

**The representation of work**

**and the role (game) of the worker**

Gilberto Güiza-Rojas

# Gilberto Güiza-Rojas

plastic artist

e-mail: gilbertogg@gmail.com

site: gilbertoguiza.com

## *Academic background*

- 2016 : Master Photography and Contemporary Art - Distinction "Very Good"- Université Paris8  
Practical Supervisor : Alain Bernardini - Theoretical Supervisor : Paul-Louis Roubert
- 2014 : Workshop « The photographic protocol » with artists Patrick Tosani and Arno Gisinger  
Le Fresnoy – Studio national des arts contemporains, (Tourcoing, France)
- 2013 : Bachelor's degree in Plastic arts, Photography Specialty - Université Paris 8
- 2009 : Certificate in Fashion Photography : Escuela ZONA CINCO  
(Bogota, Colombia)
- 2007 : Bachelor's degree in Industrial Engineering : Pontificia Univerisdad Javeriana (Bogota,

## *Artistic Background*

- 2017 : Solo exhibition « Role Games. (re)present work »  
Galerie du CROUS de Paris, France  
  
Collective exhibition « Think photography. Images and forms »  
With Diaph8 group - Curators : Pascal Beausse and Alain Bernardini  
Official selection of Le Mois de la Photo du Grand Paris 2017, (Saint Denis, France)
- 2016 : Collective exhibition « Infinitely Human »  
With Diaph8 group - Curator : Michael Houlette  
Maison de la photographie Robert Doisneau, (Gentilly, France)
- 2016/17 : Participant artist for educational project « The photography at school »  
Maison de la photographie Robert Doisneau (Gentilly, France)
- 2014 : Collective exhibition «Interstices» Galerie Plateforme (Paris, France)

## *Voluntary background*

- 2016 : Founder member of Diaph8 group : Initiator of initiatives in arts and photography

## ***Biography***

Colombian artist born in 1983 living and working in Paris. He is a founding member of Diaph8, a group created within the Masters of Photography and contemporary art of Paris 8 University in order to create a network and a platform for artistic projects.

Through photography and video, his work questions the relation between the individual and his/her job, with a particular focus on the manual, repetitive and unskilled activities that do not involve a level of craftsmanship.

## ***The everyday life as succession of fragments***

My current life is the result of different choices that have led me to roads that are different to the ones that I was supposed to follow. Far away from Colombia, my country of origin, and far away from industrial engineering, my initial career, I'm presently in France, after 6 years of beginning a new life and a new way of thinking... the art way.

My reflections develop from my personal experience and not from formal conceptualization (which I, however, do not dismiss). My everyday life -as that of everybody else- is a delicate woven tissue that assembles a series of fragments which represent the different aspects that constitute me as a person. Each fragment can be independent and diverge sensibly with respect to the other ones. A person plays different roles in his life; that is to say that he/she adopts social, gestural, clothing, intellectual and physical positions (among others) that differ significantly depending if he/she is among family, friends, at work, walking down the street, etc.

Each situation, moment or fragment that makes up the routine of life of a person is the raw material of his/her everyday life. The way in which the person plays each role forms his/her singularity as an individual.

The acknowledgment of the presence and of the importance of these roles in my own life, as well as of the ambiguity that frequently arises when I play them depending on the situation, has led me to choose the subject of my artistic research. Thus, I've decided to focus (for the time being) in the working world.

## ***Why the representation of work?***

Work has often been considered as a space where class struggle takes place and, in this sense, it has been approached from a determined, engaged, political position. My own approach seeks to detach itself from this aprioristic political view in order to conceive work as a synthetic space which contains the different layers of society. In this sense, work is perceived as a territory that blends personal and professional relationships with communication codes, a hierarchy, and, of course, clothing codes in which the image of the individual itself is transformed and becomes uniformed.

In this context my main interest centers on the jobs that are usually situated in the lower part of the hierarchy of the companies (and of society), most often than not manual and unskilled labor. This type of jobs constitute a paradox as they make up the base of the society's work structure, but, notwithstanding this, those that occupy these jobs have a marginal, often despised, place in society.

From the work perspective, different questions arise:

Is there an image of work?

How can photography and art propose an "image of work"?

How to inscribe the presence of man in the work territory?

## ***The person as center and subject of representation***

My images and videos exist thanks to the participation of real employees. They configure an experience in which my artistic research seeks to create different relations between the workers and their work related activities: forbidden gestures and attitudes, use of the tools outside their productive function, the synthetic and iterative execution of the work related actions, etc. The people that perform actions for my photos and videos are inside a defined space of representation, whether it is inside a studio or in context, where the image development conditions are manifestly a construct. Hence, the persons become actors that do a performance piece, in which the spectators is taken to their work environments through mechanisms such as the use of work related uniforms, gestures or settings; and, at the same time their "laborer label" is being removed thanks to the discrepancy between the situations. The energy that the person usually employs for doing its everyday work is bestowed for an aestheticizing artistic construction.

