**O Fascinio de Ulisses**”, with Michèle Sylvander. Luis Serpa Projectos, Lisbon.  
“**Bab-el-Louk**”, kamel mennour, Paris.
- 2009 “**Une journée**”, CCC - Centre de Création Contemporaine, Tours.  
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“**Feux et Chimères**”, Maison de la Photographie, Toulon.  
“**Mare nostrum**”, perennial installation, public commission (1% rule), Maison des Services Publics de Sainte Musse, Toulon.  
“**DM145, légendes**”, CCC - Centre de Création Contemporaine, Tours.  
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- 2010 “**Sitio**”, Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris.  
“**100% Paris**”, Nuit Blanche 2010, Tel Aviv.  
“**Places & spaces 2**”, Arendt&Medernach, Luxembourg.

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