CONVERSATIONS
A PHOTO ELYSÉE PODCAST

EPISODE #4 – CAMILLE GHARBI
TRANSCRIPTION

Katie Kheriji-Watts
Welcome to C*onversations*, a podcast by Photo Elysée that invites you, behind the scenes of a photography project. In this series of episodes, we're exploring the work in progress of the eight artists nominated for the 2025 Prix Elysée, an international photography prize supported by Parmigiani Fleurier. I'm your host, Katie Kheriji-Watts.

Camille Gharbi is a photographer who doesn't shy away from looking at difficult subjects. She spent the last several years exploring the intersection of sexuality and violence, especially the kinds of abuse that could happen in our most vulnerable relationships. She's been nominated for the Prix Elysée with a project titled *Intimes Convictions*, which aims to raise questions about rape culture and the prevalence of drug-facilitated assault in French society. We talked about the feminist writer, Virginie Despentes, the ongoing trial against Dominique Pélicot and his accomplices and the role that doubt plays in her artistic process.

Camille, hi. Thank you so much for welcoming us to your atelier near Paris. Lovely to be here. Beautiful space. I was wondering if you could just start briefly by introducing yourself for people that might not be familiar with who you are and what you do.

Camille Gharbi
Yeah, sure. Thank you for coming here. I'm very happy to have you in this space that I really like. I'm Camille Gharbi. I am a 40-year-old photographer and visual artist, and I do a lot of things in the photographic field. But my personal work is mostly focused on social issues. For me, it's like a way of turning into images what questions me in society. On the side of that, I do a lot of commission work for different types of things, architecture and portraits and journalism.

Katie Kheriji-Watts
As you were mentioning, you're really someone who considers art as a vector for social transformation. I was really curious to hear you speak about a work of art that has transformed you personally.

Camille Gharbi
I think a lot of readings made me reshape the way I see the world and the way I conceive my place in the world and many intellectuals also. I am thinking about Deleuze right now. Lately, there is a writer that I find very accurate who is Alain Damasio, for example, *Silicium Valley*, which is a very deep and accurate writing essay about the way technology redefines the world in which we live, for example. I

could talk about Virginie Despentes. I have listened to her quite a lot. She gives many lectures.

Katie Kheriji-Watts
Let's talk a little bit about Virginie Despentes. Just briefly, for people that might not know who she is, who is Virginie Despentes and what mostly does she write about?

Camille Gharbi
Virginie Despentes is a French author of novels and essays. She got very famous, quite young, with her first novel, which was called *Baise-moi*. It was about two girls that defined to reverse the relations of power and just basically do what men do and use violence the way men would. She writes a lot about relationships and gender-based violence. She wrote this very famous essay called *King Kong Theory*. She really goes beyond our limits in terms of gender and the way we relate to each other.

Katie Kheriji-Watts
Themes of gender and violence are a big part of the work of Virginie Despentes, but they're also one of the main focuses of the work that you've been doing over the last seven or eight years or so. I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit more about why this is an important subject for you as a photographer?

Camille Gharbi
Yeah. What drives me in my work is about how do we live together. I think above all, I'm very interested in human nature and the complexity of it, and how do we make society all together. And when you think about all this, you come to think about violence very quickly because violence lies in pretty much everything. I am convinced that intimacy is a very important subject because between the private sphere and the public sphere and family and conjugality, what happens in the intimacy of people determines the way they will behave and the way they will relate to the world. For me, it's at the core of everything. The family sphere, the family cell, is the first social cell. What happens within our intimacy shapes the world in a way.

Katie Kheriji-Watts
Can you talk to me a little bit about a project that you've already done in the past on this topic, a little bit about how you chose to approach the subject and what images you were taking?

Camille Gharbi
On this specific topic, gender-based violence, I've been working on that for about six years, I'd say. The first subject I developed was called *Acts of Love*, and it was a work about femicides in France. The aim of it was to make a statement, to represent what happens, to highlight those crimes, and to make them visible because we hear about those crimes. We know they happen. We know the statistics. We read articles, but we are not very concerned. It doesn't touch us. I wanted to find a visual way to raise empathy and to bring awareness on this issue.

The angle I chose was the banality of those crimes and to express this banality through the domestic objects that are turned into lethal weapons. The images are quite conceptual. It's not a documentary work. The images show a lot of objects, like a typological sort of work. Within each image, you have a list of names and date of death and age and place. By reading this, you realize it's only women. By looking at the photos next to it, you see it's objects from the house, domestic objects. The subject comes quite quickly, and people, when they read and watch, they start imagining what happens.

