

Centre
de la photographie
de Mougins



André Villers

**+ Clara Chichin
Elsa Leydier**

Press kit

**Beyond
the Spectacle**

**21.02 –
7.06
2026**

**Curators
of the exhibition:**

**François Cheval
and Yasmine Chemal**

**Opening
Friday 20.02.2026
18:30**

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André Villers

Beyond the Spectacle

In early 1953, in Vallauris, André Villers (1930-2016) crossed paths with destiny: Pablo Picasso. From this encounter, and for the next ten years, Pablo Picasso and André Villers would remain inseparable. André Villers observed, learned from, and captured Pablo Picasso as he played and invented. Two worlds came together. The painter gave him his first Rolleiflex, the “sewing machine” that would become André Villers’ instrument of alchemy. From this bond was born *Diurnes* (1962), thirty images chosen from hundreds, accompanied by Jacques Prévert’s poems: a four-handed work in which the photographer dared to retouch the master, with Pablo Picasso’s consent. When Dole’s museum dedicated “Photobiographie” to him in 1986, it revealed a body of work far beyond mere documentation of Pablo Picasso. André Villers proved to be an experimental artist: he cut negatives, layered multiple exposures, and interwove signs and letters. With Michel Butor, he created *Les Pliages d’Ombres* (1977), the pinnacle of photography freed from documentation and open to metamorphosis. Image becomes language; language becomes image. As early as 1967, Louis Aragon recognised this imaginative power by publishing André Villers’ photos in *Les Lettres françaises* to illustrate Lautréamont. Faithful to the spirit of Michel Butor, André Villers pushed the boundaries of visual storytelling. The image was no longer a mirror of reality, but a fracture; it questioned the distance between the author, the subject, and the viewer. Pablo Picasso’s friend, and later a collaborator with Karel Appel, Robert Combas, and others, remained above all a member of a fellowship of artists: those who reject the instant, making creation an ongoing dialogue.

We are now invited to redefine, to replant, or to graft new strains in order to renew photography, having moved beyond the era of doubt and systematic critique of the medium. Since the 1970s, the very foundations of Niépce’s invention have been examined, dissected, and challenged. Now, the material itself is once again the anchor point. Imaginary cellular mixtures, other seeds yet to come, offer the hope of giving rise to forms resonant with their time. The language of plants and minerals is called upon to imagine a different creative fertility: a testimony to an era that refuses to be guided solely by chemistry or the cold precision of contemporary technologies. The photographic act thereby regains the slowness and accuracy of an artisanal gesture.

André Villers

The photographer once again becomes a nomadic gatherer, a sower of images and a patient companion of the living. It is a point worth dwelling on: photography can, and must, remain a living organism—a pigmentary body composed of signs, emulsions, and vibrant microelements. It is no longer about capturing but about accompanying the movement of life, shedding mere information to become a sensitive language. Long confined within the false opposition between document and art, photography had been reduced to a disembodied geometry. Today, a new generation reformulates the equation: the visual signs, texture, and matter do not dissolve meaning; instead, they expand it, extending its reach. Restored as substance, photography breathes again. It offers a stage where matter becomes knowledge, where sensations enrich the world. Behind the method, the choice of material defines what is essential and unfolds the chain of forms. Life, like a syllogism in action.

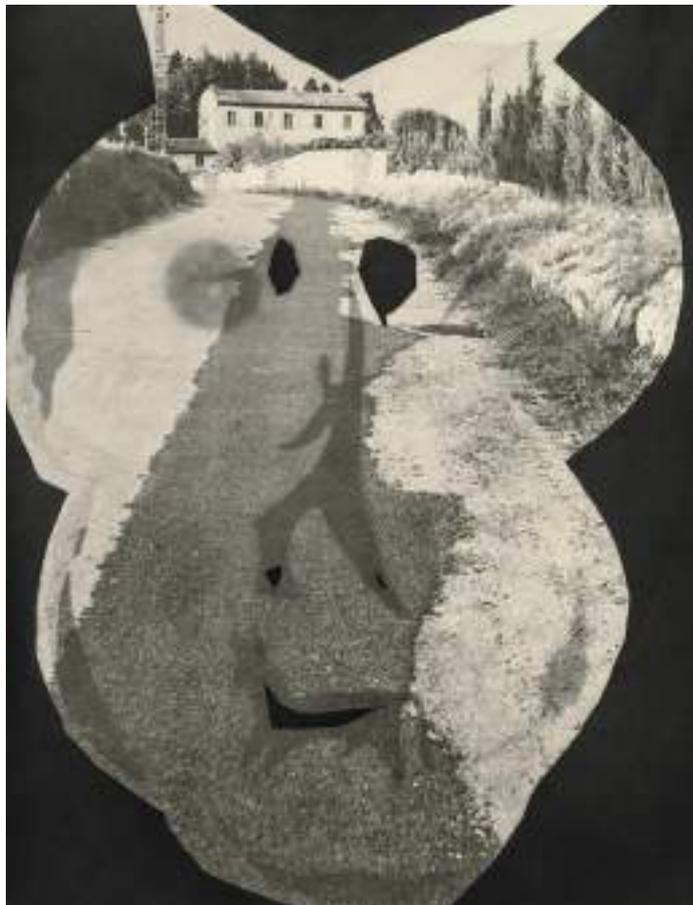
Portrait of Michel Butor
1976
Gelatin silver print
40 × 30 cm



