



Vincent Perez Identities

Exhibition open from 4 November 2019 to 26 January 2020
Preview on 21 November at 6 pm

Press visit in the presence of Vincent Perez
on 21 November 2019 at 4 pm

Press Release

Directly downloadable at www.cameramuseum.ch



Les Parisiens 1. Photo by Vincent Perez



A Swiss actor with an international reputation, Vincent Perez is also director, screenwriter and general delegate of the festival Les Rencontres 7e art Lausanne.

Vincent Perez is also a photographer. Born in Lausanne in 1964, he became passionate about photography as a teenager. He attended the Vevey photography school and began his apprenticeship with a professional from Lausanne. The young man then turned to drama and comedy, acting under the direction of the greatest directors, from Patrice Chéreau to Jean-Paul Rappeneau, from Roman Polanski to Bruce Beresford.

In the 2000s, the actor returned to photography on film sets, in the world of dance, in the working class districts of Paris, during long trips to Russia. He exhibited his portraits at the Rencontres de la photographie d'Arles in 2014, then at the Maison européenne de la photographie of Paris in 2017. The portraits of Parisians and Russians presented at the Swiss Camera Museum are from this latest exhibition. Never before has Vincent Perez exhibited his photographs in Switzerland. His book "A Journey to Russia", with texts by the writer Olivier Rolin, was published in 2017 by Delpire.

If he is interested in landscapes, Vincent Perez excels in the portrait genre. He works in natural light or with a circular diffuser flash, attentive to details and colours. His images show a keen eye for others, without distinction of class or status. These are portraits with a high intensity of expression, simple and direct. The photographer is concerned with everything that can constitute an identity: features, looks, attitudes, clothes, accessories, the relationship of a body with the space around it.

The selection of photographs accompanies a presentation of the 100-year history of PENTAX, a renowned Japanese brand of which Vincent Perez is the ambassador. The photographer uses the medium format digital Pentax 645 Z for his shots, most of the time equipped with a 55 mm lens. Pentax's centuries-old history is marked by major innovations. Such as the fast return mirror for SLRs, exposure measurement through the lens (TTL) or autofocus for SLRs. Today, in the digital age, the brand remains faithful to its values of innovation. It is owned by Ricoh Imaging S.A.S.



Interview with Vincent Perez

« Photography allows me to discover myself »

You became interested in photography as a teenager thanks to the painter, teacher and journalist Pierre Gisling. Can you tell us about that?

Pierre Gisling is the man who changed my life. At the age of eleven, I took part in a drawing competition at the Comptoir Suisse in Lausanne. I was spotted by Pierre, who was organizing a drawing camp for young people from French-speaking countries. I was part of it. From that moment on, I took better care of my artistic side. During this first meeting, Pierre Gisling lent me a camera. It was a Yashica or a Pentax, I don't remember very well.

Why a camera?

In Pierre Gisling's logic, it was necessary to give all the possible tools to a kid who arrived at his home. I have done sculpture, drawing, oil, charcoal, cutting, stained glass and also photography. The first image I took was the portrait of Pierre Gisling.

The photo then became your favorite expression tool. To the point of entering Vevey's photo school.

It was the most obvious choice. I was fifteen years old. I wasn't good at studying. I started an apprenticeship as a photographer in Lausanne, first in the passage Saint-François, then in the rue du Petit-Chêne. I went to Vevey's photography school two days a week to learn the technique. This lasted two years. I liked the contact with the other students. We were all dreamers with one thing in common: a passion for photography. It allowed me to open up to the outside world, to move forward into the unknown.

Why didn't you finish your apprenticeship?

Let's blame it on the outbursts of youth. I'm instinctive and impulsive. At the time, I was tortured by the reading of playwrights like Stanislavski. I was passionate about cinema. But first I went to the theatre school. I entered the preparatory of the Conservatoire de Genève. After one year, I participated in a competition for a scholarship. I got it. This allowed me to spend a year at the Conservatoire de Paris as a foreign student.

How did you get back to photography?

Through the camera. When I was shooting "Indochine" in the 1990s, I filmed a lot of Vietnam. I had then completely dropped the photography. I regret it today! But the camera gave me back the taste of taking pictures. I bought myself a Contax G1, then a G2. This last device was extraordinary. I had several objectives. Then I took an old Rolleiflex to take 6 x 6 pictures. I really like medium format. I took family photos, of what was happening around me, during



trips. From time to time, a picture was successful. Everyone told me: "You have talent, you were a photographer!". I was pleased, but I knew it wasn't true. It was even a little painful. I had started to follow a path in my teenage years, but I quickly abandoned it. I was having a hard time with it. It was guilt making.

