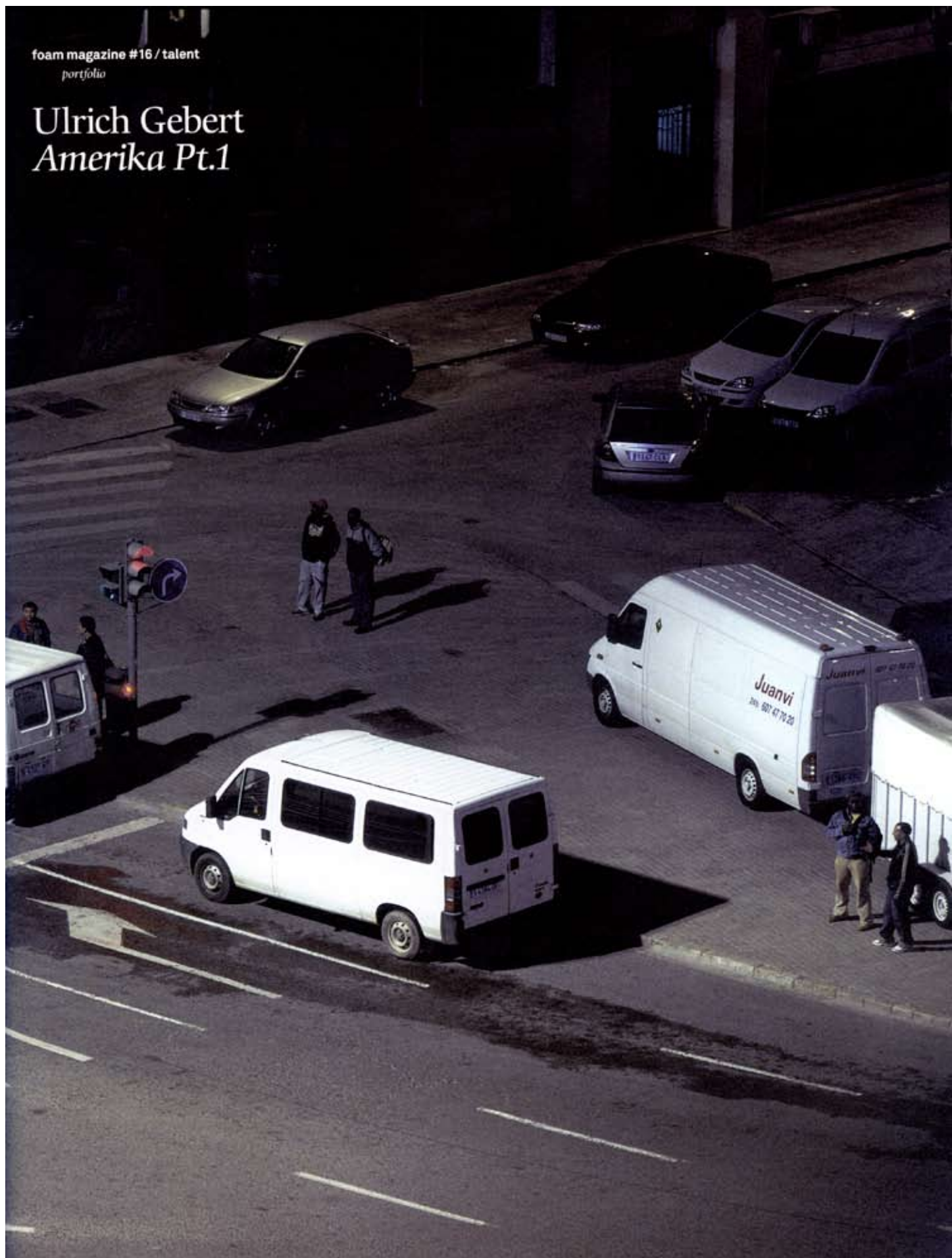
