



PAVILLON  
POPULAIRE

EN

# MERS ANDREAS MÜLLER-POHLE ET RIVIÈRES

NOVEMBER 3, 2021  
JANUARY 16, 2022

ENTRÉE LIBRE



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**Andreas Müller-Pohle – Mers et rivières.**

From November 3, 2021 to January 16, 2022

(private view Tuesday November 2, 2021) - Subject to change

Pavillon Populaire, fine art photography venue of the City of Montpellier

## INDEX

I	A word from Michaël Delafosse, Mayor of Montpellier President of Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole .....	5
II	2021: Photography, Environment, Ecology .....	6
III	Andreas Müller-Pohle, a central figure of the European photographic avant-garde .....	9
IV	Statement of intent by Gilles Mora, Artistic director of the Pavillon Populaire, Curator of the exhibition .....	10
V	Project itinerary .....	11
VI	Biographies: Andreas Müller-Pohle, Gilles Mora and Hubertus von Amelunxen .....	18
VII	The Pavillon Populaire, Making photography accessible for all .....	20
VIII	Press images .....	21
IX	General information .....	24

## I A WORD FROM MICHAËL DELAFOSSE

Mayor of Montpellier  
President of Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole



“Death associated with water is more dream-like than death associated with earth: the pain of water is infinite.” Published in 1942, *Water and Dreams* remains the most famous essay by philosopher Gaston Bachelard, perhaps his most bewitching too. Clear, shining or still waters, soft or violent waters, but also composite waters: the imagination of the material is limitless and has always nourished bards, poets, plastic artists and musicians.

Initiated in the mid-2000s, photographer Andreas Müller-Pohle’s series showcase and investigate water, a vital but weakened element, an element threatened by the environmental hazards brought by the unreasonable use we make of our world. The exhibition “Mers et rivières. Andreas Müller-Pohle” gives us the opportunity to learn more about the work of this important figure of the European avant-garde. It forms an “environmental” diptych, dedicated to water, with the previous exhibition: “Eaux troubles” by Edward Burtynsky.

Let’s randomly pick a photograph. The silhouette of a church on the opposite bank, a few leafy trees billowing under an azure sky, a fine trail of clouds, the signature left by a plane and, on the right, a massive bridge like an unfinished diagonal. Then suddenly the eye stops on a few droplets sitting on the lens, a handful of bubbles and the presence, in the foreground, of a band of dark green water subtly streaked with rays of light. Water is present, essential, obvious, sometimes intrusive, in all the photographs displayed.

Taken at the level of its surface, taken while immersed, from the inside, water reveals the state of the world. The Danube, the sea bordering Hong Kong, two rivers merging by Kaunas, Lithuania: three “places” offering dozens of perspectives and visions at water level, which end up composing a painting both poetic and tragic of the marks, mutations and alterations that our industrial societies impose on the environment.

If “the pain of water is infinite”, so will ours be the day when this fundamental and primary element runs out. Artists are our sentries; they witness the ongoing disaster and capture a few flashes of beauty. We must all work together so that the maxim of the scholar Yun Seondo holds true forever: “only water is faithful and never-ending.”

## II 2021: PHOTOGRAPHY, ENVIRONMENT, ECOLOGY

Faced with the proven threats of climate degradation, no one is innocent, and especially not photographers. Having so often claimed their status as a privileged witness of reality and history, they had to assume the posture of an uncompromising observer in the face of the ecological drifts that now threaten our environment. This brings new weight to their mission, and many engage with it with faithful conviction, applying different strategies, each of them delicate adjustments between their aesthetic imperatives, and their consciousness-raising mission. Let one of these two factors take precedence over the other, and the authenticity of their photographic work is affected.

It is therefore with a double interest that the Pavillon Populaire devotes a season of major exhibitions to the relationships between photography, environment, ecology, and artistic involvement. We felt compelled to select two examples among many, illustrating these necessary tensions, this authentic commitment that drives photographers to maintain these balances, never renouncing what they consider a necessary objective: unequivocally denouncing the devastation of nature through unfettered economic liberalism and productivism. And, through this choice, photographers underline the aesthetic legacy that is under threat, without allowing the spectacle of the destruction itself to become a pretext for aestheticisation, which happens very often. This is a very fine line to walk that some tread with a certain ambiguity, while others manage to with more flexibility. Bearing witness to environmental devastation, the conscious photographers realise that there is beauty in the terrible (the one foretold by Baudelaire in the middle of the 19th century, in the grip of the ugliness of modernity), all the while the terrible actually annihilates beauty. How can photographers reconcile the two in an act of revelation, without the intended message being muddied?

