

## PIERRE GONNORD :

**Peculiar Destinies** / From my Door to the people's house- a long ritual of silence & contemplation in darkness- trying to "solve their mystery". I install my studio in the domestic interior of my models. This "no man's land" is the meeting point between my photographic space and the intimate living places of the model. I set up the studio in the bedroom, living room, or entrance to the house to invite, in silence, the individual family of whom I have chosen. I repeat this ritual- probably the oldest since man became aware of his condition, and he learned to create to deceive his destiny and invent his eternity. I ask myself "what is the face of the other?" it is a disturbing territory, insane, changing, mysterious, a membrane. Initially I have an individual in front of me- a portrait session. My eyes want to go beyond the perception of the model. This face is mine, yours, ours. An abstraction, a territory, a planet – the materialization of a mental state that is beyond time. With my camera I organize an obscure and silent "ritual", almost always face to face under the unique light of the window, the day light or my flash. Words are exchanged only before and after the session, the rest happens through the eyes. During the session, I see, we are seeing: I'm waiting for low tide, high tide or the gaze. The dark backgrounds Black, Green, Grey, Blue, Isolate the faces that float like stars in the cosmos, as the light emerges from darkness, helping the abstraction.

**A camera like a life vest** / I started photographing in 1999, while going through a difficult period. Photography was, for me, a kind of lifeline, opportunity to look at the "others", to approach, to overcome the limitations of my shyness, my loneliness, my conditioning and my taboos. I never asked the question why or what, I just began with the portrait. It was an excuse to live "another life", designed to probe humans as distinct as they may be. I want to look at my contemporaries and those I met in the anonymity of large cities and in suburbs and rural trails, things I felt around and inside me. I also decided to let my subconscious have a free rein.

These people are always anonymous, with rather marginal, or different, shall I say, standards of living set by society and the traditional canons of beauty.

I choose men and women of my time- first based on their appearance, because they surprise me and seem attractive, provocative, rebellious and independent, but almost always fragile behind their opaque shield. They represent a different conception of beauty, but also social realities. The history of the last decade in the west – immigration, migration, rural-urban, economic crises, the era of communication and globalization- all this has contributed to a change in attitudes, lifestyle and exploded the social structure of our society. But my question is not only directed to the appearance and social situation of my contemporaries. What is behind the façade, behind the constructed image, the background, beyond the racial and social codifications?

I am looking to feel the essence, to feel Human. Will I be able to see anything beyond the architecture, go beyond appearance, to go beyond the portrait? To touch the spiritual and the sublime in us? For me, photographing is always disturbing. In contact with my contemporaries I ask myself the question we all ask, "what mystery lies behind the appearance of Humans?" Where is the essence? What distance separates us from the others? Pictures as contemporary mirrors but also as timeless icons. And so I spend most of my time alone, or on roads in search of another. Taboos and preconceptions disappear progressively as we experience what is vital and real and that is why my photographic work is accompanied by ones who have lived on the ground. These are the people who I decide to approach.

**Vagabond** / In Spain we think of Federico Garcia Lorca, who was familiar with the Gypsy people in Sacromonte in Granada- a free people who pay their difference through singing and celebrating. The Spanish and Portuguese Gypsy community is the largest in Europe: the latest arrival from central Europe is now more established and integrated. Cultural contributions to the domain of singing (Cante Jondo, Flamenco) and dance are indisputable. Andalusia is the Gypsy world par excellence and its contribution to the race by "holding cultural values" has helped integration and acceptance for decades, however, living and working (in the past tradition and folklore) remain a domain of exclusion since most of the Andalusian Gypsies live in neighborhoods that are reserved in city suburbs and many do not work. Children's schooling, literacy and health, however, are insured by the regional and central governments. I decided to meet families of these neighborhoods in Seville, and in the largest concentrations of the Gypsies now in Lisbon. I have voluntarily chosen families and clans with more traditional views on law enforcement and strictly



idiosyncratic Gypse families. I have not had a problem approaching or integrating despite the insecurity due to trafficking in drugs and high unemployment in these neighborhoods.

**Cultures** / Where my projects drive me- in Japan, I was invited by the French ministry of culture and the association Francais d'action Artistique (AFAA) for a residence at the Villa Kujoyama in Kyoto. I visited China while I was invited for an exhibition at the Arles Photo Festival in Beijing. A prestigious Spanish Magazine sent me to Bangladesh to portray the Nobel Prize winner Muhammad Yunus (Grameen Bank), that was one of the most fabulous encounters. Cuba- Through a project for a Spanish Cultural organization, the Iberian Peninsula and next year Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, Honduras and Russia for a project with an important non-governmental organization. Afterwards, to the USA to make a photographic reflection upon southern faces (Alabama, Mississippi, Missouri, Georgia) to celebrate the 50th anniversary of William Faulkner's Death- a project with the university of Georgia in Atlanta.