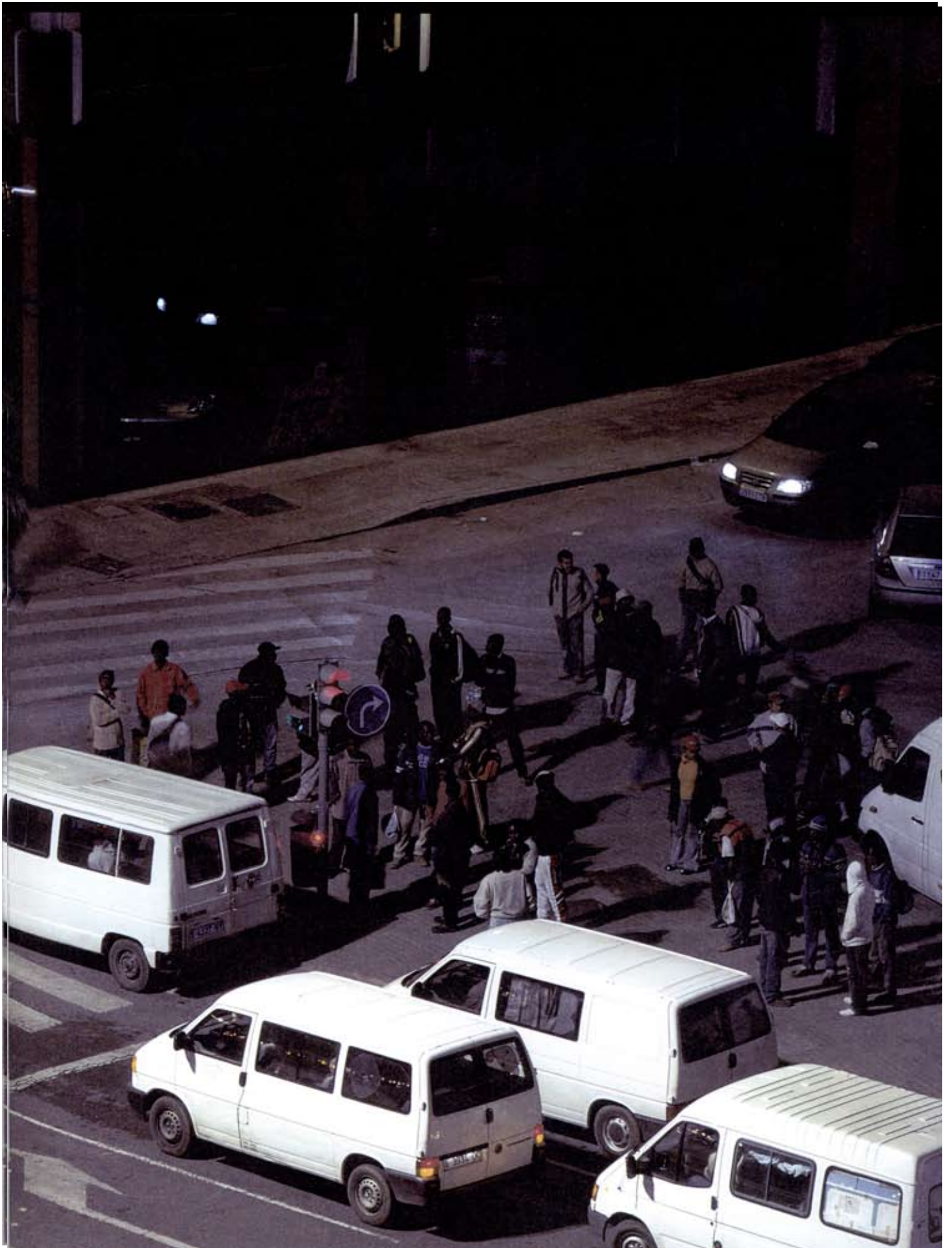


