

**Liu Bolin. The Theatre of Appearances**  
**Matthias Bruggmann. An Act of Unspeakable Violence**  
From October 17, 2018 to January 27, 2019

Elysée Lausanne

Press Kit



**The Musée de l'Elysée participates in societal debates that redefine both the way we see photography and the role of photographers today. From October 17, 2018, to January 27, 2019, two committed viewpoints on today's world are juxtaposed: the photographed performances of Liu Bolin, internationally acclaimed Chinese artist, and the images of Matthias Bruggmann, Swiss photographer who pushes the boundaries between documentary and artistic photography.**

Dedicated to the production and support of contemporary photography both in Switzerland and abroad, the Musée de l'Elysée pursues its commitment to photographers who observe the events that shape our world and reveal the complexity of society. *"The role of an institution like ours is to encourage exploration and exchanges around the major issues of our time thanks to the work of artists who portray the world as it is, its troubles, its challenges and its dangers, as well as the hope of improving it by understanding it better. Pertinent and committed, the photographs of Liu Bolin and Matthias Bruggmann have the same purpose: to develop a lasting awareness in the greatest number of people possible"*, emphasizes Tatyana Franck.

Even if the images produced by Liu Bolin and Matthias Bruggmann use very different visual languages, they both explore the photographer's point of view: how does an artist commit himself to addressing the reality that surrounds him, whether it be geographically remote like the Syrian conflict in the case of Matthias Bruggmann, or very close like that of contemporary China for Liu Bolin?

Both artists propose a reflection on what their work reveals and on what it conveys. At the same time, Liu Bolin and Matthias Bruggmann raise important questions: how can we interpret a photograph in order to get beyond appearances and decipher the content of what we are shown? Both of them force the visitor to slow down and take the time to react, a time devoted to acquiring knowledge and understanding. It is their way to fight against the rapidity and transience of images.

#### **Live on social networks**

Liu Bolin and Matthias Bruggmann respond to questions by the public on Monday October 15, between 6 and 6:45pm

#### **Press conference**

Guided tour of the exhibitions with the curators and photographers on Tuesday October 16, 10am

#### **Opening reception**

Tuesday October 16, 6pm



Cover: Liu Bolin, *Water Crisis*, from the series "Hiding in the City", 2013 (detail) © Liu Bolin / Courtesy Galerie Paris-Beijing

Marmarita, Reef Homs, September 11, 2013 © Matthias Bruggmann / Contact Press Images. Courtesy Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne and Galerie Polaris, Paris

Above: Liu Bolin, *Your World*, from the series "Hiding in the City", 2014 © Liu Bolin / Courtesy Galerie Paris-Beijing

Matthias Bruggmann, *Industrial City, Deir ez-Zor*, May 5, 2015 © Matthias Bruggmann / Contact Press Images. Courtesy Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne and Galerie Polaris, Paris

**The first museum exhibition in Switzerland of Liu Bolin's work, *The Theater of Appearances* brings together almost fifty monumental photographs and several sculptures illustrating the main themes addressed by the Chinese artist over his career: the political and economic strategies of the Chinese government, ancestral traditions and religious and cultural symbols, individual or collective acts of resistance, the transformation of the urban environment, ecological damages and a hyper-consumerist society.**

In 2005, his series "Hiding in the City" opened with a self-portrait of Liu Bolin, immobile, covered in paint and melting into the rubble of his own studio located in the artists' quarter razed by the Chinese government. Since then, any and all locations may be a potential source of creation, but in which he will only appear paradoxically: imperceptible and incredibly present at the same time.

In this retrospective exhibition, the sculptor, performer and photographer Liu Bolin, known as "the invisible man", presents an extraordinary selection of photographs taken in China from 2005 to 2017. By challenging the viewer to find where the artist's body is hidden in the image, Liu Bolin creates an unprecedented effect of a mirror turned towards the person who is looking at him. "*Put yourself in my place*", he seems to be asking.