## ***Tempo, travail in situ, (2017)***

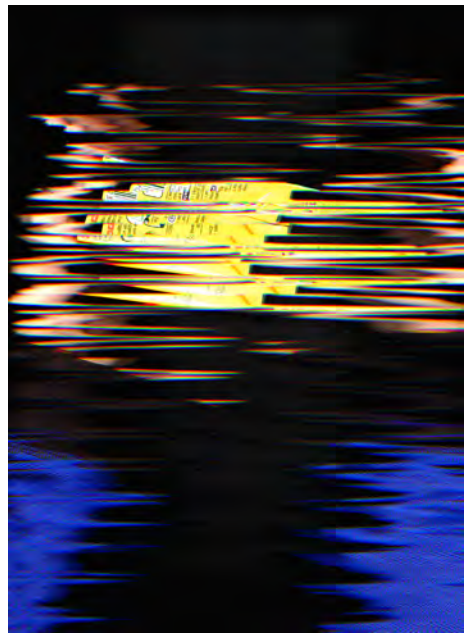
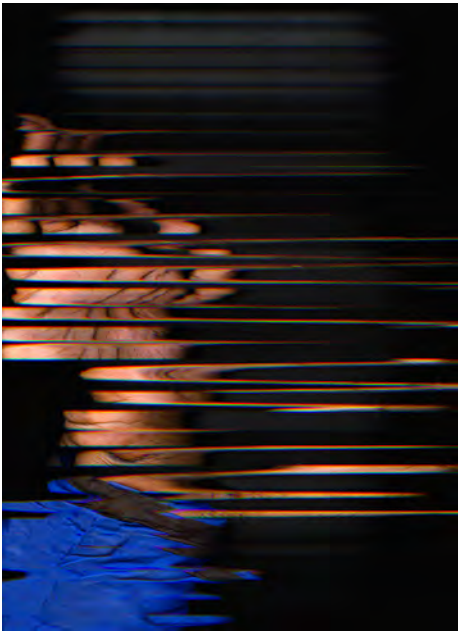
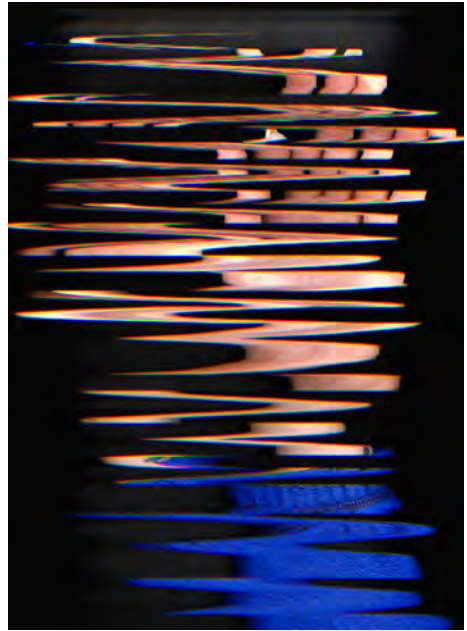
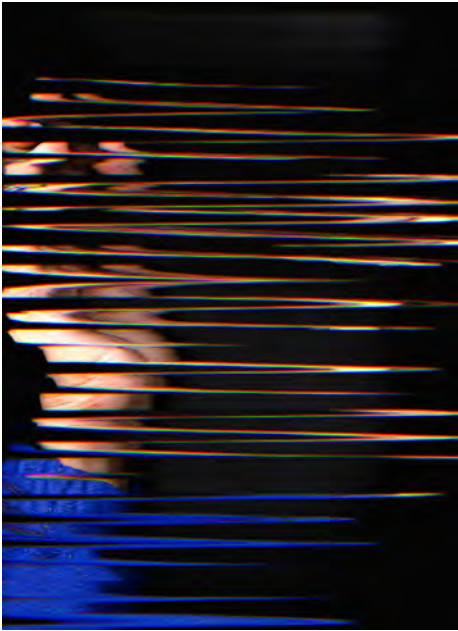
*Work carried out for the exposition « Think photography. Images and forms »*

The sound environment in the big supermarkets is saturated by the multiplicity and the frequency of the beeps at the registers. This sound establishes the rhythm of the cashiers' gestures.

