

ALEXANDRE CHRISTIAENS (BE)

Crystalline networks

Musée de la photographie, Charleroi
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www.alexandrechristiaens.com



Atlantic Ocean, 2013 © Alexandre Christiaens

Alexandre Christiaens: Journey around my dark room

Pierre-Yves Desaive

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In Olivier Smolder's 2008 film adaptation of Xavier de Maistre's 1794 work, *Journey around my room*, as he makes his audience follow the footsteps of the Maasai people, he states that 'one of the main challenges that the traveller encounters (...) is to move away from the images of which he had dreamed before setting out on his journey'. This statement is particularly pertinent – and this is indeed what the filmmaker was referring to – when it applies to a journey that one has taken because of the images they have seen, whether it be film or photography. Right from the outset, we imagine that this journey is exotic – because if it is not exotic, then what is even the point of documenting it? Yet it is only 'exotic' in Houellebecq's use of the word. As Gauguin stated: 'This is the REAL Tahiti, i.e. the ACCURATELY IMAGINED Tahiti' (his capitals). Globalisation – or whatever the word we wish to use to describe the phenomenon that allows us to encounter environments a thousand miles away that are governed by the same rules as our own – has made the quest for authenticity obsolete, if not obscene.

Alexandre Christiaens is well aware of this. His images do not seek to represent a hypothetical elsewhere. Indeed, his images contemplate the elsewhere as a basis upon which the photographs are constructed. While there is already exoticism – in the sense of otherness – in his work, this exoticism is further enhanced due to the divergence between the subject and the way the photographer captures the former. In his depictions of India, he portrays visions of constructions (a wooden boat, an old cinema) absorbed by the night. In his photographs of Mount Athos, he perfectly captures the triangular shadow that is cast over the land and sea, giving the viewer the freedom to imagine the landmass that overlooks the landscape. He photographs the mountains of Lebanon as a woman's body, and a woman's body as the mountains of Lebanon. In the background, refugee camps sprawl across the Bekaa valley, a sorrowful mapping portrayed by an old piece of sheet metal overlapping the infinite sky.

What is more, the metal sheet that symbolically encroaches upon a landscape, which initially appears idyllic, demonstrates the photographer's desire to capture textures as closely as possible: fishing nets on the ground, the skin of a raw-boned dog, the branches of a cypress tree. In the depths of the caves he explored in Romania, once again he gives his full attention to physical matter – in this case concretions. Similarly, in night-time outdoor landscapes the presence of light, which seems to be barely tolerated, is reduced to a minimum.

This interplay between texture and light is most expertly crafted in seascapes, which occupy a special place in Alexandre Christiaens' work. Whether the seascapes depict the surge of the Atlantic as a rigid mountain of water, or whether they transform a calm sea into a black silk scarf that caresses the shoreline, Alexandre Christiaens' images lend a strong sense of the material to an element that, since time immemorial, embodies the elusive in the earthly world. Some photos are taken from a boat in the ocean, others on the land, and others simply leave us guessing. It is significant that the visitor first witnesses an unusual concrete construction that resembles a sort of modern-day unfinished temple, reminiscent of the other side of the wall of the Parthenon, constructed on the sea. Two worlds collide and complement each other: perfect stability on the one hand (in this case, it is a bridge pier under construction), and on the other, both elements drifting away from each other. In many respects, it is this complementarity that constitutes the basis of Alexandre Christiaens' artistic thinking.

