

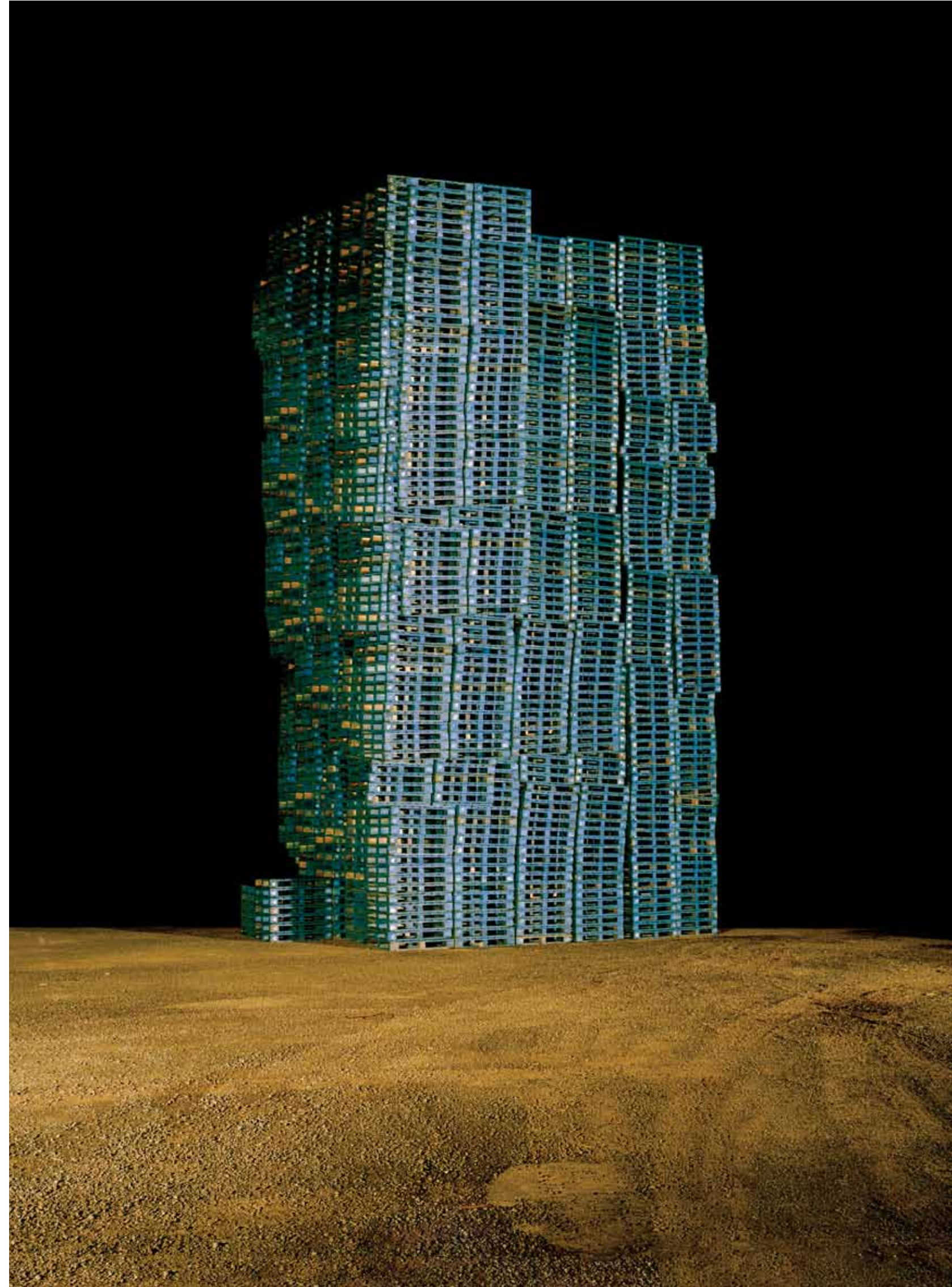
Edgar Martins

disconstruction of photography



A young Portuguese conceptual artist, that has left his mark on the world.
He believes that an image is not worth more than a thousand words and strives
to retain the time factor in his projects.

