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MUSÉES DE LA VILLE DE STRASBOURG



MEMORIES OF ALSACE CHARLES FRÉGER

ALSATIAN MUSEUM

9 JUNE 2023 / 1ST APRIL 2024

Press Relation

Museums Communication Department

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Press kit and visuals downloadable at:

www.musees.strasbourg.eu



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1. Project

The exhibition 'Memories of Alsace' presents the result of an artist's residency undertaken by Charles Fréger in Strasbourg between 2018 and 2022. During that period, the Alsatian Museum and La Chambre hosted this photographer of international renown in order to carry out a large-scale art project, the starting point of which was Alsace.

Exploring the picturesque iconography of Alsace, as it developed at the turn of the 20th century, Charles Fréger questions constructions of identity and their instrumentalization for nationalistic ends. Although starting with Alsace-Lorraine, as a point of tension between France and Germany, Fréger more broadly examines the vision of the Other, of the enemy or, at the very least, of the one designated as such. Illustrations, imagery, and especially caricature and propaganda provided the source of the artist's considerations. He has combined these elements with Alsatian and Rhineland folklore. Carnival masks and floats, embroidery, blown glass and ceramics have been employed in order to generate, via the work produced by the artist, a poetic, nostalgic snapshot of Alsace, the formidable efficiency of which reminds us of the extent to which the question of identity and its instrumentalization remains topical.

Following "Bretonnes" (2011-2014) and "La Suite basque" (2015-2017), "Memories of Alsace" (2018-2022) is the third part of Charles Fréger's research into regional identities. For this project, he often chose to portray his subjects in silhouette, a technique he had already experimented with in previous projects. This approach lends the subject a specific discursive function; by removing it from an overly factual reality, it inscribes it in the sphere of narration, even of myth (in the sense that Roland Barthes understood it), thereby creating a salutary distancing.

The exhibition is presented in six rooms of the permanent exhibition space of the Alsatian Museum, and also extends into the new space adjoining the museum. Nearly 80 works produced by the artist for this project are being presented for the first time. Photographs, ceramics, glass pieces, illustrations, video and animated films testify to the close collaboration that Charles Fréger established with the hundred or more cultural actors from the Grand Est and Upper Rhine areas mobilized for this project. The contemporary artworks also interact with historical pieces from the the Alsatian Museum collection, other museums in the region and private collections, making it possible to convey both the artist's approach and the richness of the material culture of the region in which he immersed himself for four years.

Curation: Marie Pottecher, Chief Heritage Curator, Director of the Alsatian Museum

The related Charles Fréger exhibition "Silhouettes" will be presented at La Chambre in the autumn of 2023.

2. Visit

The exhibition is on display in certain rooms in the Alsatian Museum, which have been refurbished for this purpose, and in an adjoining exhibition space. The visit is divided into six sections.

It opens with a prelude, in which historical objects and artworks from the collection of the Alsatian Museum are employed to raise the question of the image of Alsace as it developed from 1871 onwards, following its secession from France to Germany. It is an image of absence, of mourning and, to some extent, of revenge which was to remain present in the French collective imagination until 1914.

The second section, entitled “Alsatian House” presents several series by the artist, some of which take the form of everyday objects (plates, images, embroidery, etc.). It is a question of evoking the presence of the memory of Alsace in the everyday life of the population at the end of the 19th century, a time when the image was disseminated via an unprecedented diversity of media. These are supplemented by two video pieces which endeavor to highlight the impact of the war and the loss of Alsace-Lorraine on the destiny of individuals.

This section extends into the corridors of the museum with the series, *Wedding in Seebach*, which was Charles Fréger's first project in Alsace. He highlights the diversity of Alsatian regional costumes. Alsatian women are represented as silhouettes, thereby acquiring a form of evanescence, as in a dream.



Charles Fréger, photographie extraite
de la série *Mariage à Seebach*, 2018

On the ground floor of the museum, a room, titled **Interlude**, presents in a didactic way many historical documents, objects and artworks which enable the visitor to better understand the approach undertaken by the artist during the four years of his residency in Alsace, but also the

elements that inspired him and to which he refers in "Memories of Alsace". Four themes are addressed: national propaganda and hatred of the enemy, suffering and mourning, folklore and, finally, the silhouette, which has been an ongoing preoccupation of the artist for several years.