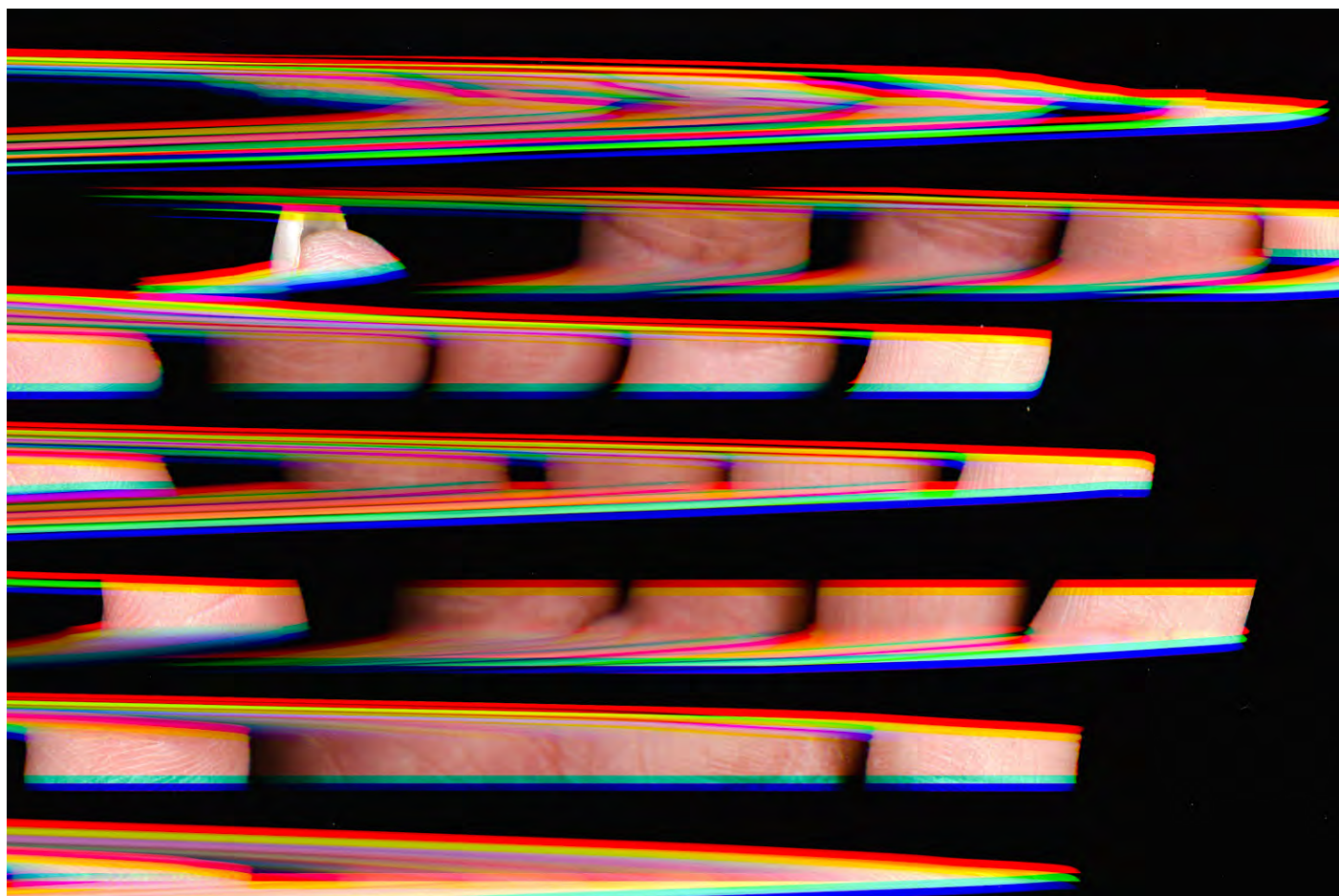
For the Tempo series, the persons that work every day as cashiers participated in the creation of the images following a protocol, which resonates with their work posts. The image is created by a scanner in such a way that the hands of the men and women are "scanned" while they perform their job gesture, in the same way that they do every day with the products.

During the execution of the images the workers wore a pair of headphones that played the beep of a metronome, which corresponded to the average speed of the products passing by the register (1.5 seconds per product in each transaction)

The gestures, whose pace is set by the Tempo of their work, produce images that, thanks to the scanner's sweep for capturing the image, open up a new aesthetic dimension. In this way, the hands of the performers are fragmented by the cadence of the action and the chromatic aberrations strengthen the evidence of the image capturing device.







***Tempo, (Detail), travail in situ, (2017),***

Work carried out for the exposition « Think photography. Images and forms »

## ***In the struggle ( En la Lucha ), 2017***

... "In the struggle". The struggle as routine. The struggle as a way of surviving. The struggle as a symbol of life, of optimism. The struggle as action and positive action.

In the big markets of Bogotá, the "coterros", the men who transport the merchandise for the wholesalers and the traders, do a true "ballet" of loading and unloading goods. They're payed only in tips by the clients for carrying bags between 20 and 50 kgs. "The load" is more than a load, it's truly a body, a weight that won't move, becoming in its passivity a metamorphic foe, difficult to handle.

In spite of the length of this work, in which the workers may have up to 30 years of experience, there is a camaraderie, a hope, and a dynamism proper to the struggle.

The workers performed struggling with their loads, for the sake of the construction of the photographic performance. They are useless gestures, which are not directly linked to the action of loading and moving the goods, but are rather inspired by wrestling images previously chosen by the workers.

The series is an exploration in which the work space becomes a dramatized space thanks to the photographic device that evidences the mise-en-scène. It is also in a way a spectacle because the public (clients, traders and colleagues of the performer) is present and witnesses the realization of the images.







*In the struggle ( En la Lucha )*, 2017, Archival pigment print, 120 x 80

## ***Taking off the shoes (Se Déchausser),*** **2016**

This series interrogates the spaces that mediate between the possible representations of the work territory. It is the interstice laying between the work, its space, the mise-en-scène and the performative act.

The workers carry out the performance in the same place where they carry out their daily work activities. This performance is done in front of an inserted black background which does not occupy all the space in the image and which does not intend to become an actual scenery. Conversely, this background blends with the space and evidences the device and the intention of the mise-en-scène of the image.

It is not only a spatial interstice, but also a gestural one. Removing one's shoes implies a body gesture in which the worker abandons his/her work uniform. In western culture, the foot conveys an aspect of intimacy and it's treated with a sort of modesty, one just doesn't take the shoes off anywhere, whether it is to avoid the contact of the foot or sock with the dirty floor, or because we are ashamed of someone who might be looking at us.

In these images the workers share this part of their privacy in benefit of the photography. From a different point of view, the action of taking off one's shoes (which are part of the work uniform), changes the role of the worker who becomes a performer in the new space of representation, acting thus towards the search for aesthetical gestures in contrast to the sternness of work.







***Taking off the shoes (Se Déchausser), 2016*** , Archival pigment print, 120 x 80 cm

## ***The Crushed Ones (Les Écrasés), 2016***

This series interrogates the work conditions and, at the same time, it creates a paradox in its representation. The objects and uniforms used by the workers for executing their tasks are scanned in order to obtain singular images that are rich in detail.