Everyone now agrees on the fact that *water* is becoming the major ecological issue, because of its foreseen scarcity as much as its quality, now terribly compromised by invasive pollution. The two contemporary photographers that we have selected to show at the Pavillon Populaire conduct their work of observation and accusation around the liquid element, the one that philosopher Gaston Bachelard defined as the most vital and the most poetic.

Canadian Edward Burtynsky documents the plundering of our large liquid territories on a planetary scale, using the most complete and newest digital technological tools, worthy of cinematographic blockbusters (it is, indeed, the “Burtynsky Studio”). On the other hand, German Andreas Müller-Pohle works on the much more modest scale of the individual photographer, undertaking a singular visual odyssey, at the very heart of European nourishing waters (the Danube River), or within the great maritime scenery enveloping the Asian megalopolis of Hong Kong. His journey bears witness to the insidious pollution that threatens the fragile ecological balance of the waters in which he immersed himself, and it is coupled with a high poetic charge.

By exhibiting these two major photographic works, the Pavillon Populaire invites us to share a double reflection: on ecology for the environment, and ecology for the eye.

Gilles Mora

Artistic director of the Pavillon Populaire



### III ANDREAS MÜLLER-POHLE, A CENTRAL FIGURE OF THE EUROPEAN PHOTOGRAPHIC AVANT-GARDE

**FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FRANCE**  
**3 SERIES**  
**86 WORKS**

**Andreas Müller-Pohle has constantly focused on the role and the conditions of creation and reception of photographic perception. His series on water and its vital ecological function, on which he started working in 2005, offer a lyrical as well as a critical vision of this major issue.**

Andreas Müller-Pohle developed an unusual method: he photographed seas and rivers "from the inside", either immersing himself underwater or photographing the waves at surface level. He presents us with banks, shores and environments in their natural state, and also with the changes that our industrial societies make them undergo, seen through liquid colours in which the photographer merges, vanishes even, in what amounts to a true "water movie".

This extremely subjective point of view provides, in contrast to the purely documentary, factual and objective photographers so typical of the "Düsseldorf School of Photography", a poetic and innovative approach, unique in contemporary environmental photography. It allows a Bachelardian reverie around aquatic environments, while retaining a deeply critical outlook in the face of the ecological deterioration of an element subjected to the devastating rule of industrialisation and consumption.

## IV STATEMENT OF INTENT BY GILLES MORA, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE PAVILLON POPULAIRE

A central figure of the European photographic avant-garde, Andreas Müller-Pohle, who was born in Germany in 1951, is also the editor-in-chief of *European Photography*, the prestigious magazine which he founded in 1980.

His artistic work, initially very experimental and strongly theoretical, has constantly focused on the role and the conditions of creation and reception of photographic perception.

In the mid-1990s, he started practising and exploring digital photography. His series on water and its vital ecological role, on which he started working in 2005, offer a lyrical as well as a critical vision of this major environmental issue.

Andreas Müller-Pohle developed an unusual method: he photographed seas and rivers “from the inside”, either immersing himself underwater or photographing at surface level. He presents us with banks, shores and environments, in their natural state or with the changes that our industrial societies make them undergo, seen through liquid colours in the midst of which the photographer merges, vanishes even.

This subjective point of view provides a poetic and unique environmental approach, in contrast to purely documentary, factual and objective photographers, in particular those of the “Düsseldorf School of Photography”. This shooting protocol, with its experimental undertones in line with Andreas Müller-Pohle’s spirit, allows Bachelardian reverie around the aquatic elements, while retaining a deeply critical outlook in the face of the ecological deterioration of nature subjected to the toxic rule of industrialisation and consumption.

## V PROJECT ITINERARY

The exhibition and its catalogue present the three projects Andreas Müller-Pohle produced, illustrating this photographic approach, and the resulting outcome.

### THE DANUBE RIVER PROJECT, 2005

The Danube, the only European river connecting the west to the east of the continent, enjoys an idyllic vision in the collective unconscious. It flows through a vast cultural, political and historical territory, from Germany to Romania, more than 2000 kilometres marked by the former Soviet regime. In his aquatic odyssey, from the sources of the river to its mouth, Andreas Müller-Pohle turns the Danube and its banks into a theatrical stage on which the diverse geographic and cultural perspectives of the countries crossed by the Danube are inscribed, as strange and unexpected poetic metaphors, revealing this great river to us in an entirely new way. The results of the chemical analyses of the river are indicated on each photograph, as samples were collected for every photograph taken, providing a factual and scientific counterpoint to the poetics mentioned above.

