

## **HORIZONVILLE**

The Valais is one of the most touristic places in Switzerland.

Its mountains are the icons of this country. To reach those idyllic places, it is necessary to drive through the Rhône plain.

However, only a few people know what the plain looks like and what is going on there. A highway is passing through the valley, so nobody stops there before arriving to the famous ski resorts.

The industrial landscape, which is characteristic of the valley, isn't attractive at all, at least at first sight. Nevertheless, most of the inhabitants are living there.

Since I hadn't a lot of money and wanted to travel, I decided to make a road trip by motorbike for three months in this valley (which is located 50km far from my home), looking for an exotic lifestyle, something else than the pictures I knew from my country (I was inspired by David Lynch's movie «a straight story»).

By the means of a trip by motorbike in the Rhône Valley, the pictures are about the American dream. The myth we know through the medias and the movies. Most of the people I photographed haven't ever been in the United State of America. They feel a sense of belonging to another culture that they don't really know. Far from the Swiss stereotypes, the confusion of symbols and the lifestyle of the people take us in a strange atmosphere, a dreamed reality that doesn't exist in facts.

### **Some words about the work by Manfred Schmalriede**

Here in Switzerland the Wild West myth has the characteristics of the life of former American pioneers transposed into the modern world. Thus the contemporary and the historically-oriented way of life clash.

Industrial buildings as the ambience for rustic architecture, and on top of this the guarantees of mobility, mobile homes, trucks, cars and motor bikes rebuilt for all possible events, compete with horses, nostalgic clothes, symbols, tattoos. The paradigms are treated generously as too are obviously the activities derived from them. Everything evokes the impression of bizarre absurdity. Yet, especially in the portraits, the photographer gives the people the possibility of consciously showing themselves in a discreet way.

Something which initially strikes us as being alien to all the norms of our society thus receives a touch of normality. Using photography obviously makes it possible to document differences in our view of life and to interpret them so that we learn to understand and respect them. In my opinion, with this documentation and interpretation Yann Gross has proved that a photographer really can combine the position of distant observer with the understanding stance of a transient participant.