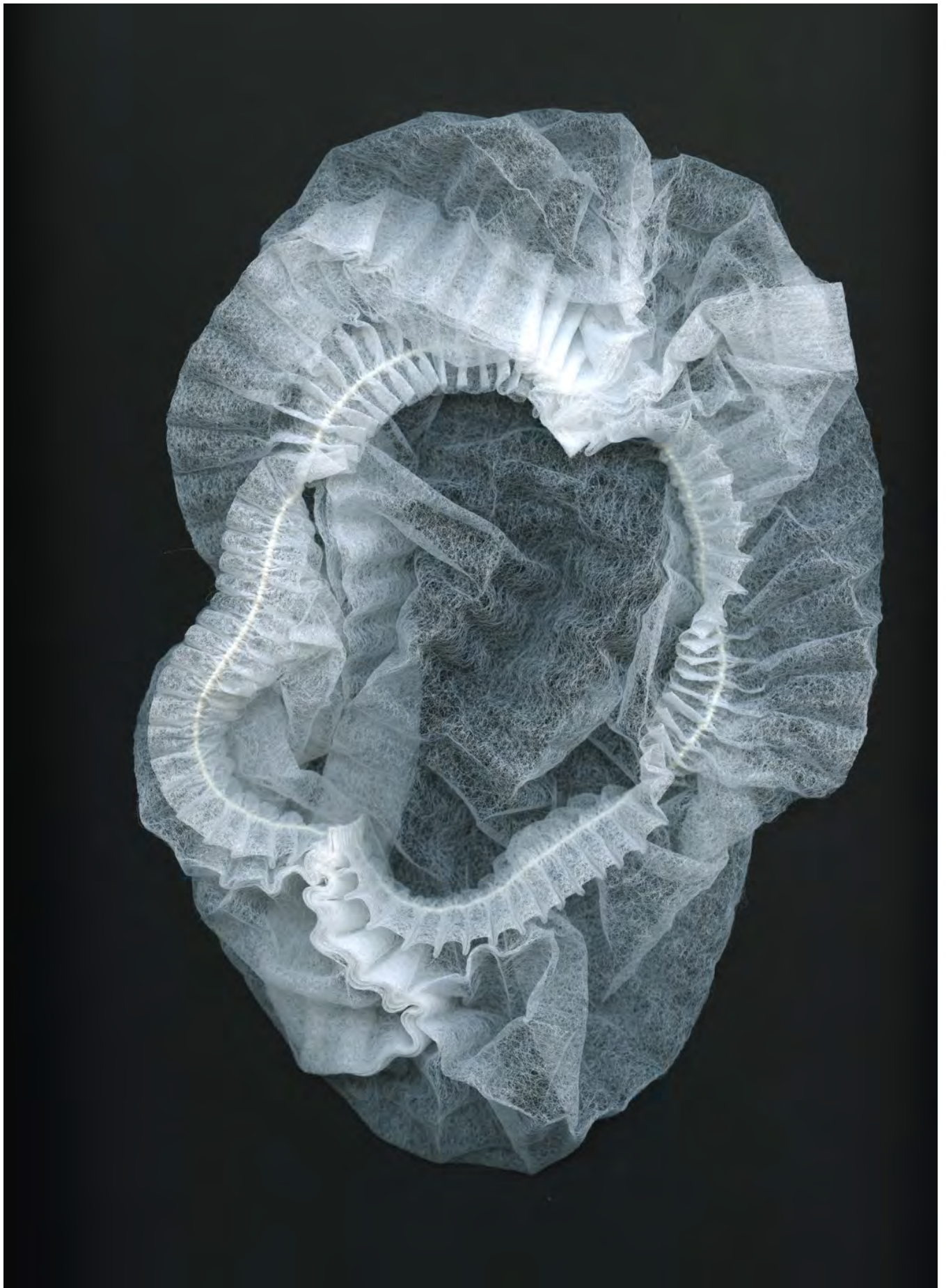
This image capture technique demands the crumpling of the objects during their digitalization. The physical crushing of the object echoes the social trampling suffered by the individuals who perform manual, repetitive, non-qualified jobs that require no craftsmanship.

Nonetheless, the objects are not completely crushed in the images. The minimum width that remains opens up the possibility for the existence of volume, and the perception of three-dimensionality still persists. This three-dimensionality evokes the presence of the bodies that interacts daily with these objects in the workplace.

The images employs an important aesthetic mechanism, that of enlargement. This procedure is usually employed to bring out the spectacular and contemplative aspect of an image; however in “The Crushed Ones”, the hyper enlargement helps to emphasize the grind, stains and the wear due to work. It’s a sort of exaltation of the “flaws” which takes them to an aesthetical level.







*The Crushed Ones (Les Écrasés)*, 2016, Archival pigment print, 90 x 120 cm

## ***Polyvalent Worker (Employé Polyvalent), 2015***

The video is a performance piece in which the artist, in his condition as a worker, puts himself in scene for questioning the link between “small job” and the artistic process. It is an autobiographic piece.

Day jobs are in many cases the only way to survive for creators in every artistic discipline and students of every field. A relative precariousness surrounds these statuses and forces the persons involved in them to seek these economic activities that fortunately exist, as they permit the people to develop another path.

When the fast food service mixes up with the artistic exploration that questions society, the result takes an artistic form. The person erased by the nature of his work appears and fades between the darkness and the light.

The automatization of formulas and imposed phrases in the frame of the paid activity merges with the concepts of the artist's theoretical research. The only restraint established is to don't stop and to try to keep a high speed of verbalization throughout the performance. This creates a long improvised performance piece in which fatigue, mistake and stutter attest to the condition of the day job that has allowed the artist to reflect and create.