Manipulations
 From the series *Pliages d'Ombres*
 (Artist's book comprising
 5 photographs by André Villers
 and a text by Michel Butor *Pliages
 d'Ombres*)
 1977
 Gelatin silver print
 50 × 40 cm



Pablo Picasso/André Villers
 Bohu (planche 13)
 From the series *Diurnes*
 (Artist's book comprising
 30 photographs by Pablo Picasso
 and André Villers, and
 a text by Jacques Prévert)
 1962
 40 × 30 cm
 © Succession Picasso 2026
 /see the conditions p. 16



André Villers

Biography

Born in Beaucourt, in eastern France, near the Japy and Peugeot factories, André Villers (1930-2016) entered the Vallauris sanatorium in 1947 to treat bone decalcification. It was there that he discovered photography, took his first classes, and began experimenting with developers, shaping a singular visual universe.

A self-taught artist, he developed from the 1950s a practice focused on exploring photographic processes: multiple exposures, solarizations, collages, photograms, variations in printing, and direct interventions on the image. The darkroom became a true laboratory for him, where photography was conceived as matter, visual writing, and process. Each image resulted from a careful dialogue between artistic intention, technical constraint, and controlled chance.

Although he is often primarily associated with photographing Pablo Picasso, this exhibition reveals that André Villers was far more than that. It celebrates his creativity and his singular photographic vision.

His attention to process went hand in hand with a passion for books and publishing, which he considered privileged spaces for invention. Throughout his career, André Villers created works and artist's books in collaboration with artists, writers, and poets such as Pablo Picasso, Claude Viallat, Ben, Arman, César, Hans Hartung, Jacques Prévert, Michel Butor, and Louis Aragon. These collaborations gave rise to hybrid forms in which text and image interact, overlap, and transform, extending his fascination with formal experimentation.



André Villers
Circa 2000
Gelatin silver print
40 × 30 cm
© L. Lejeune

Elsa Leydier

The Impostor

The Impostor, a figure derived from the eponymous syndrome, has little in common with an actual impostor except for the persistent feeling of being one. The Impostor embodies dormant potential, buried beneath doubt. She stands in diametrical opposition to the rigid, immutable archetype of the genius, who never questions their own talent. If she were a tarot card, The Impostor would be the card of unrecognised potential.

It is this latent potential that is contained in the photographs of this body of work, printed on recycled paper embedded with seeds. By incorporating the possibility of their own disappearance, the images are both vulnerable and charged with potential, albeit an uncertain one. The work never emerges in its entirety; its fulfillment may not take place before our eyes, nor even within our lifetime.

This detachment from the spectacular is echoed in the aesthetic of Elsa Leydier's photographs. They evoke doubt, hesitation, and at times a potential that can be sensed but is not yet fully present – one that may require patience before it might, one day, come into bloom.

The images also reveal struggles that emerge: The Impostor's ability to question herself, as well as the world around her, propels her forward, from shifting sands and through troubled waters. She advances patiently and tentatively, sometimes stumbling, aligned with slowness and a longterm perspective, guided by the hope of the eventual emergence of her potential.



L'Impostrice serie
Digigraphies on seeded paper
2023
90 × 60 cm

2023
40 × 26,6 cm

2024
40 × 26,6 cm



Elsa Leydier

Biography



Elsa Leydier is a visual artist and photographer, graduated from the École Nationale Supérieure de la Photographie in Arles in 2015. After living for over eight years in Brazil, she now lives and works between Paris and Marseille.

