

# GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE



**ROBERT POLIDORI**

*Photographs*

25.02.2023 – 29.04.2023

Press kit

# GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE



Robert Polidori, Mumbai, 2011. Photo: Dinesh Madhavan

*"Where you point the camera is the question  
and the picture you get is the answer to decipher."*

Born in Montreal in 1951, the Canadian photographer Robert Polidori, who lives in Ojai, California, is known for his large-scale photographs of empty urban environments and interior spaces, often rundown or destroyed. In his photographs, history resonates through architecture that was defined by that vanished presence, sorts of time capsules that jealously guard memories. Polidori himself considers the rooms and places he chooses as “memory theatres” where presence no longer exists. All that remains are the structures, which could disappear forever at any moment. In the 1970s, he arrived in New York and worked at the Anthology Film Archives under the supervision of Jonas Mekas. He graduated from the State University of New York in 1980. In 1998, he obtained the World Press Award for his coverage of the construction of Getty Museum, then, in 1999 and 2000, he received the Alfred Eisenstaedt Award for the photographs he took for the New Yorker Magazine. In 2007 and 2008, he obtained the Communication Arts Award. Recently, in 2022, he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for photography. His works grace many collections, including those of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

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**Robert Polidori**

*1624 North Claiborne Avenue, New Orleans, March  
2006*

Photo mounted on aluminium

Ed. 1/10

101.6 x 137.2 cm / 40 x 54 in

© **Robert Polidori**

Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Cologne, Paris, St. Moritz

# GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE



**Robert Polidori**

*West End Boulevard, New Orleans, September  
2005*

C-print (on Fuji Crystal Archive paper) on Dibond  
101.6 x 137.2 cm / 40 x 54 in

© **Robert Polidori**

**Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Cologne, Paris, St. Moritz**

# GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE

**ROBERT POLIDORI**

*Photographs*

25.02.2023 – 29.04.2023

Galerie Karsten Greve is happy to present *Photographs*, a solo exhibition featuring the Canadian photographer Robert Polidori. Through a selection of photographs taken in Beirut, Versailles, Pripyat and New Orleans, the artist sheds light on the link between architecture and memory.

In his photographs, Robert Polidori captures a troubled, timeless past. Venturing into abandoned or inaccessible places, he documents areas ravaged by time and the seasons, where the memory of the past is tangible.

*“People always ask, ‘How did you get into photography?’ Through Frances Yates, and her book The Art of Memory, which had a profound impact on me. It traces the history of mnemonic systems, from ancient Greece to the early seventeenth century. I had always thought the natural application of the camera was to serve history — that was its utilitarian function. But one of the things mentioned in The Art of Memory was that students of memory would study empty rooms, a concept the Romans called locus”* Robert Polidori explained.

He thus photographed New Orleans in 2005, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, a decision taken impulsively at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York when he was about to board a plane for a completely different destination. There, he discovered apocalyptic scenes. *West End Boulevard, New Orleans, September, 2005*, immortalises a small house crushed by trees and dominated by a sinister-looking sky — an image that exudes *pathos*. Polidori returned to New Orleans in 2006, six months after the hurricane’s deadly rampage. In the titles of his photographs, the place name is always given, as well as the numbers of the empty houses fighting to remain upright. In his works, the human figure, the main victim, is absent, while all these relics gather around it. In *5020 Warrington Street, New Orleans, March, 2006*, viewers feel both that they are the witnesses of a terrible event and trespassers, slipping into a private, intimate place: a symmetrical bedroom with two wardrobes, the abandoned clothes the only sign of its former occupants.

That absent presence is what so utterly fascinates Polidori. It is there, too, in his series captured in Pripyat, Ukraine, the strange town built at the beginning of the 1970s to house those working at the Chernobyl nuclear power station and their families. It became a ghost town after the fatal accident that occurred in the early hours of 26 April 1986. Polidori visited 15 years later, in 2001. He discovered architecture that was frozen in time, covered in dust. In *Music Theory Classroom in School #5, Pripyat, 2001*, Polidori thus presents viewers with an old music classroom, identifiable as

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such through an old piano at the back on the right. On the walls, the paint is flaking and the room is completely buried in dust. The pictures are remarkably clear, an effect the artist was able to achieve by using a large camera.

