

Concerning the Nocturnal Pieces.

The pieces are as much about fiction as they are documentary. A duality of factual and imaginary has been central to this work from its inception. In the early stages it was tied up with underlying themes of science fiction. My driving around at night in deserted peripheries was partly fictionalized as a kind of downgraded space odyssey, travels into alien worlds from which life was either absent or somehow removed. The lunar appearance of empty parking lots brought to mind a converse of sorts to the astronaut's description: "the moon's color is that of your driveway".

The sci-fi connotations have since receded, particularly after I started working exclusively in large format. I became interested in a set-like quality that places take on at night, in a staged appearance that becomes evident in the photograph. In that sense there is a *derealizing capacity* of photography manifest in my work.

Themes of absence and disappearance still run through many of the pieces: the set is empty, with no visible human actors. There is a degree of theatricality to the images, although I don't really intend to suggest a setting in which some plot might be unfolding, or be about to unfold. The stage remains empty: it is absence that's being played out, so to speak (although something of a lurking presence might make itself felt at times).

I find it useful to articulate ideas about my work in terms of a number of dualities. Any photographic image is both a trace and a construct. It creates "reality" just as much as it might reveal it. I think these tensions play a big role in photography's vitality as a medium.

Another duality is that of chance and control. Chance often manifests itself in the unforeseen detail that only becomes apparent later, in the developing, printing, and editing process, but may take great importance in structuring the piece. I proceed very deliberately; setting up a shot is a slow and careful affair (and then the exposure times themselves average 30-45 min or so). But in a strong sense I am also just feeling my way through: I really *don't see* all that much in the darkness, especially on the ground glass of the 8 by 10" view camera. And so at that stage, I typically do not quite have an image yet: my conception for the piece will come about progressively, over the course of an extended process.

Philippe Mazaud, 2007/2008.

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