



# EURO VISIONS

CYPRUS / ESTONIA / HUNGARY / LATVIA / LITHUANIA / MALTA / POLAND  
CZECH REPUBLIC / SLOVAKIA / SLOVENIA BY TEN MAGNUM PHOTOGRAPHERS

CARL DE KEYZER/MARTINE FRANCK/ALEX MAJOLI  
PETER MARLOW/MARTIN PARR/MARK POWER  
LISE SARFATI/CHRIS STEELE-PERKINS/DONOVAN WYLIE  
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MAGNUMSTEIDL  
Centre  
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Four years ago I did a project going around Europe, following in the footsteps of Charles V, and I didn't go to Malta because, although Malta was part of his empire, Charles V himself never went there. Also, as a Belgian, a Fleming, I could identify with the history of Malta, a little country invaded by just about everyone else. Like Belgium.

**Your original idea, of looking at the traces of history, was fairly vague...**

All the concepts I have worked on are utopias: you know from the outset that you're not going to achieve a result that will correspond perfectly to the original idea. You have to delimit, to shape the situation by creating a frame. Here, my idea was to give visual expression to this tumultuous history of conquests and occupations, to this mixing of cultures, a blending that you can see in the physical diversity of the population, and especially in the faces. That too was a utopia.



**Where does your interest in history come from?**

I don't trust history, or rather, I don't trust the way it is constructed and used in politics and the media. I was educated by Jesuits who tried to inculcate a very tendentious view of history, one which for many years I believed. Only later did I realise that there were other truths. Since then I have cultivated this wariness, but I also like to manipulate history, to disrupt its representation and force the viewer to ask questions.





Your version of the history of Malta is in an ironic mode...

I went to Malta in the summer. The island was besieged by tourists who are attracted both by the climate and, precisely, by this historical dimension which is touted in the travel brochures. It's the island's main resource. After all those successive invasions, the new invaders really are the tourists. I tried to play on the myths attaching to the island. For example, the image of the tramp sleeping in the cave refers to the Odyssey and Calypso's



cave, which was supposedly on Malta. As for the Order of Malta, it has moved to the Vatican and the only knights left on Malta are the bikers who belong to the Knights of Malta club. Or take an image like the one of the tourists in the museum, which confronts three different versions of history: the official version in the visitors' headphones, the icon, in the form of a poor-quality reproduction, and the spin-off, a fun Playmobil version displayed in a vitrine. All these versions come together in a deliberately chaotic image, like a collage.





**A collage obtained without the slightest retouching?**

For this project I used a new digital camera with 22 million pixels, incredibly sharp. What I like about digital is the absence of grain, because the grain always prevents you from producing an impression of reality. Here, the lack of grain means that I can get hyperrealist images, images that are sharper than what you really see, more real than the real and closer to a painting effect – there is no grain in painting. This is an extra element with which you



can perturb the gaze and play with reality. Using a flash in broad daylight can be that, too: the flash makes things unreal and allows me to get away from photography's depth of field and producer a flatter, two-dimensional space. I reject the hierarchy of elements and I don't want to privilege the foreground in my treatment. As for retouching, I sometimes do it, but always in the spirit of the moment when I took the photograph, or of how I remember it, and in a limited way – it generally has to do with the balance of colours and values.





**And yet, in spite of this use of artifice, you refuse any kind of staging.**

That's a long story. As a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent, I studied painting, photography and cinema and I made images in a Surrealist spirit. I soon became bored with the limits of my own imagination and turned to reality, and I stuck to it. As for the reflex of wanting to change things when you're doing reportage, that's something



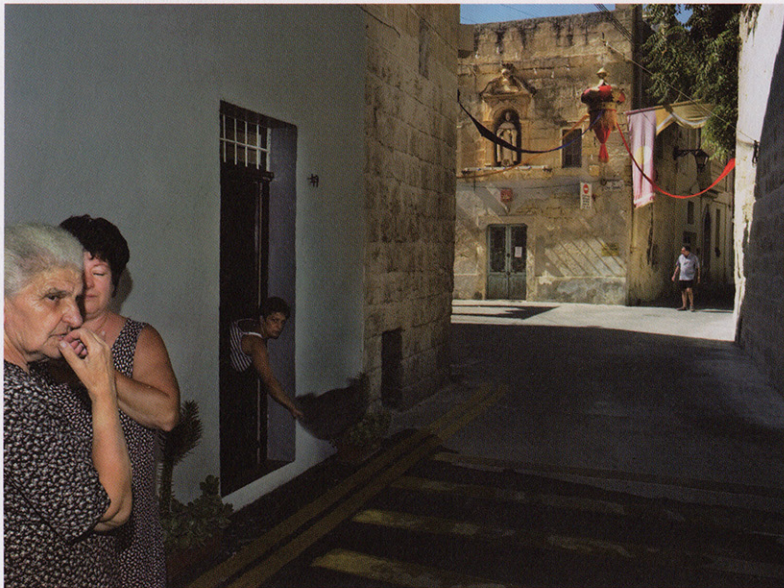
that has been done throughout the history of photography. A lot of photographers take that course. When they see a plastic bottle in their field of vision, they remove it. Personally, I've never done that because I think that the attempt to find a solution to this problem – a bottle of water in front of the subject – often leads you to images that are more interesting than when you solve the problem by removing the bottle.