On entering the new exhibition space adjoining the Alsatian Museum, the visitor encounters **the fourth section of the exhibition** featuring artworks created by Charles Fréger in response to images of Alsace and the Germans produced between 1871 and 1918. The references to the illustrators of that period (with Hansi in pride of place, but also featuring Benjamin Rabier, Henri Loux, Henry Clod and Raymond de la Nézière) who generated an image of a rural and picturesque Alsace in contrast to a ridiculous or degrading one of the Germans, constitute the starting point for the series "*The Boche*", in the style of Hansi, but also for the sculpture, *Louse* and the installation *Paradise Lost*. Similarly, the *Schnug* series highlights the staging of history for purposes of geopolitical justification.



Charles Fréger, photographie extraite de la série *Schnug*, 2021

"Parade", which constitutes **the fifth section** of the exhibition, tackles (via photographic and video works and an installation) the military and national propaganda implemented on both sides of the border, contributing to the outbreak of war in the summer of 1914.

This is addressed in the **sixth and final section of the exhibition**, “Dénouement: Hostilities Commence”. Charles Fréger approaches this topic through artworks in different media, including video and sound (*Barbarity*). However, the whole is dominated by the polyptych, *Memories*, which, like an iconostasis, visualizes the mounting peril which was to result in the disaster of war.



Charles Fréger, photographie extraite de la série *Les Souvenirs*, 2019

The exhibition concludes with a reference, a homage which Charles Fréger wished to make to the pacifist sculptor Émile Derré and his sculpture *Reconciliation. You Shall No Longer Kill* (1923).

3. The residency

In 2018, photographer Charles Fréger embarked on a major artistic project with the French region of Alsace as its starting point. For this artist, who seeks out communities identifying themselves through costume around the world, this small territory aroused growing interest in the course of the historical and iconographic research undertaken. His photographs, staged like paintings, were inspired by local events, illustrations, monuments and crafts. He has striven to represent what constitutes (in the collective imagination) the Alsatian identity, constructed at the crossroads of French and German influence.

For four years, two Strasbourg structures, the Alsatian Museum and La Chambre (an exhibition and training space devoted to photography) accompanied the artist in his research and production, guiding him in his documentary research and in his discovery of the territory and its actors.

For each shoot, many cultural partners and associations were mobilized in Alsace, Lorraine, Franche-Comté, Baden, the Black Forest and beyond. The project, in constant evolution, radiated out on both sides of the border and brought together participants from various fields, from historians to dancers, from ceramists to costume designers, from master glassmakers to historical reenactment groups. Each new stage focused on a specific subject and constructed an image combining traditions, imagery and the contemporary artistic vision of Charles Fréger.

The chronological framework encompassed by the project runs from the war of 1870-1871 to the end of the First World War. This half-century corresponds, both in France and Germany, to a period of construction and affirmation of a national narrative and identity. While the context and the stakes differ in France and Germany (the memory of the defeat of 1870-1871 and the provinces lost following the Treaty of Frankfurt, plus legitimization of the new republican regime for the former, and the desire to rally the German states around the Hohenzollern dynasty for the latter), the means employed to address the different strata of society and make them share these values were similar.

The rhetoric thus elaborated (fed by historical references and parallels, memories of glorious and heroic acts of war, and scenes imbued with pathos) was exploited by both German and French artists. But (and this is where the break with previous periods lies) it was also spread more widely thanks to technical processes that allowed mass distribution at low cost via a variety of new media. Chromolithographs, prints, illustrated newspapers, postcards and crockery thus became vectors for the dissemination of this iconography to the point of being supports for a specific production whose message and memory are still alive, more than a century later, in the visual culture on both sides of the Rhine and which Charles Fréger understood how to revive in order to better question them.

Charles Fréger was initially interested in a mythological construction of Alsace, between France and Germany. Seen from beyond the Vosges mountain range, the Alsatian woman with the big black bow, on which she stitched a tricolor cockade, mourned the homeland from which she was torn, while on the side of the Wilhelminian Empire, she expressed gratitude towards her new benefactor (sometimes the Emperor, sometimes a soldier). The many scenes that can be found on the most diverse objects (popular imagery, crockery, mugs, medals and postcards) inspired the artist who alternately employed the codes or the support.

