

DAY  
ONE

François L'Hotel

'Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner,  
A photograph is always invisible; Its not what we see.'

Roland Barthes

**B** **I** **O** **G** **R** **A** **P** **H** **Y**

Born in Paris, François L'Hotel studies at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs of Paris, a course of studies which he describes as both academic and subjective. The son of a garage owner, he will always maintain a keen interest in « celestial mechanics » - his experiments will successfully result in many inventions in the industrial field which he rejects by distilling its objective approach.

In the meantime, he learns a vocabulary of his own by capillary action and redefines the codes of the image. By returning to the photographic surface he likes so much, he creates his pieces with intense sensitivity so as to trigger the introspection necessary for contemplating the abstract.

François L'Hotel's photographs deny up to the presence of the image itself and endow the matter with an immaterial substance that attracts the viewers and incites them to question the issue of detection, to read and interpret the image in a haste that allows the eye to evade control.

The pictorial dimension of his work stems from his training as a painter. François L'Hotel's language is undeniably that of poetic emotion which he assigns to his photographic worlds by transferring the absolute purity of austere aesthetics to the image.





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Isn't the artist ultimately rooted in the present time, by means of his body ?

Isn't the creative act a reward for both extreme attention and absolute availability to reality ?

## T H E   E Y E   &   P H O T O G R A P H Y

The focalization of our eyes, be it practical, emotional or intellectual, will never reveal but a tiny fraction of the visible world, even if the latter is there for all to see. Like a mobile and adaptable projector, our relation to reality is nothing but a finite and often superficial viewpoint. Very early, I realized that, paradoxically enough, the immediacy of our perception guaranteed neither objectivity nor insight, and that, accordingly, photography could both unveil and reveal reality. At the height of my fascination for the visible, I sensed that it would only give away its truth in a roundabout and surprising way ; that it would show itself to me only by means of some sort of indirect game, like an image hunt. A photograph is endowed with a form of innocence. If it seems to mirror the staring eyes, it may also take them aback and escape their viewpoint, leaving another reality in its stead.

My work consists in playing hide-and-seek with reality ; but that game follows a fundamental rule that is central to sports : one has to mobilize one's whole body, instead of using it as a mere complying tool. One can only become a sportsman or a sculptor at the cost of hard work and once the sport or the art have become intrinsic functions of the hand, the foot or the eye. Once the sculptor's hand fully masters the material, the sculptor no longer shapes it – he knows it intimately. And so it goes with photography. Mastering the technique must result in the same intimacy. In order to capture more fractions of the real, the eye must dismiss command and absolutely espouse the camera lens, which will then offer it the supreme power to record what it does not see.

To me, the photographic game is a hunt, and that hunt is all about instinct. In that game, I proceed intuitively, giving a free reign to the lens. Isn't the artist ultimately rooted in the present time, by means of his body ? Isn't the creative act a reward for both extreme attention and absolute availability to reality ? It is this psycho-emotional approach to the contradiction between attention and withdrawal – which may be counterproductive – that I am experimenting for the first time in this new series.

Relating the genesis of the look it emerged from, its context, the place, sometimes the hour when I surrendered to its appeal, is a means to highlight the origins of abstraction, the transition from the visible surface to depth, to the punctum, as Roland Barthes would call it.

## A B S T R A C T I O N

Even if my photographs are abstract, their referents and genesis are not. I am constantly connected to the most prosaic reality by an umbilical cord. I am not trying to sublimate reality, reducing it to its geometric structure or pure chromatic tones ; on the contrary, I aim at revealing its mysteries. The Day One series consists of dust, tracks, marks, fragments – so many signs of a memory the history of which I must imperatively reconstruct.

Abstraction results from this focus on the materiality of things, from using the lens like a stethoscope. That is why each photograph comes with a narrative ID file. Relating the genesis of the look it emerged from, its context, the place, sometimes the hour when I surrendered to its appeal, is a means to highlight the origins of abstraction, the transition from the visible surface to depth, to the punctum, as Roland Barthes would call it.

My photographs start from that punctum, the plot that I hunt for, and move towards the narrative. At times, I just imagine the story ; at other times, I try to render it. I don't care about shooting nice pictures. If, owing to the formalism of my photographs, their abstract quality may seem to be self-sufficient, it is in fact a golden thread that guides me along my exploration of reality.

