Émergence, Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, 2013–2020

François-Xavier Gbré

François-Xavier Gbré (born in 1978 in Lille, France) lives and works in Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

Gbré graduated with a degree in photography from École Supérieure de Montpellier in France.

In touch with time and geography, his work summons the language of architecture as a witness of memory and social change. From colonial vestiges to landscapes redefined by current events, he explores territories and revisits history and its making.


His work is part of the international collections at Centre Pompidou (Paris, France), the Smithsonian Institution (Washington, D.C., USA), Tate Modern (London, UK), Queensland Gallery of Modern Art (Brisbane, Australia), the Walther Collection (Neu-Ulm, Germany – New York, USA), Philadelphia Museum of Art (Philadelphia, USA), Chazen Museum of Art (Madison, Wisc., USA), and Centre National des Arts Plastiques (Paris, France), among others.

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*Émergence, Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, 2013-2020* is a series of 57 small-format photographs taken in Abidjan, the economic capital of the Côte d’Ivoire. Gbré documents the evolution of the city in a deep and detailed investigation of its urban territory. Filtered through the prisms of time, nature, and architecture, he
recomposes a landscape and horizon that outline an experience of moving through Abidjan. Since 2011 and the end of the post-electoral crisis, Abidjan has been rebuilding itself with spectacular infrastructure and a redefinition of the individual and collective landscape. It is a page in the social history of the city that the artist captures by following the destruction of informal settlements and the construction of real estate projects intended for a so-called growing middle class. The city becomes the showcase of a country where development is not, however, homogeneous.

In addition to his field research, Gbré draws on photographic and documentary archives that he collects and presents in relation to his own work. For the *Rencontres d’Arles* photography festival in 2020, the installation of *Emergence, Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, 2013-2020* is put into perspective through the inclusion of an aerial photograph of Abidjan taken during a period known as the “Ivorian miracle,” a period of prosperity and construction during the years 1960-1970 that constituted an urbanistic, architectural, historical, and social framework on which the constructions from the decade of the 2010s are superimposed.
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François-Xavier Gbré, Aerial view of Cote d’Ivoire, date unknown. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Cécile Fakhoury (Abidjan, Dakar, Paris).

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