

'For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world – such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define. The spectator is a *prince* who everywhere rejoices in his incognito.... Thus the lover of universal life enters into the crowd as though it were an immense reservoir of electrical energy. Or we might liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life.'

This translation from Charles Baudelaire's *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (1863) is from Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (Phaidon Press, 1965), p. 9

This publication accompanies
the exhibition *A Sense of Place*,
presented at Les Rencontres d'Arles
from 6 July to 4 October 2026.

Curator: Géraldine Lay

Artistic advisor: Cyril Delhomme

ARLES
2026
LES RENCONTRES
DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE

A SENSE OF PLACE

HARRY GRUYAERT

Harry Gruyaert invites us on a sweeping urban tracking shot, freed from the cardinal points that usually mark out such a journey. New York, Paris, Tokyo, Moscow, Antwerp, Ouarzazate, Old Delhi or Zanzibar: ultimately, the destination matters little. What links these photographs is not so much the subject but the way it presents itself to the viewer, the way it takes shape under the photographer's gaze: the vibrant intensity of colour, the sharp outlines of shadow, the urban geometries that punctuate space like a jazz phrase.

Yet this meandering, which echoes the films the photographer creates from his images and which he has brought together here under the title *A Sense of Place*, reveals another dimension of his work: a chronicle of urban life. The city becomes a theatre where social processes shape identities, where each person invents – simultaneously – their own individuality and their sense of belonging to a collective. Whilst Harry Gruyaert's compositions and his mastery of colour have often been celebrated, less attention has been paid to the prominence his meanderings accord to the anonymous city-dweller.

In a café, on a street corner, or leaning against a wall, his figures are captured in the apparent insignificance of everyday life. Harry Gruyaert's gaze is driven by nothing more than a curiosity devoid of any social hierarchy. The visual power arises from the reconfiguration of reality through colour and composition. Social rituals, eclectic architecture and muted lighting, caught in the moment, become strange, tender or subtly ironic. The ordinary becomes theatrical.

This vast exploration of modern life, conducted over more than fifty years across the globe, not only captures what is happening in the image, but also reveals, beyond the frame fixed by the photographer's eye, a genuine zest for life.

Géraldine Lay









LIST OF WORKS

p. 7: 2nd Avenue/42nd Street, New York City, NY, USA, 1982
p. 8: Paris, France, 1985
p. 9: CDG Airport, Paris, France, 1985
p. 10: Papeete, Tahiti, French Polynesia, 1985
p. 11: Waterloo Battle Commemoration, Boom, Belgium, 1988
p. 12: Antwerp, Belgium, 1992
p. 13: Mombasa, Kenya, 1988
p. 15: Old Delhi, India, 1985
p. 16 and 17: Zanzibar, Tanzania, 1989
p. 19: Madison Avenue, New York City, NY, USA, 1969
p. 20: New York City, NY, USA, 1985
p. 21: Paris, France, 1985
p. 22: Brussels, Belgium, 1981
p. 23: Paris, France, 1985
p. 25: New York City, NY, USA, 1985
p. 27: Moscow, USSR, 1989
p. 29: Arles, France, 2022
p. 30: Galway, Ireland, 1988
p. 31: La Courneuve, France, 1985
p. 33: Manhattan, New York City, NY, USA, 1979
p. 34: New York City, NY, USA, 2014
p. 36: Tokyo, Japan, 1996
p. 37: Tokyo, Japan, 1997
p. 38: Los Angeles, CA, USA, 1982
p. 39: Istanbul, Turkey, 1998
p. 41: Paris, France, 1985
p. 43: Carnival, Antwerp, Belgium, 1992
p. 45: Los Angeles, CA, USA, 1982
p. 46: New York City, NY, USA, 2002
p. 47: Trans-Europe Express, Brussels-Paris, 1981
p. 49: Gare du Midi, Brussels, Belgium, 1981
p. 50: Shibuya district, Tokyo, Japan, 1996

