

## Interview by Bianca Laura Petretto

*Your photographic experiences were born from your empathy with your dear friend Hervé Guibert. On the tips of your toes you captured the fleeting moment, the extraordinary flow of hours and days. What philosophy, what feelings did you go through, did you share as friends and artists?*

I photographed Hervé Guibert from 1979 to 1991, the year he died: a photographic project that lasted twelve years. At the beginning and the end I didn't take many photos. Hervé knew what it meant to let yourself be photographed. It meant leaving a visual record that would last much longer as the souvenir of his physical appearance would last with those who had met him. He had decided, long before our encounter, that with his art (literature, photography, cinema) he could create an image of himself that only he alone would control. At an early stage of our relation I arrived, with my little Rollei 35. I insisted on photographing him, as if in a game. At first he refused. Then he gave in. The game transformed into work, and became a project of photography. It made us think about portraiture and self-portraiture. It became an experiment, something almost scientific. The road we took seemed to us to be good, promising, novel. At the end of Hervé's life it was me who hesitated to take photos; for fear of losing what we had managed to create, to exclude the evident force of the spectacle present in photographing a dying man, particularly a man dying of Aids. I didn't want to do it. He asked me to go on. Hervé gave our mutual photographic work a name: *folie à deux*. We had built up a story, not yet completely revealed, of true moments and absurd stories, of pretentious falsifications and complicity, of sincere affection and reciprocal attraction. Doctors of the nineteenth century thought that the madness of two individuals, empathetically involved, generated a contagious madness. Perhaps this is the most enjoyable form of madness? We never got bored photographing each other. Hervé too had a Rollei 35; we often swapped cameras and film (always 400 ASA). He made as many photographs of me than I did of him. Only few of these photographs have been published so far. We lived together and mixed our images, we even had a certain pleasure imagining that one day gallerists, publishers and heirs would be in trouble to find out who was the author of a particular image. In Guibert's archive in Paris there are as many negatives of mine as there are those of Hervé in my archive in Berlin. We believed that art was friendship, complicity, a shared vision of the world, against a background of a common conviction that questioned the truth of the substance of what you transmit and what you understand when you first look at something. We realised that we should not trust in easy answers; that behind the facade there are always secret rooms to explore.

Bianca Laura Petretto: What remains from art? Interview with Hans Georg Berger in *Town of Waters. The photographic work of Hans Georg Berger*. Edited by F P Campione and A M Montaldo, Aisthesis, Milan, 2001

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