

FEET, GHOSTS AND TREES

On March 6th I came to Brussels to work on my image archive at Les Hangars. I travelled by foot back and forth from the residency at Rue de la Senne to my friends' house. In the morning it was an easy walk down, but, not accustomed to hills, I found the voyage back to his house, up in Saint-Gilles, trying. Also, coming from Amsterdam, the city seemed very overwhelming and disorganised to me.

I remembered a trip to Prague 2 years ago where I found myself unable to get into the rhythm of the city. I wrote a story then on how I literally bumped into people, children and city furniture. In Brussels I apparently unconsciously decided to not let this happen again. Wanting to get into the rhythm of this city, yes, but not at the cost of accidents, pain, or disturbing others. I behaved painfully cautious. I concentrated on my feet and on the surface of the streets that is again very different from Amsterdam, where everything is organized and extremely flat: Boring, YES, unpredictable, NO. Here in Brussels I found holes, different paving stones, height differences, streets that suddenly turned into footpaths, people biking on the sidewalk, trash everywhere and small enclaves of living in public space.

When I looked at the photographs I made of these first days I saw only bricks and surfaces, no trace of living beings except my own feet and a cat named Pony. Like Tom Cruise alone on Time Square in the movie 'Vanilla Sky', the images showed me alone at Rue de Midi, only feet and no faces.

One month later I returned to Brussels for a week, staying with the same friend. After having walked this route already for 14 times I felt it was safe to look up, enjoying the people and life all around me. The sun was shining and I started practising my French by reading the signs on the shop-windows, already familiar with their cellars and lower facades. Brussels smiled back at me. Almost at my friends house I realised that where I expected a building, 2 in fact, was now a hole. It looked like a building site, and I was sure it had not been there a month before. Immediately Brussels was like a stranger to me again, for it could not be possible that in the short time I was away the city changed so fast. The only possible explanation was that I was lost, again.

After re-establishing my position I learned that a city does not change so rapidly, not at it's normal pace. As life and time becomes suspended and distorted through emergent situations it was not me that was lost. In fact there had been two houses there at this busy street a month before. They had been obliterated by a big explosion. The whole street got covered with rubble, there were several wounded and a man lost his life in the accident. As I missed the whole actual emergency I only noticed the attempt of a city to get back on its feet at incredible speed.

During my last night in Brussels I found another, less disturbing example of astonishing speed. In my first week I photographed a square of dirt close to my house, with an A for Anarchy sprayed on it. At my last night in Brussels I was happy to find a young tree growing out of this A, Already 3 meters high, **imagine how big it will be in another month?**