In Beirut, his photographs of Hotel Petra illustrate the way human activities and the passing of time have left their mark on the walls, and how the rooms bear witness to their history. Located in the centre of Beirut, Hotel Petra, once grand and luxurious, was damaged during the civil war in the 1980s and then abandoned. In *Hotel Petra #5, Beirut*, 2010, Robert Polidori reveals a building giving in to the passing of time and embracing decay. As in Pripyat, there are layers of paint flaking off in a superposition of motifs — a slow, almost lascivious, deterioration unfolding with the passing of time. However, as long as the walls still stand, they will hold the memory of their former glory.

In a certain way, Robert Polidori views these places as memory capsules. The absence of the human figure emphasises the importance of the architecture that is structured around it. That intention is evident in his photographs of the Château de Versailles, which he started to photograph at the beginning of the 1980s, during the very long renovation and maintenance works. A landmark monument, the Château de Versailles was trodden not only by kings and aristocrats, but also by the countless crowds of tourists that keep it alive today. However, although there were endless luxurious interiors, the artist was just as interested in the oddly bare picture rails, visible in *Salle la surintendance de Colbert, (6) ANR.01.006, Salles du XVII, Aile du Nord – R.d.C, Château de Versailles, France*, 2007, as in the rich mouldings and decorations that are artworks in themselves, which feature in *Boiserie detail, Salon d'Angle (Salon de Jeu) de Madame du Barry, Corps Central - 2ème étage*, 2007. The Château de Versailles thus becomes an uninhabited palimpsest, a temple of memory frozen in time.

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**Robert Polidori**

*5020 Warrington Street, New Orleans, March  
2006*

Photo mounted on aluminium  
101.6 x 137.2 cm / 40 x 54 in

© **Robert Polidori**

Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Cologne, Paris, St. Moritz

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**Robert Polidori**

*Music Theory Classroom in School #5, Pripjat*  
2001

Photo mounted on aluminium  
101.6 x 127 cm / 40 x 50 in

© **Robert Polidori**

Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Cologne, Paris, St. Moritz

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## Awards, grants and commissions

2020	Guggenheim Fellowship
2008	Liliane Bettencourt Prix de la Photographie for <i>Parcours Muséologique Revisité</i>
2006/07	Deutscher Fotobuchpreis for <i>After the Flood</i>
2000	Alfred Eisenstadt Award for Magazine Photography, Architecture
1999	Alfred Eisenstadt Award for Magazine Photography, Architecture
1998/06	Staff photographer, <i>The New Yorker Magazine</i>
1998	World Press Award for Art

## Selection of public collections

Instituto Moreira Salles, São Paulo, Brazil  
Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal, Canada  
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France  
Château de Versailles, Versailles, France  
La Caisse des dépôts et consignations, Paris, France  
Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris, France  
Fundación « la Caixa », Barcelona, Spain  
UBS Art Collection, Zürich, Switzerland  
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, United Kingdom  
Briscoe Center for American History, Austin, TX, USA  
Colby College, Waterville, ME, USA  
First National City Bank of New York, NY, USA  
Grinnell College, Grinnell, IA, USA  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA, USA  
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX, USA  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA  
New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA, USA  
New York University, New York, NY, USA  
Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, USA  
The Berman Collection, Los Angeles, LA, USA  
The Centre Pompidou, Paris, France  
J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, LA, USA  
The Link Group, Chicago, IL, USA  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, USA  
Santander, New York, NY, USA  
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, USA  
Yale University, New Haven, CT, USA

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**Robert Polidori**

*Boiserie détail, Salon d'Angle (Salon de Jeu) de Madame du Barry, Corps Central - 2ème étage*

Photo mounted on aluminium

2007

182.9 x 152.4 cm / 72 x 60 in

© **Robert Polidori**

Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Cologne, Paris, St. Moritz

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## Selection of personal exhibitions