Thus, for example, the image of Germans created by the illustrator Hansi at the beginning of the 20th century, chubby or lanky but always decked out in a pair of glasses with opaque lenses, spread widely in France between 1910 and the post-war period. Charles Fréger wished to

demonstrate all the radicalism of such a representation, especially after 1918, by transposing it from the domain of children's literature (from which it comes) to that of photography. The recourse to the universe of the Rhenish carnival makes it possible to nudge these representations into the domain of the grotesque and thus demonstrate their tendentious dimension.

Unlike the question of Alsace-Lorraine (which only became an issue once war was declared in the summer of 1914), the brutal assertion - and therefore confrontation - of nationalisms was far more decisive in the escalation which led to the outbreak of the conflict. This tragic outcome is made explicit by the reference to memento mori and dances of death. Death, with a grimacing appearance reminiscent of the works of José Guadalupe Posada, inserts itself into the naive scenes that Charles Fréger has reproduced and whose outcome it heralds.

Charles Fréger's research thus mobilizes different levels of representation and expression of the construction of identity, from ancient imagery to living folklore. By exploring the resonances that run through these representations throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and across the Rhine region on both sides of the border, he constructs an update that is both synthetic and personal. By freely relying on existing historical works, he strives to link identity to emotion, in order to better anchor it in the present while recalling the intricacies of its conception and its continual evolution.

Residency supervision:

Alsatian Museum: Marie Pottecher, Head of the Alsatian Museum

La Chambre: Catherine Merckling, co-director

The "Memories of Alsace" residency received support from the DRAC Grand Est and the Grand Est Region.

4. Biography of Charles Fréger

In the last twenty years Charles Fréger has developed a dense and singular form of work with an almost encyclopedic ambition.

The large body of photographs compiled by the artist since 1999 testifies to his insatiable research: approaching communities that might be sporting, military, festive or scholarly in nature, examining the individuals who compose them, and detecting the links, rituals, and forms that unite them. In each of these circles, Charles Fréger is interested in bodies and clothing as ambivalent territories: when the pose reveals a dream identity, when the clothing, acting as a uniform, sees its rigour tested by a facetious teenager. That is the image he is seeking. Grouped for a long time under the generic title “Photographic Portraits and Uniforms”, the work was initially shown to be the heir to a certain Nordic tradition. Enhanced with performances and videos, it has developed to such an extent as to reach a fundamentally theatrical dimension. Distancing himself from the portrait as he previously practiced it, Charles Fréger has been concentrating for several years on the silhouette and its expressive potential. Since 2010, he has devoted four books to masquerades: Wilder Mann (2010 -), devoted to the European continent, Yokainoshima (2013-2015), located in the Japanese archipelago, Cimarron (2014-2018) anchored in the territory of the Americas and, finally, Aam Aastha (2019-2022), in India.

At the same time, since 2015 he has been exploring another path via silhouette photography. In this case figures from a common visual culture are his subject, including Joan of Arc and her epic story. Reducing the figure to its contours, the subject becomes the image and its historical destiny, no longer the figure of Joan but its representations, its “uses”. The work is fed by iconographic research deliberately mixing the learned and the popular, the medieval period and the 21st century.

Charles Fréger was born in 1975 and is based in Normandy, France. In recent years he has notably exhibited at the Nantes History Museum, the Musée des Confluences (Lyon), the Armani Foundation (Milan) and Rencontres d'Arles.

5. La Chambre

SILHOUETTES

From mid-November 2023 to end of January 2024

Pursuing its vocation of supporting creation and welcoming artists in residence, La Chambre has accompanied the work of Charles Fréger in the region in collaboration with the Alsatian Museum. In conjunction with the *Memories of Alsace* exhibition, La Chambre will present a perspective on the artist's work over the winter period by displaying excerpts from his series of photographic silhouettes.

For several years, Charles Fréger, known for his artworks devoted to masquerades, has been exploring another path in parallel, through photographs in silhouette. In this case the figures of a common visual culture are his subject. The *SILHOUETTES* exhibition thus presents a selection of works from the *Breton* series (2011-2014), *The Epic of Joan of Arc* (2016-2017), *Prehistory* (2017-2018), *La Suite basque* (2015-2021) and *Memories of Alsace* (2018-2022).

