

Sophie Calle

(Paris, 1953)

Precious few moments of Sophie Calle's personal life have not passed beneath the implacable lens of her art. Her work tends to be profoundly autobiographical, and everything she narrates – with an analytical gaze never bereft of a pinch of irony and complacency – proves a way to share episodes which sooner or later we all experience, and to elaborate on them collectively for therapeutic purposes. Over the course of a career which began in the early 1980s, Calle has never glossed over even the most intimate and painful aspects, such as the death of her parents, the crisis of her relationship or the disappearance of her beloved cat Souris.

The 'others' have always been a complementary part of this research: she followed a man she had just met from Paris to Venice (*Suite Vénitienne*, 1980) or was trailed herself by a detective hired by her mother (*La Filature*, 1981); she got hired as a maid in a hotel so as to be able to make her way into the guests' bedrooms undisturbed (*L'Hôtel*, 1980), and she called all the numbers in an address book found by chance in order to reconstruct the life of the owner (*Le carnet d'address*, 1983). Invited to represent France at the Venice Biennale, she first published an ad in the newspapers in order to choose the curator of the pavilion (and entrusted the task to an artist: Daniel Buren), and then she asked another one hundred and seven women to interpret the letter with which her companion at the time put an end to their relationship (*Prenez soin de vous*, 2007). In a constant roleplay that turns the tables on authorship and blends truth and fiction, anyone may become an accomplice to Calle's voyeuristic spirit.

Almost inevitably, the themes of abandonment, of loss and absence have intertwined with her investigation into seeing and not seeing. The seven films in the collection are a part of the larger project *Voir la mer*, produced in Istanbul in 2011. After discovering that in a city surrounded by the sea there are a lot of people who have never seen it, being socially marginalised or from the more inland areas of Turkey, she took some of them to the beach and filmed them from behind, asking each of them to turn around towards her after a few minutes. An artist who has always integrated the written word in her works, this time she chose to let the images speak for themselves and capture the emotions of the gaze. On other occasions, she asked blind people to tell her what they think beauty is (*Les aveugles*, 1986), what colour each of them feel they can perceive (*La couleur aveugle*, 1991) or what the last image was that they saw before the accident that blinded them (*La dernière image*, 2010). The works from her *Disparitions* also belong to this current, produced inside museums that have suffered thefts of works: before the bare wall, she reconstructed the details of the missing object thanks to the recollections of members of staff.

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