

## MICHEL CAMPEAU

### THE DONKEY THAT BECAME A ZEBRA: DARKROOM STORIES

#### DARKROOM

Starting in 2003, Michel Campeau travelled the world to photograph darkrooms. Havanna, Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Niamey and Montreal were some of the stops where he recorded the chambers of analogue photography. These places where icons of picture making were once crafted through chemicals on silver gelatin paper are nearly obsolete via the digital age. Today they seem like illusions of a time long gone. Campeau highly appreciates these historical places. He regards their fate as an important means to bring attention to the influence of globalisation and the digital revolution on culture. However, he also refers to the visible regional standards of photography, which are not as universal and more ethnocentric as the Western world may have thought them to be.

Photographer Martin Parr commented: "Most photographers have spent hours and days in that peculiar environment known as the darkroom. Here, prints are magically created using chemicals and light. Campeau's photographs show the passing of an era. As digital production takes hold to a greater and greater extent, we will look back at these images and mourn the darkroom's passing."

*Information about the book:*

*Michel Campeau, Photographic Darkroom / Photogenic Obsolescence  
Kehrer Verlag, Heidelberg, 2013.*

#### GESTURES AND RITUALS OF THE DARKROOM

As an artist and collector, I reiterate my attachment to photographs, books, archives and iconographic documents from various aesthetic and conceptual angles. Here, unlike files stored on hard drives or synchronized in the iCloud or Instagram, the old images owe their survival to the existence of the base material to their device: the negative, the print, the slide and the polaroid. Without real nostalgia for what has been and sooner or later what will be carried away by the digital brilliance – I have saved the "ruins" of analog, the "traces" demonstrating what was the practice in this transitional place of photographic creation, from the advent of the daguerreotype to the century-old reign of the silver halide.

I focused my attention on the images of anonymous photographers chose to be the memorialist of the matrix character of the darkroom, a derisory and neuralgic place of photographic creation, intoxicating with experimentation, failure, discovery and "Revelations". Ultimately, I was surprised to find myself in front of the panoply of the rituals carried out in the dark room, these gestures that I long described as "jazzy" are improvised and approximate, far from logarithms and the accuracy of computers.

Michel Campeau, 2019

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### RUDOLPH EDSE. AN UNINTENTIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

A few slides found on the Net – self-portraits of a man surrounded by attributes of photography – were the trigger that gave rise to this series and the book. For a number of years Michel Campeau had been buying photographs on eBay, making his choices entirely subjectively, as if he himself was pointing his camera at a boundless universe. Intrigued by these self-portraits, the artist-collector set about acquiring all the images he could find by the unknown photographer. He was finally able to purchase the entire archive of work by Rudolph Edse (Hamburg, Germany, 1913–Worthington, Ohio 1998) from the dealer. It was the images of a man practicing photography that had first attracted Campeau, who is interested in masculine sensibilities that echo his own. But he was subsequently thrilled to discover that Edse had devoted much of his leisure time to documenting his family life. Differently from an ordinary amateur photographer in this case the images were skillfully composed and the story they told apparently perfect.

McCord Museum, Montreal, 2018

Project partners:



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