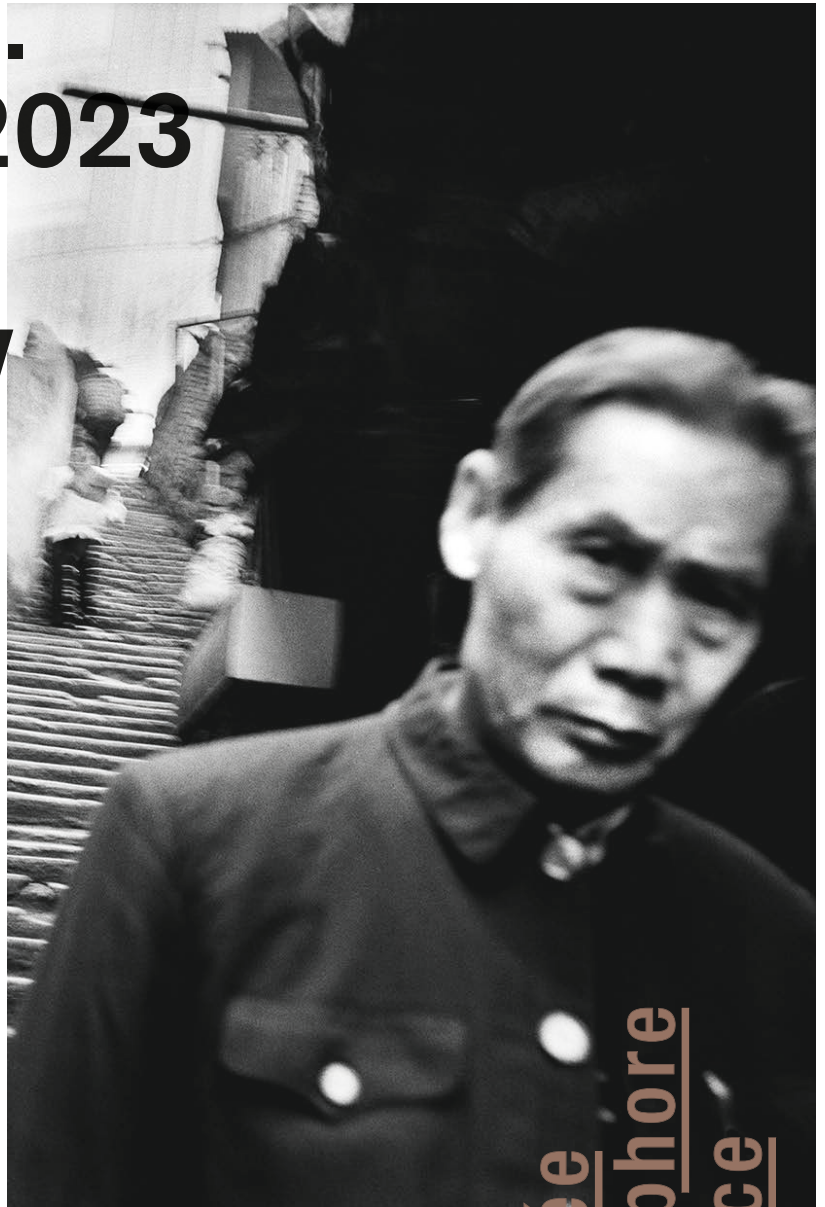


Bertrand Meunier Erased

June 17 th...
Sept. 17 th 2023
Opening
Wednesday
June 14 th
6.30 pm



musée
Nicéphore
Niépce

Curated by:
Sylvain Besson
Bertrand Meunier

Exhibition
co-produced
with the Musée
de la Photographie
de Charleroi.
With support from
the Picto Foundation.

The museum would like to thank:
Les Amis du musée
Nicéphore Niépce
Canson

A book is published
for the exhibition:
Bertrand Meunier, Erased,
text, Pierre Haski,
Atelier EXB, Paris, 2023

Bertrand Meunier is a founding member of the Tendance Floue collective and winner of the Prix Niépce in 2007. He is the perfect representative of this type of French documentary photography, his style is cinematic, rooted in analogue practices, and for him, the medium is first and foremost a tool for understanding the world rather than a mere recording technique. Meunier has refined his approach since his early work for VU' agency and commissions for *Newsweek* and *Libération*. His high standards and rigorous slant provide the viewer with a world vision devoid of frills, one that requires them to think and question.

Bertrand Meunier donated his archive to the museum in 2021 and invited the institution to revisit his collection.

In 80 silver prints, videos, installations and press clippings, *Erased* proposes a new take on the vast body of work produced by Meunier in China from 1999 to 2019.

During his regular trips to China, Bertrand Meunier was able to capture the transformations the country has undergone in the past twenty years, from joining the World Trade Organisation [2001] to the protests in Hong-Kong in 2019-2020, before the COVID epidemic closed the country off to foreigners.