In these series, the photographer makes the image (and its historical destiny) the subject by resorting to the silhouette, which reduces the photographed figure to its contours. The work is fed by iconographic research deliberately mixing the scholarly and the popular, and willingly mixing eras, from the medieval period to the 21st century. Thus, for example, in *The Epic of Joan of Arc*, it is the story of another epic that is played out in Joan's: that of her representations, of her "uses" through the centuries, thereby reflecting contemporary history and its narratives. In Brittany, the Basque Country and Alsace the artist employs the representations of strongly marked regional cultures. In these last two border regions the jaws of history cut into the smooth surface of the popular image. Thus the silhouette, through its quiet destitution, exposes the sometimes brutal sources of a popular imagery which is based on the fabrication of archetypal figures, sometimes for reasons of cohesion, or else – and sometimes coincidentally – with the aim of stigmatizing.

SILHOUETTES thus sheds light on the photographic research of Charles Fréger who, through the development of an aesthetic language, explores the ways in which history is narrated and transformed into an image and how its modes of propagation are invented.

As part of this exhibition, a programme of guided activities will be offered in conjunction with the Alsatian Museum.

6. Cultural structures and associations linked to the project

France :

- **La Chambre, Strasbourg**
- **Haute école des arts du Rhin, Strasbourg**
- **Archives of Strasbourg City and Eurometropolis**
- **Maison Bossert, Strasbourg**
- **Rhine National Opera**
- **Fort Großherzog von Baden – Fort Frère, Oberhausbergen Association**
- **International Glass Art Centre, Meisenthal**
- **Museum of the Image, Épinal**
- **Musée de la Faïencerie, Sarreguemines**
- **Théâtre du Peuple – Maurice Pottecher, Bussang**
- **Belfort Historical Museum and Citadel**
- **Northern Vosges Regional Natural Park**
- **Lichtenberg Castle**
- **Haut-Kœnigsbourg Castle, Orschwiller**
- **Municipality of Ribeauvillé**
- **Volerie des Aigles, Kintzheim**
- **Berstett folk group**
- **Les Chiérothains, reenactment group, Meuse**
- **Groupe Hauvoy, Colmar**
- **Groupe Hanau-Lichtenberg, La Petite Pierre**

Germany

- **Theater Eurodistrict BAden ALsace, Neuried**
- **Holzbildhauerei Stiegeler, Grafenhausen**
- **Landwehr 109 reenactment group**

7. Publication

Charles Fréger. Souvenir d'Alsace
ISBN: 9782351252154
Anticipated price: 35€
176 pages, 150 illustrations



Sommaire

Introduction : De l'Alsace comme une évidence (Marie Pottecher)

Souvenir d'Alsace : projets (Textes de Martine Sadion)

- Mariage à Seebach
- Les Alsaciennes
- La Danse de l'Aigle
- Les « Boches » d'après l'œuvre de Hansi
- La Danse macabre
- Les Souvenirs
- Kriegslébskuchen
- Les Conscrits
- La Lettre à Fifine
- Ex-Voto
- Le Pou
- L'Obusite
- Schnug
- Le Paradis perdu
- Couvre-chefs
- Réconciliation

Essais :

Images retrouvées du pays perdu (Bertrand Tillier)

Images de l'Alsace : la perspective allemande (Daniel Mollenhauer)

Extraits :

L'image de l'Alsace et, en premier lieu, de l'Alsacienne au grand nœud noir occupe une place à part dans l'histoire de la culture visuelle. À l'exception de la Pologne, nulle autre représentation d'un territoire disputé entre deux nations n'a donné lieu à un tel développement iconographique et symbolique. Est-ce dû à l'importance des États engagés dans cette rivalité ? Quoi qu'il en soit, l'Alsacienne, nécessairement francophile et captive, devient l'incarnation d'un peuple, puis des peuples, à libérer. Son image revêt une dimension politique évidente et connaît une diffusion sans guère d'équivalence durant plus d'un demi-siècle.

Marie Pottecher, De l'Alsace comme une évidence

Pour *Souvenir d'Alsace*, l'artiste rassemble toutes les « images » qui ont frappé l'imaginaire des soldats et des civils pendant le conflit. Il les réinterprète dans un polyptyque choral et lucide – un polyptyque qui, par bien des aspects, rappelle les grands retables foisonnant de personnages de la fin du Moyen Âge.