Posing sometimes for hours in front of a wall, a monument or a landscape, Liu Bolin thus totally fades into the background, with the invaluable help of his assistants and without any other form of manipulation. At the end of the process, the performance is immortalized in a photograph that creates an image which is playful on the surface but which actually conveys a deeper meaning: "*Some would say that I disappeared into the landscape; personally, I would say that the environment swallowed me up.*"

For Liu Bolin, it is not the artistic and human prowess of his performances in themselves that is of the essence but, instead, the backdrops into which he very specifically decides to disappear. Using his own personal history – his disappearance/appearance as an artist – he thus makes a revelation/denunciation of everything that is collectively at work around him in China.

Throughout his career, Liu Bolin has always been very sensitive to the social problems that have gone hand-in-hand with the political and economic upheavals of the People's Republic of China since its foundation. Political watchwords used as teaching tools for working classes can be considered an underlying theme of the series "Hiding in the City". Most Chinese citizens are so used to hearing them that they no longer pay any attention to these mandatory and explicit public messages that rapidly become meaningless. By painting some of them on his body, the artist is asking the viewer to discover their full meaning, a task that is sometimes more difficult than it appears to be.



Ecology has always been one of the key subjects of Liu Bolin's artistic approach. His disappearance at the very heart of his images, only making this deterioration of life deep within the Chinese heartland more tangible, questions us both emotionally and morally: *"I hope that my work will be a warning for my generation and for the generations to come"*, he says.

For the past several years, Liu Bolin allowed himself to reveal the "trade secrets" of his performances, exhibiting the costume he wore or allowing a photographic or video recording of the entire artistic process. One of his costumes is on view in the exhibition.

### Curation

Marc Donnadieu, Curator in Chief, Musée de l'Elysée, assisted by Emilie Delcambre-Hirsch, Exhibitions' Department, Musée de l'Elysée

### Biography

Liu Bolin was born in 1973 in Shandong province in eastern China, where he continues to live and work. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Shandong before earning a degree from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing in 2001. His artistic commitment began in the 1990's as China was recovering from the devastating effects of the Cultural Revolution, with its economic development on the upswing and the stabilization of its political situation.

The photographs and sculptures of Liu Bolin have been exhibited in many museums and institutions worldwide. He has also collaborated with Kenny Scharf, JR, Jon Bon Jovi, Jean-Paul Gaultier, Fernando Botero, Carlos Cruz-Diez and Annie Leibovitz.

In 2013, Liu Bolin presented a TED Talk in Long Beach, California, which was seen by millions of viewers online. In 2015, he was commissioned by the "United Nations Global Goals" campaign to create an image to promote 17 goals – including ending poverty and encouraging sustainable development and the fight against social injustice and inequality – where he faded into the backdrop of 193 country flags. In 2017, Liu Bolin was one of the major speakers at the conference "Art for Tomorrow 2017" sponsored by the *New York Times*, emphasizing the importance of the artist's role in transmitting environmental issues in his works.



### Catalogue

A book published by the Musée de l'Elysée under the direction of Marc Donnadieu accompanies the exhibition. It brings together an important collection of works created by the artist in China between 2005 and 2017. Unpublished texts provide original insights into Liu Bolin's creative principle, bearing a strong symbolic charge. What if, in our post-modern society, for each individual as well as for the artist, to disappear was to protest?