- 2023 *Robert Polidori. Photographs*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, France
- 2022 *Robert Polidori: Recollections*, New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA, USA  
*Present/Past: The Robert Polidori Photographic Archive*, Briscoe Center for American History, Austin, TX, USA  
*Robert Polidori: Total Gnosis Enigma*, Kasmin, New York, NY
- 2019 *Robert Polidori: Fra Angelico / Opus Operantis*, Flowers Gallery, London, United Kingdom
- 2018 *Robert Polidori: Devotion Abandoned*, Studio Trisorio, Naples, Italy  
*Robert Polidori: Fra Angelico / Opus Operantis*, Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York, NY, USA
- 2016 *Robert Polidori: Ecophilia / Chronostasis*, Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York, NY, USA  
*Robert Polidori: 1986-2016 Remembering Chernobyl*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, France
- 2015 *Robert Polidori*, Camera Work, Berlin, Germany  
*Robert Polidori, Exteriors and Interiors*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne, Germany  
*Robert Polidori, Versailles*, Edwynn Houk Gallery, Zurich, Germany
- 2014 *Robert Polidori, Spuren der Zeit*, Museum Bad Arolsen, Bad Arolsen, Germany  
*Versailles, The Memories of Walls*, Fontana Gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
*Robert Polidori, Selected Works*, Erie Art Museum, Erie, Pennsylvania, PA
- 2013 *Robert Polidori, Versailles*, Mary Boone Gallery, New York City, NY  
*Robert Polidori, La Mémoire des Murs*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, France  
*Robert Polidori, Selected Works*, Faulconer Gallery, Grinnell, IA  
*Robert Polidori, Secrets de Versailles*, Galerie de Bellefeuille, Montreal, Canada
- 2012 *Robert Polidori*, World Inventory, Weinstein Gallery, Minneapolis, MN, USA  
*Robert Polidori, Retrospective*, Galleria Carla Sozzani, 10 Corso Como, Seoul, South Korea  
*Robert Polidori & Jonas Mekas, Portraits*, Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York, NY, USA
- 2011 *Robert Polidori, Versailles*, Galleria Carla Sozzani, Milan, Italy  
*Robert Polidori, Ars Memorativa*, Sundaram Tagore Gallery, Hong Kong, HK  
*Robert Polidori*, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID, USA
- 2010 *Robert Polidori*, Camera Work, Berlin, Germany  
*Robert Polidori, Versailles*, Flowers Gallery, London, United Kingdom  
*Robert Polidori, Versailles*, Arthur Rogers Gallery, New Orleans, LA, USA
- 2009 *Robert Polidori, Fotografias*, Instituto Moreira Salles, São Paulo, Brazil  
*Robert Polidori, Fotografias*, Instituto Moreira Salles, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
*Robert Polidori*, Musée d'Art Contemporain, Montreal, Canada
- 2008 *Robert Polidori, After The Flood*, Ogden Museum, New Orleans, LA, USA  
*Robert Polidori*, Camera Work, Berlin, Germany  
*Robert Polidori, Versailles, Etats Transitoires*, Flowers Gallery, London, United Kingdom  
*Robert Polidori, Versailles, Etats Transitoires*, Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto, Canada  
*Robert Polidori, Versailles, Etats Transitoires*, Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York, NY, USA  
*Robert Polidori, After the Flood*, Aurthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans, LA, USA
- 2007 *Robert Polidori, After The Flood*, Jarach Gallery, Venice, Italy  
*Robert Polidori, After the Flood*, Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto, Canada
- 2006 *New Orleans, After the Flood*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, USA  
*Fotografien*, Martin Gropius Bau Museum, Berlin, Germany  
*Robert Polidori, Chernobyl*, Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York, NY, USA

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- 2005 *After The Flood*, Flowers East, London, United Kingdom  
Robert Polidori, Flowers Central, London, United Kingdom  
*Chernobyl*, Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto, Canada
- 2004 *Havana*, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA, USA  
Robert Polidori, Weinstein Gallery, Minneapolis, MN, USA  
Robert Polidori, Contact, Toronto, Canada
- 2003 Robert Polidori, Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York, NY, USA
- 2000 Robert Polidori, Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York, NY, USA
- 1999 Robert Polidori, Weinstein Gallery, Minneapolis, MN, USA  
Robert Polidori, Robert Miller Gallery, Minneapolis, MN, USA  
Robert Polidori, Gallery One, Toronto, Canada
- 1997 Robert Polidori, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France  
Robert Polidori, Robert Miller Gallery, New York, NY, USA
- 1991 Robert Polidori, Galerie Jacques Gordat, Paris, France
- 1990 Robert Polidori, Galerie Urbi et Orbi, Paris, France
- 1988 Robert Polidori, Atelier des Cannelles, Mois de la Photo, Paris, France
- 1983 Robert Polidori, Braathen Fine Arts, New York, NY, USA
- 1979 Robert Polidori, CEPA Gallery, Buffalo, New York, NY, USA
- 1975 Robert Polidori, Whitney Museum of Art New Filmmakers Program, New York, NY, USA