By imagining, they start putting themselves in the shoes of the person who've been maybe murdered by him through this subject. They start imagining what could have happened.

Katie Kheriji-Watts
Femicide is a word in French to designate women who have been killed, mostly by their partners. Is that correct?

Camille Gharbi
It designs the fact of being killed because you're a woman, basically. The proper expression would be conjugal femicide. But it's true that in the media, we use it mostly to talk about conjugal femicide. But the proper definition is the fact of being killed because of the fact that you're a woman.

Katie Kheriji-Watts
What objects were you taking pictures of, for example?

Camille Gharbi
It's a series of 20 pictures, and you can find basically anything could be turned into a weapon. But in this series, I have an iron, a knife, of course, a screwdriver, a rope, a plastic bag, electric wire. The aim of that was really to make this statement that femicides and the domestic violence is a reality that touches so many, so many, so many families, and we have to start looking at it and considering it as a public issue. For a long time, we've been considering that intimate violence were just private matters, and it would not concern the society. It's just like specific things between two people. We know now that it's a system. It's part of this patriarchal system in which we live, and we have to start considering it as a a social issue and a public issue. We have to acknowledge the fact that it touches people from every social class, from every age. It's among us.

Katie Kheriji-Watts
Camille, you've been nominated for the Prix Elysée Prize with a project that focuses on what in France is called chemical submission, which basically means drugging someone without their consent in order to victimize them. Why did you want to focus on this specific topic right now?

Camille Gharbi
Family is the first society cell in which we live, and it's no It's no coincidence that families and couple cells are the place of so much violence. It's no coincidence that intimacy is the place of so much violence. I'm talking about physical, psychological, and sexual violence. It's no coincidence that this violence is mostly gender-based because intimacy is the cradle of domination. And that's why our intimacies are at the core of the patriarchal and capitalist world in which we live. If we want to change the world, we have to start with that, with our intimacies. And we have to start changing the way we relate to each other. That's why talking about intimate violence is vital. And that's why talking about sexual violence is even more vital because sexuality is at the heart of everything. It's at the heart of life, and it's It's no coincidence that sexuality is the place of violence and of relations of power. And rape is about power. It's not about sexuality. It's about power and domination using sexuality. And considering that, I think that chemical submissions, which is the topic I've chosen to explore with the Le Prix Elysée, is the climax of all this. Chemical submission is about turning someone into such an object that you deprive him or her, of her or his consciousness.

Katie Kheriji-Watts
How did you personally get interested in this topic of *soumission chimique*, chemical submission?

Camille Gharbi
All came from this affair we have in France, which is called *Le Procès Pélicot*, which is about that retired who drugged his wife for about 10 years, giving her medications to put her to sleep, and who went on some chats to get other men to come to their place and rape her. When I heard about that story, it was about two years ago, I think, a year and a half ago. The *procès* is happening right now in France, but it came out in the news about a year and a half ago. I was very shocked by this affair when I heard of it. Among the thing that shocked me was the fact that so many guys from so many ages and so many backgrounds came to that house to rape a 70-year-old woman who was lying unconscious on her bed because we knew already a year and a half ago that those guys who came to that house were from 20 to 70 years old, that they were coming from very different backgrounds. Some of them were journalists or truck drivers or whatever. What appears to me through this is this terrifying banality of rape culture. When we talk about violences, It's important to talk about victims, and it's important to understand what happens, but it's also very important to be interested in perpetrators.

Katie Kheriji-Watts
The project that you've been nominated for, the title is *Intimes Convictions*. I think in French, you would say, intime conviction, or conviction intime, something like that. I was reading what you wrote about it. And what I was understanding is that a big part of it for you is really about creating a visually accurate representation of rape culture that goes beyond cliché. And I was wondering if you could talk to me about the process that goes into creating images that reflect reality and that move us beyond

stereotype and assumption. How do you, as an image maker, as a photographer, what's your process? How do you go from a topic that you're interested in and how do you think this is the image I want to make about this particular topic?

Camille Gharbi
What interests me in what I do, whatever the topic is, is creating images that are not obvious and that rely more on imagination than on representation, I'd say. For me, it's very important because we live in a world of images, and we see images all the time. We consume images to get information, to talk to use them all the time. In this context, I am interested in trying to make and to create images that people will see, and they will spend a bit more time than just two seconds on them. We need time just generally talking, because if we want to think about something, we need some time to go through our minds. If we just read a caption, all of what is induced by the social networks. We go very quickly through everything, and we don't take the time to think. With my images, I try to open a mental space so that people can get in and start thinking of what I'm talking about. And usually in my work, I'm not saying something. I'm more raising questions, and I turn them into images, and I ask them to other people, do you see what I see? Do you see the same thing as I see? Why are we in this situation? What's happening? And with this process, I think that we can collectively start to think a bit deeper about whatever I'm showing.