Martine Sadion, Les Souvenirs

Dans *Souvenir d'Alsace*, Charles Fréger ne crée pas seulement des œuvres qu'il se contenterait de juxtaposer. Il s'empare d'images et d'objets qu'il cite et déplace, qu'il modifie aussi, en instaurant ainsi les conditions d'un dialogue fécond entre passé et présent au sein même de l'institution qu'est le musée. Mais son projet ne se limite pas non plus à ces jeux d'écarts qui ouvrent de nouveaux champs de signification ou des espaces d'interrogation. En déployant ces confrontations d'images du passé et de ses propres œuvres entre les murs du Musée Alsacien qui n'est pas un *white cube* aseptisé mais une suite de *period rooms* régies par les strates d'une histoire riche de ses collections patrimoniales et de sa mission ethnologique première, Charles Fréger pourrait presque sembler entrer par effraction dans ce lieu s'il n'avait été invité à s'y installer. Car c'est bien d'« installation » qu'il s'agit, au sens le plus fort du terme et en regard d'une pratique artistique qui, au moins depuis les années 1960, jouit de son histoire propre.

Bertrand Tillier, Images retrouvées du pays perdu

Ce double oubli de la valeur de l'Alsace dans le processus de construction de l'identité allemande et des anciennes querelles franco-allemandes autour de la question alsacienne (et lorraine), qui avait été pendant presque un siècle au cœur de la prétendue inimitié héréditaire entre les deux peuples, traduit le changement profond des rapports de la nation allemande à son propre passé et à l'apparition d'une nouvelle culture mémorielle.

Daniel Mollenhauer, Images de l'Alsace : la perspective allemande

8. Cultural and educational programme

Programme prévisionnel sous réserve de modification, accès dans la limite des places disponibles

Du 9 juin au 30 septembre 2023

VISITES

Découvrir l'exposition

Samedis 10 et 24 juin, 8 et 22 juillet, 5 et 19 août à 15h

Durée : 1h30 / Tarif : entrée du musée

Coups de projecteur

Dimanche 6 août

15h : « Mariage à Seebach »

15h30 : « Les Boches » (d'après Hansi) »

16h : « Schnug »

Durée : 20 mn / Tarif : gratuit

SPECTACLES ET +

En regard de l'exposition

Der fröhliche Weinberg – 'S luschtiche Rablând

Comédie patrimoniale en dialectes alsacien et badois, d'après *Le Joyeux Vignoble* de Carl Zuckmayer

Représentations en plein air :

- Dimanche 2 juillet à 20h à la Stadthalle am Nollen de Gengenbach / Kultursommer Gengenbach
- Jeudi 13 juillet à 19h30 à Ettenheim-Altdorf
- Vendredi 14 juillet à 20h au Schössle Heiligenzell à Friesenheim
- Samedi 29 juillet à 20h au Schwarzwälder Freilichtmuseum Vogtsbauernhof à Gutach

Proposé et interprété par le Theater Eurodistrict BAden-ALSace, avec le soutien du Land Bade-Wurtemberg, la Regionalstiftung Sparkasse Offenburg/Ortenau, l'Ortenaukreis, la Ville d'Offenburg, la Ville de Lahr, la Collectivité européenne d'Alsace et la Région Grand Est.

Tarifs et informations sur www.theater-baden-alsace.com

Journées du patrimoine

Samedi 16 et dimanche 17 septembre de 10h à 18h

Entrée gratuite

Du 1^{er} octobre 2023 au 1^{er} avril 2024

Visites commentées, coups de projecteurs, spectacles, ateliers, visites-rencontres, conférences...

Suivez le programme et nos actualités sur www.musees.strasbourg.eu/agenda et la page Facebook Musée Alsacien de la Ville de Strasbourg – officiel

À L'AUDITORIUM DES MUSÉES (MAMCS)

Projection dans le cadre des Dimanches d'ARTE

Dimanche 1^{er} Octobre

« Paris-Berlin, destins croisés », série documentaire, épisode 2. Le deuxième épisode retrace les années 1870-1921.

Table ronde

6 février 2024 à 18h30

« Historiographie de l'Alsace dans la Grande Guerre : propagande, histoire et points de vue croisés entre France et Allemagne »

Avec Jean-Noël Grandhomme , Bertrand Tillier, Daniel Mollenhauer et Marie Pottecher.