## Selection of collective exhibitions

- 2022/23 *Civilization: vivere, sopravvivere, buon vivere*, Musei San Domenico, Forlì, Italy
- 2022 *Archive Fever – Now*, Les Enluminures, New York, NY, USA  
*Photography from the Collection*, Sheldon Museum of Art, Lincoln, NE, USA
- 2019/23 *Civilization: The Way We Live Now*, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, South Korea; Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia; Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand; Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée, Marseille, France and Musei San Domenico, Forlì, Italy
- 2015 *Frontiers Reimagined: Art that Connects Us*, Museo di Palazzo Grimani, Venice, Italy
- 2014 *Acbrochage*, Galerie Karsten Greve AG, St. Moritz, Switzerland  
*Kunsterräume*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne, Germany
- 2013 *Scale*, Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto, Canada  
*Memory Theatre 2013*, Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, Rochester, NY, USA  
*Preview 2013*, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID, USA
- 2012 *Intérieurs: Angela Grauerholz, Lynne Coben & Robert Polidori*, Art 45, Montreal, Canada  
*Group Show*, Sundaram Tagore, Gallery, Hong Kong, HK  
*Beyond Words: Photography in The New Yorker*, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China  
*Jonas Mekas / Robert Polidori*, Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York City, NY, USA  
*Past as Prologue*, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID, USA

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- 2011 *Spectrum: East/ West/ Beyond*, Sundaram Tagore Gallery, Hong Kong, HK  
*Celebrating Noma's Centennial*, New Orleans Museum of Art NOMA, New Orleans, LA, USA  
*The Interior World*, Danziger Galler, New York City, NY, USA  
*Fifteen Years*, Weinstein Gallery, Minneapolis MN, USA  
*Structure*, Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto, Canada  
Summer 2011, Weinstein Gallery, Minneapolis, MN, USA  
*Process*, Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York City, NY, USA  
*Winter 2011*, Weinstein Gallery, Minneapolis, MN, USA  
*Yangtze The Long River*, Camera Work, Berlin, Germany
- 2010 *Bredaphoto 2010*, Bredaphoto, International Photo Festival, Breda, The Netherlands  
*Il ventre dell'architetto*, Jarach Gallery, Venice, Italy  
*Photography*, Flowers Galleries, London, United Kingdom  
*Art of Caring A Look at Life Through Photography*, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, OH, USA  
*Diversidade e Afinidades: Universo x reverso*, Espaço Cultural Contemporaneo, Brasília, Brazil  
Summer 2010, Weinstein Gallery, Minneapolis, MN, USA  
*40 Years On: Selection of Works by Artists Affiliated to Flowers Over the Past 40 years*, Flowers Galleries, London, United Kingdom
- 2009 *Stigmata*, Musée de l'Elysee, Lausanne, Switzerland  
*Royal Academy Summer Exhibition*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, United Kingdom  
*Alec Soth: Fashion Magazine/ Robert Polidori, Versailles/ Nicholas Africano: Sculpture*, Weinstein Gallery, Minneapolis, MN, USA  
*The Art of Caring: A Look at Life Through Photography*, New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA, USA  
*Wonderland*, McClain Gallery, Houston, TX, USA  
*Trouble in Paradise: Examining the Discord between Nature and Society*, Tucson Museum of Art, Tucson, AZ, USA
- 2008 *The Interior: Contemporary Photographic Views*, Weinstein Gallery, Minneapolis, MN, USA  
*Somenben*, Jarach Gallery, Venice, Italy  
*Remembering Dakota*, North Dakota Museum of Art, Grand Forks, ND, USA  
*Remembering Dakota*, Chazen Museum of Art, Madison, WI, USA  
*Brasil des Focos*, Paços das Artes, São Paulo, Brazil
- 2007 *New Works by Gallery Artists*, Flowers Galleries, London, United Kingdom  
*Says the Junk in the Yard*, Flowers Galleries, London, United Kingdom  
*Brasil des Focos [o olho de fora]*, Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
*Ingenium Photographie et Ingéniosité 1846-2006*, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, Belgium
- 2006 *The Living is Easy*, Flowers Gallery, London, United Kingdom  
*New Work*, Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto, Canada  
*Peintres de la vie moderne*, Donation, Caisse des Dépôts, Paris, France  
*Photograph Collection*, Centre Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, France  
*The Living is Easy*, Flowers Gallery, London, United Kingdom  
*PAPER*, Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto, Canada
- 2005 *Epilogue*, Jackson Fine Art, Atlanta, GA, USA  
*Atomica*, LombardFreid Projects, New York, NY, USA