PYD



Grèce, Athènes Parthenon, 2016 © Alexandre Christiaens



Chili, Valparaiso, 2015 © Alexandre Christiaens



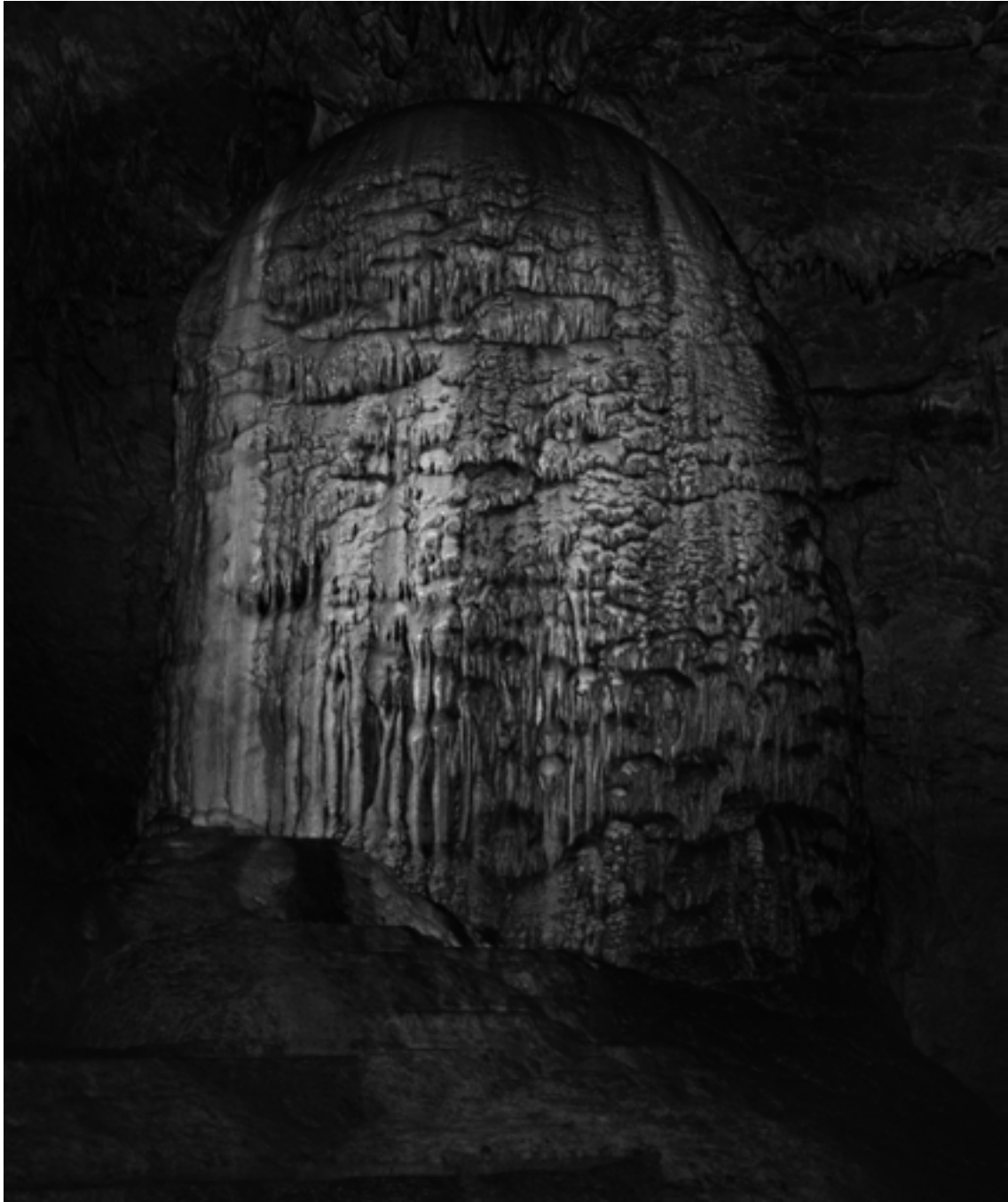
India, Mandvi, 2015 © Alexandre Christiaens



India, Mandvi, 2015 © Alexandre Christiaens



Grèce, voyage à Cythère, 2002 © Alexandre Christiaens



Roumanie, Grotte Méziad, 2007 © Alexandre Christiaens



Grèce, Mont Athos, 2002 © Alexandre Christiaens



Grèce, Mont Athos, 2002 © Alexandre Christiaens



Grèce, voyage à Cythère, 2002 © Alexandre Christiaens



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Iles de Wight, 2000 © Alexandre Christiaens



