

SYNOPSIS :

« PROSTITUTES OF EUROPE » A different take on prostitution

by
Mathilde BOUVARD

**A socio-artistic photo report on a European dimension. 2007/2008
European exhibitions 2008/2010**

Prostitutes of Europe is a socio-artistic project on a European dimension. Mathilde Bouvard has travelled through Europe meeting sex workers who willingly work in this field, taking their pictures and recording their testimonies. She has been to Paris, Berlin, Brussels, Prague, Stockholm, Budapest, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Geneva, London, Bern and Marseille.

Her objective, in exhibiting her work, is to reveal the social and human aspect of this particular activity to a large public, as well as drawing attention to its complex position within European affairs as a delicate subject.

Part of the profit from the exhibitions was given to the organisations Mathilde works with, so that they can continue their work in the best conditions possible.

These organisations work for the social inclusion of those facing difficult situations. They also work to prevent STIs as well as providing free medical and legal assistance. An organisation such as "Espace P" in Brussels strives to encourage a better understanding between the workers and the city's inhabitants, trying to establish a relationship based on tolerance.

The results of these meetings are records, photographs and sometimes just the simple shared moments one will not find exhibited on any wall.

The photo-report is a selection of 45 black and white photographs, 3 fabric paintings and written accounts.

The photos present a different perspective on prostitution, far from the average stereotypes somewhere between sordid realism and the image of a woman "working the street."

According to Pascale, who used to work the Bois de Boulogne, prostitution "*It is far from being a piece of pavement. It is a whole life. A way of life.*"

Following the fiery tracks of Grisélidis Réal, sex workers have shared their stories with Mathilde Bouvard.

The project is supported by the European Community.

There have been exhibitions in Paris, notably in March 2009 as part of the European Congress on Prostitution at the Théâtre de l'Odéon, in Berlin, at the Maison du Livre in Brussels, as part of the Sexworker Open University in London, in Geneva, in a castle in Bligny during the Rencontre Femmes d'Histoire and in Avignon. In addition, in June 2009 a part of the exhibition was presented at the Nuit de la Photographie Contemporaine (Night of Contemporary Photography) at the Foire St Germain in Paris.

The exhibition has been the focus of many press reports, documentaries and other publications. There is a diverse use of materials; it does not only include photographs and first-hand accounts but also pictures, videos and music by Claire Fenateau and Clémence Demesme. It is a campaign for prostitution, which is a very different thing from sex slavery even though it is often confused with this. The work done by the different organisations is also valued, with texts and also conferences and workshops.

As a special guest for the third *Nuit de la Photographie Contemporaine*, Mathilde Bouvard presented this project alongside her next work, *J'ai faim!* (I'm hungry!) which considers contemporary famine and poverty in Western Europe.

She has also been assigned the post of artistic director for a multidisciplinary festival called l'Art et le Sexwork, due to take place in Paris in 2011.