

## Biography

Born in 1957 in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France, Couturier now lives and works in Paris. After finishing university studies in economics at the Études de Droit et Économie in Paris, a friend introduced him to the creative possibilities of photography. Couturier then participated in workshops and worked with established photographers, focusing on commercial architectural work. He soon found the genre to be "too static" and pursued personal work as well. Couturier has exhibited extensively in Europe and the United States, including at the Lowe Museum of Art, Miami; the Musée d'art Moderne et Contemporain, Strasbourg; The Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York; and the Fogg Museum of Art, Cambridge, Massachusetts, among others. Publications include *Berlin: Mutations urbaines*, text by Vincent Von Wroblewsky, Paris: Édition Archipress, 1997; Philippe Piguet, "Stéphane Couturier—Vistas" in *Imago 99: Encuentros de fotografía y video*, Salamanca: Centro de Fotografía de la Universidad de Salamanca, 1999; Matthieu Poirier, *Stéphane Couturier, photographies*, Paris: A. Biro, 2004; *Stéphane Couturier*, Clermont-Ferrand: FRAC Auvergne, 1999; *Stéphane Couturier: Landscaping*, Paris: Édition Ville Ouverte, 2002; *Stéphane Couturier: Mutations*, Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 2004 and *Stéphane Couturier, photographies*, Paris: L'Insolite, 2005. His works are found in the collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California; The Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois; The Santa Barbara Museum of Art, California; The Cleveland Art Museum, Ohio; and the Saint Louis Art Museum, Missouri, among many others. Works from his *Landscaping* series were featured in the International Center for Photography's Triennial, *Ecotopia* in 2006.

## Endnotes

1. Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: M.I.T. Press, 1960/1990, p. 46.
2. Quoted in an essay by Matthieu Poirier in *Stéphane Couturier, photographies*, Paris: A. Biro, 2004.
3. Email correspondence between the author and the artist on May 11, 2007.

Essay by Olivia Lahs-Gonzales, Director, The Sheldon Art Galleries.



3648 Washington Boulevard, St. Louis, Missouri 63108  
Telephone: 314.533.9900 Fax: 314.533.2958  
Website: [www.thesheldon.org/galleries.asp](http://www.thesheldon.org/galleries.asp)

### Gallery Hours:

Tuesdays and Thursdays, Noon to 8:00 p.m.  
Wednesdays and Fridays, Noon to 5:00 p.m.  
Saturdays, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.  
One hour before Sheldon concerts and during intermissions.

## Checklist of the Exhibition

*Beuthstrasse*, from *Urban Archaeology*, 1996, Cibachrome print, 60 x 48 inches, courtesy of the artist and Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

*Edouard VII, Paris*, from *Urban Archaeology*, 1997, Cibachrome print, 48 x 60 inches, courtesy of the artist and Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

*Edouard VII, Paris*, from *Urban Archaeology*, 1997, Cibachrome print, 60 x 48 inches, courtesy of the artist and Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

*Olympic Parkway #1*, from *Landscaping*, 2001, chromogenic color print (Type C), 35 x 42 inches, courtesy of the artist and Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

*Olympic Parkway #2*, from *Landscaping*, 2001, chromogenic color print (Type C), 35 x 42 inches, courtesy of the artist and Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

*Vista Grande Road, San Diego, California*, from *Landscaping*, 2002, Cibachrome diptych, 48 x 90 inches, courtesy of the artist and Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

*Proctor Valley, San Diego*, from *Landscaping*, 2004, chromogenic color print (Type C), 49 x 67 inches, courtesy of the artist and Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

*Palais de Tokyo*, 1997, Cibachrome print, 41 x 34 inches, courtesy of the artist and Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

*Usine Gevelot*, 1996, Cibachrome print, 32 x 25 3/4 inches, courtesy of the artist and Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

*Seoul, Tanji #6*, 2003, chromogenic color print (Type C), 45 1/2 x 45 inches, courtesy of the artist and Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

*Grand Palais*, 1997/2003, pigment print, 32 x 27 inches, courtesy of the artist and Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

*Grand Palais*, 1997/2003, pigment print, 32 x 27 inches, courtesy of the artist and Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

This brochure is published on the occasion of the exhibition *Stéphane Couturier* in the Bernoudy Gallery of Architecture of the Sheldon Art Galleries, June 9 - September 15, 2007.

The publication of the brochure is made possible by Ellen and Durb Curlee. The exhibition is made possible in part by The Ellen Curlee Gallery, St. Louis.