Charles Fréger, *La Danse de l'Aigle*, 2019, vidéo

9. Practical information

Alsatian Museum

23-25, quai Saint-Nicolas, Strasbourg

Tel: +33 (0)3 68 98 50 00

Opening hours: weekdays (except Tuesday) from 10am to 1pm and from 2pm to 6pm, Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 6pm

Tel: +33 (0)3 68 98 50 00

Group visits: additional information at www.musees.strasbourg.eu/groupe-tarifs-reservations

Entry price: 7.50 € (reduction: 3.50 €)

Free entry:

- under 18
- Culture card
- Atout Voir card
- Museums Pass Musées card
- Éduc'Pass card
- disabled visitors
- students of art history, archeology and architecture
- job seekers
- those receiving state benefits
- Eurométropole employees with badge.

Free entry for all: 1st Sunday of each month.

1 day pass: 12 €, reduced entry: 7 € (access to all City of Strasbourg Museums and their temporary exhibitions)

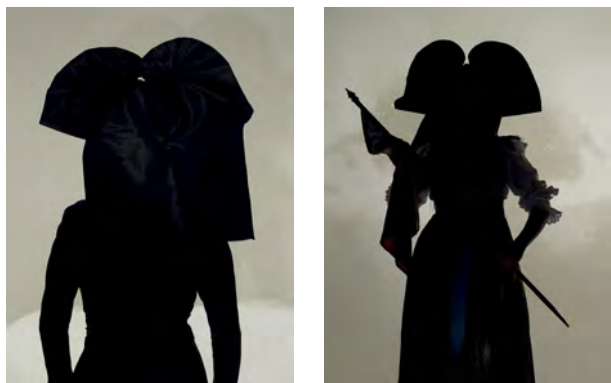
3 day pass: 18 €, reduced entry: 12 € (access to all City of Strasbourg Museums and their temporary exhibitions)

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SOUVENIR D'ALSACE CHARLES FRÉGER

Musée Alsacien
9 Juin 2023 - 1 Avril 2024
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WWW.MUSÉES.STRASBOURG.EU

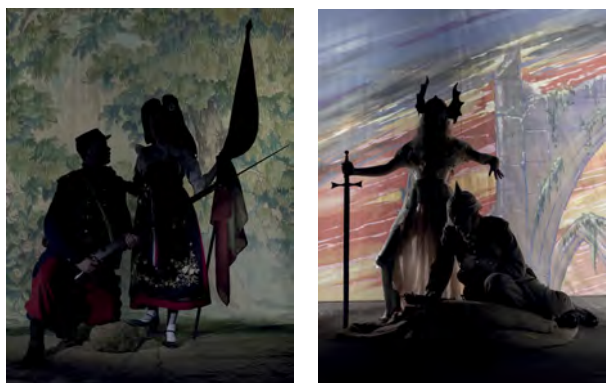
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Musées de la Ville de Strasbourg
Julie Barth
2 place du Château, Strasbourg
julie.barth@strasbourg.eu
Tél. + 33 (0)3 68 98 74 78



1. et 2. Charles Fréger, photographie extraite de la série *Mariage à Seebach*, 2018



3. Charles Fréger, *Les Alsaciennes*, réalisée par la faïencerie de Lunéville-Saint-Clément, 2019, chromo-sérigraphie sur faïence
Photo : M. Bertola, Musées de Strasbourg

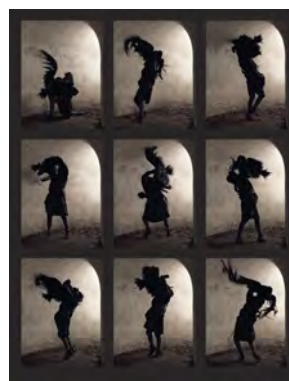


4. et 5. Charles Fréger, photographie extraite de la série *Les Souvenirs*, 2019



6. Charles Fréger, *L'Homme sauvage*, 2021, photographie imprimée à l'encre alimentaire sur papier azyme et pain d'épices

7. Charles Fréger, photographie extraite de la série *Schnug*, 2021



8. Charles Fréger, *La Danse de l'Aigle*, 2019, vidéo



9. Charles Fréger, *Point de croix*, réalisé par Elisabeth Dossmann, 2021, broderie au fil de coton rouge sur toile de lin d'après une photographie,
Photo : M. Bertola, Musées de Strasbourg