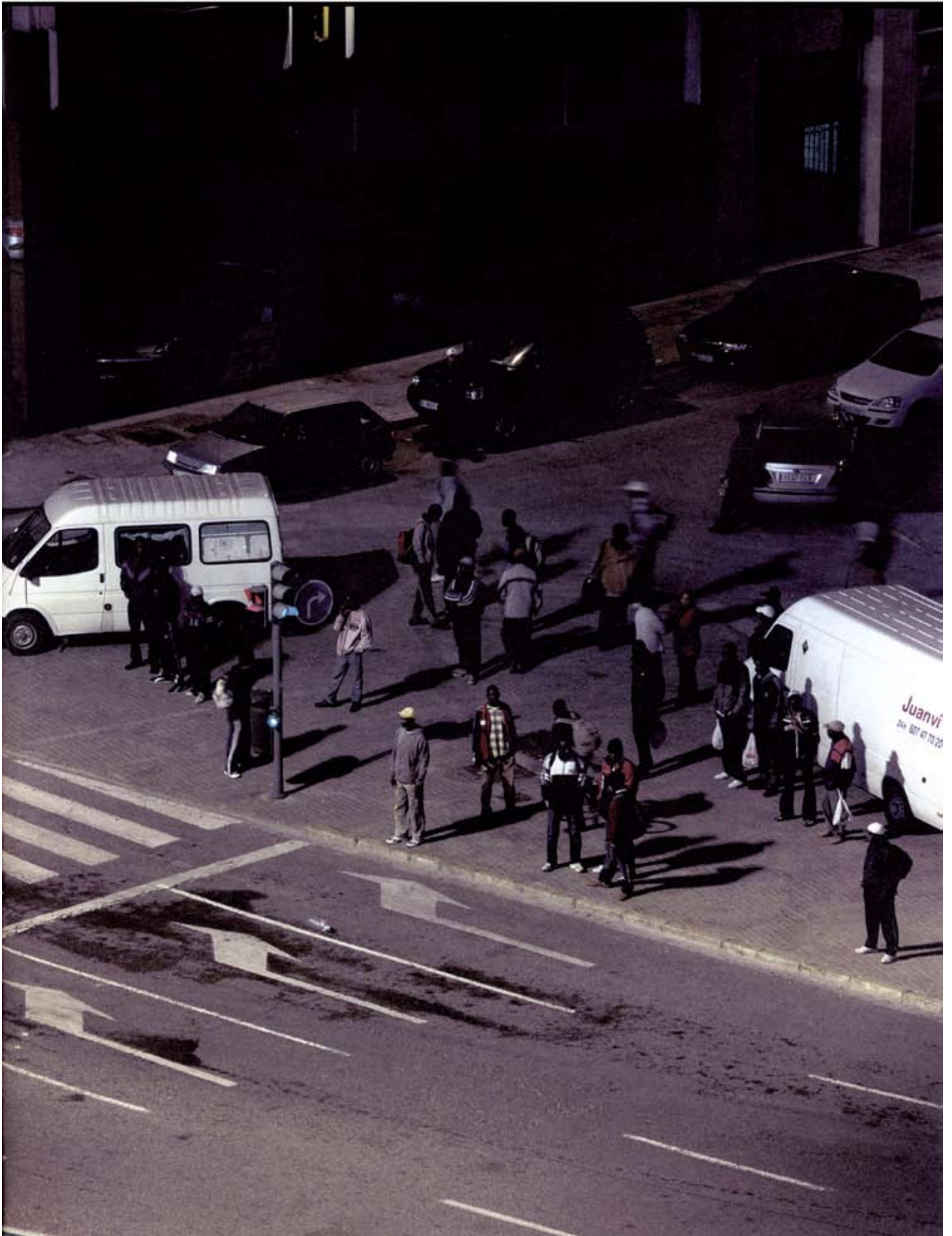
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portfolio

