

Secondary Roads Pierre Gonnord

French photographer, guest of the festival Forosur_Cáceres exposes his portraits of the nomads of the Spanish-Portuguese border

MANUEL MORALES 26 OCT 2014



Attia, 2011

Since his colleague Cristina García Rodero recommended to him for over five years, “Seek the border, because it has many hidden ways,” French Pierre Gonnord (Cholet, 1963) is dedicated to portraying the nomads who move between Spain and Portugal for work. “With patience and a lot of spent fuel,” he says, Pierre Gonnord has traveled thousands of miles to photograph “individuals away from the cities”. A sample of this study consists of 14 photos in large format - several made in recent months, exhibiting until November 2 at the Renaissance palace Hernando de Ovando, Cáceres, as part of the festival Forosur Cáceres. This contemporary art fair is in its third edition, this time devoted to photography, and Gonnord as guest artist. Since last Wednesday until Sunday there have been exhibitions, debates and workshops, attended by gallerists, collectors, curators, critics and fans.

Gonnord’s exhibition, Gaia, also reflects his lifestyle: “I have been driven by back roads to see what I can learn from these people. The photos are a tribute to those people on both sides of the border. “ Gonnord, who lives in Madrid since 1988 and speaks in a fast Spanish with a French accent, is attracted by the borders because “they are zones of shock, of battles, of crossover, and are also natural separations, a river, a mountain, a lot of energy there. “ This has led Forosur to choose Gonnord as a protagonist: “He is someone who thinks in terms of transhumance” said Rosina Gómez-Baeza, curator of this event promoted by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Junta de Extremadura and has had a budget of 100,000 euros.

Gonnord’s photos are characterized by their black background “to clear the environment and isolate those portrayed” – the elderly, children, horses and even a ram – contrasts with the white walls of the palace courtyard, whose columns give the effect of a gallery of princely portraits. However, looking at us “are humble people, of the country, who have a different texture and live in a way close to the earth, but I learn the local customs of people who give me lessons in dignity.” Gonnord’s first step in his work is not to use the camera. “First I meet the territory and people, without haste, because people are suspicious, of course. That is the greatest barrier and the greatest stimulus. I spend days with them and when I have spent a couple of months, I take a first shot which I give them”.

When I finally get the desired picture with the traditional Hasselblad, I feel for the emotion. “I did not prepare them to pose because I know how they will behave. I try to capture their expressions, I hear them ... by speed shooting, the session lasts a minute because of the extension cord, and you can convert them into models. I prefer to repeat shooting days elsewhere to attract another energy. But I do not bring a studio, that hurts everything.”

Photographer since the late nineties, this Frenchman in love with the light of Madrid has shown in his career preference for portraiture. “Because it’s like shamanism to ask about where we are and where we go. It has something magical that you make with a mysterious tool. This artist recognizes that sometimes when he gets to a village and sees someone who catches his eye: “By his look, by the strength of the face, the mouth ... but then opens that mouth and I say to myself, well, he’s innocent, naive ... that is important to see and hear.” The aim of his portraits is awakening “an attitude of tolerance towards the other”.

A few meters away from the images, a debate took place over the weekend about the power of the Internet and social networking in photography. “I’m not into that, I spend my life on the road. I think you cannot share a picture you’ve done an hour ago, we must reflect. I see a verbal looseness among that. They are very interesting tools but I do not know if we will know how to use them or if they will make them with us.”

When finished with his presentation, Gonnord will go to the Andalusian village of El Ejido, “to meet Sub-Saharan Africans, young people with great force. All my work I’ve done in the Peninsula, I do not need to go to Machu Picchu.” Gonnord just thinks back to get the camera: “I want to take pictures ... life happens fast and the cemetery is full of remorse”.