

# WALKERS (AN ARCHEOLOGY OF PATHS)

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PHOTOGRAPHS 2016-2022

## WALKING AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Walking has been a personal preferred way to be in the world and an essential strategy to engage with taking photographs from the outset, which is reflected in my photographic series and works. A lone figure progressing in a wide open landscape would be a perfect icon of my work. Walking places me in the world in a physical way through pleasure and physical effort. As I walk I experience the landscape, the climate, the terrain, the state of the trail in my physical body, with profound emotional and intellectual resonances. Walking gives me at once the comfort (and sometimes also discomfort) of working within the limits of a well known space (my own body), and the thrill of opening new horizons at every turn of the path. As I walk, I work towards my images, which is in itself a desirable future, and I walk at the same time towards a past that is embedded into the path itself.

## LANDSCAPES AND IDEOLOGIES

The landscapes in this series have been photographed in countries at the threshold between Europe and Asia, in the mountains of Caucasia, in Georgia and Armenia.

Those were countries left in limbo after the soviet era, where the collapse of an entire system remains visible throughout, in the infrastructures, in people's way of existence and in the landscapes.

Landscapes are marked by ideologies. In Capitalism nature is subjected to the laws of profit and is exploited systematically, leaving very little ground untouched and 'undeveloped'. In Caucasia, where intense mining occurred under communist rule, the relentless exploitation of nature will be likely to return under Capitalist hegemony. But at the time of my travels, if this felt like a probable threat, it had not yet materialized. In the remote parts where I was walking with my husband and son, there was at once a sense of pain and hope in people and places. In the grey area where no structural power had truly replaced the old, self sufficiency and survival was allowed to those close to nature, who knew how to reach far into its folds, to gather and to hunt. The paths they take are the fragile network that sustains an economy of freedom and precarity at the fringe of society, at the limit of Europe.

## A BALANCE OF POWER AND CARE

Paths don't go in straight lines but follow the relief of the ground, as the human body adapts to its curves in a dynamic relationship where boundaries are tested but can't be overstretched.

Paths exist where people have the need to continue using them over time. They are the result of an enduring relationship between walkers and nature. But they are fragile because they exist only out of being used, and in most places it would take just a few seasons for resurging nature to reclaim them. Yet, most paths have a very long history: that is because they have been maintained over long periods of time by their users, even though they go through difficult terrain, in far remote places. The path, as informal as it is, serves vital purposes, in a permanent conversation with nature, outside of the structures of power.

## OBJETS TROUVÉS

I have walked on many paths throughout all of Europe, from Eastern Europe to Portugal and Iceland, and very often in France over the years. It is so long ago that I can't recall when I started picking broken fragments of crockery from the dirt of the paths, but I have been consistently keeping those modest treasures in glass jars in my studio, until they started to make sense as a collection.

During a long walk in the mountains or in a forest, a flash of color would catch my eye, breaking from the monotony of the brown mud or the grey sand of the path, and I couldn't help but break my stride to unearth a small fragment of pottery, maybe a piece from a broken cup or a saucer that would have me speculate: the fragment of smudged porcelain was so out of place in the middle of nowhere, how did it get here? and how long had it been buried in the mud before resurfacing for me to find it? Those shiny fragments of history were wonderful vessels for day dreaming as I continued walking, and as I took them away, back to a domestic world where they once belonged.

\_ Isabelle Vigier, July 2022