**Combat The Forgetfulness** / To capture the fugitive, contemplate and devours the face of the other, its beauty, its force and its secrets...for me it is a vital act of faith and trust in Mankind- to construct images that are dear to me and will survive, it's the fight against oblivion. The celebration of the "others", its difference from our common appreciation of beauty, grace and dignity. A vital Experience that makes us a little more equal-slightly more eternal too. Why did I choose portraiture? For the encounter in this school of life that allow me to learn from those who live so far away, or close to home and who are my peers. I celebrate the human condition and the drama of life- the wonderful and absurd and eternal meaninglessness that always ends too soon. But we cannot know or choose our destiny. It is nomadic work.

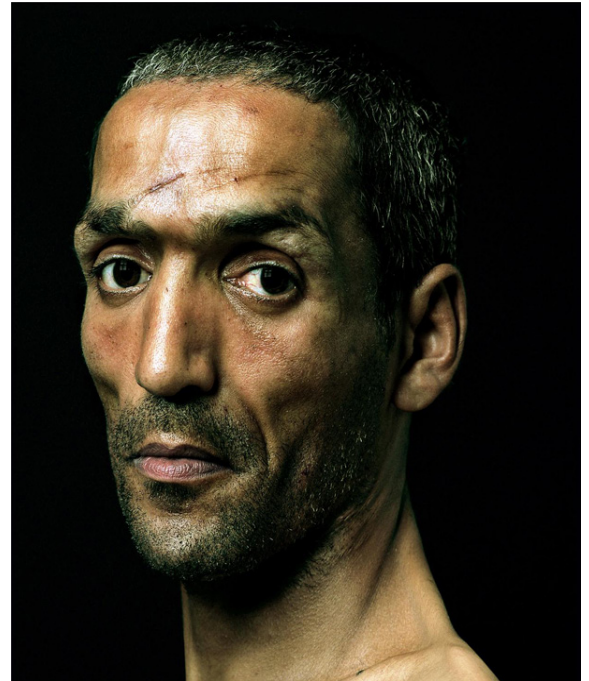
**Pasolini** / In his work I love especially the "trilogy of life- the Decameron (1971)", "The Canterbury Tales (1972)" and especially "1001 nights (1974)" ... In search of what is not and what is no longer. What remains and will always be timeless. The celebration of the human character, the beauty of imperfection and his writings on the power of the periphery.

**The Primitive Magic of Photography** / The portrait as an attempt to invent an eternity... the people I decide to meet and photograph are often from traditional cultures and their relationship to the camera is very special, for reasons of faith and social origins...they have had little experience with portraiture and have immense respect for the images. Pictures often mark important events - birth, first communion, Marriage and death. Photography still remains for them a ritual in which one gives a lot: it takes the soul on the road. They have looked at my work very carefully, considered and agreed to give very seriously to this ritual. They then receive a small album, a portfolio of our meeting that I personally deliver in gratitude that goes in the dresser drawer or cabinet with other 'relics' or photographs of the family. And I find it very beautiful, very touching at a time when photography has completely changed its meaning and place.

Da Vinci said that the first portrait was born when man has seen, been aware of, his condition and traversed the contours of his shadow on a wall. When we visit the Cairo Museum, Naples, Athens...or places that hold wonderful treasures and secrets, what fascinated us beyond the beauty and mystery is the proximity of those people who have lives so long ago and communion of feeling and the communion of humanity separated by so many ages. The civilized world was first a Mesopotamian cradle of writing and the Mediterranean - Egypt, Crete, Greece and Rome gives us first great portraits, the first 'civilized' performances of the human condition.

The body is /too much/ of a reality that we can't escape...the body. As said by Proust and Foucault, is a prison imposed on us and one that we try to escape or transform to our will. This body- a body with which we present ourselves to others & we awake with every morning. This grid of windows in the face in which we are trapped! The portrait is in some way a Utopia, An idea that can escape from a reality claims to represent. It idealizes & speaks much better of what is trapped inside & can only escape through thoughts & dreams. Beyond the person who is represented there is the idea of common humanity that is universal & timeless.