### HONG KONG WATERS, 2009 – 2010

If not for the sea that surrounds it, Hong Kong would never have been the prosperous and sprawling city that it is today, an archetype of modernity and its often-negative side effects. It is this “oceanic culture of the city” that Andreas Müller-Pohle explores through photography, precisely from the sea itself, in which he is immersed. This standpoint provides a series of surprising views, blending the astonishing architectural organisation of the city’s coasts and the obvious marks of an exuberant tropical environment sometimes still intact, but tragically threatened by an industrial and technological cancer. These images offer an unexpected outlook on Hong Kong, filled with an ambiguous beauty, giving the aquatic and maritime kingdom an eminently symbolic and poetic value.

### KAUNAS UPON THE RIVERS, 2017

The city of Kaunas in Lithuania, located at the confluence of two rivers, offered Andreas Müller-Pohle a photographic residency. In turn, Müller-Pohle seized this opportunity to utilise his very particular approach to show us an idyllic vision of a place that, whilst lacking in extraordinary features, has retained an untouched European natural habitat thanks to its almost pastoral riverside position.



The exhibition, made up of 86 large-format colour photographs, will lead to the publishing of the eponymous catalogue by Editions Hazan, comprising all the images presented.

Introductory texts by Hubertus von Amelnxen and Gilles Mora

Texts by Andreas Müller-Pohle  
Biographies and bibliography

## THE DANUBE RIVER PROJECT [LE PROJET DANUBE], 2005

The Danube is the most European of all rivers and the only one that crosses the continent from west to east. I became interested in a portrait of this river in 2004, after having dealt extensively with the subject of water a few years earlier. In Berlin, on the Spree River, I made my first tests with the split technique popular with divers, in which the camera looks half below and half above the surface of the water, thus combining two levels of landscape in one image. After months of further research, I made four trips between July and November 2005, first through Germany, Austria, and Slovakia, then to Hungary, then to Croatia and Serbia, and finally to Bulgaria and Romania. I took water samples at the shooting locations and inserted their chemical values into the pictures as a "blood count" of the river, so to speak. My way from the source in the Black Forest to the mouth in the Black Sea, 2800 kilometers long, was that of a traveler who only visited each place once and took the respective weather and light conditions as they came. Thus, the Danube River Project is ultimately a personal river log – a poetic-documentary interpretation that would certainly look very different today. — Andreas Müller-Pohle



**Danube River Project [Le projet Danube]**

Linz, 2005

© Andreas Müller-Pohle



**Danube River Project [Le projet Danube]**

Budapest, 2005

© Andreas Müller-Pohle

## HONG KONG WATERS [LES EAUX DE HONG KONG], 2009-2010

Hong Kong was my second home for many years and – until its seizure by the Chinese regime – a place of immense fascination. A hyper-vertical architecture rises from a tangle of picturesque water landscapes that present themselves in hundreds of islands with endless coasts and ports, canals and waterfalls. My long-cherished plan to have a city portrait follow the Danube project should not be realized anywhere else: Hong Kong, a city of water that has been exposed to a continuously rising sea level for decades and in which the element of water means life and threat at the same time. I began underwater tests on Hong Kong Island and Cheung Chau in the summer of 2008, and between January 2009 and December 2010 made seven trips, most of them lasting several weeks, during which I made not only the photographs but also numerous video and sound recordings that became part of the Hong Kong Waters project. In contrast to my river project with its consecutive course, the water landscapes of Hong Kong lay at my feet anew every day, and I like the idea of having followed a circular eastern mode after the linear western one. — Andreas Müller-Pohle

## KAUNAS UPON THE RIVERS [KAUNAS SUR LES RIVIÈRES], 2017

The Lithuanian city of Kaunas is located at the confluence of two dominant rivers, the Neris (female) and the Nemunas (male), and near the Kaunas Sea, an artificial reservoir created by damming the Nemunas for energy supply. Unlike the Danube and Hong Kong projects, *Kaunas upon the Rivers* originated in a period of just eight days as a result of an artist-in-residence program, in which I took part at the invitation of the Kaunas Photo Festival, accompanied by the photographer Jhoane Baterna-Pateña. Kaunas has some impressive bridges; otherwise, the city panorama is rather unspectacular and tranquil. Neither cargo nor passenger ships disturb the leisurely lapping of the two rivers, which only get into a fleeting whirl at the point where they meet – a romantic hotspot for lovers. Outside the city center, the banks are almost entirely left in their charming original state. Scenes of nature and images of untouched landscape are therefore the predominant motifs of this project. — Andreas Müller-Pohle

