

Uncertain Rites of Passage

In his latest book, *Se mettre au monde*, Steeve Iuncker takes an intimate look at teenagehood, questioning what have become the rites of passage of today's generation in a society that has given away many of its traditions.

Steeve Iuncker is a photojournalist. When he works on personal projects, they are long term, sensitive ones. Interested in capturing the inextricable steps that frame life, he has been decrypting death for years. His latest series, *Se mettre au monde*, recently published as a book by Le Bec en L'Air, explores another form of death; the death of childhood.

As anthropologist and sociologist, David Le Breton, writes in his essay for the book, "In our contemporary cultures, access to the age of adulthood is no longer marked out; no common orientation guides the young person in his quest for meaning and values. [...] Adolescence then becomes an uncertain period, a delicate in-between, a situation of liminality, in other words a fuzziness that is difficult to live."

Iuncker's photographs incarnate this condition. Shot on 4" x 5" large format film, they are printed on Fresson paper using a four-colour coal process. The resulting images are as blurry as the experience he portrays and unveil a gallery of bodies, sometimes constrained by pain or chain, sometimes unleashed by love or substances. Each photograph is soberly paired with a simple word, "drunkenness", "boredom", "protest", as many ritual apparatuses available to youngsters on their way to adulthood.

Later in his text, Le Breton adds: "They search for themselves through blows, pain, self-testing, deprivation, drunkenness, vertigo, wandering or sleep. They use drugs, alcohol, provocation. [...] The intention is to no longer be there, to strip oneself of one's character, to no longer have to support him. This bears witness to the impossibility of being an individual and of being invested as an actor in one's existence."

A father who saw his son struggling through this uncodified experience, Steeve Iuncker relates to this description. No surprise that his book opens with an ambiguous image, of a young couple cuddling under a white sheet that would be evocative of a mortuary if it weren't for the letters "u.n.i.v.e.r.s.i.t.a.i.e.s" (i.e. university) that one can decipher, printed on it. Next to the two heads, a health report. The image is filled with a mixture of tenderness and brutality - the reminder of the recent physical trauma, the intertwined hands, and the bottom right corner turned bright red from the analog process co-exist. Imbued with a delicate intimacy, it stands as an empathetic metaphor for the adolescent try-out.