Softcover / 112 pages

60 illustrations

16 x 22,4 cm

ISBN : 978-2-88350-114-0

### Cultural programming

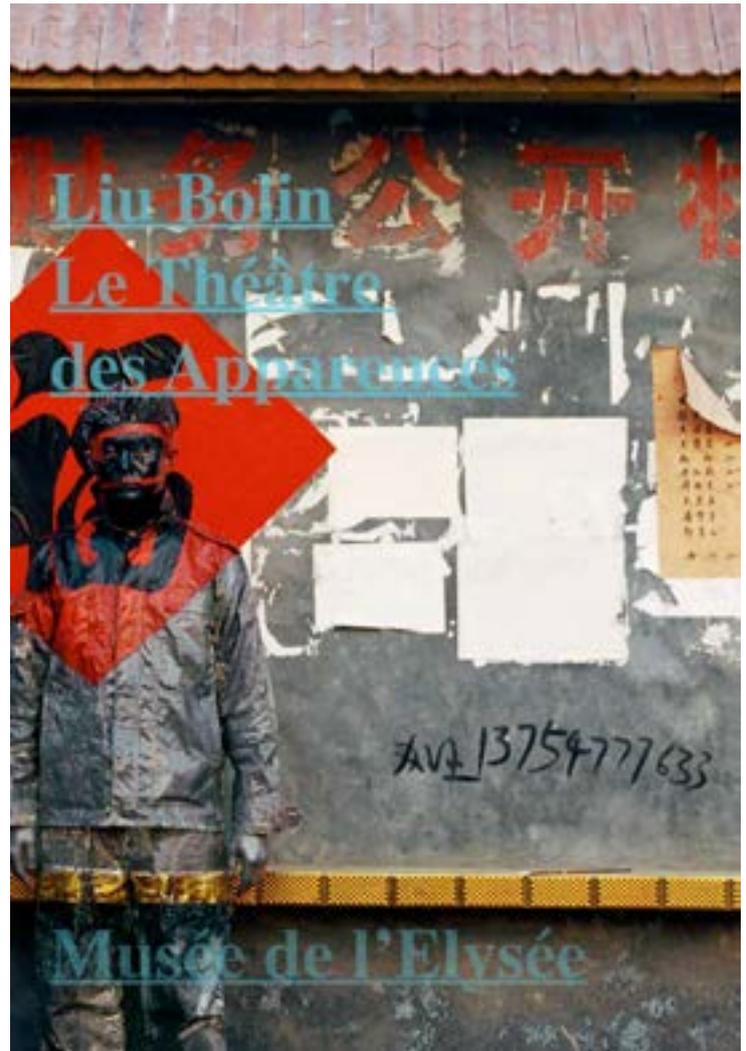
- #AskaPhotographer : live with Liu Bolin and Matthias Bruggmann in partnership with *Le Temps*

Monday October 15, 6pm-6:45pm, on social networks

- Workshop *Camouflage* for the young public

Every wednesday, 2pm-5:30pm, free, no registration required

Hide in a work that you made and leave with a unique photograph!



**The photographs in the press kit are available for the press free of charge**

Their use is limited to promoting the exhibition *Liu Bolin. The Theater of Appearances* at the Musée de l'Elysée. They must not be cropped or modified and no mention must appear on the image. Please use the captions provided.

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Liu Bolin, *Temple of Heaven*, from the series "Hiding in the City", 2010  
© Liu Bolin / Courtesy Galerie Paris-Beijing



Liu Bolin, *Your World*, from the series "Hiding in the City", 2014  
© Liu Bolin / Courtesy Galerie Paris-Beijing



Liu Bolin, *Panda*, from the series "Hiding in the City", 2011  
© Liu Bolin / Courtesy Galerie Paris-Beijing



Liu Bolin, *The Great Wall*, from the series "Hiding in the City", 2010  
© Liu Bolin / Courtesy Galerie Paris-Beijing



Liu Bolin, *The Laid off Workers*, from the series "Hiding in the City", 2006  
© Liu Bolin / Courtesy Galerie Paris-Beijing



Liu Bolin, *Road Block*, from the series "Hiding in the City", 2007  
© Liu Bolin / Courtesy Galerie Paris-Beijing

**Matthias Bruggmann is the winner of the second edition of the Prix Elysée, with the support of Parmigiani Fleurier, for his project on Syria. Hoping to "bring, to Western viewers, a visceral comprehension of the intangible violence that underlies conflict", he takes the gamble of hiding nothing in his explicit and brutal pictures. Taken in the field, they force the viewer to slow down and take stock of the war – geographically distant, admittedly, but made omnipresent by the media.**

If the tens of thousands of pictures of torture taken by Syrian photographers do not attract the attention of a Western audience, what can a foreigner who doesn't even speak Arabic hope to accomplish? The photographs of Matthias Bruggmann take a critical look at the representation of the atrocities of war. They give Westerners a more nuanced picture of the reality of an armed conflict and blur the boundaries between photojournalism and contemporary artistic photography.