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- 2004 *Season Preview: New Work by Gallery Artists*, Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto, Canada  
*De Wereld Deugt*, Wijzelf Helaas Wat Minder, de Appel Arts Centre, Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
*Photography at Colby*, Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, ME, USA
- 2003 *Robert Polidori Esther Haase Kuba*, Camera Work, Berlin, Germany
- 2001 Grant Selwyn Fine Arts, Los Angeles, CA, USA
- 1999 *Preview IV*, Weinstein Gallery, Minneapolis, MN, USA
- 1998 Weinstein Gallery New York, NY, USA
- 1997 Robert Miller Gallery, New York, NY, USA
- 1994 Conseil General de la Nièvre, Nevers, France
- 1989 Chicago Art Institute, Chicago, IL, USA
- 1982 Braathen Fine Arts, New York, NY, USA
- 1981 P.S.I., Long Island City, New York, NY, USA
- 1980 BraathenGallozzi Gallery, New York, NY, USA
- 1978 International Center of Photography, New York, NY, USA
- 1975 Bykert Gallery, New York, NY, USA

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**Robert Polidori**

*Hotel Petra #5, Beirut*  
2010

Aqueous Inkjet on natural fiber paper, mounted on Dibond  
151.9 x 189.8 cm / 59 3/4 x 74 3/4 in

© **Robert Polidori**  
Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Cologne, Paris St. Moritz

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**Robert Polidori**

*Salle la surintendance de Colbert, (6) ANR.01.006,  
Salles du XVII, Aile du Nord – R.d.C, Château de Versailles, France  
2007*

Photo mounted on aluminium  
182,9 x 152,4 cm / 72 x 60 in

© **Robert Polidori**

Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Cologne, Paris, St. Moritz

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**Robert Polidori**

*Boiserie détail, Salon d'Angle (Salon de Jeu) de Madame du Barry, Corps Central - 2ème étage*

Photo mounted on aluminium

2007

182.9 x 152.4 cm / 72 x 60 in

© Robert Polidori

Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Cologne, Paris, St. Moritz

# GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE

## DAMN°

### THE HEART OF THE MATTER

*Robert Polidori documents the ramshackle*

By Anna Sansom, 2016.

Robert Polidori photographs human habitats and environments. With his meticulously detailed, large-format colour-film photos, he creates images as a visual acknowledgement or commendation of the present day situation and the history that has devised it, within the confines of a single frame. Beginning his career in avant-garde film, he assisted Jonas Mekas at the Anthology Film Archives in New York, which critically shaped his approach to his métier. Having become known for his images documenting decay, desolation, and destruction in Havana, Chernobyl, and New Orleans, Polidori has since set his sights on population and urban growth in dendritic cities worldwide.

Robert Polidori made his name photographing the soul and desolation of interiors. Amongst these are the decaying houses in Havana; Chernobyl and the ghost town of Pripyat in the aftermath of the nuclear meltdown; and destroyed homes in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. He also documented the restoration of the Château de Versailles, a pivotal moment in the palace's history. For the last nine years, the Canadian-born, California-based photographer has been focusing his view camera on another subject: auto-constructed cities. Whether it is Amman, Jordan; Mumbai, India; or Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, these teeming metropolises have been built by impoverished inhabitants. Polidori calls these places 'dendritic', appropriating the term used for the branching extensions of a cell structure.