Whatever a photographer thinks of his art and however abstract a photograph may be, it will never be a mere representation. It will always be a testimony of what happened, of what was there. Reality will never cease to fashion its motives and exceed the photograph. Throughout this exhibition, the abstract dimension of the images opens onto temporality, memory and imagination.

I am a hunter of stories and secrets. Throughout this exhibition, each and every work was designed to show a narrative abstraction to the spectators, to guide their eyes into the heart of a matter that was fashioned both by the forces of nature and those of the imagination, the Real and the symbolic.

## M E D I T A T I O N   &   A D V E N T U R E

I have conceived Day One as a meditation which exudes its experience between introspection and exploration. Each work displays a plot, an enigma and results from an encounter. The present series thereby consists in tracing the visions, the dreams or images that were born within me along the way.

In Athens' torpor, sitting down a tree, I waited for nightfall. As night sets in on the cityscape, artificial lights bring about a timely shift towards unheard of unveilings, fascinating reconciliations, and the frontier between objects seems to vanish to let them talk together in some unknown language.

I have come across the border between the world from above and that from below. Amongst the battles, the sensual delights and the landscapes that are blown forth by winds from another world, I have seen the infinitely live and abstract forms of troubled matter jostle and crave for eternity.

I have deciphered a palimpsest of death and words. I have witnessed the apparition of two white beings who seemed set on a never-ending face-to-face confrontation. This time, my imagination has paid a respectful tribute to memory in that improvised memorial.

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*I mainly work with my subconscious. It is as though I were fishing on the bank : I am not trying to catch anything in particular, but from time to time, something gets caught on my line and I pull it up*

## T H E   A R C H I V E S   O F   M A N K I N D

The Day One series that is on show in the present exhibition has fed on dust, fragments, « murder scenes », geometric constructions and a few glimmers of magic spells and enchantments. Hunting for and attracted to the signs and tracks of a human memory and history, my eyes, inscribed in both an ethnological and an aesthetic field, are puzzled by every trace left on the surface of things by any motion. That is what I call the Human impact. To me, that impact is neither a photographic theme nor a thesis. The photographs which investigate it are not meant to illustrate an anthropological project directly. Each one of them has been conceived as a device that respects the hybrid halo of a material, a practice or a human action, without any objectivizing unveiling.

I don't belong to any traditional school of photography. Unlike many of them do repeatedly, I don't explicitly place memory, urban life or mankind at the heart of my research. Contrary to those approaches, I refrain from objectifying ; I believe in discretion and elegance. I don't like shouting too loud to be heard and, most of all, if I want to show the tracks of man's passage on our earth, I only do so in the specific context of a plot and a questioning endowed with some poetic aura.

I love the hidden stories, the ghost towns, the repeated impacts, the extinguished fires, the awkward decorations of man, whom I try to understand. All these webs of materials, shapes and meanings appear to me as abstract works of art. The involuntary vestiges left by man on his environment are generally invisible prosaic archives which appeal to me. Many of my previous series centre on that field of investigation, with a slightly different perspective for each. What matters to me is the way we see rather than what we see at first glance. I don't have the eyes of the ethnologist or the sociologist who define a field or an object by ridding them of any projection. On the contrary, I claim to be surprised and inspired by the visible because, depending on the angle, it can communicate with the powers of the spirit and the imagination. I imitate the fisherman who lets his line free, and I can identify with Carl Whitaker's beautiful metaphor – which may make a loose cannon or a pariah of me in the world of photography :

"I mainly work with my subconscious. It is as though I were fishing on the bank : I am not trying to catch anything in particular, but from time to time, something gets caught on my line and I pull it up."

I am a hunter of stories and secrets...

'The Day One series that is on show in the present exhibition has fed on dust, fragments, « murder scenes », geometric constructions and a few glimmers of magic spells & enchantments.'



