

Text for the exhibition “Territoires Partagés” (Shared Territories)
Pavillon de l’Arsenal, October 2002

For more than a century urban planning has demonstrated its lack of success in controlling the shape of the city on a large scale. The phenomenon of contemporary metropolisation only reinforces this failure: the fragments that constitute the archipelago of the planned city are dispersed across the immensity of the spontaneous city.

Emmanuel Pinard’s photographs demonstrate this difficulty to control the territory by attaching themselves to the description of places, which, in the context of the dialectic of town planning, are generally considered as “non-qualified”.

The formal and programmatic indeterminacy of the sites leaves them open to multiple social practices. These images represent the traces of such practices, as well as those of the physical limits of planning – the constructed limit between planned city and spontaneous formations.

Such fragments of the urban environment provide a general statement on the contemporary city based on local situations chosen for their exemplarity through their realization on the one hand of the resistance of land to planning and on the other of the positive quality of such situations.

A lengthy stay in these places leads Emmanuel Pinard to an attuned knowledge of their physical configuration and their uses. His images are also like chemical precipitations that condense the characteristics of the photographed landscapes.

The work fits into a historic tradition that, since the 19th century, puts the rigour of the photographic approach at the service of the city’s description. Today, this documentary approach allows the complexity of the landscapes of the contemporary city, to be captured above and beyond their superficially chaotic character.

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