It is by the face that we make conscious the human qualities of the other & that we find ourselves in all the portraits of great civilizations. In our world it is often a Judeo-Christian intercession of grace & love. The face of the saint. The king of redemption. Then the industrial revolution & Secularism. A consideration of the social. Psychology. Anthropology, & Sociology... The portrait artist addresses these issues without the state;



contemplating the other, we are aware of our nature. The first picture that caught my eye was the cover of a book by Richard Avedon, In the Window of the Bookstore, Galignani, on Rue De Rivoli in Paris in the late 70s. I was a teenager & A woman's face like an Italian Madonna looked at me with distance, elegance, & mystery & gave me a key to the mystery of photography. Today I will remember above all the series of portraits of Jacob Israel Avedon & Finding the Other Side of the American Dream, In The American West.

The way I work has a slow & silent approach & looks for the opportunity of the meeting, neighborhood Life – Like the hand of a guide. In photography there is no reality, the mode/interpreter plays himself, his social group, while the author makes his self-portrait that the public will in turn use a mirror.



**Painting** / When we consider the whole history of portraiture, the face is the principal representative element. In the time of El Faiyum, It already questioned the relationship between the individual & their image, between seeming & being, Between presence & absence. Everyday, in my persistent search for people & the relationship I try to establish with them, I go on with a very old ritual. The fact that I prefer to look for the intimacy in a tiny studio, In the framing of the face with no more information added, the absence of gestures or signs in the expression that might help the public, my lighting & the black or dark abstract background I use to cat the predominant gaze, & the large formats are in that sense a connection with the history of the portrait. The people I select are never common citizens. They are carefully selected for their physiognomy, gazes, sensibility, intelligence, loneliness, & it is maybe the distance & the intimacy I try to establish through those photographic portraits of my contemporary fellows, which represent the closest connection with Renaissance works.

**Spanish** / Are the great masters of the human representation from the golden age of the baroque portrait. Sincere & sober research of the human soul – The treasures of the Prado museum in Madrid & revile. The structure abstracted, neutral, & non-existent. The warm light, the contrast of the battle between light & shadow – Zurbaran, Ribera (the portrait first, the rest in the background, the sight & accidents of nature accepted). Murillo (The supernatural reality & kinder side of a sensitive die-hard. Murillo is the emotion of the human to access the divine life of street people), El Greco upset the rules of composition & colour-defying nature of things & being.

**Goya** / The absolute master of Spanish painting without any concession. His revolt against life – Tragedy in a decadent country, invaded & ravaged by war. The Pinturas Negras. The psychological portraits of the Duquesa De Alba, Santa Cruz, or Chinchon. I think if I had been living in Holland, Africa, or Asia, The USA, My approach to the portrait would have been totally different. The light & the street life, The sense of tragicomedy, the colours & the temperature corresponds to the energy of a country of stark contrast & strong & expressive faces.

**Velázquez** / Painting were a psychiatrist's portrait. Economy of means. Less hassle, less detail, less reality, fewer colours, more soul. Such as the plight of Philip IV & the psychology of Jesters & Dwarves, the infant heir Don Felipe Prospero, the Loyalty of his dog & the red tint of innocence.

**El Faiyum** / was a revelation at the Louvre as a child. Then in the British & Metropolitan Museums. The Inquiry of silent living portraits from the dead, The Meeting of the 3 concepts of the utopia human body – the Egyptian mummy, the Greek death mask & the Roman Portrait to transport the soul & to gain access to eternity.

**Myths** / Through my encounters & my subjects, I can access the faces & stories of the mediterranean world Legends & Ancient traditions of the earth. The Gypsy people are still the guarantors of this heritage, the last farmers of Trás Os Montes in Portugal or Os Ancares in the mountains Leon, or the Andalusian & Asturian Miners. These activities have taken place since the Tartésiens, Romans, & Arabs on the famous Ruta De La Plata, which in turn united the South to the North across Andalusia, Extremadura, La Mancha, Castilla, & Asturias.

**Funeral** / It is with the gypsies & the farmers visiting the dead, the mourners – 'Plañideras' – from Spain & Portugal, the Maghreb & the Old Mediterranean world who resign themselves to disappear gradually. Bereavement carried in tribute to the disappeared –

for memory, for dignity, & as a proud uniform of death. It is also my childhood memories & my own legacy of grief.

**People from nowhere** / I would prefer to say people from Now-Here... Today's society has become exclusively urban & due to the margin's aggrandizing periphery the countryside is emptying slowly. Also, the gap is widening between North & South. However, young people are growing in the most marginalized clan, where the mainstream is that of a geriatric society... & the machine soon may well be reversed... the people I meet are alive & belong to an expanding world.

