

Bart Michiels

The Course of History

INTRODUCTION

Bart Michiels' contemporary photographs of historic battlefields contemplate the sites of some of the deadliest conflicts on the European continent, from the classical era through the middle of the twentieth century. Although any obvious physical scars have long since been erased, subtle disturbances in these otherwise peaceful pastoral scenes allude to past trauma: tracks cut through the fields of Verdun, where some 750,000 men were killed or wounded in World War I; the sea appears blood-red at Lepanto, where a four-hour naval battle between Christians and Muslims in the sixteenth century cost 30,000 men their lives.

Michiels' images "produce a tension between the ideal of perfection found in these vistas and the violence once committed there," Sarah Stanley writes in *Afterimage* (2005). "Picturing the abiding state of nature reveals the gulf that will always remain between the earth's ecology and the ecology of war."

Collapsing time and triggering memory, these images from "The Course of History" call our attention to the ways that landscapes speak of, and remain mute about, the past.

Bart Michiels was born in Belgium and studied at the Hoger Instituut voor Beeldende Kunsten in Brussels. His work is in the collections of the Foto-Museum, Antwerp; Le Musée de la Photographie, Charleroi; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City. He was a finalist for the 2006 Santa Fe Prize for Photography, and his work has appeared in *Popular Photography*, *View Camera: The Journal of Large Format Photography*, the *New York Sun*, and *Afterimage*. Michiels has had two shows—one of them earlier this year—at the Foley Gallery in New York, where he now works and lives.

The images here are chromogenic prints.

M.W.

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Omaha Beach 1944, Easy Red (2003) 60" × 72"



The Somme 1916, Lochnagar Crater (2005) 28" × 33"



Verdun 1916, Le Mort Homme (2001) 60" × 72"



Waterloo 1815, The Fall of the Imperial Guard (2001) 60" × 72"



Passchendale 1917, Goudberg Copse (2005) 28" × 33"



Thermopylae 480 BC, Kolonos Hill (2006) 42" × 50"



Thermopylae 480 BC, The Death of Leonidas (2006) 42" × 50"



Lepanto 1571, Mare Sanguinoso (2006) 28" × 33"