Grèce, Cythère, 2017 © Alexandre Christiaens



Grèce, Delphes, 2017 © Alexandre Christiaens



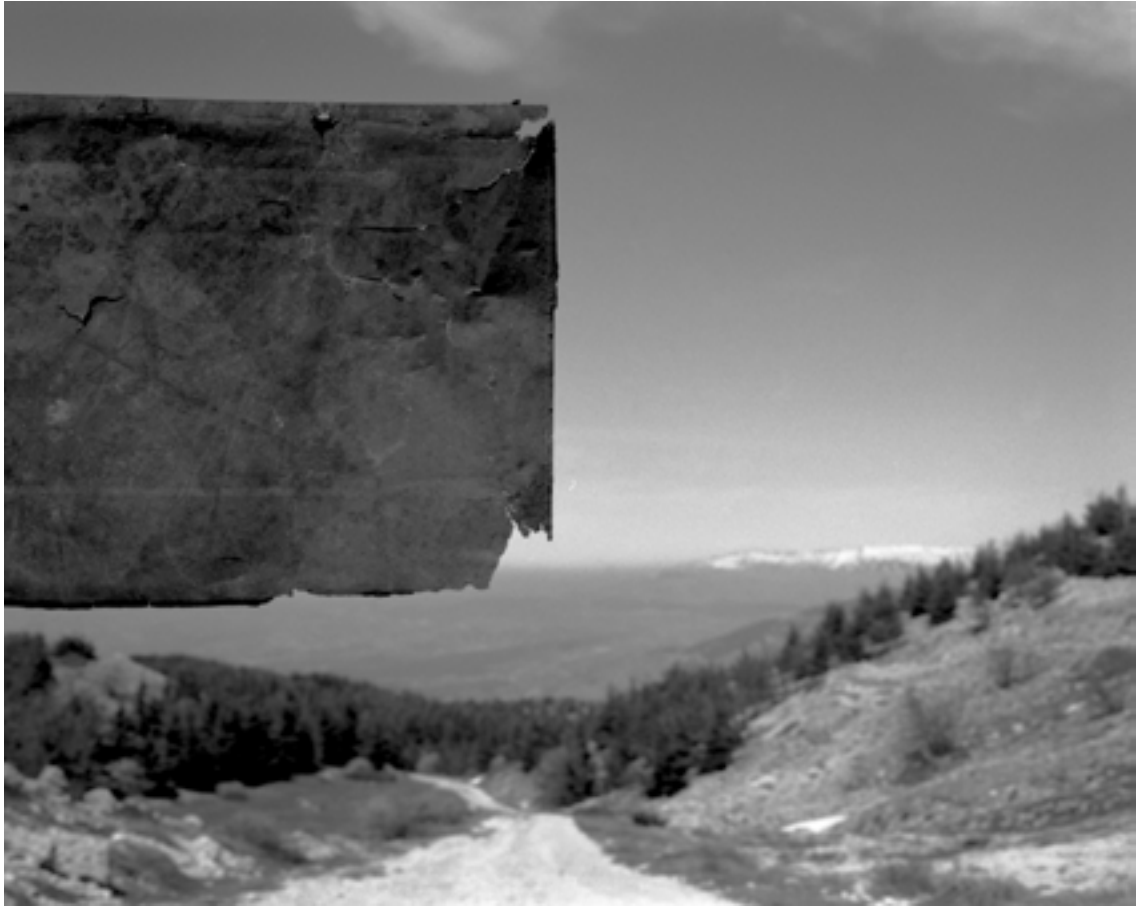
Grèce, Cythère, 2017 © Alexandre Christiaens