***Polyvalent Worker (Employé Polyvalent), 2015,***  
Video 12'16", Loop Reproduction

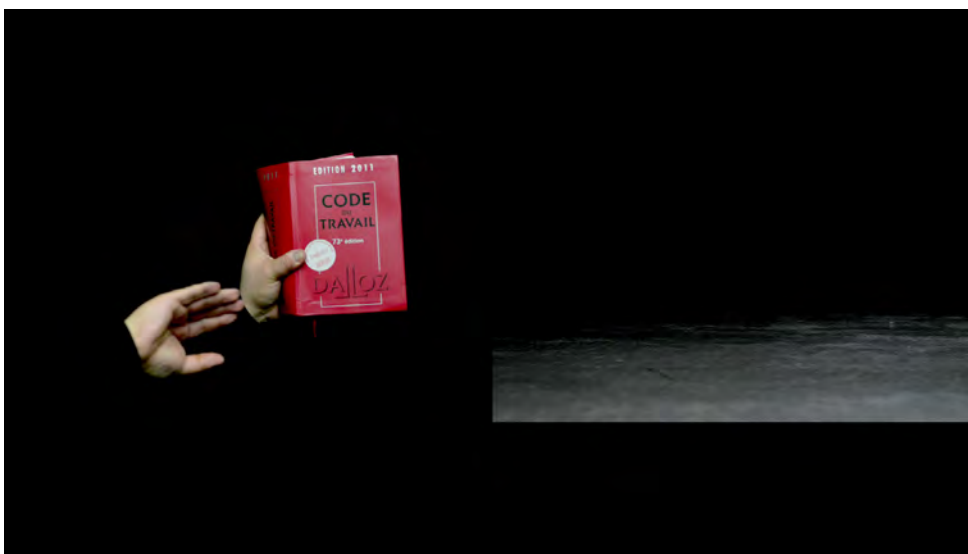


# ***Organizing the Code (Ranger the Code), 2015***

The performance is the gesture of organizing the Labor Code in a shelf in order to place it the proper spot. The repetitive action shows how, through the daily routine of his/her job as an arranging employee in a library, the worker performs the activity mechanically in a loop that loses its meaning.

This video doesn't just interrogate the book arranging task, but conveys an overall questioning view regarding the work as a whole. Here the body of the worker is displayed as it engages a repetitive task which consumes its entire energy. On the other hand, it shows the Labor Code, an object that represents the laws that frame the relationships between employer and employee.

The performance questions the work activity that is increasingly exhausting the workers' forces. The progressive wearing out of the book is analogue to the "wearing out" worker's body. The Labor Code itself, which is supposed to protect the laborers physically and psychologically, encounters ever more problems that hinder it from accomplishing its mission due to the increasingly competitive and dehumanizing conditions of a society whose main axes are globalization and investors' revenue.



***Organizing the Code (Ranger the Code), 2015***  
Video 12'16", Loop Reproduction

## ***Hands Study (non-work gestures), (Étude de mains (gestes de non-travail)), 2015***

This series was conceived from the idea of decontextualizing the relation hand/tool. It is a search of establishing a different relationship between the worker and his job.

In the moment that the photo is being taken a simple gesture, inspired by the mannerist poses of classical painting, is created distorting the intention of the work action. The worker adopts a light and delicate attitude through this gesture that seeks to reduce as much as possible the strength and the energy of the hand that is engaged daily in the execution of the work activity.



Agent de Nettoyage



Agent de Nettoyage



Employé Polyvalent (Kebab)



Employé Polyvalent (Kebab)



Vacataire (Rangement en Bibliothèque)



*Cleaning Agent, Hands Study (non-work gestures), Agent de Nettoyage, Étude de mains (gestes de non-travail)*  
(2015),

## ***CROUS Saint-Denis (2014)***

The series interrogates the representation of the manual jobs, particularly that of the workers of the university restaurant at Saint Denis.

The photography allows the spectator to face an image that is easy to recognize, but that proposes a two-stage interpretation: in a first moment, the look is global and synthetic; the photo shows the worker with his/her back facing the spectator and wearing a hairnet. In a second moment, a more detailed lecture is generated thanks to the size and quality of the image; this lecture is achieved through a fragmentary look on the details that embark the spectator in a journey of materials and forms that transform the subject of the image into a more sculptural and aesthetical form.







***CROUS Saint Denis (2014)***, Archival pigment print, 90 x 120 cm

## ***Role Games, (Jeux de Rôle) (2014)***

This series plays with the fluctuations in the subject's representation: in this photographic work the students/workers to use their job uniforms, which display the visual identity of the company employing them. These students wear the work uniforms outside their usual context, driving them away from their original purpose.

The persons carry out the gestures of their job as a performance piece with their faces hidden behind their work uniforms and objects, in order to accomplish the photographic image.

The student, that usually wears a "disguise" due to his/her need to work, transforms his role as a worker and becomes a performer for an artistic action, and restates in a different way his presence through his body and energy.