Why?

Photography is the only means of expression with which I have a direct relationship. I can really be myself. I can create my own universe without going through others. For me, photography is a personal research, where I go to meet myself. So I gradually returned to photography. And seriously since 2010.

Is it because of this doubt that you first showed your work very far from France?

As I had to find my style, I had to show my pictures to get reactions. To take as little risk as possible, I exposed my work as far as possible! I was offered a job at a museum in Vladivostok. It was a question of taking pictures on the theme of Franco-Russian friendship. I photographed artists, painters and actors, then I showed the images. The exhibition was cacophonous. I wasn't telling a story. But it was interesting. The exhibition then went to Moscow. There, I received my first real commission: to photograph the Bolshoi dancers on behalf of the Moscow Ruarts Gallery. I had to professionalize myself. It was serious. I worked for a year. The exhibition was very successful. But I was not happy with the result. There were too many images: some were good, others less successful. They should have been better selected. I still hadn't found my language.

When did you first show your work in France, where you live?

I met a great photography scholar, François Hebel. He was in charge of the Rencontres d'Arles. He selected my photographs and mounted an exhibition at the Rencontres d'Arles in 2014. When I discovered the show, I felt a strange emotion. It was the first time that this had ever happened to me. I could feel the presence of the people I had photographed. That's when I understood what the work of a curator is.

The Maison européenne de la photographie in Paris exhibited your portraits of Russians and Parisians in 2017. Why the portrait genre?

From the moment someone is there, in front of me, and I photograph him, that person takes on a timeless dimension. It is a captured and sustainable presence. That's why I love old photos. I collect old negatives, on glass or film. This relationship to time fascinates me.

How do you make your portraits?

Photos become interesting as soon as I establish a good relationship with my subjects. When I don't know the person, the picture is not as good. I spend time talking, being attentive to each other. It's very instinctive.



Do you work alone or with assistants? Let's take the example of "Parisians", the customers of African origin of a clothing store in the 18th arrondissement of Paris.

I had a helper who approached the clients and guided them to me. This fixer knew the area well. It was not easy: these people didn't like it when a white man came to their store to take pictures. It took me a while to make contact. But I took pictures every day. Little by little, people came to see me.

How did you become a Pentax ambassador?

Benoît Baume, from Fisheye magazine, introduced me to the Pentax managers at the Salon de la Photo of Paris. They showed me their medium format camera, the 645 Z. I liked it right away. It is handy, even if I find it a little heavy. But the device has an extraordinary sensor. Its quality is especially evident during the retouching process. The 645 Z is also very robust, even in temperatures as low as -40 degrees in Russia. I'm not saying this for marketing reasons, but because it's the truth: the encounter with this camera allowed me to find my own photographic language. That said, I also like large format. I recently returned to it with a Wista 4 x 5 inch.

With what objective do you work for your medium format portraits?

I work with a 55 mm lens, sometimes also 90 mm. I also have a wide angle and a zoom, but I never use it. I use an annular diffuser flash that is perfect for black skin. I like to bring out the colours, hang details, a little like Martin Parr... But gently, without you feeling the obvious presence of a flash. The more invisible this one is, the better. I also like to work in natural light. It depends on the pictures, actually. Some require softness, others to be more incisive.

How do you arrange time for photography outside your cinematographic activity?

I devote time to it from the moment I have a photographic project. When I have a real subject, that's all I do.

Projects in preparation?

Two books, from two different publishing houses. It is still too early to talk about it....

(Interview conducted in Lausanne on 27 September 2019)

If you need more specific information for journalistic purposes, don't hesitate to contact us on +41 21 925 34 80.



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Captions :

1. Les Parisiens I . Photo by Vincent Perez.
2. Les Parisiens VII. Photo by Vincent Perez
3. Les Russes IV. Photo by Vincent Perez
4. Le Vétéran. Photo by Vincent Perez
5. Vincent Perez. Photo by Jean-Marie Marion

Short text

Actor and director, Vincent Perez is also a photographer. Born in Lausanne in 1964, he attended the Vevey School of Photography for two years. He then forked the cinema, playing under the direction of the greatest directors. Vincent Perez returned to photography in the 2000s. He exhibits in Russia, at the Rencontres de la photographie d'Arles and at the Maison européenne de la photographie of Paris. The portraits of Parisians and Russians presented at the Swiss Camera Museum are from this latest exhibition. Never before has Vincent Perez exhibited his photographs in Switzerland. His portraits accompany a presentation of the 100-year history of PENTAX, a renowned Japanese brand of which Vincent Perez is the ambassador.

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