

Jean-Pierre Godeaut

the mystery of the aquarium photographs



© J.-P. Godeaut

Jean-Pierre Godeaut was born in Versailles in 1946. After living in his youth in Middle Eastern countries, in 1965 he became the assistant of fashion photographer (Franck Horvat). Thereafter, he was associated with several magazines devoted to decorative arts, especially architecture and interior decoration (*Interiors, Vogue, Elle...*).

In 1980, he discovered the beauty and potentialities of panoramic photography. For him, panoramic vision (both as perception and as photographs) corresponds to the original emotion one receives from the spaces and objects that one discovers with one's own eyes. This technique, which extends well beyond the "wide-angle" one, helps recreate perfectly the gigantic format of Versailles castle's parks and gardens, which he remembers from his childhood with nostalgia. He loves the grandeur and the serenity of walking in the empty park, imagining himself as a personal guest of Louis XIV.

Françoise Ayyandri,

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cocktail party from 6 to 9 pm



Les trois grâces, 1987

the mystery of the aquarium

In a project like the 'Aquarium', one can trace the photographer's passion for the water goddess, called woman. It awakens our archetypal memory of swimming in the golden age of the womb, where there are only liquids and fulfilled desires. These photos of suspended nude women in aquariums move our curiosities, compelling us to dive into these sealed boxes to touch and rescue each siren. Liberated from phobias, entering the magic of each photo, we can share the same instant in which the photographer has frozen time. Here is another mysterious journey with multiple interpretations, as in all the work of Godeaut, from his labyrinth of panoramic inner landscapes, to the tight aquariums with their conserved energies and marvels. We are fascinated by the photographic career of Jean-Pierre Godeaut because his work stirs our imagination and haunts us at the same time.

Nabil Naoum, february 2007

How can one render visible that beyond the visible which makes us say of a place that it is magical, sublime or uncanny? How can one capture in the finite frame the sense of the infinite that permeates an exceptional landscape or setting? How can one render in two dimensions that which in the world of three dimensions is of the order of the fourth dimension: that of the surreal, of dreams, of the poetry of the sensations. Genius loci... the poets of Antiquity baptized "genius of place" that imaginary or mythical presence that we project spontaneously onto those powerful places whose beauty, majesty or strangeness enthrall us and which, as if by a kind of enchantment, transform our sight into vision.

It is this genius of place that Jean-Pierre Godeaut chases out when his gaze rests on one of those settings that awaken in him a lost and now rediscovered sense of wonder: a window opening onto infinity, as the creators of the French garden conceived it; the tropical fantasy beneath Belgium's skies; the lost dream of Algiers the "White City" in the midst of its botanical gardens, the Jardin d'Essais; the water-skimming perspective of the eternal Venetian...

To complete his visions in all their magnitude, Godeaut has chosen the optical instrument which in his eyes is incomparable and of which he has become a virtuoso: the wide-angle lens. This technique, which the founding fathers of photography had dreamed of, is remarkable in that it radically opens out the angle of vision, allowing the photographer to set down in a great sweep on film all the space taken in by the eye - with the advantage over the naked eye that the image has the same clarity from one edge of the photo to the other. A single perspective is sufficient to see where reality would require us to turn our head. But technology is not everything. The impetus that comes from the artist is also essential. It is with this that Godeaut captivates us - with his panoramic views that push back the limits of the visible, that stretch out space, in order to give substance to the magic of the scene, to arouse the genius of the place.

Parks, chateaux, palaces, follies, gardens, statues, rotundas, monuments - Godeaut shows us all these sumptuous settings, all these grandiose places, these perfect arrangements, as if they were frozen in their splendor, suspended from the eternity of an instant. But he does this in order to make them slip away all the more toward their vanishing point, to make them become one with the



Les Niobides, Villa Médicis, 1979



Bomarzo, Italie, 1981

movement of their curves, make the surfaces vibrate, liberate the play of shadows, reflections, shimmers, transparencies; to draw us further into the distance, the mists, the mirage effects; to pull us into the giratory movement of the colonnades, the circular dance of the palm trees, the ballet of the statues, the awakening of fauns, shovel us into the mouth of the monster, lose us in the labyrinth of stairways or the tomb of kings. Where does this ghostly gondolier come from and where is he going as he rows on the lagoon with Venice sinking behind him?... It is a vain question! Let us allow ourselves to be transported by this crepuscular image, even if it means being precipitated to the other side of world.

With a few exceptions, Godeaut fashions great empty settings, deserted scenes to occupy his panoramic views. He does this the better to fill them with an overwhelming sense of mystery. Perhaps his own, perhaps ours... The transience of dreams on the polished surfaces of marbles, mirrors, ponds and windows. The fragility of things beneath the brilliant sheen of appearances. A voyager into the soul, wherever he goes in the world, Jean-Pierre Godeaut - armed with his wide-angle lens - always finds a way to awaken the winged genius of the places which have caught his eye.

Georges Marbeck, Paris, october 1996

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