

the 21st century, a time with great potential. But I find it useful to reevaluate the past ever now and then.

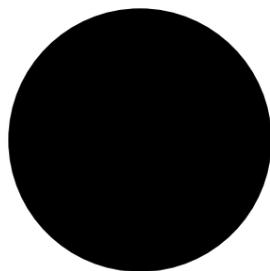
The particular phrase *imagine there's no countries* seemed very fitting as a title because this simple sentence has great implications, and calls for imagination. Most of the photographs that are on show in *Le Crédac* are landscapes, but the particular locations are not so important. These images show land as nature, not as territory, nation or empire. It is a more phenomenological approach to the land.

Also on a political level, as borders are becoming ever more prominent, as markers of inclusion and exclusion, as privacy and personal life are under close scrutiny of a surveillance society, I thought it was apt to revisit some of the utopian concepts that took form on a massive scale back then.

Septembte 2009

Interview between Geert Goiris and the team of the Centre d'art contemporain d'Ivry - le Crédac

- Mathieu Gillot, Mediator.
- Eran Guterman, Head of Communications.
- Claire Le Restif, Curator of the exhibition and Director.
- Céline Poulin, Head of the Public Outreach Department.
- Tony Regagzoni, Mediator.
- Jean-Louis Trocherie, Deputy Director.



**Geert Goiris biography**  
Born in 1971 in Bornem  
Lives and works in Anvers, Belgium  
[www.geertgoiris.info](http://www.geertgoiris.info)

Geert Goiris is represented by the galleries Art: Concept, Paris and Catherine Bastide, Brussels.

**SOLO SHOWS** (selection)

- 2010 CAB, Burgos  
Exposition avec Vincent Lamouroux, KASK, Gent
- 2009 Whiteout #02, Statements Art Basel, Bâle  
Winner of the Baloise Art Prize
- 2008 Whiteout #01, Images 08 festival, Vevey
- 2007 Frontier, Galerie Catherine Bastide, Bruxelles
- 2006 Le Grand Café, Centre d'art contemporain Saint Nazaire
- 2005 LFL gallery, New York
- 2004 The world as we know it (avec Ville Lenkkeri), Prospekto gallery, Vilnius  
Galerie Art: Concept, Paris

**GROUP SHOWS** (selection)

- 2009 Le Travail de rivière, Centre d'art contemporain d'Ivry - Crédac  
The state of Things, Bogar, Bruxelles et NAMOC, Pékin  
Beyond the picturesque, S.M.A.K., Gent
- 2008 Un-Scene, Wiels Centre for Contemporary Art, Bruxelles  
A meeting between the tragic and the funny, Hessenhuis, Anvers  
Lugares comprometidos, topography and actuality, Fundación ICO Madrid (Photoespaña festival 2008)  
P2P - casino Luxembourg
- 2007 Private/Public, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam  
The leading Thread, Centro de Arte Caja de Burgos  
Spectacular City - Photographing the Future, NRW- Forum Kultur und Wirtschaft, Düsseldorf  
El Hilo Conductor, Centro de Arte Contemporaneo de Burgos, Burgos  
Spectacular City - Photographing the Future, Architecture Institute, Rotterdam  
Tunnel Vision, Fotomuseum, Anvers  
Les rencontres d'Arles Photographie, Arles  
Freestate, Ostend  
Galerie Edward Mitterrand, Geneva  
Right on Write Off, Chapman Fine ARTS, London  
Traces, Biennale #1, photographie et architecture, Espace Architecture La Cambre, Brussels  
Buenos dias Santiago - an exhibition as an expedition, Museum of Contemporary Art, Santiago de Chile
- 2005 Belgian photographers 1840 - 2005, FotoMuseum, Anvers  
Croiser des mondes, Jeu de Paume, Paris
- 2004 Undercurrent, Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center, Istanbul  
Manifesta 5, European Biennial for Contemporary Art, San Sebastian

**PUBLIC COLLECTIONS**

- Fonds National d'Art Contemporain (FR)
- Centro de Arte Contemporaneo de Burgos (ES)
- La Salle Bank Photography Collection, Chicago (USA)
- ING, Brussels (BE)
- Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (FR)

Fotomuseum, Antwerp (BE)  
University Hospital, Jette (BE)  
Williams College Museum of Art (USA)  
Flemish Parliament, Brussels (BE)  
Seattle Art Museum (USA)  
Frac Languedoc-Roussillon, Montpellier (FR)  
Province of Antwerp (BE)  
Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane (AU)  
Lhoist Collection, Brussels (BE)

**Rendez-vous !  
during the exhibition of  
Geert Goiris**

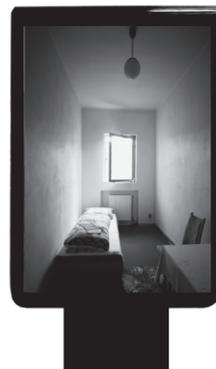
**Art-Thé**

Thursday 8 October at 3:30 PM with the mediators of the art center. 3 euros, reservation required.