**All the names** / The titles of my works are real. The first name of the model is the title & a large component of the work. It is a way to focus on intimacy & our common share of humanity. The first thing that belongs to a human being. One could be poor & alone but we possess our own face, body & first name. We share our family name which belongs to a clan, a genealogy. The first names are always conditioned by the cultural & social roots of the people, geography, religion, & social classes.

**Outsiders** / I am interested in old social human groups that are disappearing such as gypsies, farmers, Coal Miners, & traditional fishermen. I try to make portraits from behind the mask, under the skin, & that speak of individuality in the group & the uniqueness in the human race. To erase everything except the face, use clothes with the least detail. The sobriety of the colours of things that actually exist in the people I meet – in darkness & silence... I want to maintain a distance &, in a hieratic pose. Photograph that which freezes the character to better perceive & suggest the secret stories.

**Japan** / I was invited by the Villa Kujoyama Kyoto, a Japanese-French residency for artists. This series of portraits of photographs speaks about japans stereotypes, so I'm not interested in orientalism or sociology. I was interested in the marginalized human species, in individual destinies. The people did not interest me as characters of modernity or tradition but rather as actors in a real world of fiction & representation. Individuals worshipped as gods or icons but excluded by the ultra-conservative society of Japan in their everyday lives. For example the Onnagata, men who were to play female roles on the stage in the traditional prism of codified texts, or 'yum', a young woman with a shaved head, an androgynous face & A troubled beauty – A butch dancer of mind & body – who reminded me of Dreyer's Joan of Arc. Biker boys, gangs that come from Osaka who were, at the same time, gargoyle & arrogant & reminded me of Attila & the Hordes as well as characters from Mad Max. The men & women related to the Yakuza clans who wear their tattoos on their shoulders. The young contemporary women who enter under a mask of the Geisha. I think my pictures of Japan also speak of unreal beings. Some characters do not age, even if the model is young. They appear only as they are – ourselves facing our destiny, our condition.

**Sacred Quality** / The art of the suggested, the imperfect, is a mystery that does not disappear & continues throughout the works of great artists such as Tadaoando, Miroslaw Balka, or James Turrell... Fingerprints of contemplation & (Non-religious spirituality. The curator Axel Vervoordt of the Fortuny Museum in Venice. In the context of the Biennale Internazionale Dell'arte Contemporanea has organized a series of exhibitions titled, successively, Artempo, Accademia, & Infinitum, which reflect on this side of creation & relates distinguishing features of works across time, place, & culture.

**EI Manuel** / Sevilla, Gypsy district. He was born on the beaches of Atlantic Andalusia where he got his need for freedom & nomadic life. An orphan, he moved to the city of Seville. Hooked on heroin, he survived in the gypsy district dealing drugs. Lying on the table of the studio, he recalled the horse of Picasso's Guernica, wounded but still upright. The glance always present, the body abandoned.

**Jack** / I met him in the street. He worked as a night porter in a popular gay bar in Chueca in Madrid. His father was a Syrian doctor. He reads Egyptian tarot cards in his spare time.

**Kristov** / An ex-worker from the energy industry in Bulgaria, Now an immigrant of Spain. He lives the nightmare after the collapse of the USSR. A rebel against capitalistic power, An Anarchist.

**Amparo** / The widow of a gypsy family with 5 children. She sells arts & craft in Seville. She is 48 years old – the same age as me.

**Senén** / An Os Ancares Lumberjack. A Hard life in the mountains on a remote northern iberian peninsula. He greeted me warmly at his farm. A blended family in an uninhabited region composed of his brother & his 80-year old aunt.

**Complicity** / The silence & the generosity of people who take me into their homes – they offer me hospitality & sometimes lodging for several hours. The studio is usually installed in the same room as the couple & the husband agrees to wait patiently in the hallway while I take a portrait of his partner. I recall a Gypsy woman I photographed after completing a portrait of her 6 children Her shyness & reserve, her confidence. I was moved.

**Imagining Lives** / The abstraction of neutral backgrounds & scale accentuates this concept of human geography. An opaque nude, exacerbates the complexion. So bare it appears dressed. The portrait has always been a book of (false) secrets & confidences that the reader whispers to his own ear, but are only the echo of his own history. Our history, mirrors for contemplation to exercise the human condition, the eternal drama, & collective unconscious. /