Paul



Direct Matin



Mc Café



Cojean



Pizza Hut





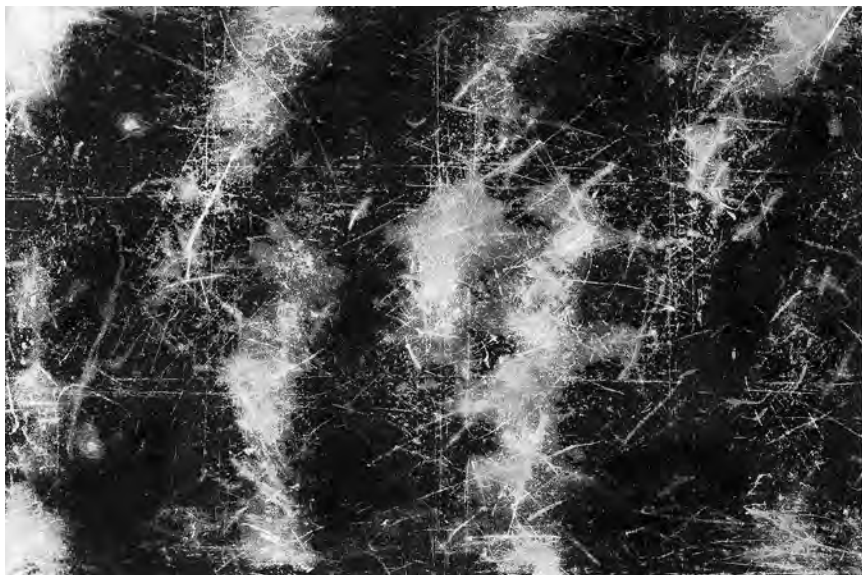
*Direct Matin, Role Games (Jeux de Rôle) (2014), Archival pigment print, 120 x 180*

## ***The Break, (La Pause), 2012-2013***

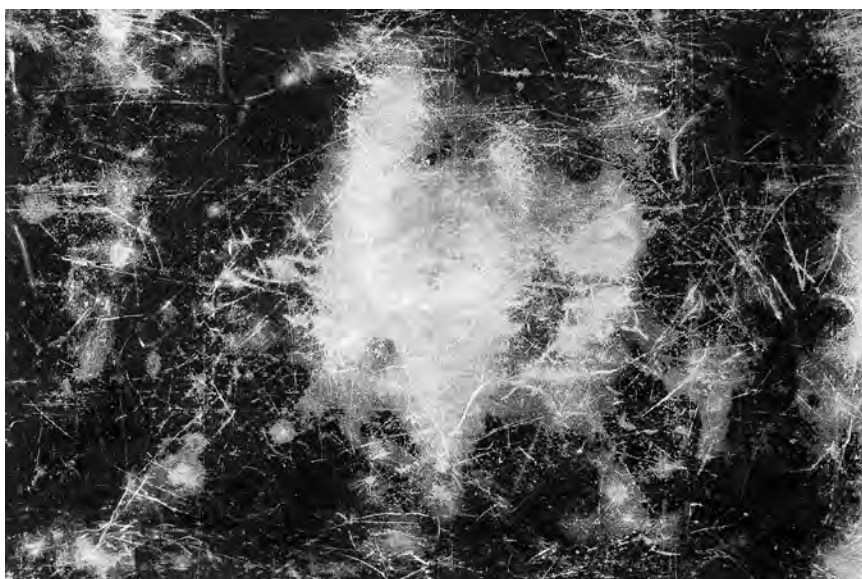
This series interrogates the paradoxical issue of the “small job” (a temporary job, aimed mainly to subsistence). Which, on one hand is a fundamental activity for accomplishing personal projects and, on the other hand, ends up being an activity that transforms the individual.

Each piece is conceived as a portrait in the form of a diptych. The image on the left represents the anonymous work: it shows metal plates used to bake products. The plates are scraped due to the manipulation, specifically due to the use of a spatula that creates “drawings”, ephemeral traces that evidence the automatism and the manual work.

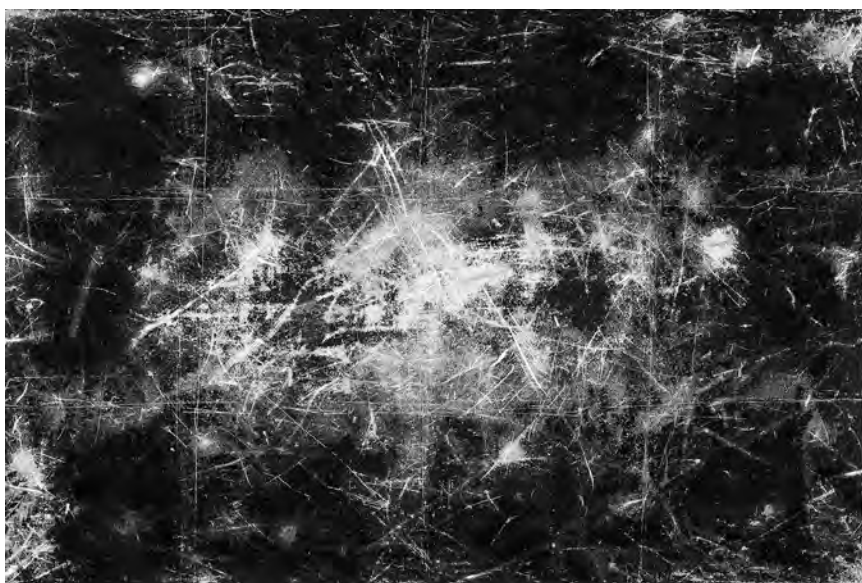
The image on the right is the portrait of the worker in the “break space”. It seeks to represent the singularity of the individual that silently struggles in a closed and aseptic space.