www.edgarmartins.com



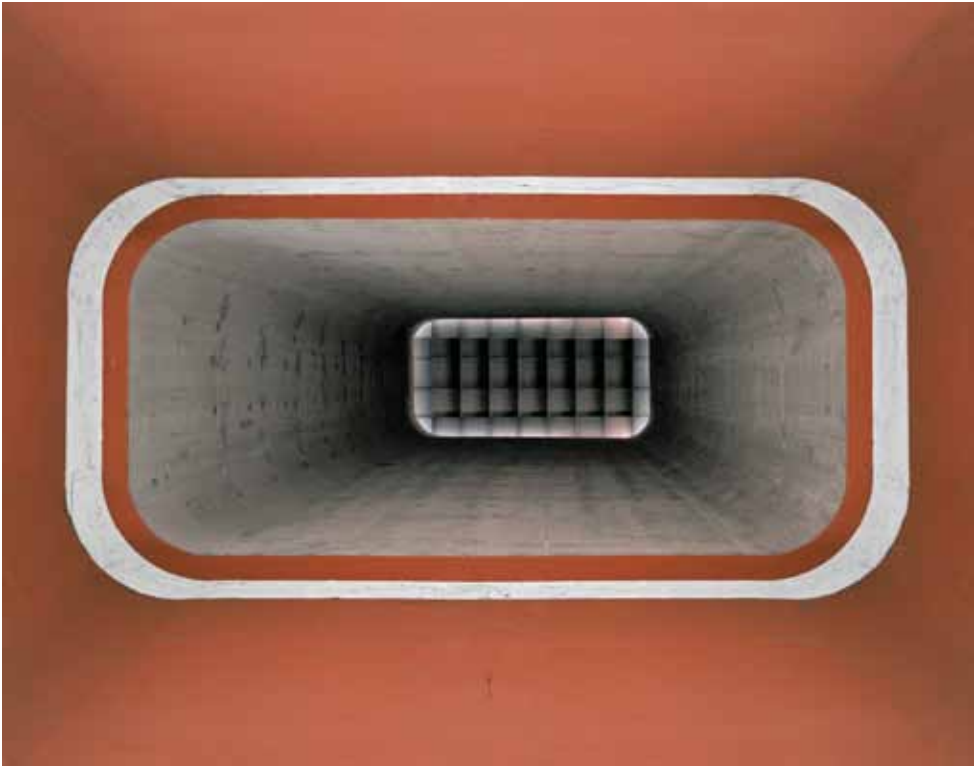


Let us first draw your awareness to this artist's ambitions for the future. "To visit space and to produce a biographic body of work that looks inwards and uses photography in an introspective way. The Latter does not come that easy to me. Furthermore, I hope one day to put my passion for sound, literature and photography to good use and produce a feature film." Edgar Martins is not afraid to want it all, his determination projects onto the world a sense that all is possible, even space travel. His travels began at an early age and through art, he explores aspects that ultimately describe and reflect his life. He was born in Evora, Portugal 1977 but it was in Macau, China, (where he lived for 18 years) that he took his first steps professionally, publishing his first book of poetry and philosophical essays in 1996. "I was convinced I would become a writer and study literature or philosophy but decided I wanted to explore visual imagery. After extensive research I opted for photography", says the artist. Written words remain his greatest inspiration, with several published books and essays to his name. It was his first exhibition at just 17 that sparked a deeper interest for the art of images and instilled disciplined, organizational skills that still accompany him to this very day. "These early ex-

periences have taught me to create work habits, to be organised. In the world we live in, which is small, with work offers that can come from England but also the United States, Berlin, Shanghai, São Paulo if there is no organisation, life becomes truly chaotic," Edgar explains.

The role of photographer

Focused now primarily on visual imagery, Edgar Martins exchanged Macau for the UK, where he graduated from the University of the Arts with a BA (Hons) in Photography and an MA in Photography and Fine Art from the Royal College of Art in London. International recognition soon followed and work began to flow in from around the globe. His works have been exhibited extensively throughout Europe, America and Asia, challenging our preconceived notions of photography in a thought provoking manner. "One could argue my work highlights a point of resistance. Resistance to the world of flux and flow that we live in. To a world haunted by mobility, but a mobility that doesn't register as speed but as intangibility and uncertainty. On the other hand my work has always sought to communicate ideas about the actual process of communication, about how difficult it is to communicate."



PREVIOUS *Reluctant Monoliths*
OPPOSITE *Caldeirão Water Tower*
ABOVE *Fratel Machine Hall*
LEFT *Pocinho Well*



ABOVE *Alto Rabagão Chair*
RIGHT *Raiva Board*



He likes to deconstruct the photographic process. “I’ve always regarded Photography as an inadequate means of conveying ideas; however, it is this precise anxiety with the medium that leads me in search of a new visual language and a new vocabulary from which I may extract my glossary of life. What motivates me, aren’t the possibilities of photography, but its inadequacies.” Edgar Martins surrendered to complete darkness with his project entitled *Topologies*, photographed in Portugal and Iceland. “Taking photos in the dark is entirely a matter of luck, never knowing what will come of it until you see the results. I comment on the world around me whilst also making decisions about my relationship with Photography. This decision process is always far more interesting than any resolution that I ultimately never definitively reach. Paradoxically, the very language of Photography, I find restrictive and inadequate, helps me channel my ideas.” As we familiarise ourselves with his work, it becomes evident that urbanism plays an important role. The photographer explains that this in part the product of a postmodern condition, “that of feeling uprooted, in part to do with my upbringing, having been born in Portugal, grown up in China and now living in the UK, and also to do with my research and general interest in literature”.