Ulrich Gebert Amerika Pt.1









Ulrich Gebert

AMERIKA PT.1

Ulrich Gebert was born in 1976 in Munich. After studying in Glasgow and Leipzig he completed a master's degree in photography at the Royal College of Art in London in 2006.

The series *Amerika Pt.1* depicts illegal immigrants on their way to work. The graphic images shot from a distance achieve a greater density as we witness a filmic sequence of the growing intensity of the morning traffic.

The title *Amerika Pt.1*, despite being shot Spain, is a ploy by the artist, a reference to lost hopes and the consistent failure of developed countries to deal with migrant workers.

Ulrich Gebert is currently living in Leipzig and has exhibited in London, Paris and Berlin. He is represented by Klemm's (Berlin).

All images: © Ulrich Gebert, courtesy of Klemm's, Berlin

'It was like the eye of God'

interview by Anne-Celine Jaeger

The Head of Photography at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, Dr Inka Graeve Ingelmann, has called your alma mater – The Academy of Visual Arts in Leipzig – the most interesting place for photography in terms of education in Germany. Do you agree?

I think you have to be very cautious with those terms. The same thing happened with the painting department in Leipzig. It's become a classic label. For me going to Leipzig was interesting because it didn't have a label at the time, but it was an interesting time to be there because there was no kind of attitude towards it being a prestigious place.

You also did an MA at the Royal College of Art. How did studying at this renowned institution affect the way you approach the medium?

In general the British teaching system is quite different to the German one. I think I prefer the British system. In Germany the approach is very traditional. You study with one professor, which is not the case in London. Coming to the Royal College was a funny experience because the reputation of the college was so enormous and it affected students in a ridiculous way. Everyone feels pressured, and then there's all the fuss about degree shows. But the other really quite important difference is that economically it's a very different set up. Leipzig is very poor in general but it's cheap to do things and study there. London is the opposite. The experience of living in London was much more important to me than the college itself. I'm back in Leipzig now because I can survive on what I'm earning through art, which would at present be difficult in London.

What do you consider your first major breakthrough as an artist?

To be honest, I'm not sure if I've achieved that yet.

How did the 'Amerika' series come about?

That was a work scholarship I got where I was sent to Spain. It was part of a European cultural project, where every participating country selected one artist who was sent to another European country to look at issues about work. I was sent to Valencia, and I wanted to do a piece about orange pickers and immigrants working there. I spent three months in Spain working on that documentary project.

What do you hope to say with these images?

It was a hard time for me because of course nobody is happy to see a photographer around documenting those things. I had to research how the work was organised, where people would meet very early in the morning before the sun rose. It's happening all over the place, but still it's a secret thing. For me the meeting place was a striking image. I was looking for an image that transcended the whole thing. Immigrant workers are sort of invisible in Spain. They meet very early in the morning, nobody witnesses it, and on the field you hardly see them because they are up in the trees. The only reminder you have that there are people working there are the white vans you see everywhere. It's a very important visual tool to show what's happening. The view from above was important for me. It was like the eye of God, or someone powerful looking down. I wanted to replicate that view in a critical way. The people looked like ants to me. It was an attempt to portray the whole system, a system where workers don't get treated as individuals.

Where do you get inspiration when you embark on a new project?

Very often, browsing through libraries as well as reading the newspaper is an important source of inspiration for me. I'm also very interested in a kind of politics and am always trying to find images or other related material that summarize something. To me it's not just about what you see on the pictures. There's always some kind of background that's related to broader issues. And it doesn't necessarily have to be documentary. I try not to limit myself to one method of working. For example in the 'Typus' series, generally speaking the images are of trees, but on a broader level, because the trees are considered to have 'invalid names' it was more about categorizations and maybe even racism and the history of that cultural phenomenon of naming things and how it involves power.

What artists and/or experiences have informed the way you work?

There is no one single person. There are bits and pieces of artists I adore. When I really started studying photography, I was attracted to Jeff Wall's work, but not so much any more. Allan Sekula is an important figure to me, as are older artists like Marcel Broodthaers, for example. At the moment I am happy to leave photography. It will always be at the heart of my practice, but I would like to expand my way of working.

What are you currently working on?

I'm working on a photography piece about customs dogs. I'm also working on a series based on alien fish in the Mediterranean. There's an institution in Monaco that monitors the Mediterranean. Because of the ship traffic, the flora and fauna change a lot. There is a certain notion that the Mediterranean is like a country and that there are certain types of fish that are native to it. But it's not a bordered area. This raises questions about territory, what is native and what not, and migration... It's not just about fish. They will be 3D pieces rather than images of fish. +