



Above, Desirée Dolron,
Xteriors VIII, 2001–15.
Opposite, from top: *Te dí*

*todos mis sueños/Librería
Julio Mella*, 2002–3, now
in the Victoria and Albert

Collection; Desirée Dolron,
Peshawar, Pakistan, 1997,
2017, a self-portrait

Desirée Dolron

Born 1963

When, in 2012, the banker-turned-philanthropist Henry Buhl sold his remarkable collection of photographs, ranging from Alfred Stieglitz to Andreas Gursky by way of Man Ray, Berenice Abbott, Walker Evans and Irving Penn, the only works he kept were those by Desirée Dolron. It is hard to think of a greater tribute to their beauty, mystery and serenity, their profound stillness and perfection, and the layers of narrative they hint at.

But then, as the London-based dealer Michael Hoppen once told me, 'Desirée is a phenomenal artist, but she doesn't engage with the marketplace and put out a new show every year. She only makes pictures when she feels inspired.' She can invest years in a single image – first finding the right location, then studying the light, then shooting with long exposure times, and finally manipulating the image digitally for as long as it takes, in some instances years. A work is finished, she has said, 'only when there are no more distractions'. She describes her pictures as 'puzzles with millions of pixels'.

For all the technology employed in their creation, however, her images are rooted in the continuum of Western painting. Those in her best-known series, *Xteriors* (2001–15), for example, are reminiscent of Flemish portraiture or the subdued, stylised interiors of Danish painter Vilhelm Hammershøi, peopled by solitary women whose faces we cannot see. Dolron's oeuvre also embraces a kind of reportage. Her first book, *Exaltation: Images of Religion and Death* (2000) documented rituals and ceremonies in India, Thailand, Morocco and the Philippines, some of them profoundly shocking.

Lately, Dolron has also been working with moving rather than still images. *Complex Systems*, for example, is a high-definition video loop of digital forms mirroring a murmuration of starlings in flight. And *Uncertain TX*, which shares its name with a town in Caddo Lake State Park, Texas, was filmed from a boat as it glided through the torpid waters of the bayou, out of which rises a forest of ravaged bald cypress trees, some of them 400 years old, swathed in Spanish moss. It's a haunting, almost primeval landscape, beautiful yet pregnant with menace and not quite real, set to a naturalistic yet percussive soundtrack that amplifies the sense of disquiet.

This is true of Dolron's work in general: whether it is staged (*Gaze*, for example, is a series in which she photographed people underwater) or records a scene she has found, it has an aura of unreality, however defined and genuine the image one is looking at. ♦
Desirée Dolron's new video works will be at Grimm Gallery New York from 4 February to 11 March.
grimmgallery.com

