

Galería Elba Benítez



Jorge Ribalta

*Renaissance. Scenes of Industrial Reconversion
in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais Coalfield*

April - May 2019

The Galería Elba Benítez is pleased to present the exhibition *Renaissance — Scenes of Industrial Reconversion in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais Coalfield*, an extensive documentary essay by Jorge Ribalta, opening April 11, 2019.

Renaissance examines the conversion of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais — a former coal mining region in the north of France — into a post-industrial complex of culture, leisure and consumerism. Roughly equidistant from Paris, London and Brussels, the Nord-Pas-de-Calais is part of northern Europe's historical center of heavy industry, and as such has played a crucial political role in the history of the continent's major nation-states. With the definitive decline and end of coal-mining in the 1980s, the region's obsolete infrastructure and altered landscape were repurposed into a public-private nexus of changed forms and formats better suited to the late-capitalist economy, such as cultural institutions (including a franchise of Paris's Louvre museum), transportation hubs, shopping malls and nodes in the new global workplace of non-material labor. *Renaissance* presents photographic observation and analysis of a specific moment within this larger and ongoing transition.

Shot in the spring of 2014, *Renaissance* consists of 172 black-and-white photographs depicting historical artifacts, buildings and building construction, archives and archival material, individuals and landscapes. The photographs and accompanying texts are organized into eight groups based on geography and underlying concept, with sub-titles such as “Small History of Photography”, “New/Old Economy” and “Leisure,” while the images themselves — closely observed while often somewhat oblique — coolly span the corresponding range of people, places and things. More historiography than history, *Renaissance* aims to bring what Ribalta refers to as “historical density” to the “documentary idea,” combining an informed political position with a research-driven artistic practice, yet while remaining free from any disingenuous pose of neutrality.

George Stolz

Jorge Ribalta (Barcelona, 1963) is an artist, researcher, editor and independent curator. In his artistic practice, Ribalta not only draws on the findings of his research activity, but also incorporates research methodologies as an artistic strategy. His photographic work belongs to the tradition of critical documentary photography, insistently examining the medium’s active role in sustaining larger power structures and driven by an awareness of the role of labor. Frequently examining and critiquing the field in which he himself operates — i.e. cultural activities and institutions — Ribalta takes as a point of departure an understanding that the realm of culture is not individualistic but rather the product of collective efforts, internally as well as externally.

Ribalta has had solo shows at the Centre Régional de la Photographie Nord-Pas-de-Calais (Douchy-les-Mines, 2016); the Linea de Confine per la Fotografia Contemporanea (Rubiera, 2018); the Württembergischer Kunstverein (Stuttgart, 2016); Museo Guerrero (Granada, 2015); the Helga de Alvear Foundation (Caceres, 2015). He has participated in numerous group shows, including at the Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (2015); the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (Madrid, 2014); The Museum of Modern Art (New York, 2000); the Centre d’Art Santa Mònica (Barcelona, 1994) and elsewhere. He has curated numerous photography exhibitions and edited numerous photography books.

Renaissance — Scenes of Industrial Reconversion in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais Coalfield began during a residency at the CRP/ Centre Régional de la Photographie Hauts-de-France (formerly Centre Régional de la Photographie Nord-Pas-de-Calais), Douchy-les-Mines, France, which initially produced the work. *Renaissance* is the artist’s first exhibition at Galería Elba Benítez.

Image: Jorge Ribalta, *Renaissance. Scènes de la reconversion industrielle dans le bassin minier du Nord-Pas-de-Calais*,
Centre Régional de la Photographie Nord-Pas-de-Calais (CRP), Douchy-les-Mines, France, December 2015 (detail of the show's installation)