**Crédacollation**

Thursday 5 November from 12 PM to 2 PM, with the artist. 4 euros, reservation required. Members : -50%.

The reception staff is at your disposal, do not hesitate to ask for any information.



Outside Pilote  
**Geert Goiris**  
*Hotel Posta, 2000*  
120 x 176 cm  
Courtesy : Art: Concept, Paris

**Geert Goiris**  
*Imagine there's no countries*  
exhibition from  
**9 September to 8 November 2009**

**Eran Guterman:** You set off on iconographic expeditions and research missions, letting viewers take part in extreme experiences to imagine the solitude that exists in each of us. The viewer is transported from a "passive" state to a state of a solitary "active explorer." How do you see solitude, yours and the viewer's?

**Geert Goiris:** The reason why I often choose extreme places and experiences to photograph is not because I want to present myself as a daredevil who goes to all these amazing places, but rather to show wilderness: the world without us, without humanity, just the surface of the land itself, as terrain unfit to sustain human beings. Being in these hostile surroundings shows how much is at stake. In fact, I find frontier territory revealing. The values and rules of organisation we tend to live by, the essence of society and survival is very visible in these places. There is obviously an ecological position behind this, but I hope it is not limited to that alone. So the explorer I would like to be is a wanderer who circles around our society and tries to look at it from the periphery, from a slightly oblique angle. An outsider by choice, mapping the outskirts of the known world.

I enjoy isolated places. I find the solitude and tranquility inspiring

and better for concentration. The viewer walking into an exhibition is also in a state of alertness, not unlike the frame of mind I try to get into when I am photographing. So essentially we both are in a receptive mode, solitary but permeable.

Looking at photographs taken during an expedition is never going to become the same as taking part in this expedition. As Hamish Fulton said: "an object cannot compete with a experience". Moreover, what we call "experience" is fundamentally undividable, despite the so-called shared experiences, we are all trapped inside our own bodies. As an alternative I try to present an image with a personal position embedded in it, one that concentrates more on a particular way of seeing. I like to stimulate the viewer to enter into different 'force-fields'. Some images draw you in, others resist, but these last ones tend to be more rewarding afterwards. The aim is to keep the visitor attentive to all the details present in the work, but I don't feel the need to persuade people. I rather offer them a safe haven for contemplation, to let their minds wander.

**Jean-Louis Trocherie:** A good part of the images you are producing seem to come from a similar disenchantment. What surfaces there over and over are extra-territorial, limitless, original landscapes: ocean, desert, ice floe, mountain. Often these landscapes, characterized by immensity and boundlessness, are the theater of unstable, threatening atmospheric phenomena, mists...

Before the power of these different contexts you draw up an inventory of situations that bear the stamp of either a human or animal presence. It is a frozen presence, however,

mute, silent, abandoned, like a liner that has run aground on ice.

It appears there, like a buoy on the ocean's surface, looking to mark, limit, appropriate, identify, create territory. But in vain, the attempt seems to have been thwarted, already bearing with it its own ruin, like that block of concrete that once was a house and now drifts on the water's surface, or those blocks of traffic signs piled up in a red-colored chaos.

Through this contrast is there a political or ecological dimension to your concerns?

**G.G.:** The visual vocabulary I use is simple and elementary: oceans, deserts, seascapes, mountains... Some of the main motives of the picturesque surface, but always in a deceptively simple way: the mountain or hill is positioned deadpan in the middle of the composition. Almost like a child would photograph a mountain: straight in the middle, without too much disturbing background noise. By using this rigid framing over and over again, a kind of catalogue arises, a collection of anomalies in the landscape.

