

BRUNO SERRALONGUE
« Histoires des avant-dernières luttes »
(Stories of the Last Struggles Before The Last)



Florange series, 2012, 125 x 156 cm, © Air de Paris, Paris

Bruno Serralongue's new solo show at Air de Paris presents a selection of photographs from his recent series: South Sudan 2011, on the official commemoration of the country's independence; Kosovo 2009, still in preparation, on the construction of a new country in Europe; and Florange 2012, the working title for a series on the industrial dispute at Arcelor Mittal in France.

Serralongue subverts both the procedures of conceptual photography – revealing the complexity of the real more than exhausting its forms – and a certain dematerialisation at work in contemporary art. Triggering a reversal of the usual state of affairs, he renders visible things which otherwise would be no more than media prompts. Despite the overt construction of his images, however, his intention is neither simply formal or even visible. His way of seeing focuses very much on the veritable historical nature of the events he covers, on the contingency of events which are not self-contained but rather, as he puts it, "endless constructions of possible conflicts via the resolution of the preceding ones."

Here he borrows and tweaks the title of Siegfried Kracauer's unfinished historical writings, *History: The Last Things Before The Last*, in images that reveal the full complexity of things and their history: things that are paradoxically intangible in that they reference the endlessly postponed end of history.

Kosovo series
2009 - ongoing



Bruno

Bruno Serralongue, *L'interprète*, Grand Hôtel, Pristina, Kosovo, 27 Avril 2011, 2011, ilfochrome collé sur aluminium, cadre et verre, 126 x 157 cm, courtesy Air de Paris

The events commemorating the first anniversary of the independence of Kosovo on February 17th 2009 were the occasion for me to shoot a first series of photos in Pristina and repeat a procedure that I put into place for my previous series: travel to a destination under my own steam and take photos of an event using a view camera alongside reporters, without having an official press card or invitation.

But I also wanted to return to Kosovo in the absence of any programmed events and media interest. Quite arbitrarily, I allowed myself 5 years during which I would regularly return to Kosovo after which the work would be considered to have reached its term.

I don't wish to answer the question whether I am for or against independence. I acknowledge the facts: a new country has come into existence in Europe. What I find much more interesting is to envisage what this means at a time when questions of identity and immigration are constantly in the headlines.

Sud Soudan series



Bruno Serralongue, "The Roots of South Sudan", Juba, Sud-Soudan, 08 juillet 2011, 2011, Ilfochrome collé sur aluminium, capot Plexiglas, 125 x 156 cm, © Air de Paris, Paris

South Sudan

After decades of civil war between the Sudanese army and rebels from the south finally led to the signing of a peace agreement in 2005 and a process of independence overseen by the United Nations, South Sudan officially became independent on 9 July 2011. The event was marked by three days of ceremonies in the new capital of Juba, attended by a number of heads of state and government representatives. South Sudan thus became the 54th state on the African continent and the UN's 193rd member.

It is also the fourth country since 2000 – together with East Timor (2002), Montenegro (2006) and Kosovo (2008) – to gain its independence in the wake of a civil war that culminated in the partition of a country along ethnic, linguistic or religious lines.

At a conference in Washington Hillary Clinton, head of America's State Department, summed up the country's situation as, "South Sudan survived being born, but does need intensive care." As for the other newly independent nations, it is up to the United Nations to ensure this intensive care; in varying degrees it assisted them along the path to independence and is now taking an active part in establishing executive and judiciary institutions on the model of the parliamentary democracy I live in.

Justifying these wars of independence is not my main concern. In principle I'm always in favour. What bothers me is the role played by other powers in the name of the "right to intervene". As Alain Badiou has said regarding another conflict, "The intervention showed

that except in out-of-the-way places where people can go on massacring each other for decades on a small scale without "morality" rising up in protest, the imperial powers – headed by the United States and under the NATO umbrella, with the UN they despise covering for them – hold a monopoly of war that can be summed up as 'We won't let anybody win a war.' [...] What counts is that nobody with real goals should triumph. It could be objected that it was as victors in wars that the Western countries, and conspicuously the Americans, have built their power. Exactly right. That only means that the lesson has been learned: 'We won't let anybody become powerful.'"

Bruno Serralongue was born in Châtelleraut in 1968. He lives and works in Paris, and since 2004 has been teaching at the Geneva University of Art and Design. Since completing his studies at the National School of Photography in Arles and Villa Arson in Nice in the 1990s, he has produced a uniquely important body of work that has been exhibited in France and abroad, most recently at the San Francisco Art Institute. He has also had retrospectives at WIELS in Brussels, the Jeu de Paume in Paris, and La Verreina Image Centre in Barcelona. His work is part of many private and public collections, including the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Tate Modern in London, the Fotomuseum in Winterthur, the Centre Pompidou and the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, Paris. His latest series South Sudan is on show at this year's Rencontres de la Photographie in Arles. Monographs on his work have been published by Presses du Réel (2002 and 2011) JRP/Ringier (2011).