Launched in 2012, his project plunges us into the complexity of the conflict. His images, which cover a geographic zone larger than Syria, question our moral assumptions and bring about a better understanding of the violence underlying this conflict.

Matthias Bruggmann explains: *"Formally, my previous work put viewers in a position where they were asked to decide the nature of the work itself. A scientifically questionable analogy of this mechanism would be the observer effect in quantum physics, where the act of observing changes the nature of what is being observed. My Syrian work builds on this framework. From a documentation perspective, it is, thus far and to the best of my knowledge, unique as the work, inside Syria, of a single Western photographer, in large part thanks to the assistance and hard work of some of the best independent experts on the conflict. Because of the nature of this conflict, I believe it is necessary to expand the geographical scope of the work. At its core is an attempt at generating a sense of moral ambiguity. The design of this is to make viewers uneasy by challenging their own moral assumptions and, thus, attempt to bring, to Western viewers, a visceral comprehension of the intangible violence that underlies conflict. One of the means is by perverting the codes normally used in documentary photography to enhance identification with the subject."*

### Curation

Lydia Dorner, Curator Assistant, Musée de l'Elysée



"The swimming pool at Al-Khair Hotel, above Marmarita. A number of the young men are from the Christian militia that protects Marmarita and helps besiege both the Krak des Chevaliers and al Husn, the Sunni village built around it. The Krak fell to the Syrian army in March 2014. Reuters, quoting Lebanese medical sources, reported that over forty of the opposition fighters fleeing the area were wounded in an ambush on the way out, with eight dead." Matthias Bruggmann



"Two men mourn their brother who died decapitated by a regime shell. The fear of bombings was such that families stopped organizing large funerals." Matthias Bruggmann

## Biography

Matthias Bruggmann is a Swiss photographer who was born in Aix-en-Provence in 1978. For the past 15 years, his work has focused on the different war zones throughout the world. After graduating from the Vevey School of Photography in 2003, he became interested very early on in the complexity of his profession in times of war. At the beginning of the 2000s, he accompanied the photojournalist Antonin Kratochvíl, who covered the invasion of Iraq. This first experience provided him with the opportunity to explore the complex link between photojournalism and reality – what is actually grasped or described. Since that time, his personal projects have taken him to Egypt, Haiti, Libya and Somalia.

Matthias Bruggmann's work was featured in the exhibition *reGeneration: 50 photographers of tomorrow*, organized by the Musée de l'Elysée in 2005, and he was part of the curatorial team for *We Are All Photographers Now!* presented at the museum in 2007. He is also one of the cofounders of the contemporary art space, Standard/Deluxe, in Lausanne. His photographs have been published in countless newspapers and magazines, including *Le Monde*, *The Sunday Times*, *Time Magazine* and *National Geographic*.

His work is included in a number of private collections, as well as the public collections of the Frac Midi-Pyrénées and the Musée de l'Elysée. His project on Syria received the Prix Elysée in 2017, awarded by the Musée de l'Elysée with the support of Parmigiani Fleurier. He is represented by the Contact Press Images agency and by the Galerie Polaris in Paris.

## Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a book co-published by Éditions Xavier Barral and the Musée de l'Elysée, produced thanks to the funding of the Prix Elysée. By juxtaposing images taken by mobile phones of militiamen fighting the Islamic state with his own photographs, the photographer invites us to reflect on the Western perception of photography in war zones and on the role of photojournalism.

Several specialists in the Syrian conflict sign a text in the book: "A Nation of Shards" by Rania Abouzeid, "The Collective Assault on Syria" by Nir Rosen, "The Syrian Crisis: Analyzing the nature of the official perspective" by Issam Abdelrahim and Mazen Bilal, "The Greatest Revolution" by Labib Nahhas, "The Syrian Revolution, causes and consequences" by Amiad Farkh.