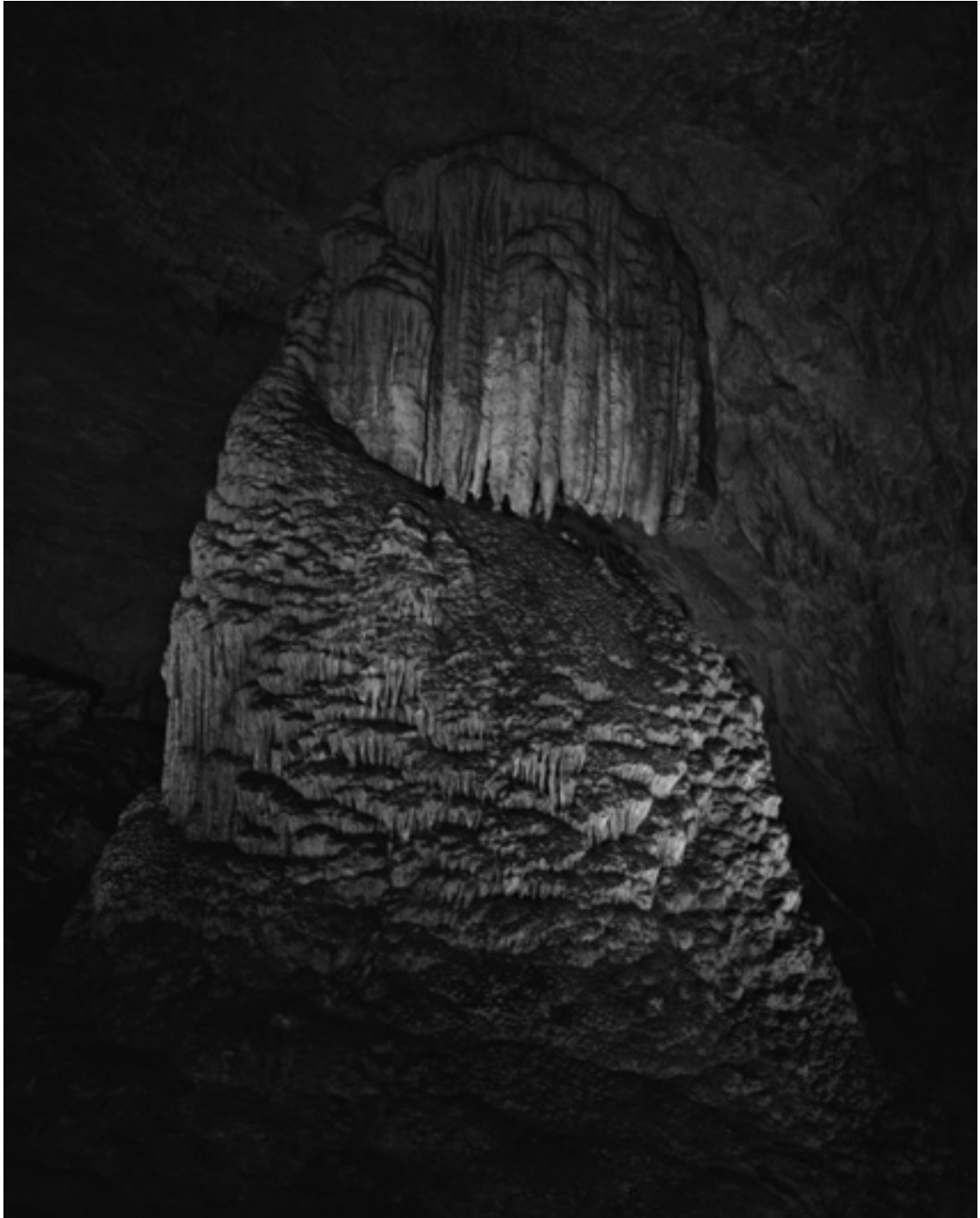
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Liban, Barouk Masser el-Chouf, 2017 © Alexandre Christiaens



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Brazil, Salvador de Bahia, Atlantic Ocean, 2007 © Alexandre Christiaens



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on **www.alexandrechristiaens.com/en**

High definition portfolio on request.

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Grèce, voyage à Cythère, 2002 © Alexandre Christiaens