

# Murambi I see you seeing me seeing you

An Encounter with a Genocide Memorial in the Land of the Thousand Hills

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*Rwanda, you linger on my doorstep, as do I on yours*

Leaving thousands of air miles and the great sea behind me, I make my way to Murambi. Each of the ten places I have worked artistically with over the last fifteen years meets in its own way, unfolding an encounter through its unique personality and forms. Murambi's meeting is no exception.

*What do you say to me, Rwanda, and what do I to you?*

When I walk a place and expose film, the place affects the entirety of my photographic work. Colour, shade, light, the ground's texture. All the factors through which this space is made unique etch themselves into me and my work.

I want to 'expose' myself.

In site-specific experiences, the totality of the situation effects every aspect of the work. Each place is structured in its own way, thus guiding experience according to its unique nature. Its pace, the felt sense of time, is different, as is its darkness.

Light shines such.

The instruction of the place offers specific possibilities.

In the creation of my work, the moment between the place and me becomes the visual and performative reality together with all its elements: the impact, the form, the movement, the sense of time, the light, the nature of the material.

*How can I meet with my full attention?*

The essence of my work is the practice of concentration. I witness the unfolding of a sensing form of perception.

I seek a simultaneity of the senses. In my work, an experience must enter me fully and be witnessed - awake - as I expose.

This seeking is a long process of preparation and practice, a process of presence and exposure. An integral piece of this work is the practice itself. I focus myself into the center of my being while remaining awake to the outward periphery. It is a simultaneous focusing inward and outward as well as upward and downward. For the exposure, the same technical parameters are always applied: a four second exposure time, an aperture of eleven, the same light sensitivity of the film, and the same focal-length.

The exposure is taken while walking in a moment of full attention. Only the photographs taken in this intensity of presence are developed.

*Show me who I am, Rwanda, I will show you too*

Compositions are written

between the place and myself as I walk. Just like a text,

a formulation needs contemplation.

In this way, my exposures require a contemplative, listening kind of awareness. It is then that all that has led to their creation can be experienced within the work itself. The final work emerges within the beholder. Something becomes visible in attention that would not otherwise be realised. It is a matter of time.

When I give free, undivided presence to a fellow human being, I experience a similar phenomenon. Something new comes to life that would not be possible without my activity. I feel that this conscious 'making possible,' this witnessing and participation, through presence, this looking at all, is a great task and challenge of our time.

*Murambi, I will keep looking, Look at me too*

I am standing on the land of the Murambi Genocide Memorial. More than 50,000 people were murdered here 25 years ago. The hill that became the tomb of the masses was thought to be a refuge. But instead of being saved most of the seekers were murdered.

Rwanda has many aspects,

as I learned, and so is its history. At the memorial, the bodies lie whitewashed with chalk and exposed for our active remembering.

I move slowly when I expose

so as to experience myself as a space of resonance. As I began to experience periphery and centre simultaneously, a courage arose, enabling me to look and meet Murambi.

*Murambi, I see you seeing me seeing you*

Here looking is a challenge. A continuous beginning. I have to rest again and again. And continue again and again.

I paused, rebuilt concentration, rested, saw, listened, paused.

Dried bodies, pressed leg muscles, caved-in torsos, contracted limbs, cracked heads, wrinkled skin. The corpses are dusted with lime for preservation. Their bodies are still clothed and their jewellery lying next to them or hanging around their necks. Below them, lime-dust falls onto the simple, white-painted wooden boards on which they rest. They are not stacked on each other but laying side by side. A dry, silent, dull and sweet smell floats faintly in the air. I hear the sounds of the surrounding villages in the distant hills. A cock crows.

We do not know the encounter with the dead from our everyday.

We do not see the dead without attention.

I experience dense intensity in Murambi. The grounds atop the hill have caved inwards where, beneath the surface, shrinking bodies form dark hollow spaces through the passing of time.

In amongst everything, I experience the colour of the spaces above, the blue of the distances, the shades of perspectives, the openness of the horizon. Smoke-like blue rises from the turquoise grass of Murambi's surface. Beneath it I see the redness of its earth.

*You are becoming an encounter, as direct as can be*

I think of this continuity of attention emanating as if it were a horizon which stretches itself outwards whilst deepening its vertical presence. In this elastic horizon, event and place become visible in a new way. They can stand and be. It is then that they speak more radically from and of themselves. I protect them from the danger of my associations and interpretations.

Again, as with the comparison of a conversation, the deeper I attend, the more I become aware of the various potentials of an encounter. Often this is unexplainable, but it can be experienced.

What does attention mean for our remembering,

then, for reconciliation and for the overcoming of violence and trauma?

*Rwanda, make me see*