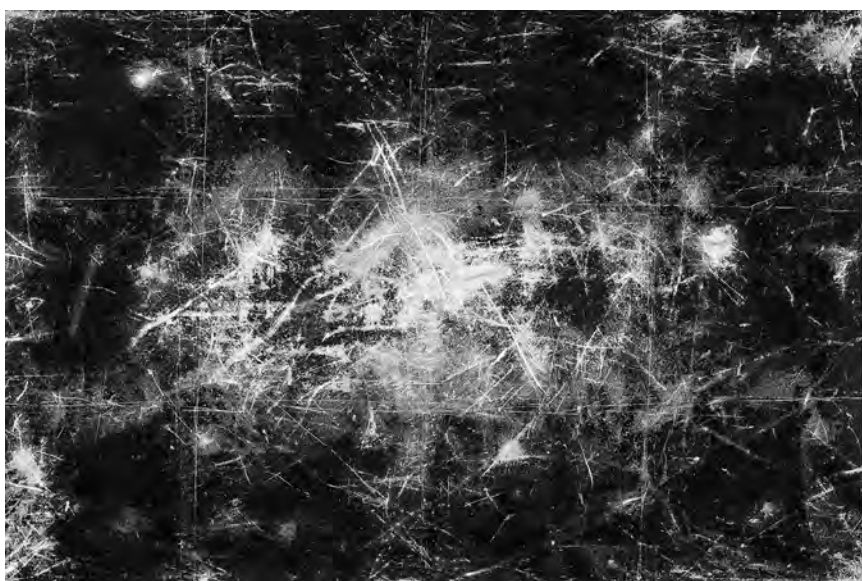
Arween



Cynthia



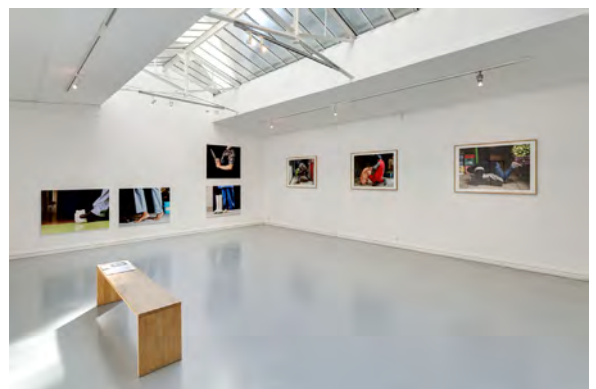
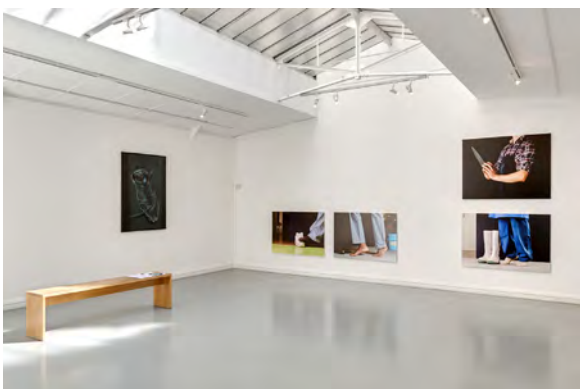
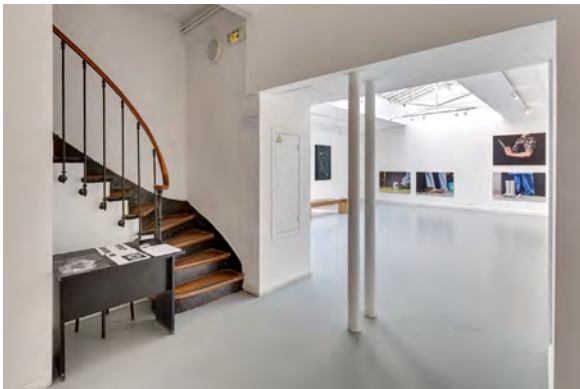
Alex



**Alex, *The Break*, (*La pause*) (2012 - 2013)**, Archival pigment print,  
120 x 80 cm (left) 75x50 cm (right)



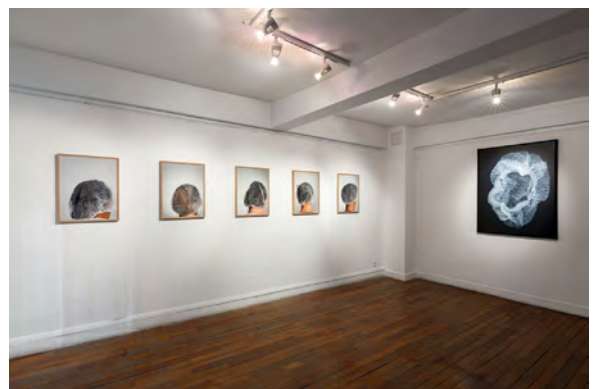
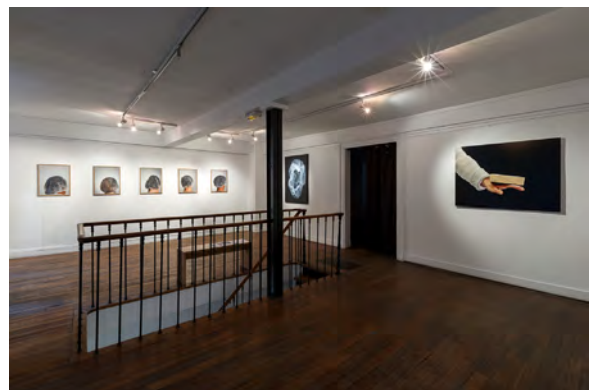
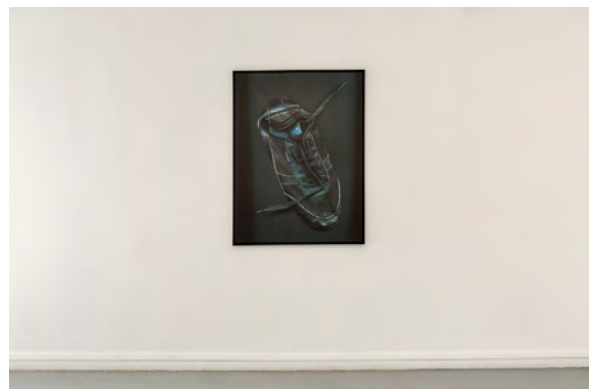
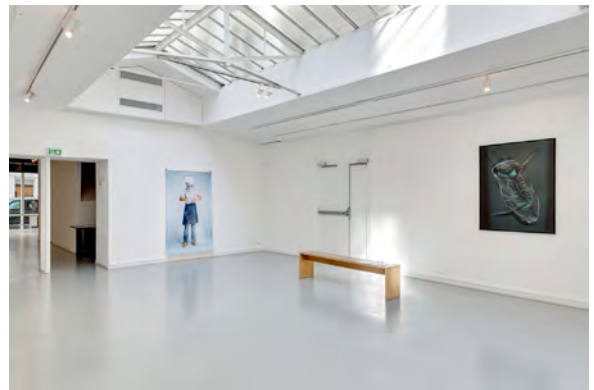
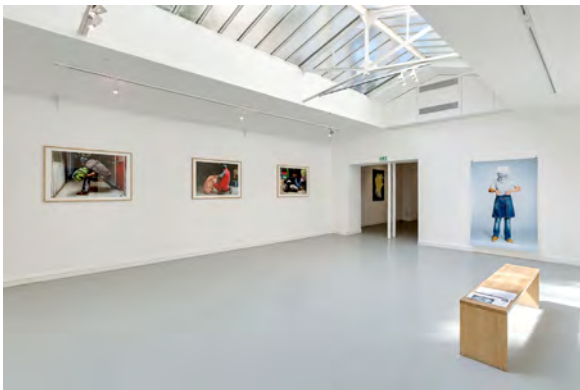
## Exhibition images