Journalist Pierre Haski [foreign correspondent for *Libération* in China for six years in the nineties], has written a piece to accompany the book dedicated to Bertrand Meunier's work in China [published by EXB] and will be used as the throughline for the show's scenography.

Photography is about reproducing the real exactly and faithfully. The job of the photojournalist is to capture the world in order to reveal, to call out and to bear witness. As a member of the Tendance Floue collective, Bertrand Meunier follows this logic, or seems to. However, his work is the opposite of [photo-] reportage. Even though his shots have been published in magazines and newspapers [mainly in *Newsweek* and *Libération*] and he was represented by the VU' agency in the early 2000s, his output does not tick any of the usual "press photography" boxes. Bertrand Meunier works over long periods of time, in black and white, always refusing the "easy" shot. He returns again and again to the countries he chooses to work in, his work spans several years during which he hovers obstinately around his subjects, letting his subjectivity and perception take over.

Erased is Bertrand Meunier's greatest work. He has been travelling to China since 1997, chronicling the progressive disappearance of the agrarian economy in favour of industry followed by its progressive replacement by the tertiary economy and new technologies. *Erased* shows us the profound transformations that have occurred in China over the past thirty years, under Communist Party rule and successive governments led by Jiang Zemin [1989-2002], Hu Jintao [2002-2012] and Xi Jinping [since 2012]. *Erased* follows the changes in Chinese society, how it has opened and closed the door to capitalism a number of times, how the government has increased its control over the population, how the decisions taken by the Party have had social and human consequences that now mean China can consider itself the economic, diplomatic and military equal of the United States, like the U.S.S.R. did in earlier times.

The world is a complex place and Bertrand Meunier strives to depict it for us. China seems so far away. But every day, here in the West, we consume Chinese products, our governments compromise with the regime and the successive large-scale reforms carried out by the party have contributed to placing China, once again, at the heart of the most crucial geopolitical issues of our time. *Erased* is, as such, essential to our understanding of today's world. While it does not provide all of the keys to understanding China, this extensive work unflinchingly depicts the resilience of a people faced with the orders of an all-powerful ruling party.

Bertrand Meunier invites us to project ourselves into his photographs to be at one with the protagonists, so that we can be truly touched by and concerned with Asian, and in particular Chinese culture.

Bertrand Meunier's photographs are not spectacular: there are no historic events, no earthquakes, no demonstrations. If they do feature, it is by accident or [almost] by chance. Bertrand Meunier is not in search of a scoop, he works at street level, getting as close as possible to his subjects in an attempt to capture the effects of government corruption and top-down decision-making that is badly implemented or increasingly partisan the further away from the centre of power you go.

He photographs everyday life in China, in black and grayscale. Regardless of who is in charge, regardless of the abrupt changes they force on the people, humans adapt, live, survive, plan, compromise, take detours. This gives his work a universal quality, and in an increasingly rigid society, reveals pockets of resilience, and, at times, fear. Meunier lets us "enter" a society that ours could become [or already has, or is in the process of becoming] with landscape changes and forced population shifts [Three Gorge Dam since 2003], corruption and scandals [the Henan 'plasma economy' scandal in the nineties] and increased surveillance, clampdowns on protests [the 'Umbrella Revolution' in Hong Kong, 2014], etc. Up until COVID, when Bertrand Meunier was no longer in a position to go to China. Nevertheless, these pictures come together to reveal how the Chinese government

delayed informing the rest of the world about the extent of the pandemic, how it postponed lockdown before shifting gears and implementing a brutal and radical 'zero COVID' policy, followed by an equally brutal end to this policy and its incomprehensible refusal to vaccinate foreigners.

Bertrand Meunier's working methods are "old school", and he has remained resolutely non-digital, using extra-sensitive film stock and silver printing processes, most often in the traditional 40x60 cm format. His subjects evolve before our eyes, apparently indifferent to the constraints of their time and the photographer. The result is a coherent, homogenous body of work, like an almost unending scene from a film that has lasted for twenty years; not for nothing, the term "cinematic" is one that comes back time and again with regard to Meunier's output. His photographs are dense, almost charcoal-filled. The shots of the landscapes are wide, and the subjects seem to pass through like ghosts, while the portraits are shot in close-up, their expressions unresolved. Meunier lets out a stream of half-destroyed buildings, arms and backs carrying weights, tense faces, but also shared glances and so many cinema references. The viewer is faced with the ruins of an apocalyptic future and a badly controlled modernity being absorbed by force. Human beings survive, human beings oppress. This is perhaps the real subject of Bertrand Meunier's work, and one he has explored everywhere he has been, in France, in China, in South Korea and in Pakistan.

Constraints and the violence of politicians can be said to be the leitmotiv of his work. The means change, as do the political regimes, but the issue is always one of controlling populations or manipulating the collective memory. Without deference, Meunier shows us individuals living their lives, surviving their lives, regardless of the orders from on high.

