

The Fall, Variation on the theme of the Leap into the Void

In 2003, during the Gulf War, Denis Darzacq travelled out to Algeria to photograph dancers during their rehearsal for a touring hip-hop show organised by two French dance companies. The young men who auditioned with such concentration knew that being chosen could change their lives and open international frontiers. Looking over his contact sheets a few years later, Darzacq was struck by the way these images showed young people suspended in space and embarked on a personal project about the housing estates of Bobigny and their inhabitants. The result was *Bobigny centre ville*, a book published with writer Marie Desplechin. In 2006, continuing his work on moving bodies in urban settings, Darzacq asked dancers and athletes to perform jumps against background that he had found and prepared. Wearing ordinary clothes chosen in agreement with the photographer, the performers executed their leaps in these precisely defined settings.

Everything had been prepared in advance. Everything was ready. The models launched themselves into space. There is nothing false in these scenes. These moments really occurred. There is no fiction, no retouching or special effects. Photographed in the courtyards of buildings or in streets in the 19th arrondissement of Paris, in Nanterre and in Biarritz, these young people were just being themselves, simply performing jumps in a modern urban setting. And the photographer shot the images, intervening only to give a few guidelines as to their movement. However, at the moment of the leap, chance and gravity also intervened.

And so the story could begin. With remote echoes of Icarus, impelled to take wing by his father in a glorious attempt to defy the laws of the universe and of gravity before he fell to earth, defeated by a more powerful force. The persistence of dream –in spite of reason, in spite of Newton and Galileo. The thrill of altitude, the happiness of the passionate, the wild and the sporting. The convulsive beauty of the figures of style of dance, athletics, circus and video. The levitating audacity of the painter of space throwing himself into the void. The wind of the useless, the power and hope of a gentle desire forgetting the coldness of matter and time. Silent movement frozen at the moment when men give themselves, or free themselves. And also, the silent austerity of our ordinary environment, monumental but poor, where the architect's discourse dissolves behind the flaking patina and dirt of everyday life. Brueghel's irony and the irony of the world at the grand and pathetic effort of the bird that drowns. Daedalus or melancholy, arrogance and its blowback, disillusion, descent, the return of the real, knocks and suffering, ground and earth. What happens next is not our business.

For twenty years, Denis Darzacq has been capturing the sensations, the bodies, the emptiness and the world of his generation, through the prism of an aesthetic and graphic style that is uniquely his. This new work of is rigorous, singular and mature, free of trickery and fuss, a fusion of simplicity and energy.

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