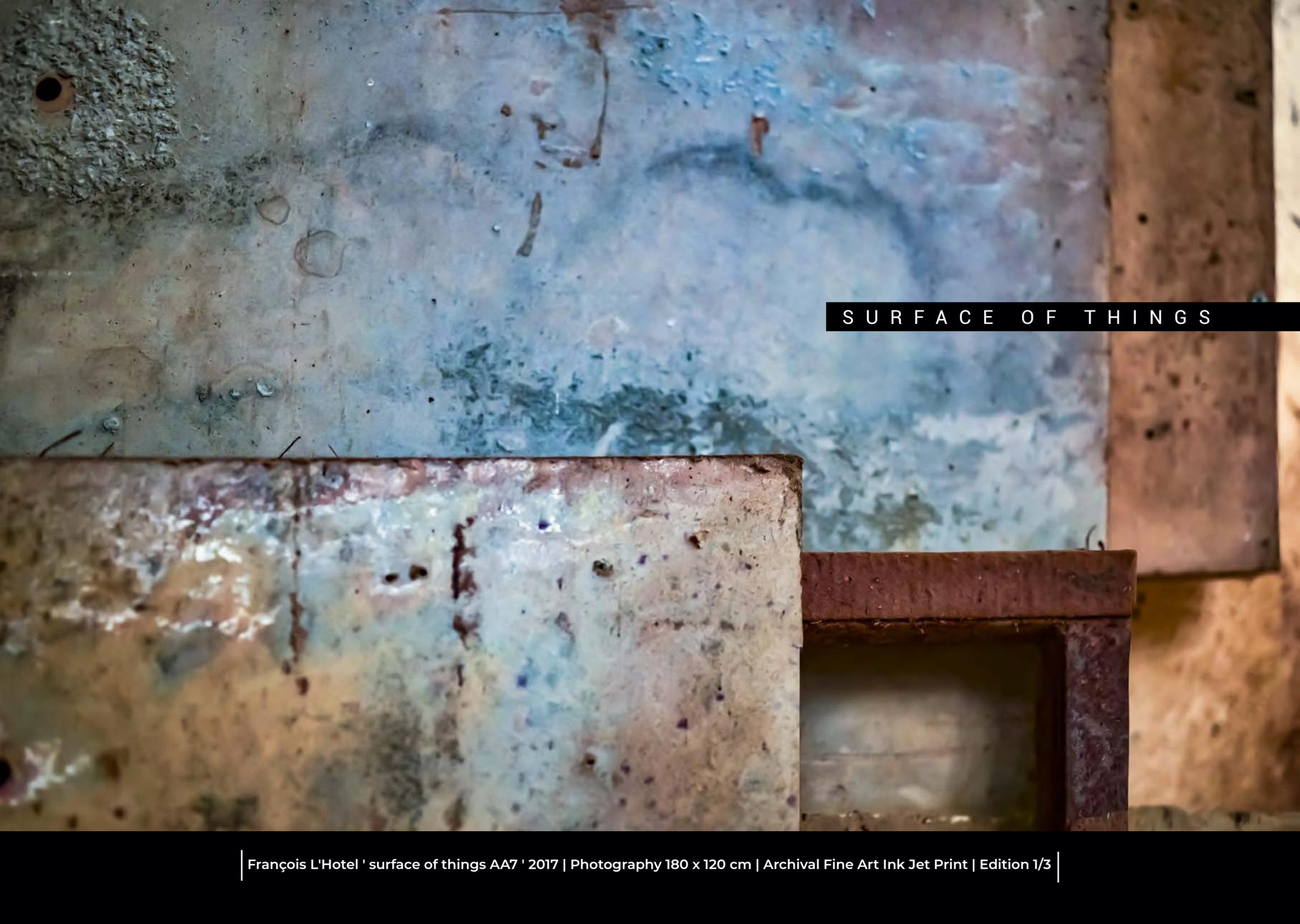
*François L'Hôtel*

DAY  
ONE

François L'Hotel



*selected imagery*



SURFACE OF THINGS

I wanted to portray the moment that would give birth to creation, coiled up between the matter and the work of art.

SURFACE OF THINGS

Like Kairos, the Greek word for the art of seizing the right moment, Time is more than a God who devours his children before burying them into dust and throwing us all into melancholy. As the photograph of this memory shows, it may also be the breath that frees things from inertia and gravity, and lavishes them with a new life and worth, by the grace of Art.

And so it goes with the objects my friend, a sculptress, collects and stacks up against the wall of her garden, behind her workshop. Here, I am catching them in the torpor of a summer afternoon : forsaken by all, they are waiting for rebirth – composed, patient, quiet.

Amidst what first appears like a chaotic heap, there emerges some order and rule. Sorted by surfaces, thickness and colours, each object must remain within sight of their demiurge-to-be.

As for her, she is waiting for the proper moment for life, the time of inspiration. As good wine requires time, she breathes in whatever she perceives up to the eloquent recovery of the materials, when they are sparkled back into shape.