His photographic style and approach dispense with all pathos and voyeurism in an attempt to reveal the violence in societies where the decisions taken by few affect many. Bertrand Meunier renders this violence through the absence of colour, through dust, ruins, looks, through the densest of blacks. This gives his pictures a timeless quality. Indeed, he does not wish to raise awareness, to generate concern, but to share the questioning process.

Bertrand Meunier donated his entire archive to the Musée Nicéphore Niépce in 2021: 6,500 rolls of film and as many contact sheets, that the museum re-examined with the photographer to propose this version of *Erased*.

Erased or the disappearance of one world after another; *Erased* or an attempt to make sure these worlds do not disappear entirely.

By lending us his doubt-filled eyes as they look through his camera, Bertrand Meunier forces us to open ours. And to doubt, alongside him.

Sylvain Besson

1.
Bertrand Meunier
Zhongshan main square,
Shenyang, Liaoning Province
December 2005
© Bertrand Meunier,
Tendance Floue



1

2.
Bertrand Meunier
Lanzhou, Gansu Province
July 2000
© Bertrand Meunier,
Tendance Floue



2

3.
Bertrand Meunier
Datong, Shanxi Province
June 1997
© Bertrand Meunier,
Tendance Floue



3

4.
Bertrand Meunier
Beijing.
March 2007
© Bertrand Meunier,
Tendance Floue



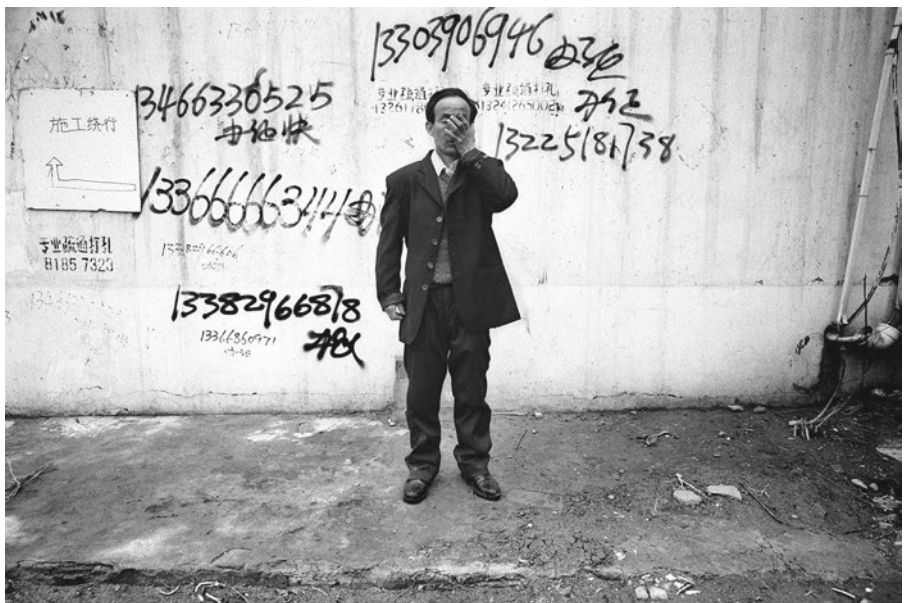
4

5.
 Bertrand Meunier
 Fengjie, Hubei Province
 December 2000
 © Bertrand Meunier,
 Tendance Floue



5

6.
 Bertrand Meunier
 Fengtai District, Beijing
 April 2007
 © Bertrand Meunier,
 Tendance Floue



6

7.
Bertrand Meunier
Fengtai district, Beijing
March 2007
© Bertrand Meunier,
Tendance Floue

8.
Bertrand Meunier
Shenzhen, Guangdong Province
December 2019
© Bertrand Meunier,
Tendance Floue



7



8

9.
10.
Bertrand Meunier
Beijing
March-April, August 2019
© Bertrand Meunier,
Tendance Floue



9



10

11.
Bertrand Meunier
Tiananmen Square, Beijing
September 2001
© Bertrand Meunier,
Tendance Floue

12.
Bertrand Meunier
Chongqing Prefecture
April 2000
© Bertrand Meunier,
Tendance Floue



11



12

13.
 Bertrand Meunier
 Yichang, Hubei province
 February 2002
 © Bertrand Meunier,
 Tendance Floue



13

14.
 Bertrand Meunier
 Hong Kong
 December 2019
 © Bertrand Meunier,
 Tendance Floue



14

15.
Bertrand Meunier
Hong Kong
November 2019
© Bertrand Meunier,
Tendance Floue



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Open
every day
except Tuesdays and holidays
9.30 ... 11.45 am
and 2.00 ... 5.45 pm
10.00 am ... 1 pm
and 2.00 ... 6 pm [july/august]

Free entrance

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et Gacon-Cartier
Canson
– Our local partners
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