

RECENT HISTORY PHOTOGRAPHS BY LUC DELAHAYE

The document tends towards the imaginary, fiction tends towards the real. You could say that if you aim at a form of truth through fiction, then the reality will become enigmatic precisely because it is obvious. Documentary photography offers an interesting possibility of achieving a poetic form. For me that is more than just an interesting possibility, it's what I'm aiming at. If an image is powerful enough, if it resists us, if, by its obscure coherence, part of it escapes our understanding, then it means that something has been won from reality.

—“Luc Delahaye: Snap Decision,” *Art Press*, 2005

For more than two decades, Luc Delahaye has photographed world events. As a photojournalist working for magazines such as *Newsweek*, he specialized in war photography, and he has received numerous awards. Concurrently, Delahaye explored several more personal projects, applying documentary-style photography, both black-and-white and color, to social issues such as homelessness in Paris or the economic struggles of life in Russia. Those experiences led to his current work. Initiated in 2001 with the war in Afghanistan, this series of large-scale photographs features significant recent events ranging from natural disasters to genocides. While the subjects are familiar to us through the media, his images propose a different view of them.

Delahaye continues to travel around the world recording global events. He uses a medium-format, handheld camera with a wide-angle lens and works with film that limits him to a few exposures. Although his approach is direct, like a reporter's, he aims for “perfect action, pure in its efficacy.” His goal is to create an image “that is subservient to neither the real nor to [his own] intention.”

From a distant and head-on point of view, Delahaye's camera records each scene with detail and accuracy and includes an uncommon peripheral vision that reveals the extended context of the events he renders. Inspired by the “reticent, understated, and impersonal” aesthetic of the photographer Walker Evans (American, 1903–1975), Delahaye applies the same qualities—documentary photography and a serial approach—to his work.

His choice of subjects also reveals a similar interest in the “ordinary.” By photographing seemingly mundane meetings, he provides unusual access to influential international institutions such as the United Nations and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). His photographs focus on the long-term effect of current events and reveal their impact well beyond their initial moments in the headlines.

A *Mass Grave near Snagovo, Bosnia* relates to the research into and identification of victims of Serbian war crimes. The photograph focuses on a working group of four individuals isolated in a vast, overwhelming landscape. Delahaye sometimes combines different shots taken at the same event to create a more powerful rendering of

the scene, a common artistic practice. The workers are arranged in a balanced composition based on their body positions: the figures in the center are seated in profile, while those on either side stand, turning their heads from the camera. Their gestures and actions—of digging and collecting, enhanced by the tools in their hands or spread out on the ground—seem to refer to the harvest and farming, evoking the rural scenes painted by Jean-François Millet (French, 1814–1875). None of those elements, including the surprising white, blue, and pink colors that punctuate the brown soil, evoke the tragedy until closer attention reveals human remains.

Enlarged to near-life-size, such quiet and subtle scenes become spectacular. By choosing a higher vantage point, Delahaye engages viewers as direct observers while making us question our ability to comprehend the image as presented—as well as images in general.

The detailed representation and clear successive spatial structure (in which the fore-, middle, and backgrounds are distinct) of Delahaye's photographs lend a surprisingly painterly aesthetic and a cool lyricism to his subjects. This ambivalent combination of documentary photography and dramatic scale suspends the images between fiction and reality, emphasizing what he calls their “obscure coherence” and challenging the viewer's experience and interpretation.

—Anne Lacoste
Department of Photographs

OF RELATED INTEREST

All events are free, unless otherwise noted. Seating reservations are required. For reservations and information, please call (310) 440-7300 or visit www.getty.edu.

Artist's Dialogue

Luc Delahaye in Conversation
Delahaye discusses his work with Philip Gfelter, front-page photo editor for the *New York Times*.
Tuesday, July 31, 7:00 p.m.
Harold M. Williams Auditorium

Talks

Curator's Gallery Talks
Anne Lacoste, assistant curator, Department of Photographs, the J. Paul Getty Museum, leads a gallery talk on the exhibition. Meet under the stairs in the Museum Entrance Hall.
Thursday, August 30, 2:30 p.m.
Museum galleries

GettyGuide™ Audio Player

Hear Delahaye describe his distinctive approach to photographing recent world events. Pick up an audio player in the Museum Entrance Hall.