**Solo exhibition « Role Games. (re)present work »**  
Galerie du Crous de Paris, 75006 Paris

® Romain Darnaud

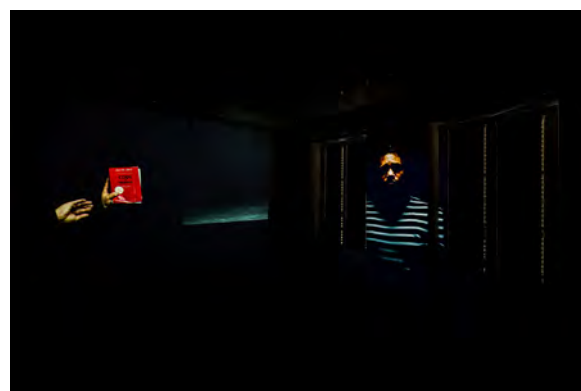
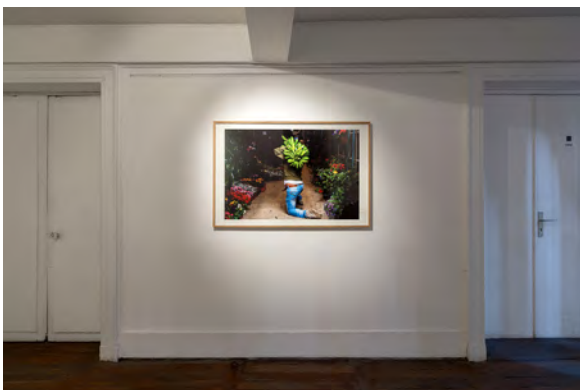
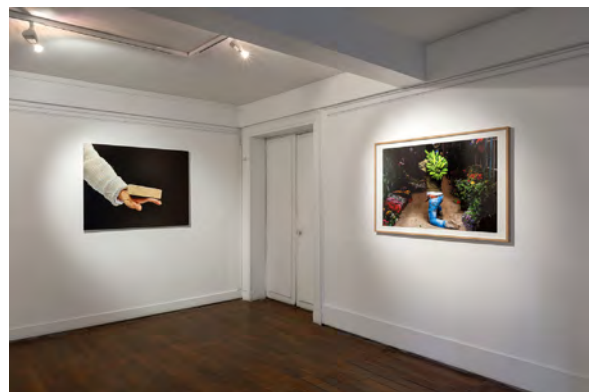
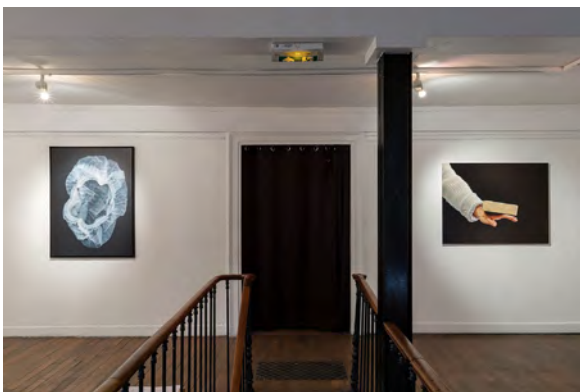
## Exhibition images



**Solo exhibition « Role Games. (re)present work »**  
Galerie du Crous de Paris, 75006 Paris

® Romain Darnaud

## *Exhibition images*



**Solo exhibition « Role Games. (re)present work »**  
Galerie du Crous de Paris, 75006 Paris

® Romain Darnaud



## *Exhibition images*



**Collective exhibition « Think photography. Images and forms »** With Diaph8 group

Curators : Pascal Beausse and Alain Bernardini, Official selection of Le Mois de la Photo du Grand Paris 2017

Saint Denis