The captivating mural is composed of a sequence of 22 photographs made from 8x10 colour film, which have been scanned and computer-stitched together. Polidori refers to it as a hybrid method, taking analogue originals and compressing them into digital. The resulting seamless image is reminiscent of Chinese and Japanese scrolls. "When you look at it in detail, it's an incredible collage of a collaged building", he says, referring to how it was made in segments by groups of people combining pieces of corrugated iron sheet. "It's built with recycled materials from demolished buildings and is completely improvised by people with no architectural or engineering knowledge." Polidori's interest in this type of auto-constructed city dates back to 1996 when he was in Amman and saw a vernacular edifice fabricated by Palestinian refugees. "This got me into survivors taking squatted land into their own hands", he says. "The slums of Mumbai are of particular importance because such a big part of the population lives in them."

Polidori came across 60 Feet Road by chance while taking a detour to avoid rush-hour traffic. "I was in a taxi and thought this place was amazing", he explains. "It's the seat of a plastic-recycling industry where Indians are doing industrial tasks by hand. Even though they're living in poverty, there's incredible ingenuity coming out of organic needs." To facilitate his activity, he had fixers and police protection. "Everything in Mumbai is complicated due to the movie industry", he laments. "Because there'd been riots in the area, the police wouldn't let me shoot without protection. Anywhere in India, when you take out a camera with a tripod, you attract a crowd, which can be up to 500 people in an hour. And violence happens when crowds run amok."

He photographed the entire façade, spanning 12 metres, in one morning. Beginning on the right hand side, Polidori moved his view camera 22 times whilst maintaining the same flat perspective. "It lies between

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architectural drawing and mapping strategy”, he says of his approach. The extraordinary level of detail captures people in intimate moments, brushing their teeth and washing themselves. Several inhabitants are staring inquiringly at the photographer. Did Polidori feel that he was invading their personal space? “People who don't like being photographed walk back inside and those who stay become implicitly OK with it”, he replies. “I was a couple of metres away, not on their property. They're aware of that subtlety and the cross-cultural looks between each other.” Polidori's arresting photography invites controversy. His book *After the Flood* (2006), about abandoned homes in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, was criticised for capitalising on the disaster. His work has also been accused of lacking integrity, transgressing ethical principles by rendering tragic or violent situations artificially beautiful, as he told *The Independent* newspaper in 2010. Yet Polidori sees it as a historical document that has a sociological dimension. “I don't have a political axe to grind, I like to photograph places that won't exist anymore”, he insists. “The path of modern civilisation and economic imperatives is taking away these kinds of places like 60 Feet Road. I'm making a record because in a decade it will be gone.”

According to Polidori, the vast tracts of squatted land are bulldozed in stages. Temporary high-rises are constructed to offer transitional accommodation while remaining plots are removed, then a permanent tower block is built. “The same thing is happening to the favelas in Rio”, he adds. Polidori denies that there is a ‘poverty porn’ component to his work. “I didn't make these pictures to glorify the poverty of others”, he pronounces. “It's respectful look at the incredible phenomenon of an organically-made habitat.” He concedes, however, that to the residents of Mumbai, Western photographers can seem exploitative. “I was in another slum near the airport and a young girl of seven or eight said to me, ‘All Westerners are photographing our trash.’” Has he considered exhibiting this work in Mumbai? “I would love to do an exhibition there and try to get people from all layers of society to come”, he says. “My gut feeling is that the work would be appreciated 50 or 60 years from now, when those neighbourhoods no longer exist.”

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## VARIED TREASURES

*Vintage and classic photos vie with bold new visions*

By Céline Piettre, 2013.