The distance I put between myself and some of the subjects could be almost extraterrestrial: like a visitor from out of space, seeing the world for the first time, would glance at things. When everything seems alien and new, there is no hierarchy anymore. Imagine crawling out of a bunker after months of hiding and discovering a whole new world around you, or to wake up from a long coma. These are narrative devices that have been used often in literature, and they have great visual potential as well. This is why the landscapes I present are not limited to grand natural scenes, with epic lookout points. Sometimes, a very banal landscape shows up, that somehow distinguishes itself through a

Le Crédac receives support from the city of Ivry-sur-Seine, the Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles d'Ile-de-france (Regional Cultural Affairs), Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication (Ministry of culture and communication), le Conseil Général du Val-de-Marne (Val-de-Marne County Council) and le Conseil Régional d'Ile-de-France (Ile-de-France Regional council).

Le Crédac is a member of and

this exhibition takes place during the event

**PLEIN SOLEIL 09**

specific kind of light, an out-of-place object, or point of view, which renders it unfamiliar again. The inaccessability of the site itself influences the image, the journey then becomes metaphorical and the destination enters the realm of the imaginary. This romantic notion of exploration, the sensation of seeing something for the first time, not only as an individual, but also as a society, is a big part of my work.

Instability plays an important role in the world I try to evoke. I somehow find the fleeting and intangible more honest than the durable and the stable. Artists recreating different forms of the intangible (Ann Veronica Janssens, James Turrell, Larry Bell, ...) are a great inspiration to me, but I work in a medium that results precisely in a permanent form: a print, or (as a kind of intermediate) slide projection. I think that many romantic painters were possessed by the same movement: translating something which is felt, rather than perceived, into a fixed graphic form. In this way I certainly share a sensitivity with the Romantical tradition: where sensual experience and the merging of body and environment come into play.

For the series *Whiteout*, I travelled to Antarctica in an attempt to visualise an atmospheric phenomenon causing complete diffusion of light: stuck in a whiteout, one experiences a bright white space around, without horizon, without any relief or structure. The geographic features of the area vanish and the viewer is left within an absolute void. Balancing on the edge of the visible attracts me: to seek out the point where the senses are not longer reliable. Being in a whiteout comes close to being buried alive. It interests me to live through these experiences and to pass on a testimony of it.

The disorienting effect I felt being

inside this phenomenon is completely cancelled once it is recorded on a film and projected: the viewer doesn't feel the same spatial confusion, so I had to make something different out of it. By bringing together a set of thirty images, a short narrative unfolds, where the destabilising effect of such a strange occurrence is passed on to the viewer in a more eluded way: it escapes perception but is understood anyway.

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**Mathieu Gillot:** I'd like to know if Geert Goiris has a precise memory of the places he's photographed and the shots he made of them, or if the photographic image comes to replace the recollection, becoming the principal element of memory.

**G.G.:** W.G. Sebald pointed out that a photograph rapidly pushes the memory of an event or place into the background. As soon as a photograph is made and looked at afterwards, the memory of whatever is portrayed starts to fade and is replaced by the memory of the photograph itself. I often venture out to specific places precisely because I want to photograph it, so I am quite conscious about this, and have ambivalent feelings about it. From some locations, I still have clear recollections, at others however, I was so occupied with making the image, abstracting the space while I was at it, that my memory of it didn't become particularly strong. Regularly using very long exposures, I sometimes stand for an hour or longer next to the camera, gazing at the object of landscape I am recording. Watching attentively like this, in a slow and deliberate way, is revealing and absorbing. It is a cliché, but sometimes it feels like becoming part of the place. As is generally accepted within science, the fact that something is being observed, alters the observed, and I see no reason why

photographing a particular setting wouldn't change the constellation itself.

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**Céline Poulin:** What interests you in those very odd moments of our reality that you photograph, moments that one could associate with the "uncanny" that Freud spoke of, where the border between the real and the unreal disappears?

**G.G.:** I have used the term "traumatic realism" before: it refers to a mental state indicating a breaking point, where fact and fiction fuse in a sort of micro-mystery, where the familiar takes on an unfamiliar presence. My images are not a documentary: they do not claim to show things as they are, but more as they seem, or as they might be.

I would like to invite viewers to reflect on the idea of seeing something (or someone) for the first (or last) time. And use the camera to record this unique encounter.