# Stéphane Couturier



t h e s h e l d o n a r t g a l l e r i e s

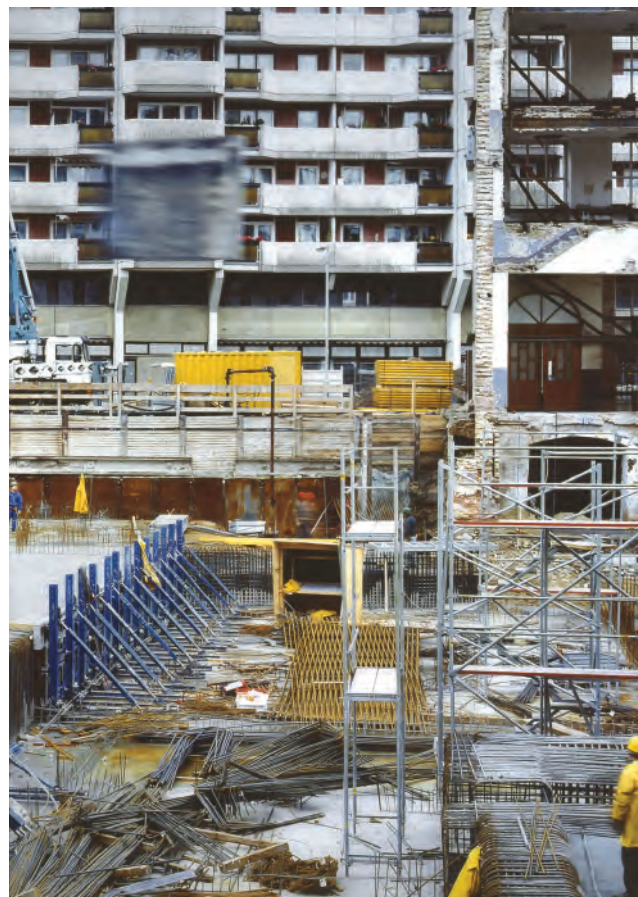


“There seems to be a public image of any given city which is the overlap of many individual images. Or perhaps there is a series of public images, each held by some significant numbers of citizens. Such group images are necessary if an individual is to operate successfully within his environment and to cooperate with his fellows. Each individual picture is unique with some content that is rarely or never communicated, yet it approximates the public image, which in different environments is more or less compelling, more or less embracing.”

— Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*<sup>1</sup>

Stéphane Couturier investigates the aesthetic and psychological possibilities of the urban environment in cities that include his own, Paris, as well as Moscow, Seoul and San Diego, among others. This exhibition, presented in the Sheldon Art Galleries' Bernoudy Gallery of Architecture features works from three series: *Monuments*, an investigation of the exoskeletons of high-rise buildings found in Moscow and Seoul; *Urban Archaeology*, an exploration of what Couturier terms the “guts of the city;” and *Landscaping*, a rendering of impending and newly-built suburban sprawl on the California border between Mexico and the United States. Each body of work remarks on facets of our relationship to and understanding of the peopled environment and provides images that ask us to consider the interconnection of their historical, physical and cerebral attributes. The medium in which these ideas are presented is also central to the interpretation of Couturier's images. Photography and all of its historical ballast (issues of photographic reality and the effects of optics and composition, for example) can affect the way in which an image can be read. Largely unpeopled and non-hierarchical in their composition, his photographs invite scrutiny.

In the flattened images of *Monuments*, Couturier concentrates on the façades of modern high-rise buildings found in Moscow and Seoul, providing on the surface



a composition of line, form and color relationships. It is only when the viewer begins to scan these surfaces (made easier by Couturier's use of large-format film which records detail and monumental print sizes that invite the viewer into the scene before them), that subtle differences emerge. The uniform cities that are recorded, which have been built or rebuilt using mediocre design and cheap materials, negate histories and engender placelessness, however the photographs of *Monuments* show in these variations that the individuality of humanity cannot be erased.

In a series of photographs begun in 1994, Couturier turns his camera to sites of construction and change, creating large-scale photographs of what he has termed the “Urban Archaeology” of cities. In these often tightly packed photographs like *Beuthstrasse*, 1996, for example, he uses a small lens aperture to bring together foreground, middle and background linking past, present and future in a flattened tableau of lines, forms and colors. Not merely formal exercises or sentimental musings on the

modernization of historic cities however, Couturier's photographs of the city in flux are also a distillation of temporal and cerebral experiences. Paris, Dresden, Berlin and others were subjects of his investigations in *Urban Archaeology*.