Under scrutiny

In 2009, Edgar Martins was thrown into the eye of the storm by critics, for his project, *This is not a House*, commissioned by the prestigious New York Times Magazine. He was asked to create a body of work that reflected the US mortgage crisis. The project toured the US over a period of 12 months, covering 6 States, then on to London and Milan and in 2012 will continue to make its way around the world reaching Dublin and Seoul.

It was when the article hit the stands in the summer of 2009 that the debate exploded over the digital manipulation of some of the images, an accusation he denies. He explains: “What was a riveting polemic about deception and misrepresentation for some, was to others the re-surfacing of a tiresome, age-old, ontological, epistemological and moral chasm between Art and Journalism. However, the public reaction to this article, in my view, is better understood and contextualised when, against the backdrop of uncertainty, ruin and bankruptcy, journalistic ethics and woes, one also considers the resonance and imagery of the ruined shelter throughout U.S. history.”

This project served as a platform to explore new ways of conceptualising and the artist believes there was a misunderstanding with regard to the values and rights associated with the creative process that led The New York Times Magazine, “to commission a photographic artist without making him fully aware of its own journalistic limits and boundaries”. The artist advocates that digitally altering the photo does not pose a problem, “when presented in a non-indexical context. However, aside from illustration, fashion and the occasional portraiture-based project, how often are social / politically-oriented issues conceptualised and understood outside the scope of the canonical photo-documentary?”

By this means he demonstrated how Photography is no more than the form found to best tell the world what he thinks. “It is true that the idea of objective truth may no longer hold in criti-



ABOVE *UP Nelly Close*
ABOVE *DOWN Old Street*

cal theory, but my work has never been about asserting artistic authorship. Photography is a medium built around conceptual tensions and so it offers me a means to bring together irresolvable contradictions.”

Temporal representations

His attention to colour, composition and detail is always evident in his photographs, yet there’s another crucial element to consider when capturing a still image: “One of the things that tends to define many of my works is their inability to record time.

I try to overcome this theme by slowing down time in the photographs. The way the objects are photographed has a very direct relationship with cinema. The long exposures allow me to interact with the camera almost as if it were a motion picture camera.” Ultimately he hopes that his images offer us an encounter with something as complex as time.



2011 was another brimful year of solo and group exhibitions, published books, work...How does one find the time? "Organising seminars and talks, scheduling for the future and still finding the time to read, write, think, visit exhibitions, and generally have a life outside art - if that is at all plausible - is not an easy balance to strike. Needless to say one has to be somewhat disciplined with one's time. But as the creative process doesn't much care for deadlines or discipline, I always feel as though I am playing catch up." This is where his organisational skills play a crucial role. "So long as the projects feed into the strategic planning of one another, then working on more than one body of work at a time isn't restrictive or complex. There is a general overlapping of concerns and ideas in many of my works, though in each one I try to find a different visual approach, constantly challenging my photographic framework." Edgar Martins has been considered by art critics as "one of the most engaging young artists, working with the medium of Photography", but what makes him distinctive as a photographer, what continues to captivate people from the world over? "I'm not sure. I suppose if I were being analytical, I would say that the work has a strong, direct visual appeal that is universal and accessible but also encompasses a strong thematic basis, often

readdressing historical themes and perspectives. This multi-layering is very engaging. Additionally, the way I portray my subject matter creates an unnerving or disorienting experience for the viewer, which makes him / her return to the work, over and over." Set on achieving his goals, he juggles an extremely busy schedule with the hope of finding the time to focus on three distinct works, "that range from a very personal project that deals with the death of a close friend, to a conceptual, biographic series inspired by one of Fernando Pessoa's most thought provoking works, to a follow-up project, The Time Machine. I'm looking to break away from my current practices and explore new ways, ideas, processes and ways of appropriating the relevant subject-matter." His work has been exhibited worldwide as part of collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, National Media Museum, Bradford; Caloust Gulbenkian Foundation, Portugal; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, USA and Foundation Carmignac, France. The artist's first retrospective exhibition took place in 2010, at the Centre Culturel Calouste Gulbenkian (Paris) and in 2011 was selected to participate in the 54th Venice Biennale. Edgar Martins is inscribed in the premier league of the artistic universe. ■



PREVIOUS *The Accidental Theorist*
LEFT *Untitled (Atlanta, Georgia) II*
ABOVE *Untitled (Connecticut, New England)*