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**Thomas Boivin**  
*Belleville*

from 10 march to 4 june 2023

# Thomas Boivin

## *Belleville*

from 10 march to 4 june 2023

Opening exhibition  
**Thursday 9 march 2023 at 6 pm**

An exhibition co-produced by the Fondation A, Brussels  
and the Maison de la Photographie Robert Doisneau, Gentilly



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### Around the exhibition

The Maison Doisneau offers a range of cultural and educational activities for a diverse audience. It endeavours to teach how to “read” an image by means of an approach that focusses on exchange and encouraging the public to develop their own perspective.

Guided tours in French and English for groups and workshops for younger visitors are scheduled from Monday to Friday and can be organised on request.

### Guided tours

Thursday 6 April 2023 at 7 pm  
Sunday 28 May 2023 at 4.30 pm

### Visits and free workshops (reservation required)

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A cultural facility of Grand-Orly Seine Bièvre



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The original commune of Belleville spread across part of the 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, which was described by Léon Paul Fargue in 1951 as “bursting with as many details as a novel”, a way for the man who wrote the prefaces for some of the most eminent post-war photography books to express his fondness for the former faubourg. Thomas Boivin’s vision of Belleville is informed by the famous photographers, from Robert Doisneau, Willy Ronis and Marcel Bovis to René-Jacques, who often walked its streets camera in hand. He shares the same predilection and - let’s say it - talent for black & white photography. It bears witness to his love of wandering around Paris and, above all, a particular affection for this multi-faceted, working-class neighbourhood.

Any analogy with the history of French photography stops there however because it is more by forgetting it than relying on this history that Boivin has created his own unique “portrait” of Belleville that switches between people, landscapes and the markers of urban life. His way of seeing things is perhaps more influenced by American photography and its exponents, such as Mark Steinmetz, Robert Adams and Judith Joy Ross (to whom he often refers). And it is true that his photos illustrate a relationship with the world, an intimate and personal experience that combines a documentary approach and a touch of incongruity that has little in common with the typical images of Paris produced over the last fifty years. With neither preconceived ideas nor constraints, neither working on a reportage nor adding images to a series, Boivin draws a picture of the place as he experiences it, photographing its inhabitants as he sees them on a daily basis.

The perimeter of Boivin’s Belleville is a personal affair; it goes beyond the neighbourhood’s traditionally accepted borders and reaches out across a large part of north-east Paris. All those who know the heights of the Parc des Buttes Chaumont, the area below Belleville or the bustling Place de la République will perhaps recognise certain places and the intriguing details mentioned by Léon Paul Fargue. The others will appreciate a different narrative based on immersion and impressions, one that explores the ambience of this carefree and disparate setting, assembling a haphazard selection of façades, nooks and crannies that almost seem abandoned and more or less luxuriant vegetation, whether planted or growing wild. This is no descriptive topographical survey. There are no captions and no anecdotal content, simply a visual language made up of shapes, textures and shadows. As Boivin himself explains, his photos are more “in and of” Belleville than about Belleville.



Thomas Boivin's approach is one part ritual and one part intuition. The ritual corresponds to his custom of walking through the streets around his home with his camera, crisscrossing Belleville year in year out and setting down his photographic chamber every day on the Place de la République, a place where people congregate. Intuition lies in his understanding of ordinary life, the daily activities he observes in this environment and which bring it to life. Some of his subjects – both people just passing through and the neighbourhood's inhabitants – seem to be enjoying their surroundings, while also merging into its meanders and more rugged areas. Others, on the contrary, stand out as if against a backdrop. In both cases, their features are revealed without artifice or pretence. The photographer is not intrusive and heavy-handed, but neither are the images captured hastily and without consent: a presence is offered (sometimes desired) and accepted in a moment of reciprocal candour that brings together the person in front of the camera and the photographer behind. Boivin does not try to hide. He knows how to approach his fellow humans while maintaining a respectable distance. Not only does he possess a feeling for places, but also an understanding of other people, of the act of meeting and a precise awareness of a given moment in time.

In these photos, the warmth of human contact can be read in the subjects' expressions and attitudes. Both thought-provoking and pleasing, it counters the idea that it has become difficult to photograph one's contemporaries in the public space and, as such, Belleville by Thomas Boivin gives street photography a new lease of life.

Michaël Houlette

The gelatin silver prints presented in this exhibition were printed by Thomas Boivin.  
Frames by Cerise Morize



Photos : © Thomas Boivin

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## Biography

Thomas Boivin mainly takes photos of the north-east of Paris (Belleville, Place de la République) and the suburbs, working primarily in black and white. Particularly drawn to portraits and the human figure, he remains faithful to an approach to photography that, while seeming simple, is very demanding.