Katie Kheriji-Watts
So, I know this is a work in progress, but I believe you've already taken, shot some images for the project. Could you maybe tell me about one or two of them, what visually they look like and how you went about making them?

Camille Gharbi
So *Intimes Convictions*, it's about rape culture, date rape culture, and the representations we have of rape culture, and what it means about the relations of power that lie within the society. There will be different chapters, I guess. And the first chapter focuses on chemical submission. When we think about chemical submission, we think about nightclubs and young people, GHB, etc. When you start working on this subject, you realize very quickly that it's wider than this. That's what the *Procès Pélicot* shows. It's one affair. When you start digging, in a way, it's obvious that it's way more common than what we think. I wanted to highlight this in this work.

The images I've made so far are conceptual. They explore the same visual trend, I'd say, then this work I talked about, *Acts of Love*, just before. They show substances that are the actual substances, like medication, drugs that I've been collecting. Each image is about one story that I found in the news. It's a collection of images that are in a square format. On each substance, you have a work that is engraved on it and the age, like a truck driver, 39. In the frame of the image, you have a little caption that talks about the family of the substance, the effects of that substance, the risk that are related to this substance, the use it has been made for, and the legal consequences. The idea was really to make visible the fact that those crimes are committed by men, mostly men, from every age and every social background, to

deconstruct this idea and this representation of drug, date, rape related to nightclubs and young people and GHB and parties, because it's not what it is. For this, I've been working with different hospitals and different psychiatrists and pharmacologists that helped me find the cases finding the substances, understanding the subject as well.

Katie Kheriji-Watts
So, research is an important part of your process?

Camille Gharbi
All my works are based on long-term research, and usually the photos are the easiest part of it. I spend most of my time making appointments with professionals. For this project, I also met legal doctors. I went to legal medicine services. The next steps will be to document the consequences for the victims as well.

Katie Kheriji-Watts
Camille, I was wondering how being nominated for the Prix Elysée might have contributed to your growth as an artist?

Camille Gharbi
For me, being a nominee for the Prix Elysée is a very big thing. It's a very important step in my career because whatever the issue is, first, it's a recognition of the work I've been doing. That means a lot, really, because as visual artists, when we work, we are alone most of the time. It's a very lonely process, and you never know if you are going to manage to have your work shown. You have to really hold on to your subject and not let it go. It's not an easy process. Having that type of recognition is very important and it's very encouraging. And in a more concrete way, it gave us the means to develop the project we applied for. That's also something because as visual artist, if you don't have economical help to develop your project, it's very difficult to do it. The Prix Elysée gives us the means to work in great conditions. So yeah, it's a great opportunity.

Katie Kheriji-Watts
I have one final question for you. What excites you the most about the creative process?

Camille Gharbi
Well, the creative process for me is not about excitement, but it's more about necessity. It always comes from a need, I'd say, like something like you have no choice but doing it. What's exciting is when you find the idea. That's a great moment when you're just like, yeah, this could be interesting. This could be relevant. This could take a bit further what I want to say on that. And otherwise, it's mostly about doubts and you know like the will of doing something. But usually, you don't know what you want. You know you want to talk about something, but you don't know what to do. And this is a big part of the process. So, you research, and you think about it, and you read. And that's what I do. I research, I read, I think, and I'm frustrated, and I have

doubts. The creative process is for me more about doubts and frustration. And the best moment would be when you have the actual idea.

Katie Kheriji-Watts
Thank you very much, Camille.

Camille Gharbi
Thank you.

Katie Kheriji-Watts
You've just been listening to C*onversations*, a Photo Elysée podcast produced by Louie Creative – the content creation agency of Louie Media. If you liked this series, please comment and give us a rating. I'm your host, Katie Kheriji-Watts. All episodes were written by me and produced and mixed by Gautam Shukla with the help of Anouk Solliez, with music by Pierre-Antoine Wucal. This series was produced by Eloise Normand, with the help of Lola Lellouche, in close collaboration with Photo Elysée. Special thanks to Julie Dayer, Lydia Dorner and the entire museum's team as well as the photographers who generously shared their stories with us. The Prix Elysée is the result of an exclusive partnership between Photo Elysée and Parmigiani Fleurier. Photo Elysée, Museum for Photography, is a Museum of the Canton de Vaud managed by the Plateforme 10 Foundation.