

Charles Fréger

Paris

Exhibition from the 29th of March to 5th of May 2007

Opening on Thursday 29th of March from 6 p.m to 9 p.m

In Luxembourg, Charles Fréger had the opportunity of carrying out one of the most important of his « Portraits photographiques et uniformes » series, the generic title of the project in which he has engaged since 1999 in Europe and elsewhere throughout the world, based on the dress code and the uniform. Carried out over three years, often in the world of young people who belong to sports, educational or professional groups, "LUX" constitutes to some extent a demonstration in the form of an inventory and an outcome of his preceding research on the figure and the portrait. This systematic approach to groups or communities, of which there are so many active entities within a country or a region, only offers a partial reflection. But it also allows for the revelation of some constants or variations, as seen in Luxembourg with the majorettes, the soldiers, the swimmers, the footballers, the horseback riders, the choir singers and the employees.

On the occasion of this new series, Charles Fréger uses a reoccurring and precise photographic vocabulary, made up of center framed, often full frontal, compositions, full length, bust or close up, set against backgrounds carefully chosen for their colour, for a variety of lines or for the usual *décor* of an activity. The transparency of lighting, and the neutrality of expression as well as the static nature of the image, acutely attentive to the quality of the skin or the textures of the clothes, suggest a reference to the portraits painted by the old Masters. The medieval profiles, or the frontal presence of the characters with attributes indicating rank and quality, similar to those found in the equestrian portrait, are all sources of inspiration for Charles Fréger's work. The photographs of today resound with the painted portraits of yesterday in these posed and emblematic images where appearance rubs up against identity, the individual against the collective.

In "LUX", this demonstration by Charles Fréger is renewed by the portraits of the swimmers skimming the water, the singers extracted from the collective of the choral society, the equestrian profiles and the group portrait where the choir singers and majorettes seem as if they are waiting for a parade to arrive. It should be mentioned that here the extent of the project authorizes and necessitates an articulation between the series. Thus, starting with very different groups, the research and style of the photographer, alternatively privileging the background, the shape of a face, the pose or the framing, permit, from one image or one series to another, the cohesion of the whole.

The common denominator in Charles Fréger's photographs remains these effects of socialization and incorporation, which are recorded on the surface of the beings in the poses and their codes of dress. The collective creates the adherent, the member or the volunteer, which then calls for a certain posture and equipment. That the young dancers must have their long hair smoothed and held in just such a way here results in a standard profile that Charles Fréger does not fail to underline. But at the same time it shows us how much this uniform series allows for the perception of the minutest differences and therefore the unique presence of each one. It seems to photographically verify this quotation of Sartre: "It is that a man is never an individual; it would be better to call him a singular universal."

Didier Mouchel

Photographic and uniform in catalogue LUX, Ed. Mudam, 2006