

# LA CAJA BLANCA

**Marmalade Magazine**

10 - 2006

*"Appetite for Destruction"*

Ossian Wards



**Feast your eyes on bombed out monuments to war and decaying legacies of natural disasters.**

"It all began in the blistering Balkan sunshine at age 19," says artist and photographer Richard Mosse. "A friend and I decided to take a detour up to Zagreb through Bosnia rather than retrace our steps up the coast. We discovered the warmth, gregariousness and hilarity of the Bosnian people, living in a battle-scarred landscape that was very exciting as well as sad to travel through." This double take, this simultaneous attraction and repulsion that Mosse encounters on his numerous trips to war-torn nations also informs his haunting pictures.

His large-format landscapes of a bullet-punctured cinema in Beirut or the half-destroyed headquarters of a Bosnian national newspaper pull and push our gaze in equal measures, drawing us in with their glorious detail and sumptuous colour, yet horrifying our sensibilities with the human implications of such wanton destruction of architecture and infrastructure. Earthquake damage to mosques in Pakistan and ancient cities in Iran, or the image of a Serbian church reduced to rubble in Kosovo, also remind us that while religion may not be able to solve the ills of the earth, it has provided us with some of our greatest buildings and monuments and that they all deserve saving, regardless of the faith they serve.

Mosse has also produced surprising portraits, such as those of Lebanese citizens going about their everyday business in *Drive Beirut, 2004*, or of inhabitants of Ramallah wearing the traditional Palestinian headscarf as a way of keeping sand out of their faces and not to denote allegiance to any terrorist cause, in *Dust, 2005*. This is a double take of a different, order one that shakes our preconceived world view and replicates it in a new, perhaps more compassionate or lighter reading of different cultures. "What attracts me most, and keeps me coming back for more, is an open-ended understanding of life that I see in people who have been through terrible suffering."

Unlike a documentary photographer or a photojournalist, Mosse works slowly and methodically, lugging around an enormous studio camera and tripod, rather than shooting thousands of images on digital ("Cyan is definitely not my favourite colour", he quips). "There is a lot of research, a lot of waiting and a lot of feeling rather useless", he says of the build-up to a trip or to a new series of pictures, "but then the

# LA CAJA BLANCA

most dynamic aspect of my work comes from intuition and the blind faith in following my instincts and sticking to my guns".

Mosse's peripatetic life has again led him to leave behind his hometown, his friends and the delights of the London underground for the even brighter lights and bigger city of New York. Having landed one of only eight places on the two-year MFA in photography at Yale School of Art, which boasts big name tutors such as Phillip-Lorca DiCorcia, Paul Graham and Gregory Crewdson, Mosse has to turn his lens towards America for the first time. "It seems difficult to me at this stage, like I am a fish out of water, but there's so much to think about in this vast, peculiar country of catastrophic politics and fear."