On that day, in the unconvincing silence of my wanderings, I wished to immortalize the passive and recessing prayer of those objects ; I wanted to portray the moment that would give birth to creation, coiled up between the matter and the work of art.



V O R T E X

| François L'Hotel ' Vortex ' 2016 | Photography 180 x 120 cm | Archival Fine Art Ink Jet Print | Edition 1/3 |

I follow the curls of smoke down into a land where monsters are kings, where phantasmagoria mingles with a forlorn life and past. The walls alone, the ceilings alone, are acts of remembrance here. Tinged with death, that dark vortex offers the morbid and sublime show of the instant when everything caught fire.

**VORTEX** A sky of circular blackish scratches is overhanging me. Amidst this saturated storm, between two damaged cliffs, the grey eye of some ecstatic piece of metal is staring at me. Trapped as I am within the vortex of that chaos, I seem to be hearing the trumpets of the Apocalypse.

**VORTEX** I am watching the struggle which is bristling with threat. I am searching this battlefield for the least sign of life. The accumulation of these black and white ploughings must bear some meaning. The beauty of these movements, as unsettled as random, hides a logic that I crave to understand. Are we caught within the vortex of creation or that of the end of the world?

**VORTEX** Here I am, in the outskirts of Athens, in a building that caught fire some months ago. I can see the sinister works of the flames. The scale of that fire can probably be accounted for by the nature of the materials that were stored inside. Being highly flammable, they gave off a thick, powerful smoke as they were going up into flames, thus forming swirling black clouds.

I follow the curls of smoke down into a land where monsters are kings, where phantasmagoria mingles with a forlorn life and past. The walls alone, the ceilings alone, are acts of remembrance here. Tinged with death, that dark vortex offers the morbid and sublime show of the instant when everything caught fire.



FAKING

François L'Hotel ' Faking ' 2016 | Photography 180 x 120 cm | Archival Fine Art Ink Jet Print | Edition 1/3

*This instant now has a place of honour in the Gallery of rare moments.  
I dedicate it to those who collect the invisible archives of reality.*

**F A K I N G** I love the fleeting dynamics of the street, the ceaseless fading of the events that run through its urban skin. What happens will always have been. The narrative of its history will always be written and erased, restlessly, before being grasped, caught, stolen by photography. I love the moment's breakaway above the chaotic flow of the city. I love the moment as it is immortalised and transformed by photography. My eyes remain focused on the contact point between motion and immobility – I search for it and cultivate it for the secrets it may disclose.

**F A K I N G** I am walking through an Athens street in the evening, as the blue of the sky and the orange-yellow of the setting sun are dissolving into each other, as the summer's scorching torpor is cooling down and life resuming its activities. I stare at a pondering bill-poster. He smiles back at me. He is realising that he has applied his paste too quickly and he must now pull down the previous layers of paper to clear a space for the new poster. The old ones are partly subsiding, peeling off under the heat. Yet, like the bird makes its nest, my pop-up friend strives to proceed as well as he can.

That is when I see a near work of art emerge within the framework of his activity, between his sharp-cut motions. I ask him to let me shoot a picture.

I love the glitchy, yet orderly marks expertly drawn in the glue, the decadent and post-modern appearance of the printed posters torn by the wind, the heat and the hand. A moment later, this beautiful wall design of paper, glue, graffiti, adhesive tape and pasted chewing-gum disappear. It is covered by an advertising poster that now lights up the street – a brand new and amnesic present.

But this image, stolen by my camera lens between two expert moves, now has a place of honour in the Gallery of rare moments. I dedicate it to those who collect the invisible archives of reality.



C R I M E S C E N E

*Amidst the silence and immobility, hand-to-hand fights, scuffles and assaults hastily rise up from those prints that neither domestic work nor reasonable stay can account for.*

**E** We are in the heart of Athens, in a middle-class flat from the 50s. Aware of my fascination for indefinite places, the landlord, a friend of mine, invited me to spend a weekend there, just before its being renovated.

**N**

**E** This is an odd idea. The rooms are empty, worn out and desolate, the surfaces are dirty, the walls are broken down and yet, when my eyes wander to the floor, they are assailed by a murder scene. Various layers of muddled and broken off prints overlap chaotically and offer their contrast to the low-angled light of sunset.