Her work explores the power and circulation of iconic images. Drawing on the visual codes of idealized representations, Elsa Leydier reappropriates and deconstructs them to reveal the social, political, and environmental issues they convey. Her practice unfolds through photographic installations that bring together the aesthetics of activism and luxury, conceived as visual ecosystems. For several years, she has been exploring ecofeminism through her long-term project *Les Désobéissances*.

In 2019, Elsa Leydier was awarded the Maison Ruinart/Paris Photo Prize and the Dior Prize for Young Photography. Her work has been presented in solo exhibitions in Colombia, the United States, France, Portugal, and the Netherlands, as well as in group exhibitions and fairs, including Paris Photo, ARCO Madrid, the Rencontres de la Photographie d'Arles, Month of Photography Los Angeles, the Kyotographie festival, Galerie Le Réverbère, agnès b. gallery, Galerie Les Filles du Calvaire, and the Circulation(s) festival in Paris.

Clara Chichin

The Precipitates

The photographs presented here are the result of walks and wanderings, from the hinterland to the Mediterranean coast.

The light and material of reality – whether organic, vegetal, or mineral – become sources of sensory experience, fostering attentiveness to the subtle forms of this place.

I seek to translate the experience of landscape, which I approach not as a backdrop but as a relationship – between outside and inside, subject and object, body and world – a way of “inhabiting the world,” not observing from a distance, but being present to what surrounds us, mapping one’s attention and movement within it.

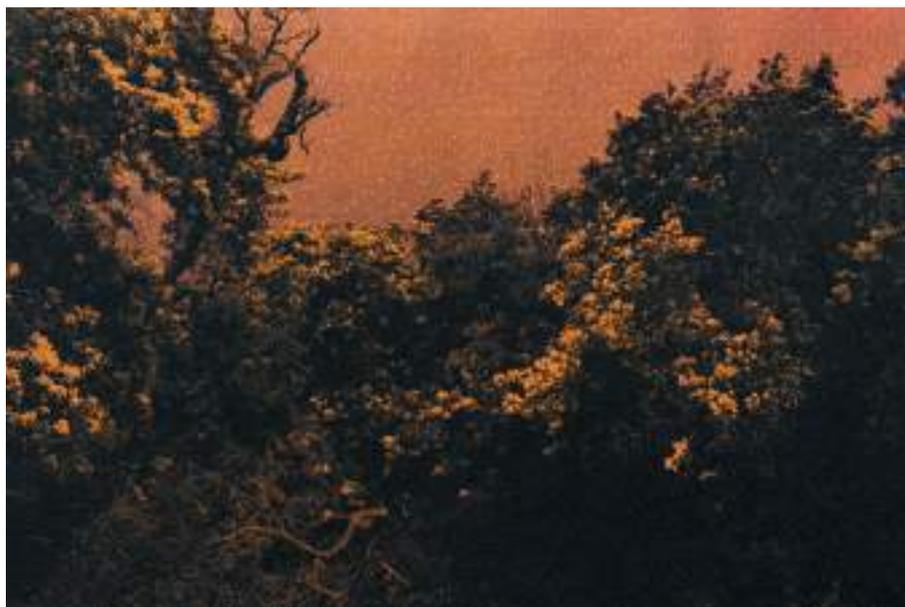
The images, more evocative than descriptive, attempt to convey an atmosphere and to reflect a form of imperceptibility – the subtle vibration of places.

From this emerges a sensitive geography, where scales of proximity and distance, fragments and vast expanses, respond to one another. Close-ups act as synecdoches, “materials for dreaming,” transforming detail into a space of immersion.

This work is part of an “ecopoetic” photographic practice that questions our relationship to the world in a context of ecological crisis—understood here as a crisis of sensitivity and connection.

The images form a sequence; a journey through the landscape. Each photograph becomes a place of passage, an experience of co-presence between humans and the world, inviting a shift in perspective and a renewed attentiveness to the places, materials, and presences that inhabit us as much as we inhabit them.

Les précipités serie
Digigraphies
2025
60 × 90 cm



2025
40 × 60 cm



2025
60 × 90 cm



Clara Chichin

Biography



Clara Chichin (born 1985) is a graduate of the *École des Beaux-Arts de Paris* and holds a master's degree in Literature, Arts and Contemporary Thought. For over a decade, she has developed a photographic practice grounded in the sensory experience of landscape, wandering, and everyday life.