One of the exercises I ask my students is to imagine that they are going on a long journey: so far and irreversible that it is possible they may not ever return from it. Which images will they take along? What kind of visual inventory will they pack before they leave? On top of that, they also have to think what they want to communicate (to new people they might meet) about the place and people they left behind. So the whole concept of seeing something 'fresh' and unbiased is something I find very valuable in a pedagogical framework. Of course it is an illusion to create a 'naive' school of photography: nobody can escape the bombardment of images and all the conventions and unspoken rules of image-making. But according to me there is still a largely uncovered potential to look at familiar things in an unprecedented way, which is as close as I can come to the interpretation

of Freud's theory of the uncanny applied to photography.

The situations I depict aren't very strange in a fraudulent sense: we can all see – very clearly – an animal, a building, a landscape. It is because this animal, building, landscape... doesn't behave as it should (as it 'normally' does in photographs), that the image itself might seem strange and illusory. So the unheimlich character of these scenes is situated more within the construction than in its separate parts.

I like to create works that are otherworldly and strange, I don't see any point in presenting an exact reproduction of the facts as they occur.

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**Tony Regazzoni:** From my point of view, there is something very romantic (in the pictorial and literary sense of the term) running throughout your photographs, in terms of the subjects photographed, the very idea of exploration and your way of proceeding.

It so happens that this period, romantic painting, corresponds to the advent of photography, which shook up forms of representation for this reason. Although painting was until then the only means available for illustrating a potential reality, photography very quickly succeeded it, becoming the most "objective" solution for representing reality. Probably in reaction to that, painters seized on the canvas as a space for experimentation and projection, supplying what photography, at the time, could not supply.

First of all, do you feel connected with a history of painting, especially the painting I was talking about earlier?

We know nowadays that photography is no longer "objective" and that it is quite

easily doctored. What pushes you to work in a "classic" way without resorting to some digital treatment? Does that have a relationship with the objectivity of photography that I was talking about earlier?

**G.G.:** I am not trained in the tradition of painting, but as a photographer, it is impossible not to be influenced by all the other two-dimensional media, most of which go back to painting. As someone who grew up with television much more than with looking at canvasses, I am equally influenced by the fantastic realism of people like Stanley Kubrick, George Lucas, etc... These authors have shown great confidence in the photographic medium and used it to depict imaginary worlds with an astonishing naturalism.

Photography can easily be manipulated and its "objective" qualities are of little value to determine the veracity of a historical event. At the same time traditional photography is an analogue technique, it records very small increments of light intensity. This means that it actually can record something that is not always visible to the human eye. When I was photographing the snowy and icy landscape right before a whiteout would set in, I couldn't see a thing. Later, as I got the film back from the lab, I noticed something had made it into a film anyway, and very faintly a landscape showed itself. To me this kind of discovery is more meaningful than manipulating or altering photographs. Digital construction of an image never satisfies my curiosity to the same extent than revealing something through the photographic process.

Recording the invisible is in itself already a 'romantic' undertaking: applying a scientific method (measuring the light and exposing it in a film) to achieve poetic ends. A brilliant transfiguration occurs every time an analogue photo is being made: light becomes matter.

**Claire Le Restif:** The title of your show, coming from John Lennon's *Imagine*, and the visual aspect of the building constructed by Jean Renaudie housing the Art Center are the fruit of the 1970's. At a press conference in 1973, John Lennon and Yoko Ono announced the birth of Nutopia, a conceptual country "that has no land, no boundaries, no passport, only people." A country that belongs to everyone. Do you place your artistic work among 21st century utopias? Or rather in reaction to the utopias of the 20th century?

**G.G.:** I don't want to enter into nostalgia, but just felt the urge to reinstate the powers of the counterculture and the celebration of freedom and creativity that happened in this period. Lennon and Renaudie, both in their different ways had visionary qualities.

There is no point to argue about the 'revolution' itself, whether it was a bourgeois endeavour or not, whether it came out of a truly utopian momentum, or if it was actually aimed at instant satisfaction, and as such laid the foundations of today's individualists' society. I wasn't there and cannot judge. But clearly some shockwaves agitated society at large. The changes that took place (sexual revolution, the church losing its grip on the masses, etc.) shaped much of what came after. Being a child of the 70's, it determined much of my upbringing as well.

If you look around today and see how much of the democratic principles have been sacrificed, and how religion has divided people across the globe, we are in fact very remote from Nutopia. There was an unmistakable independent creativity at play within cinema, music and the arts in general. Today's mainstream cinema and pop music pale in comparison. I am happy to live in