Despite being a major international fair, Paris Photo has a markedly relaxed feel about it compared to FIAC (Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain), which preceded it by just a couple of weeks. A few hours before the opening, gallerists were still taking the plastic coverings off the photos, among them the Munich-based Daniel Blau Gallery, whose display includes World War II photographs. Rare vintage shots by Robert Capa, taken in Sicily and France, are on display, alongside photographs of German youth during the Nazi era, including a striking image of a group of teenagers pretending to drive a chariot. Black-and-white images are not limited to vintage prints. They can also be found to Camera Obscura booth, with the timeless photos of Bernard Plossu and Masao Yamamoto, and at the long booth of the Eric Franck gallery, which features the work of two important Brazilian artists, Thomas Farkas and Geraldo de Barros. Bernard Bouche's booth also features black-and-white prints, including a striking suite of recent photographs by Belgian photographer Marc Trivier that seem to experiment with light and time. Gilles Berquet also goes monochrome in his captivating sculptural nudes, which are on view at Bertrand Grimont's booth, as does the Swedish artist Marten Lange, whose series "Another Landscape", seen at Robert Morat's booth, is one of the discoveries at the fair. We seem to be a long way from the orgy of color that characterized photography at one point. In the landscapes of John Chiara, at the Von Lintel Gallery booth, the color seems either faded or electrified through chemical manipulation. At the Thomas Zander booth, Lewis Baltz has, for the first time, used color in an entire series, titled "89-91 Sites of Technology". The subject is the antiseptic interiors of corporate offices, such as those of Toshiba and France Telecom. A little farther away is the booth of the New York-based gallery Cheim&Read, which, with its display of works by Jack Pierson, Adam Fuss, and William Eggleston, has made a strong debut at Paris Photo.

Just across the aisle, Galerie Karsten Greve is putting on a much-anticipated solo show by Robert Polidori. While it is not unusual to come across the Canadian photographer's large format works at fairs, the German gallery has brought together a significant collection of his photographs, ranging from places devastated by Hurricane Katrina to rooms undergoing renovation at the palace of Versailles, which he managed to sneak into 2007.

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## The INDEPENDENT

### **Elegantly wasted: Award-winning photographer Robert Polidori finds beauty in disaster**

*Polidori's journey has taken him from Cuba to Chernobyl*

2010.

It began, 25 years ago, with a series of pictures of New York apartment interiors. An estate agent had described to me how the occupants of three apartments of one Lower East Side building had all happened to die within a two-week period. During an inspection he had discovered that the apartments had been systematically ravaged by thrill-seeking adolescents.

While listening to his narrative, I was struck by the psychological implications of the scene he described. Having convinced the building manager to take me to one of the apartments, I felt compelled to photograph the scene before me. I was convinced that there was something intrinsically historic and psychic about the subject-matter that should be captured. Upon further reflection I came to regard the implications of the scene as being evocative of the human condition in general.

The production of those "portraits" opened a particular path of inquiry which over time led me to other analogous subjects. The 1994 photographs of Samir Geagea's "headquarters" in Beirut's Christian Ashrafiéh neighbourhood illustrate another form of habitat violation. My attention was first brought to the building by its location near Rue Monod where the best sandwiches in Beirut were then available. One day while eating my falafel, I happened to catch a glimpse of an elderly woman crawling through a ground-floor window. It had never occurred to me that anyone could still actually live there. I ran after her and introduced myself as a photographer. She then showed me in and guided me through the internal courtyards to finally escort me to the large shooting gallery spaces facing the main square, all the while pointing out which phases of the war caused which damages. "*Regardez Monsieur le photographe,*" she asked, pointing to the scenes that I more or less tried to capture. "*Pensez-vous capable de prendre des belles et jolies photos de tout cela ?*" Well, I tried, but taking up her dare put me on a more problematic path than I ever could have anticipated.

My work has often been criticised as somehow lacking integrity because I transgress ethical principles by rendering tragic or violent situations as artificially "*beautiful*". This "*aestheticising*" is considered to be conceptually disturbing since, some argue, it brings a viewer to an experience by which realities and their causes are ultimately trivialised and misrepresented.

I certainly didn't feel any shame while photographing these sites. I simply attempted to portray things as they appeared to me. I never once attempted to execute any embellishments. For this reason I felt surprised and puzzled when criticisms arose. How could I answer the challenges? If I had made these images intentionally ugly would my critics have looked at them more carefully or generously? Likely not. And besides, since when was pathos morally inadmissible in the photographic arts?

I feel nothing when I make these types of photographs. I feel before and after, but while executing them it is my belief that there is only time to accurately act and react. In the few short moments of pause when self-reflection becomes possible, I think of myself as performing some sort of photographic rite of Extreme Unction by commemorating the life trajectories of habitats that were permanently interrupted by cataclysm.

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