

Synopsis:

## PHOTOGRAPHING WORDS

Photographic essay by  
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It was while working for a photographic commission for the *Fondation Louise Roulin* that I was had the occasion to meet the residents of three establishments in the 18th arrondissement of Paris: Vincent Compoin, Eugène Carrière, Anne-Marie Blaise.

Meetings, afternoon teas, dancing evenings were organised in all three, and it was through going to them that I was able to develop relationships with the residents. But at the same time, I asked myself: how to photograph them? How best to respect these poor, fragile people without “stealing their souls”, as they say in Africa?

Then the idea of installing a studio, where they could take their own photo, dawned on me as being the obvious solution.

The photos were taken by the subjects themselves during our conversations, in the same conditions for all of them in order to avoid any theatrical or dramatic aspect, against a light-coloured background and using flash. I was facing them, with the camera on a tripod, and we just talked – or sometimes didn’t – as no agenda was imposed. That said, many of them were eager to talk about themselves, and I was eager to listen to their stories.

Sometimes what they said stopped them pressing the shutter, they were so concentrated on their words, and so it was during the moments of silence that they could most of the time take their own photographs. And so it swung between words and photos. Each portrait was the reflection of a shared moment, of freed speech on one side and of careful listening on mine.

Men and women from 50 to 70 years old, with different origins, told me why, and how, it had come about that they had lost everything. The common points to all these stories was the loss of one or several loved ones, often a mother, who, when she had not abandoned them at birth, would not reveal the identity of the father; the breakup of a couple; some of them had lived through were and had been tortured.

It was agreed to take the photos of the subjects as they were, without props nor judgement, in order to find in the “naked truth” of the portrait the certain beauty of just being simply there in front of the camera.

I interviewed them afterwards and asked them how they thought they looked on the photos, whether they liked what they saw, and I let them answer or evade the question as they pleased. I had no means of recording, I just noted down their words on the spur of the moment, sometimes leaving it up to my memory to sort through what I had heard. It is these spontaneous words and the subjectivity of my memory that I chose to use as captions for their portraits.

I would like to thank them for having shown such confidence in me.  
Caroline Feyt