p. 52: Shanghai, China, 1999
p. 53 and 55: Las Vegas, NV, USA, 1982
p. 56: Washington DC, USA, 1986
p. 57: Moscow, USSR, 1989
p. 59: Ouarzazate, Morocco, 1986
p. 61: Gare du Midi, Brussels, Belgium, 1981
p. 62: Moscow, USSR, 1989
p. 63: Galway, Ireland, 1988
p. 65: Northern France, 2001
p. 66: Antwerp, Belgium, 1988
p. 69: New York City, NY, USA, 1982
p. 70: New York City, NY, USA, 2017
p. 71: Paris, France, 1985
p. 73: Manhattan, New York City, NY, USA, 1979
p. 74: Istanbul, Turkey, 2006
p. 75: Entrance to GUM, Moscow, USSR, 1989
p. 77: New York City, NY, USA, 1996
p. 79: Rue Royale, Brussels, Belgium, 1981
p. 80: Cafeteria, Malmö, Sweden, 1982
p. 81: Las Vegas, NV, USA, 1982
p. 82: Killorglin, County Kerry, Ireland, 1988
p. 83: Paris, France, 1985
p. 85: Waterloo, Belgium, 1981
p. 87: Paris, France, 1985
p. 89: Near Wavre, province of Brabant, Belgium, 1981
p. 90: On the road, California, USA, 1982
p. 91: Dominican Republic, 1991
p. 92: Paris, France, 1985
p. 93: County Kerry, Ireland, 1983
p. 95: Tokyo, Japan, 1997
p. 96: Paris, France, 2025
p. 97: Manhattan, New York City, NY, USA, 1982
p. 99: Los Angeles, CA, USA, 1982

p. 101: Thermae Palace Hotel, Ostend, Belgium, 1988
p. 102: Antwerp, Belgium, 1988
p. 103: Pontedeume, Galicia, Spain, 1998
p. 104: Antwerp, Belgium, 1992
p. 105: Antwerp, Belgium, 1981
p. 107: Liège, Belgium, 1981

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Actes Sud
Anne-Sylvie Bameule

Les Rencontres d'Arles
Christoph Wiesner
Éline Gourgues
Amanda Antunes

Géraldine Lay
Cyril Delhomme

Manon Lenoir
Agnès Dahan

Albin Millot / Atelier Pigment
Daniel Regard / Les Artisans du Regard

Roger Szmulewicz / Gallery Fifty One

Marie Kalt
Valéry Faidherbe
Tuur Florizoone

Agnès Sire
Saskia & Marieke

Magnum Photos

COLOPHON

Text
Géraldine Lay

Translation
Patrick Lennon

Copy editing
Derek Scoins

Project management Hannibal Books
Hadewych Van den Bossche

Design
Agnès Dahan / Agnès Dahan Studio

Scans
Albin Millot / Atelier Pigment

Lithography
Daniel Regard / Les Artisans du Regard

Production manager
Camille Desproges

Printing & binding
Brizzolis, Madrid, Spain

Publishers
Manon Lenoir (Les Éditions Textuel)
Gautier Platteau (Hannibal Books)

© French edition: Les Éditions Textuel, 2026
www.editionstextuel.com

© English edition: Hannibal Books, 2026
www.hannibalbooks.be

HANNIBAL

ISBN 978 94 9353 132 1
D/2026/11922/64
NUR 653

Hannibal Books team
Laura Bijnens, Sara Colson, Pieter
De Meyere, Natacha Hofman, Séverine
Lacante, Sofie Meert, Gautier Platteau,
Hedwig Scheltjens, Stephanie Van
den Bosch, Hadewych Van den Bossche

All rights reserved. No part of this
publication may be reproduced or
transmitted in any form or by any means,
electronic or mechanical, including
photocopy, recording or any other
information storage and retrieval system,
without prior permission in writing
from the publisher.