Visit www.getty.edu

Explore highlights of this exhibition and the Museum's collection on the Getty's Web site.

Also on View

Edward Weston: Enduring Vision
July 31–November 25, 2007
A seminal figure in the history of photography, Edward Weston (American, 1886–1958) began his long career in Southern California. The Getty Museum's collection of Weston prints is among the most significant of any art museum, spanning four decades of the artist's work. This exhibition traces the breadth of Weston's accomplishments in California, Mexico, and across the United States, employing a selection of prints drawn from the Museum's holdings alongside a smaller number of complementary loans. One gallery is devoted to photographs by Weston's colleagues and students.

COMING
SOON

The Goat's Dance: Photographs by Graciela Iturbide
December 18, 2007–April 13, 2008

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Luc Delahaye was born in France in 1962 and became a photojournalist in his early twenties. In the 1990s he distinguished himself for his coverage of the wars in Lebanon, Afghanistan, Rwanda, Chechnya, and Bosnia. A member of the Magnum agency from 1994 to 2004, he worked independently or was commissioned by Western news magazines. Delahaye was awarded the Robert Capa Gold Medal in 1993 and 2002; World Press Photo first prizes in 1993, 1994, and 2003; the ICP Infinity Award in 2001; the Niépce Prize in 2002; and the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize in 2005.

In addition to his war coverage, Delahaye realized several documentary portrait series: *Portraits/1* (1996) is a series of photo booth

portraits of homeless people he encountered in the Parisian subway. *Memo* (1997) is a collection of portraits of war victims in Bosnia, reproduced from the obituary pages of a local newspaper. *L'Autre (The Other)* (1999) presents a selection of portraits of people he photographed in the subway without their knowledge. Another series, *Une Ville (A City)* (2003), is a social and architectural survey in a suburb of Toulouse, France.

In the winter of 1998–99, Delahaye traveled to Russia to photograph the social consequences of the country's economic crisis. Depicting the struggles of the Russian people, this striking series, titled *Winterreise (Winter Journey)* was published in

2000. Through its rich colors, it reveals a transcendent narrative form of documentary photography.

Since 2001 Delahaye has dedicated himself to a large-scale photographic series of current events, traveling around the world to depict new subjects. A first selection of a dozen images, *History*, was published in 2003. His work is in the collections of several institutions and has been exhibited internationally, including at the National Media Museum (Bradford, England, 2004), Huis Marseille (Amsterdam, 2004), the Cleveland Museum of Art (2005), La Maison Rouge (Paris, 2005), and the Sprengel Museum (Hannover, Germany, 2006).



Taliban

November 12, 2001. In the Shomali Valley, a Taliban soldier killed during an offensive of the Northern Alliance on Kabul, the Afghanistan capital

After the September 11 attacks, the United States and members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) decided to provide support to the Northern Alliance, that is, the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan. Their goal was to wrest control of the country from the Taliban, an extremist religious/military group that ruled most of the territory after winning the civil war in 1992–96.

Chromogenic print, 2002; 110.8 x 236.9 cm

Courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Ralph M. Parsons Fund



A Rally of the Opposition Candidate Alexander Milinkevich

March 12, 2006. In Minsk, Belarus, a rally for the opposition candidate Alexander Milinkevich during the presidential election campaign

Led by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka since 1994, Belarus is generally considered the last European authoritarian regime. The European Union and the United States enacted sanctions against the government, condemning its election irregularities and the persistent violations of fundamental human rights. Despite restrictions of freedom of expression and assembly, a rally for opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich was organized during the week before the presidential election.

Digital chromogenic print, 2007; 181.9 x 247.3 cm

Promised gift of Michael and Jane Wilson



The Palestine Hotel

April 15, 2003. The Palestine Hotel, home of the international media in Baghdad

In the 2003 Iraq war, the Palestine Hotel was the headquarters for the international media covering the conflict. On April 8, 2003, during the U.S. invasion of Baghdad, an American tank fired a shell at the hotel, killing two journalists and wounding three.