### Kaunas upon the Rivers [Kaunas sur les rivières]

Kaunas Reservoir, 2017

© Andreas Müller-Pohle

### Kaunas upon the Rivers [Kaunas sur les rivières]

Nemunas, 2017

© Andreas Müller-Pohle



## VI BIOGRAPHIES

### ANDREAS MÜLLER-POHLE, GILLES MORA AND HUBERTUS VON AMELUNXEN



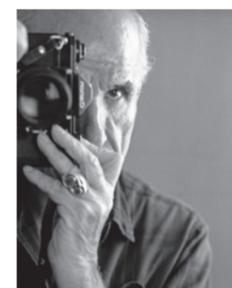
#### THE ARTISTE

**Andreas Müller-Pohle** is a Berlin-based media artist and publisher. He studied Economics and Communication Sciences at the Universities of Hanover and Göttingen. In 1979, he founded *European Photography*, an independent art magazine for contemporary photography and new media.

His first artistic projects in the late 1970s focused on issues of photographic perception and later on photo recycling, where he also incorporated video. In the mid-1990s, he began exploring the use of digital, genetic, and political codes. Various projects on the topic of water followed, with large portraits of the Danube River and the megalopolis of Hong Kong. Müller-Pohle's works have been widely published and exhibited and are included in numerous private and museum collections worldwide. As a publisher, Müller-Pohle has edited the major works of the media philosopher Vilém Flusser in the ten-volume Edition Flusser, including the seminal *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie (Towards a Philosophy of Photography)*, which has been translated into over twenty languages. Before that, Müller-Pohle was already noted as one of the pioneers of the modern electronic book with the publication in 1986 of Flusser's essay *Die Schrift: Hat Schreiben Zukunft? (Does Writing Have a Future?)*. In 2001, Müller-Pohle was awarded the European Photography Prize by the Reind M. De Vries Foundation. He is the author of numerous texts on photo theory, including on Visualism, and has been a visiting professor and lecturer at, among others, the Higher Institute of Fine Arts in Antwerp, Belgium, and the Hong Kong Design Institute. Current works include an artist book and video with unpublished material from Hong Kong and a long-term photo, video, and sound project titled "Studies on Traffic".

muellerpohle.net  
waterimages.net

## THE CURATOR OF THE EXHIBITION ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE PAVILLON POPULAIRE AND AUTHOR



**Gilles Mora** is a specialist in American modernist photography. He is also the author of the Walker Evans monograph, *Walker Evans: The Hungry Eye* (Harry N. Abrams, 2004) and of the book *The Last Photographic Heroes: American Photographers of the Sixties and Seventies* (Harry N. Abrams, 2007).

He was the director of Rencontres d'Arles from 1999 to 2001. He also co-founded the journal *Les Cahiers de la photographie*.

## THE AUTHOR

Professor **Hubertus von Amelunxen** is a researcher in cultural history. He studied German and Romance philologies, philosophy and art history in Marburg and in Paris. From 1989 to 1994, he co-headed the magazine *Fotogeschichte*, taught art history and cultural studies, founded and directed the Forum for Interdisciplinary Project Studies at the Muthesius-Hochschule für Kunst und Gestaltung de Kiel. He has been a visiting professor in Basel, Düsseldorf and Santa Cruz.

From 2000 to 2007 he was senior consultant curator at the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal. From 2001 to 2005, he taught at the ISNM (International School of New Media) in Lübeck, which he also founded and directed. He was appointed a member of the Berlin Akademie der Künste in 2003. Since 2006, he has been the Walter Benjamin Chair at the European Graduate School in Saas-Fee. From 2005 to 2009 he served as rector of the École européenne supérieure de l'image en France. From 2010 to 2013 he was president of the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Braunschweig. He is the author of numerous books and articles and has curated many international exhibitions, the most recent being *Notation. Kalkül und Form in den Künsten* for the Akademie der Künste and the ZKM | Centre for Art and Media Karlsruhe, 2008 – 2009 (collaborating with Dieter Appelt), *Cy Twombly — Photographs* for the Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels (2012) and *Air Wants To Go. Dominik Lejman* for Op enheim, Wrocław, 2020. He leads one of the largest archives on the Fluxus movement, the Archivio Conz in Berlin.