Softcover / 336 pages

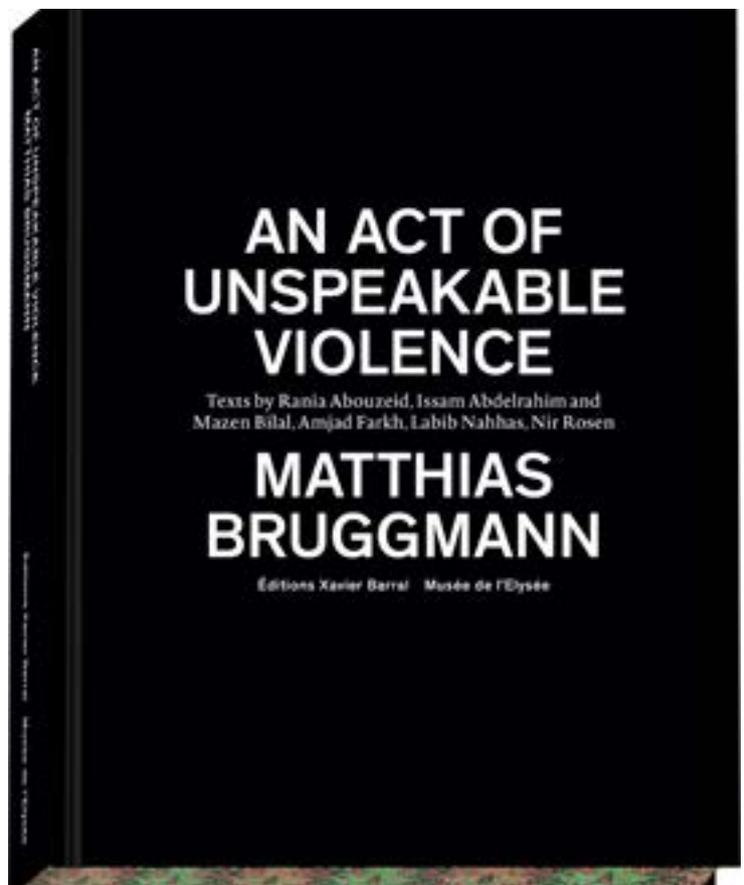
16 x 22,4 cm

Two versions: French and English

French ISBN: 978-2-36511-186-7

English ISBN: 978-2-36511-187-4

Price: CHF 45.-



### Cultural Programming

- #AskAPhotographer : live with Matthias Bruggmann and Liu Bolin in partnership with *Le Temps*  
Monday October 15, 6pm-6:45pm, on social networks.

- Meet Matthias Bruggmann  
Saturday November 3, 2pm-6pm, free, no registration needed  
Dialogue with Matthias Bruggmann: confronting images of conflicts  
Based on the model of the interactive workshop *Dialogues on Humanity: Facing Images of Conflicts* organized during the Nuit des images at the end of June this year, the public is invited to slow down the process of reading images and engage in a dialogue with Matthias Bruggmann and the museum team.

- Guided tour  
Saturday December 1, 4pm, free, no registration needed  
Guided tour by Matthias Bruggmann followed by a signature of his book published by Éditions Xavier Barral and the Musée de l'Elysée at the museum's bookshop.

- Portfolio in *Reporters without Borders*  
Matthias Bruggmann's portfolio on Syria is included in the next issue of *Reporters Without Borders*, along with an article by Marie Peltier, a Belgian historian specialising in contemporary conspiracy theory.  
More information: <https://rsf.org/>

- Round table at the Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris  
Saturday November 10, 5pm  
Matthias Bruggmann invites specialists in the Syrian conflict to discuss his work and the critical reception of the publication. In the presence of Lydia Dorner, curator of the exhibition at the Musée de l'Elysée. Debate moderated by Claude Guibal, a journalist specialising in the Middle East.  
More information: <http://www.ccsparis.com/>



