Tangency

Paul D’Haese’s photographs are ideal images. They do not require any text. Adding words to images is tricky, as words tend to evoke different images or even examples as justification and, consequently, explain the image in question based on a different framework. It is probably no coincidence that these photographs do not have titles, a code at most, enjoy the protection of a wide white framework and uniform colour treatment and have the rhythm of a series that comprises a project.

These projects do, however, have titles. They have the ambition to totalise something, not externally, not an encyclopaedic or scientific series or quasi-infinitive total of a collection, but a totality determined by the photograph and the process of photography itself. The cultural landscape, the built-up environment with all of its demarcations and flight lines, forms the perfect subject matter.

Photography is a static medium. Just like the movements of time are concentrated in a ‘decisive moment’, a similar event is taking place with the space. In the image, the space is ‘folded’ as it were due to the movements resulting in the choice of the ‘right viewpoint’. The objective representation of the photography is the result of movements that place this objectivity at risk. Paul D’Haese uses the static image to draw attention to these movements, which are an amalgamation of technical interventions and personal drives, cast as it were into a diagram full of playful references. Not only do his numerous escapades underlie the cropping of his subject, but the cropping itself also follows a meticulous, almost mathematical movement. Consequently, the body and the photographer’s eye form a *tangent*, which indicates the ratio for taking a perspective of the subject in the landscape. The photographer is unable to grab hold of the subject; it is not objectifiable and can only be ‘touched’ and shared by means of his photograph. The viewer, who is drawn into the image in this tangential movement, encounters demarcations in Paul D’Haese’s photographs, often blind (or blinded) walls or partitions or dysfunctional entities that do not so much conceal a reality but describe it and designate it at the same time as not knowable. ‘Touch’ is all that is possible.

So, what initially appears to be objective photography, ends up also being utterly subjective and physical. This combination of a rational-scientific and intuitive-physical relationship to reality reflects the ambiguous status of the Western image culture and its doctrine of nature imitation (mimesis), especially since the discovery of the linear perspective and ‘biases’ like the *trompe-l’œil* and *anamorphosis*, the distorted view that observing from a different angle or through a special mirror will yield the correct image. In our surrounding - urban by definition - landscape, Paul D’Haese seeks such ‘biases’ and involves us in this process through a tangential effect, the *tangency* of his photographic work. His careful use of horizontal and diagonal dynamics within a verticality that is kept as perpendicular as possible, a precisely measured on-site framework and subtly developed colours and lighting ensure that this *tangency* is clear and inescapable.

You have no choice but to share the photographer’s perspective. And this does not require any text. Words are tricky. The ‘touching’ images suffice.

Francis Denys