Her work embraces a poetics of image-as-sensation, in which landscape, the vegetat, and natural elements are treated as perceptual materials rather than descriptive subjects. Walking and drifting are central to her process, shaping an embodied encounter with places, where the landscape is felt rather than depicted.

Rooted in an eco poetic photographic approach, her work reflects on our relationship to the living world and seeks forms of re-enchantment in response to contemporary ecological challenges.

A finalist for the Leica Prize in 2017, Clara Chichin has exhibited her work at the Abbey of Saint-Georges de Boscherville, the Jeu de Paume, and the 38th International Festival of Fashion, Photography and Accessories at Villa Noailles. Between 2022 and 2024, she developed a collaborative project with Sabatina Leccia, resulting in the publication *Le Bruissement entre les murs* (Sun/Sun, 2024), finalist for the Author Book Prize at Les Rencontres d'Arles and the Nadar Prize 2025.

Our publications:

#1

**Isabel Muñoz
1001**

176 pages

Isbn: 979-10-90698-50-5

© 2021

Authors:

Yasmine Chemali,

François Cheval,

Stéphane du Mesnildot,

Yuta Yagishita,

Pascal Bagot,

Emil Pacha Valencia

Translation:

Sara Heft

#2

**Natasha Caruana
+ Jenny Rova
L'amour toujours**

192 pages

Isbn: 979-10-90698-51-2

© 2021

Authors:

François Cheval,

Laurence Pourchez,

Jenny Rova,

Natasha Caruana,

Dr Chris Hoff,

Christophe Perrin,

Yasmine Chemali

Translation:

Sara Heft

#3

**Yuki Onodera
+ Li Lang**

La clairvoyance du hasard

176 pages

Isbn: 979-10-90698-52-9

© 2022

Authors:

François Cheval,

András Páldi,

Jean Daunizeau,

Takayo Iida,

Yasmine Chemali

Translations:

Ruth Oldham,

Patrick Honoré

#4

**Tom Wood
Every day is Saturday:
portraits anglais**

192 pages

Isbn: 979-10-90698-53-6

© 2022

Authors:

François Cheval,

Leïla Vignal,

Jean Daunizeau,

Alexis Tadié,

David Peace,

John Peel,

Yasmine Chemali

Translations:

Ruth Oldham,

Alexis Tadié,

Leïla Vignal

#5

**Catherine De Clippel
+ Marie Baronnet
Ce qui nous arrive ici,
en plein visage**

192 pages

Isbn: 979-10-90698-54-3

© 2022

Authors:

Jérôme Esnouf,

François Cheval,

Jean-Paul Colleyn

Translations:

Ruth Oldham,

Jennetta Petch

Éditions

Cahiers :

#6

Harold Feinstein**La roue des merveilles**

192 pages

Isbn: 979-10-90698-55-0

© 2023

Authors:

François Cheval,

Alexis Tadié,

Ya'ara Gil-Glazer,

Yasmine Chemali

Translations:

Ruth Oldham,

Jennetta Petch,

Alexis Tadié

#7

Anna Niskanen**Point sublime****+ Jessica Backhaus****Nous irons jusqu'au soleil**

144 pages

Isbn: 979-10-90698-56-7

© 2023

Authors:

François Cheval,

András Páldi

Anna Niskanen

Translation:

Jennetta Petch

#8

Stephen Shames**Comrade Sisters : Women****of the Black Panther Party****+ Bayeté Ross Smith****Au-delà des apparences**

192 pages

Isbn: 979-10-90698-57-4

© 2024

Authors:

Yasmine Chemali,

François Cheval,

Paul David Henderson,

Ericka Huggins

Translation:

Jennetta Petch

#9

Black is Beautiful**Kwame Brathwaite**

192 pages

Isbn : 979-10-90698-58-1

© 2025

Authors:

Yasmine Chemali

François Cheval

Kwame Brathwaite

Translation:

Jennetta Petch

Sandra Hübschen

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Informations

Open

**21.02 → 31.03.2026
13:00 → 18:00**

Closed

on Mondays and Tuesdays

**1st.04 → 7.06.2026
11:00 → 19:00**

Closed on Tuesdays

Admission

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Student → 3 €

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