**S**

**C** Amidst the silence and immobility, hand-to-hand fights, scuffles and assaults hastily rise up from those prints that neither domestic work nor reasonable stay can account for. The tracks overlap so much so as to conceal any trajectory and forbid any possibility of rest, pause, centre, emptiness or moving space. This total lack of logic grabs my eyes, which waver between the sociological temptation to reconstruct their initial and human verticality, and that, more artistic, to admire the dynamic abstraction of these mysterious prints.

**E**

**M** These mutating places – modern day Lascaux – where random use sends us messages as well as human hands would, make up art works that are worthy of the greatest artists.

**I**

**C** I have spent many hours working in that flat as in some timeless space, trying to rescue the memory of this murder scene from the coming workers who would rub out this mysterious hurly-burly for ever.



DELUXE CHAOS

In here, art flows from the artist to his close surroundings by capillary action, and the studio expresses him as much as it inspires him. Its staging is indissociable from his universe, it is the extension of his being, both the crucible and the mirror of his creation.

**DELUXE CHAOS** A studio is more than the mere material case of the artist's creation. As I am standing in that of my mascot-of-an-artist, I realise that it is far more than a mere physical storage space for the tools, objects and materials that he works with and draws his inspiration from. Everything here is endowed with the depth of interiority, in which and by means of which the things resonate together. That richness is intimately linked with the owner of the place. In here, art flows from the artist to his close surroundings by capillary action, and the studio expresses him as much as it inspires him. Its staging is indissociable from his universe, it is the extension of his being, both the crucible and the mirror of his creation.

**DELUXE CHAOS** Grateful for the favour Alexandra Athanassiades has done me of allowing me to move about freely in this intimate place, I have tried to reproduce the osmosis between the matter and the creative soul that animates her by stealing behind a window to shoot the pedestal of a statue that was carved in a great cube of plexiglas.

**DELUXE CHAOS** This transparent material itself constitutes a kind of front door, a stopping-off place towards an imaginary world where all treasures originate. Here, the abstract is an interface between the visible world of things and the forge and fire that works them on. The things then turn into images and immerse us into the treasure land of a Persian wizard, a shambles in which gold-filled bags, parchments and precious fabric, tools and drawings make up a symphonic and plastic order.

**DELUXE CHAOS** I « receive » this studio like a child who devoutly cherishes the precious wrapping of his gift, like the translucent and reflective envelope of his art.



LOOSE MY AIR

Franois L'Hotel ' Loose my air ' 2016 | Photography 180 x 120 cm | Archival Fine Art Ink Jet Print | Edition 1/3

That thick glass plate is the submarine porthole of a life beating below our feet. Heavy with depth and symbols..

LOOSE MY AIR In the alleys of Athens' old town, most of the sidewalks are fitted with aeration grids designed to ventilate the buildings' cellars both in summer and winter. Some landowners preferred to have them protected from the passers-by's stampings with extra thick glass plates. Underneath, the construction – as unsettled as it is dynamic – blossoms into a random existence.

LOOSE MY AIR As if detained between the surfaces of the plate, frozen time draws a compact frontier between two worlds. Below lies a fallow land of dead leaves, hair strands, dust and all kinds of tiny waste. It is the world of the Ancient who, hidden yet active within the crevices of matter, live on an existence that seems to pass a little more each day. The overall shade of that vegetable Hades is livid, its colour and aspect are those of a bygone world.

LOOSE MY AIR Above stands the world of ever renewing ephemeral events ; the world of colors, of flowers freshly fallen on the battlefield of seasons ; the world of all sorts of leaves, more or less dry and colored ; that of enigmatic marks of shoes or paint.

LOOSE MY AIR That thick glass plate is the submarine porthole of a life beating below our feet. Heavy with depth and symbols, this underground flow calls for the testimony of my eyes, it relies on me to penetrate the light of my negative. Amongst the battles, the sensual delights and the landscapes that are blown forth by winds from another world, I can see the infinitely live and abstract forms of troubled matter jostle and crave for eternity.



T I M E O U T

| François L'Hotel ' Timeout ' 2017 | Photography 180 x 120 cm | Archival Fine Art Ink Jet Print | Edition 1/3 |

A city is more than the mere gathering place of practical means, goods and people ; from day to day and for one and all, it is the physical partner of their silent bodies. Dynamic and still unfamiliar to the young, with the help of years, it either becomes an ergonomic fabric or a threat, a kindly friend or a cruel, uncompromising reality.

**T** They do not run but they casually scamper along, and whenever they have to go home, carrying armloads of shopping bags, packets or gifts, the elderly, who are streetwise, take breaks against all kinds of stone or iron props - the refuges of their tiredness.