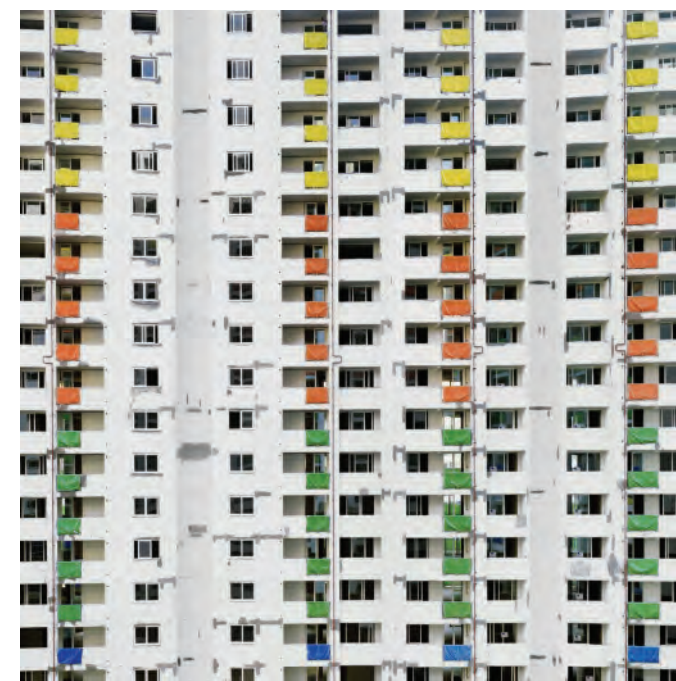
Each of these cities is loaded with its own distinct history involving dramatic change and rebirth: Paris reshaped through Haussmanization in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the bombing and rebuilding of Dresden during and after World War II; and post-wall Berlin's *Mitte* (previously no-man's land and East Berlin), recreated as a dense web of new high-rise construction that glorifies commerce. As a resident of one city (Paris), and a visitor to the others, Couturier gives us layered images that conflate experience, expectations and presumptions. His particular vision of Parisian construction sites is that of an inhabitant who brings to the scene the full weight of historical references, elements of change and art-historical tenets such as modernism's embrace of the everyday as beautiful, post-modernism's deconstruction of these same experiences, and the amalgam that constitutes today's expressions and experiences of the urban fabric. In cities, the skeletons of new structures rise, are clothed and inhabited, and the spaces that they occupy are experienced in new ways by passers-by who each bring to the scene their own personal histories. In archaeological exploration, the past is uncovered to be re-experienced, studied and speculated on in a new context and time. Inviting similar scrutiny (facilitated by Couturier's use of a large-format camera which records minute detail, as well as monumental print sizes that invite the viewer into the scene), Couturier's *Urban Archaeologies* are presented like maps of places in non-hierarchical compositions which allow the viewer entry from many planes.

Couturier's *Landscaping* series, begun in 2001, shows a previously untouched environment



on the San Diego-Tijuana border as it is about to explode into sub-urbanism through monumental feats of “landscaping.” In these renderings of the landscape under development, Couturier also flattens elements, creating an image that is a reminder of California artist Richard Diebenkorn's gymnastic paintings of San Francisco-area hillsides. His photographs of the shifting California range also lay bare the dichotomy that exists between the public desire for a natural home setting and the sanitized version that is ultimately constructed. In *Proctor Valley*, 2004, for example, two waiting tracts are sprayed by developers with artificial green “grass.” Partitioned for individual housing, the scene provides an ironic pastoral contrivance within the scrubby hills of the California desert. Several works from *Landscaping* are presented as diptychs or polyptychs in which Couturier flattens and varies viewpoint or the order in which the individual images are arranged to underscore the uniformity of the suburban environment.

Each of these projects provides us with a new way to consider the state of land and city spaces and how they function (or could function) in a changing post-industrial world. Couturier, who by trade and out of necessity has also practiced architectural photography (a genre which glorifies and objectifies buildings by presenting a view no deeper than its skin or façade), eschews these commercial ideologies in his personal work and instead provides us with a way to experience the city and other peopled spaces as “organic living organisms,”<sup>3</sup> rich with histories, futures and possibilities for our own stories and associations.



TOP: *Beuthstrasse*, from *Urban Archaeology*, 1996, Cibachrome print, 60 x 48 inches, courtesy of the artist and Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.  
BOTTOM: *Proctor Valley*, San Diego, from *Landscaping*, 2004, chromogenic color print (Type C), 49 x 67 inches, courtesy of the artist and Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

TOP: *Seoul, Tanji #6*, From *Monuments*, 2003, chromogenic color print (Type C), 45 1/2 x 45 inches, courtesy of the artist and Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.  
BOTTOM: *Vista Grande Road*, San Diego, California, from *Landscaping*, 2002, Cibachrome diptych, 48 x 90 inches, courtesy of the artist and Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.