

... and in the biography of the artist

by Jeanne Calmont

Originally from the Parisian suburbs, JR made his debut in the world of graffiti during a period where he took the habit of leaving his print on the rooftops of Paris. Happening upon photography by random chance, after having found a camera in the Paris metro, the fetish awakened within him. JR begins to produce portraits of his graffiti friends. The cost of developing the photos pushes him to exploit the resources of an ordinary medium, the photocopy, pasted in the streets or even the metro. The economy of means, the colors reduced to black and white, contrasts with the flash and colors of the billboards which populate the urban and suburban spaces where the artist chose to place his work.

In 2004, JR made a name for himself by covering, without authorization, the walls of the Cité des Bosquets at Montfermeil with 20 large format posters representing young people from the neighborhood. Using a wide angle 28mm at short distance allowing to "be close to the person, in confidence" produces deformed and expressive images of which the lines, weathered reliefs, are still visible in situ.

Co-produced in 2007 with the photographer Marco, the cycle Face to Face is the second chapter of the artist's project in which JR is no less confrontational as he literally puts face to face Israelis and Palestinians practicing the same profession (professors, actors, taxi drivers...). The prints are posted without authorization from the local authorities in eight Israeli and Palestinian cities as well as on two sides of the wall which separates the two countries. Taken with a 28mm, these black and white shots, 20 meters high, constitute today the largest illegal exposition in the world.



Face 2 Face, *Holy Triptych*. Project produced in 2006-2007 by JR and Marco / © JR

At this point, his reputation has become international, if he no longer makes clandestine work, if he exposes on the London Tate Modern's facade, at the Biennial of Venice, at the Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie in Arles, at the Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris..., JR is no less an activist (contraction of the terms artist and activist). This title that he claims is verified in the permanence of his artist's initials, remnants of his underground past as an author of unauthorized expositions. Guaranteeing the artist's anonymity and the independence of his technique, these initials are as well the means to leave to the faces of the streets the possibility to be the only "heroes" of the artistic action : an intention of which the exposition, which is held on Ile Saint-Louis until the end of October 2009, is the most complete and probing testimony.

JR is represented by the London gallery Lazarides (www.lazinc.com) and by the German gallery Springmann (www.springmann-kunst.de). Three of the artists works have already been sold at auction : Train action in Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya (29 millimeter, women), photography mounted on aluminum support, 120 x 160 cm, 2009, ed. 3, 29 June 2009 at Artcurial was sold for more than 16,000 euros (estimation 10,000-12,000€); Favela, photography mounted on aluminum

support, 80 x 143, 2008, ed.3 sold for \$25,000 yet estimated at \$10,000-12,000 during the sale of contemporary and post-war art 13 May 2009 at Sotheby's New York and Ladj Li (Braquage, photography mounted on wood support, 69.5 x 105.4 cm, 2008, single edition print, estimated £ 10,000-15,000 was sold £ 26,250 during the sale at Sotheby's London 6 February 2009...

For more information on the artist : www.jr-art.net (<http://www.jr-art.net>)

<http://artyparade.com/en/news/10>