Chromogenic print, 2004; 111 x 241 cm

Promised gift of Michael and Jane Wilson



The Milosevic Trial

September 26, 2002. Slobodan Milosevic, former president of Yugoslavia, at the opening of his trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, The Hague, Netherlands

Slobodan Milosevic (1941–2006) was indicted by the United Nation's International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia for crimes against humanity in the wars of Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo in the 1990s. The Kosovo trial began in February 2002 in The Hague. September 26, 2002, was the opening day of his trial related to the Bosnia and Croatia cases. It was suspended following his death on March 11, 2006.

Chromogenic print, 2003; 109.2 x 243.8 cm

Courtesy of the High Museum of Art, Atlanta. Purchase with funds from the H. B. and Doris Massey Charitable Trust, 2003.55



The Registration of Internally Displaced People in Eastern Chad

May 27, 2006. Near the Chadian village of Koubigou, close to the Sudanese border, the registration of internally displaced people for the distribution of nonfood items

Since 2003 Darfur civilians have been the victims of the Sudanese civil war militia attacks, leading to more than 300,000 estimated deaths and the displacement of more than 2.4 million people, including more than 200,000 refugees in Chad. In 2006 the violence extended to Chad and Central Africa.

Digital chromogenic print, 2007; 281.9 x 137 cm

Courtesy of the artist



Jenin Refugee Camp

April 14, 2002. The Jenin refugee camp, in the West Bank, after the battle between Palestinian militants and the Israeli Army

The Jenin refugee camp is located in Israeli-occupied territory, and its current status is subject to the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement. The city of Jenin had been handed over to Palestinian authority in 1996. In 2002 Israel launched Operation Defensive Shield in response to the Palestinian uprising known as the second Intifada. In April an intense battle occurred at the Jenin refugee camp. The city was then retaken by Israel.

Chromogenic print, 2003; 109.2 x 243.8 cm

Courtesy of the High Museum of Art, Atlanta. Gift of the artist and Ricco/Maresca Gallery, 2003.54



132nd Ordinary Meeting of the Conference

September 15, 2004. The 132nd meeting of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Conference at its Vienna headquarters

OPEC was founded in 1960 by Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela. Today it consists of twelve countries that hold about two-thirds of the world's oil reserves. Its primary goal is determining—and stabilizing—international oil prices while safeguarding its members' individual and collective interests.

Digital chromogenic print, 2006; 138.7 x 300 cm

Promised gift of Michael and Jane Wilson



A Mass Grave near Snagovo, Bosnia

November 16, 2006. A team of the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) at work on site #SNA04ZVO, near the village of Snagovo in Bosnia

The ICMP has been working on locating, recovering, and identifying people who disappeared during the conflicts in Bosnia and Herze-

govina. DNA analysis of mortal remains is compared with blood samples collected from relatives of the missing. In less than five years, the ICMP has assisted in identifying more than 11,000 individuals, accounting for more than half of the victims.

Digital chromogenic print, 2007; 181.9 x 301.9 cm

Courtesy of the artist



Musenyi

April 6, 2004. In the village of Musenyi, Rwanda, a burial ceremony for eighty anonymous victims on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the genocide

During the 1994 civil war in Rwanda, a mass extermination was supervised by the Hutu-dominated government and carried out by two extremist Hutu militia groups against the ethnic Tutsis and their Hutu sympathizers. Between April and July 1994, an estimated 800,000 to 1,000,000 people were killed.

Chromogenic print, 2004; 122.5 x 263 cm

Courtesy of the artist



Aftermath in Meulaboh

January 9, 2005. Aftermath of the tsunami in the city of Meulaboh, Aceh province, Indonesia

Meulaboh, located just under one hundred miles from the December 2004 earthquake's epicenter, was among the areas hardest hit by the Indian Ocean tsunami. The city lost one-third of its population, an estimated death toll of 40,000.

Digital chromogenic print, 2006; 175.9 x 241 cm

The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007.15

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July 31–November 25, 2007 The J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Center