

The typical Maxime Fauconnier shot is hard to pin down: whether of an impossibly gorgeous young model staring straight into camera (I'm assuming he's a model; otherwise I quit) or a low-angle on a shadowy pillar in faint dusky light, there's a skewy, hip kind of classicism at work that doesn't quite conceal the melancholy beneath. He's said that he doesn't see much difference between photographing live and inanimate subjects, and it shows.

'It's all portraits to me,' he says. 'I find still life very exciting. *Everything Is Connected* is definitely that - still lives of things you wouldn't usually think of as still lives.'

Many of the photographs I find most striking, in fact, are the completely unpopulated ones; to wit, a haunting children's slide from *Everything Is Connected*, a beachside basketball court, a can of coke on a motorcycle. But as Fauconnier points out, of course, they're not completely unpopulated.

'More than a moment of void, you feel that someone was just there, or that someone will enter the frame just after. And also, there's me there, engaging with it, taking the photograph. So there's always somebody there. I wouldn't say that they're all self-portraits, but it's close.'

Even those that do depict people seem elliptical somehow: the people (they're usually young and nearly always beautiful, as previously noted) look away, or are moving out of frame, or are seen through a translucent surface. Or, as in one case, apparently naked and asleep. They all have a sense of sadness and liminality to them, a quality that carries across to his short films, in particular *Blackout*, which seems to exist somewhere between film and photography, a collection of stills with the subtlest hints of movement. The Belgian-based Fauconnier started work on the project in the US, and there's a story behind it.

'I was living in the Bronx at the time hurricane Sandy hit, and I took one of the very few subway trains running the following days out to these deserted and pitch black parts of Manhattan. It didn't feel real. All I remember seeing were the emergency lights placed on the sidewalks, really. I saw some people, bumped into a couple too, but they were basically shadows, walking left and right. The context was dramatic obviously - but it touched me and I started thinking about images, completely stripped, isolating simple elements, without the noise and the light of the city. The stillness comes from there.'

From there the project expanded to include pictures from Spain and France. Fauconnier's nomadic lifestyle - he somewhat sheepishly admits his bags rarely get unpacked - seems to breed a sense in his

work of things passing, of details that are more poignant for their fleetingness, of people leaving. Is it a conscious thing?

‘It wasn’t for a long time, to be honest, though maybe more now. Really, it’s just how I like to photograph people and things. I remember my early portraits, I would always ask people to close their eyes. I still do it. I’m interested in out-of-focus portraits, in shooting reflections of people in walls or glass buildings. It adds layers and to me tells something more. More than a face or an expression, it’s about a body within an environment. But yes, a lot of my work is about people escaping.’

And what about him? Is there any prospect of him settling down in Brussels, or will the escaping continue?

‘Well, I’m “based” in Brussels. I lived in New York multiple times but I don’t know if I could move there permanently: I probably couldn’t block out all the aggression and nasty stuff. But the South, Oregon, New York occasionally, are all places I’ll spend time, I’m sure. I visited Rome for the first time last year, and honestly I could imagine living there.’

This summer will bring the shoot for Fauconnier’s first scripted film project, “JULIAN”, for which he and his collaborators are about to launch a crowdfunding campaign. He’s keeping the details close to his chest for now, but no doubt it’ll be one for anybody with a taste for the bruised, grainy romanticism of Gus van Sant or even Larry Clark. Check Fauconnier out now so you can say you recognised his distinctive brand of slightly unsettling beauty before everybody else does - as it seems inevitable that they will.