

Emmanuel Pinard in Marseille

Éric Lapierre, January 2003.

“There is nothing more poetic than the all the transitions, all the heterogeneous combinations.”

Novalis, Fragments

In 2001, the public institution Euroméditerranée, in partnership with the Ministry of Culture and Communication and the city of Marseille, initiated a photographic study with the aim of illustrating the changes of the territory within its in charge. The sector of interest is located to the north of the Vieux-Port and has a surface area of 300 hectares the redevelopment of which is a pretext for rethinking the relationship between Marseille and its port.

Emmanuel Pinard photographs the urban substance of metropolitan peripheries: large open spaces, qualified only by the uses they exist for, are devoid of all symbolic ambition. We are used to setting this type of environment – considered chaotic and of no value – against the traditional centre, seen in contrast as the guardian of the values of order hierarchy and, symbolically representational of the community.

Each of the images produced by Emmanuel Pinard as part of the Euroméditerranée project is like a drop of acid on the traditional consensus of the centre’s superiority over the periphery: it dissolves it, making visible an image of a city in which elements of metropolitan scale, such as motorway viaducts or port-related installations coexist evidently and easily with elements at a local, daily scale. In this heterogeneous environment, small bars shelter in the shadow of motorway piers, half wild vegetation infiltrates between structures, white ships bigger than the harbour buildings shuttle between the two Mediterranean coasts, beyond the Digue du Large breakwater. Emmanuel Pinard photographed the Marseille front from the Digue du Large breakwater, in the form of a fascinating seven-piece polyptych, more than 8 metres long. It is the image of an urban port seafront and a monumental installation, which obliges the spectator who wants to see the whole of it, to follow the photographer’s movement walking along the breakwater. Turning towards the sea, Emmanuel Pinard photographed the horizon, from the Digue du Large breakwater, as he had so often done in his peripheral landscapes. This maritime horizon is not a simple line separating the sky and the sea: it is as if curved – and, similarly constructed – by the presence, at each end, of bits of emerging land. In the foreground, concrete blocks stand for the artificiality of the inhabited landscape, and consequently, its cultural dimension.

A constructed horizon, a material foreground, and a statement about the photographed terrain: as with Chelles, Créteil, Montesson or Brasilia, the same gaze, a capacity for analysis and an evocation of mystery are proof that documentary photography is an artistic undertaking situated beyond objectivity.