

## BEYOND ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY

*Ed Barnas*



*Georges Rousse, "Reims" 2012*

Photography, by its nature, is a documentary medium. What it documented and how it is presented depend on the vision of the photographer and the choices made when interacting with a particular environment. With a trait shared by many photographers over the history of photography, Georges Rousse has long had an affinity for abandoned and derelict spaces, a trait shared by many photographers over the history of photography. His early interest in such spaces led to a career as an architectural photographer. Exposure to Land Art and Kazimir Malevich's Black Square against a white field moved him away from traditional documentation to a more interactive approach, combining painting, architecture and photography.

Rousse seeks out spaces that are in transition, either derelict or about to be repurposed. It does not matter if that space is old (Reims, 2012; Châsse-sur-Rhône, 2010) or modern (Alfort, 2002; Barcelone, 2003). He inhabits it emotionally and intellectually, transforming it in his mind's eye from an ordinary space into something transcendent. He sketches out his vision on paper and then proceeds to physically interact with the space through paint

and/or installation and document the result. His palette makes use of a wide variety of geometric forms and primary and secondary colors (as well as shades of grey) to add emotional depth to the empty space.



*Georges Rousse, "Guise" 2015*

His intervention with the site is a hands-on process. It is not the result of darkroom manipulation or of digital post-production. Rousse establishes his camera's viewpoint, outlines his vision on the ground glass, proceeds to execute it either with a construct (Reims, 2012) or with paint applied to existing surfaces to create floating trompe l'oeil geometric shapes (Uz4850ès, 2011). Sometimes the original color choice is not as effective as envisioned and is changed during the process (as occurred with both Châsse-sur-Rhône, 2010, and Utopia, 2015).

The resultant prints are large - the eleven images on display range from 43" x 51" to 49" x 63" in size. This allows the viewer to come up close and visually almost enter the space presented. Seeing these images on the gallery walls I was struck by the feeling of depth they engendered. While this is partly due to the careful choice of viewpoint, sharpness of detail and the extreme depth of field, Rouse's geometric intervention in the space carries it beyond those technical aspects, moving beyond the realm of classic architectural photography into a more spiritual realm.



*Georges Rouse, "Paris" 1996*

These images need to be seen at the size envisioned by Rouse in order to most effectively experience their depth. I found myself drawn most deeply into those images featuring staircases -- the deep black descending spiral shown in *Paris*, 1996, with its chalked highlights and red corner. The curved handrails of *Guise*, 2015, coupled with floating intersecting circles, also pulled me in.

Rouse is often invited to inhabit spaces around the world and an interesting example of these residencies is a pair of images done in Matsushima, Japan (2013). Here the viewer is presented with two opposite (i.e., back-to-back) views inside an empty home. Rouse noted that the blue star and its reverse were chosen as a symbol of hope after the Fukushima disaster.

My only qualm is that I would have liked to have seen more examples of Rouse's use of constructs in his work. Some glimpses of these appeared in the film about his work, *Utopia*, which was screened at the gallery. However,

gallery wall space is limited and the large scale of his prints severely limits the number that could be shown.



*Georges Rousse, "Matsushima" 2013*



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