His work brings the traditional image of Paris up to date by focussing on what makes each face and each expression unique. His work can be seen in the collections of Neuflyze OBC, Bachelot, Paris Collection and the Fondation A. Stichting in Brussels.

## The Maison Doisneau and the Lavoir Numérique

The Maison Doisneau and the Lavoir Numérique are cultural facilities operated by the Établissement Public Territorial Grand-Orly Seine Bièvre. They share the same mission and are run by the same team..

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From Wednesday to Friday 1.30 pm - 6.30 pm  
Saturday and Sunday 1.30 pm - 7 pm  
Closed on public holidays  
Free admission

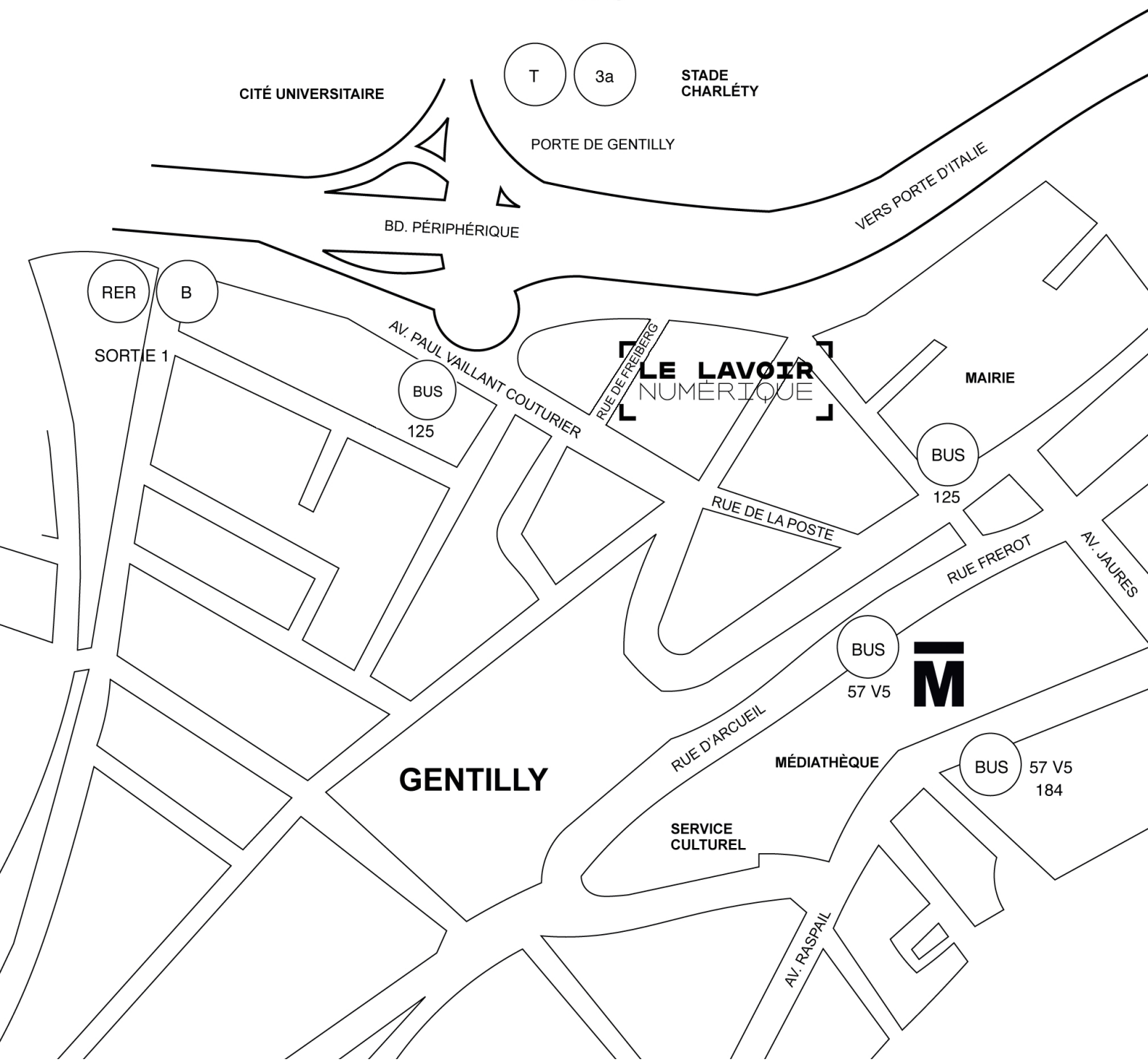
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