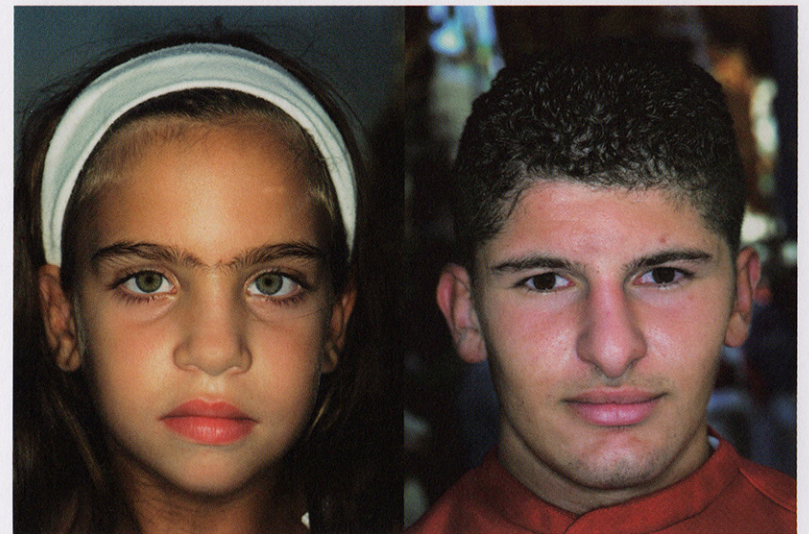


In Malta, did you work as a journalist?

The paradox is that, although I am a member of Magnum, I have never thought of myself as a journalist. My whole development is based around fiction, lies. And, at the same time, I still believe that the real can provide situations and images that are much richer than fiction. When I see situations that are suited to a journalistic approach, I hide, I try to find another way round. Recently, working in a Siberian prison, where I was the first Western



journalist to come and work, I felt I had a responsibility, a mission: to tell the world what was going on there. That was very heavy. In fact, I did the opposite; I added all kinds of things, colours, I did something quite unreal, almost fictional. When reacting people went on about my irresponsibility [laughs], about the fact that I had no right to play around with reality in such a situation. So, yes, I am an irresponsible journalist, but it's true that I do like to provoke.



## CARL DE KEYZER

Born 1958, Kortrijk, Belgium. Lives and works in Ghent.

After his studies in photography and film at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent, Carl De Keyzer became a freelance photographer and taught at the Royal Academy from 1982 to 1989. During this period, he also co-founded and co-directed the photo gallery XYZ-Photography in Ghent.

He gained international recognition in 1987 with the publication of his book *India*, which was awarded the Grand Prix of the Triennale de Fribourg. In 1989, his second publication, *Homo Sovieticus*, which deals with the collapse of the Soviet Union, sealed his fame and led to his nomination at Magnum Photos in 1990.

The next year, Carl De Keyzer won the Eugene Smith Award. Between 1990 and 1992, he surveyed the United States by photographing different places of worship. The resulting book *God, Inc.* looks at the relationship between patriotism and religious aspirations.

In 1996 Carl De Keyzer returned to the still persistent traces of the former Soviet bloc and did a series of photographs published under the title *East of Eden*. This project explores the border zone between two ideologies; it is a diversified portrait of a country deeply marked by Communism, but seeking a transition to democratic freedom. The work evokes inertia and silence, which are like mixed metaphors for collective memory and hope. In the year 2000, he published *Europa*. Subtitled [Re] constructing the Past, it compiles eclectic images taken over a period of ten years, between the late 1980s and the late 1990s. Oscillating between fictional construction and reconstruction of reality, the title probes the ambivalent process of writing History.

A distinct thematic and formal analogy can be found in *Tableaux d'Histoire*, which was published in 2002. In this book, Carl De Keyzer breaks with the precept that History unfolds linearly and opts for chaotic synchronism. His latest publication *Zona* (2003) brings together photographs taken in seventy Siberian prison camps. Here, he documents the astonishing mises en scène in these modern-day gulags.

## Awards (selection)

1988 Grand Prix, Triennale de la Ville de Fribourg.  
1990 The Rencontres d'Arles Book Award.  
1990 The Eugene Smith Award, International Center for Photography.  
1992 Prix de la Critique, Kodak Award.  
1995 Staatsprijs voor Beeldende Kunsten.

## Exhibitions (selection)

1990 *Homo Sovieticus*, Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne, Switzerland.  
1992 *God, Inc.*, California Museum of Photography, Riverside, USA.  
1996 *East of Eden*, S.M.A.K., Ghent, Belgium.  
1997–2004 *Tableaux d'Histoire*, Centre National de la Photographie, Paris, France; Nicolaj Contemporary Art Center, Copenhagen, Denmark.  
2003–2004 *Zona*, Caermersklooster, Ghent, Belgium; Canal Isabel II, Madrid, Spain; Musée de la Croix-Rouge, Geneva, Switzerland.

## Publications (selection)

*Homo Sovieticus*. Amsterdam, Focus, 1989.  
*God, Inc.* Amsterdam, Focus, 1992.  
*East of Eden*. Ghent, Ludion, 1996.  
*Europa*. Ghent, Ludion, 2000.  
*Zona*. London, Trolley, 2003.