**U** A city is more than the mere gathering place of practical means, goods and people ; from day to day and for one and all, it is the physical partner of their silent bodies. Dynamic and still unfamiliar to the young, with the help of years, it either becomes an ergonomic fabric or a threat, a kindly friend or a cruel, uncompromising reality.

**O** I love all cities, but I am particularly fond of those which adorn signs and traces, like ancient palimpsests ; those which are always about to speak to me. Many of them maintain the appearance of a gigantic signalling system that mirrors their codes and customs. As time goes by, men add up to the vestiges of time, drawing graffiti to display their talents, messages or insignificance. Those new layers will enrich the parchment of the streets and facades, but to me, they will never achieve the magnetic power of the traces men innocently inflict upon their environment.

**E** As I am strolling about Kolonaki, a chic Athens district, I notice the singularity of some of the posts. Planted in the ground to keep the cars out, their heads are covered with abstract cabalistic signs. My curious and imaginative mind instantly makes out the effect of use, the sketch of a story, the sheer human secretion of everyday life. I look around and understand that the people who live in this residential area are not quite young.

**T** As I am standing by one of those posts, figures carrying armloads of boxes and packets suddenly appear in my mind. Painted a thousand times in various colours, the damaged posts are now marked out in squares. I can picture the time when, weary of carrying their burdens, those unsteady figures put them down at the top of the posts and scratched them once more as they lifted their loads. In my own way, I have tried to express them gratitude for offering me, a mere passer-by, a chance to learn and dream.



SCHISM LINE

François L'Hotel ' Schism Line ' 2017 | Photography 180 x 120 cm | Archival Fine Art Ink Jet Print | Edition 1/3

At the heart of this flood of desolation, a few light gaps  
reverberate with urban pulse beats – or is it twilight?

SCHISM LINE

Our most wonderful dreams may very well be inspired by the secret « life » of matter. Whatever the accidents by which it is formed and deformed, matter will always be an image repository to me.

The blue slide of a cracked stripe has turned into a charcoal grey sky ridden with late thunderstorms and resonating scars. Yellow dust that spread like pollen along a dark line is now a succession of valleys splashed by a sunflower squall – the breakaway of that yellow-woven fringe, like powder that is being drawn up into the sky, arouses a craving for summer. At the bottom of this golden upthrust, a black line, which encroaches here and there on the sunflower powder, draws the outlines of a road – or is it the slow and resolute flow of incandescent lava ? At the heart of this flood of desolation, a few light gaps reverberate with urban pulse beats – or is it twilight ?

The wedding gold and lava guide the eyes to the foreground of a torrent the meanderings of which seem carefree, as if blue here were invulnerable. Lost at the bottom of the image, that piece of sky is bathing amongst the rocks and the hills, flirting with the flames – it is a pause and a promise.

This dream has arisen from the segment of a badly painted sidewalk in Athens. In the city centre, these are often used as parking lots. Seen from above, that untimely use, added to the badly painted surfaces that extend over the gutters and to the daily dirt, compose the painting of a dream that brings together pictorial references and the innocent prose of life : the schism of a story that remains to be told.

DAY  
ONE

François L'Hotel



24 Pictures



INSIDE THE HOLE



GATHERING OF WEARINESS



BLACK EYES



VORTEX



CRIME SCENE



LOSE MY AIR



LEAKAGE



SURFACE OF THINGS

*I wished to immortalize the passive and recessing prayer of those objects..*



TIMEOUT



FAKING



DELUXE CHAOS



EVERY DAY LIFE



SCHISM LINE



LA LIGNE BLEUE DES VOSGES



LIQUIDITY



AT NIGHTFALL

*the painting of a dream that brings together pictorial references and the innocent prose of life..*



FLUIDITY



FOLDING LINES



JAPANESE SLIP 2



HECTIC BORDER



GREY DAY



PSYCHOTROPE



SOLAR WINGS



GARDEN APPEARANCES

*I dedicate it to those who collect the invisible archives of reality.*



François L'Hotel

8	FRANCOIS L'HOTEL		PHOTOGRAPHER
0	MARTINE LUCCHESI		WRITER, PHILOSOPHER, NARRATOR ARTIST
1	HELENE LEITE		TRANSLATOR
2	MANAL AL JASSIM		GRAPHIC ARTIST



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