"Using toilet cleaner and a dental probe, middlemen clean ancient coins. Coins and other antiquities are exported throughout the region, mostly to Turkey, but also Lebanon and, in some cases, Jordan, from where silver shekels then make their way to the Jerusalem souvenir industry. The trickiest part is faking provenance so that the antiquities can enter the highly lucrative Western market—dealers in neighboring countries would take a fifty percent cut on the sale for the procurement. The asking price for a Byzantine mosaic measuring around two square meters was between 1,500 and 2,000 dollars and smuggling it out to a neighboring country cost around 4,000 dollars at that point. Many of the deals were carried out over WhatsApp, and Syrians were often double-crossed by unscrupulous foreign dealers. One of the men in this photograph later complained that a North American dealer had cost him a small fortune when he refused to pay up his share." Matthias Bruggmann



"The remains of a barrel of chlorine (Cl<sub>2</sub>) that was dropped on a house from a helicopter. This is one of the hundred or so documented attacks using chemical agents that happened before and after the 2013 Ghouta bombings in Damascus that the United States estimates killed 1,429. The Syrian government was the only warring faction to have access to airpower, therefore it is unthinkable that anyone else dropped this barrel. A man who refused to give his name, presenting himself as the owner of the house and the father of two of the children killed in the bombing, explained that he was an employee of a government-run granary. When he went back to work, he said, men came and offered him to interview him on an official TV channel to say that Jabhat al-Nusra had dropped the bomb. He added that the men offered to give him money to rebuild his house in exchange. This attack, which killed 3 and wounded over 130, was extensively documented, both by Human Rights Watch and by Christoph Reuter in Germany's *Der Spiegel*. As of mid-2018, the Syrian Archive also held over a dozen videos of the attack and its aftermath." Matthias Bruggmann

**The photographs in the press kit are available for the press free of charge.**

Their use is limited to promoting the exhibition *Matthias Bruggmann. An Act of Unspeakable Violence* at the Musée de l'Elysée. They must not be cropped or modified and no mention must appear on the image. Please use the captions provided.

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Matthias Bruggmann, Ghazi Ayaash, Deir ez-Zor, May 25, 2015 © Matthias Bruggmann / Contact Press Images. Courtesy Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne and Galerie Polaris, Paris



Matthias Bruggmann, Rabiah, Reef Hama, April 23, 2012 © Matthias Bruggmann / Contact Press Images. Courtesy Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne and Galerie Polaris, Paris



Matthias Bruggmann, Hadar, Reef Quneitra, August 7, 2015 © Matthias Bruggmann / Contact Press Images. Courtesy Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne and Galerie Polaris, Paris



Matthias Bruggmann, Bab Hud, Homs, May 26, 2012 © Matthias Bruggmann / Contact Press Images. Courtesy Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne and Galerie Polaris, Paris



Matthias Bruggmann, Industrial City, Deir ez-Zor, May 5, 2015 © Matthias Bruggmann / Contact Press Images. Courtesy Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne and Galerie Polaris, Paris



Matthias Bruggmann, Shirqat, Iraq, September 22, 2016 © Matthias Bruggmann / Contact Press Images. Courtesy Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne and Galerie Polaris, Paris

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## The Musée de l'Elysée

The Musée de l'Elysée is one of the world's leading museums entirely dedicated to photography. Since its establishment in 1985, it has improved public understanding of photography through innovative exhibitions, key publications and engaging events.

Recognised as a centre of expertise in the field of conservation and enhancement of visual heritage, it holds a unique collection of over one million phototypes and more than a dozen Collections and full Archives including those of Charles Chaplin, René Burri, Nicolas Bouvier or Ella Maillart.

By 2021, the City of Lausanne and the Canton of Vaud will see three of their flagship cultural institutions brought together on a single site. The Cantonal Museum of Fine Arts, the Museum of Design and Contemporary Applied Arts (mudac) and the Musée de l'Elysée will be housed just a few yards from the station in the former CFF locomotive hangars.

[www.plateforme10.ch](http://www.plateforme10.ch)

## Practical information

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### Hashtags

#LiuBolin  
#MatthiasBruggmann

### Opening hours

Tu - Su, 11am - 6pm

**Closed on Mondays, except bank holidays**

**Open until 8pm the last Thursday of the month**



The Musée de l'Elysée  
is an institution  
of the Canton of Vaud