## VII THE PAVILLON POPULAIRE, MAKING PHOTOGRAPHY ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL

**The Pavillon Populaire, Montpellier's photographic art venue, is located in the heart of the urban area, on the Esplanade Charles-de-Gaulle, and is free to enter. The venue offers three exhibitions each year.**

Accessible to all audiences, the venue invites you to discover, through the subjects presented, the different aspects of the photographic medium. Offering high quality programming, **it recently showcased the works of artists of national and international notoriety such as Brassai, Bernard Plossu, Patrick Tosani, Jakob Tuggener, Denis Roche, Ralph Gibson and Elina Brotherus.**

The institution is under **the artistic direction of photography historian Gilles Mora, who founded the magazine Cahiers de la Photographie and chaired the Rencontres de la Photographie d'Arles. Under his direction, the Pavillon Populaire invites national and international curators and artists around established themes, for original exhibitions fully designed for the venue.** The relevance and originality of the subjects displayed, the quality of the prints and the care taken in their staging have enabled the Pavillon Populaire to **gain international recognition among the photographic art community and with general and specialised media, all while winning and retaining an ever-growing audience.**

Indeed, since 2011 the Pavillon Populaire has attracted nearly 800,000 visitors (with an average of 27,000 admissions per exhibition) offering projects covering both historical and contemporary photography. The 2018 season, which focused on the link between photography and history, accounted for 140,000 visitors.

This popular success is now coupled with international influence thanks to an ambitious programme. 2019, which centred on contemporary photography, saw the walls of the Pavillon Populaire populated by works by Anglo-American Andy Summers, the guitarist of legendary group The Police — this exhibition, conceived by the City of Montpellier, was carried over to the Maastricht Museum in the Netherlands; followed by Canadian Lynne Cohen, for her first complete retrospective in France; and finally, by Austrian VALIE EXPORT, a world-renowned figure in contemporary creation.

In 2020, through an exhibition on the works of Jean-Philippe Charbonnier, followed by an exhibition exploring the New York School, it became possible to compare mid-twentieth century French humanist photography and American street photography. And let's not forget the Boutographies, celebrating young European creators yearly.

**The Pavillon Populaire gives everyone, whether they are from Montpellier or just visiting, the opportunity to discover and rediscover major works of fine-art photography, free of charge, through new and original projects, associating high artistic standards and popular reach, met with unswerving public success. And it's all these qualities that make the Pavillon Populaire, along with Montpellier, such a prominent venue of the photographic art scene in France.**

## VIII PRESS IMAGES

### Danube River Project [Le projet Danube]

Donaueschingen, 2005

© Andreas Müller-Pohle

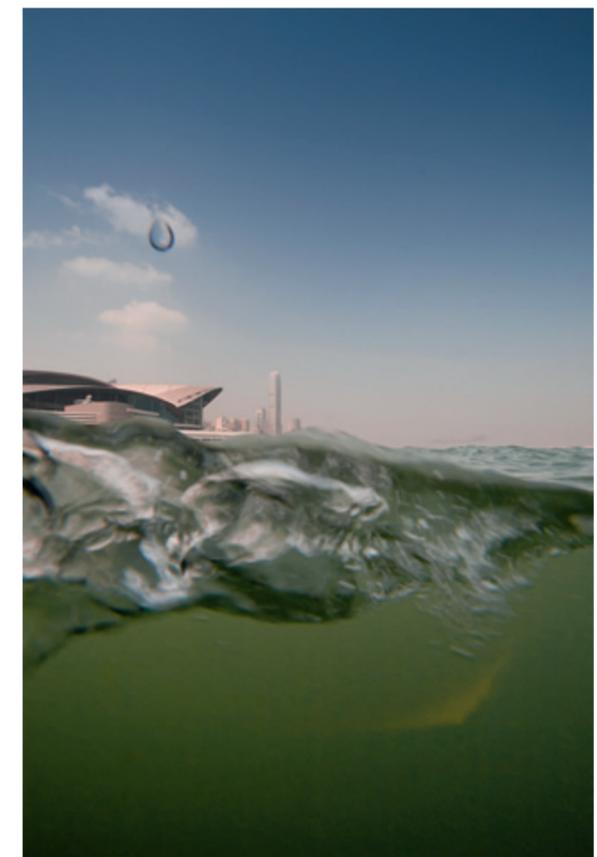


### Hong Kong Waters

[Les eaux de Hong Kong]

Kowloon. From a Boat in Kowloon Bay, 2009

© Andreas Müller-Pohle



### Danube River Project [Le projet Danube]

Linz, 2005

© Andreas Müller-Pohle

### Hong Kong Waters

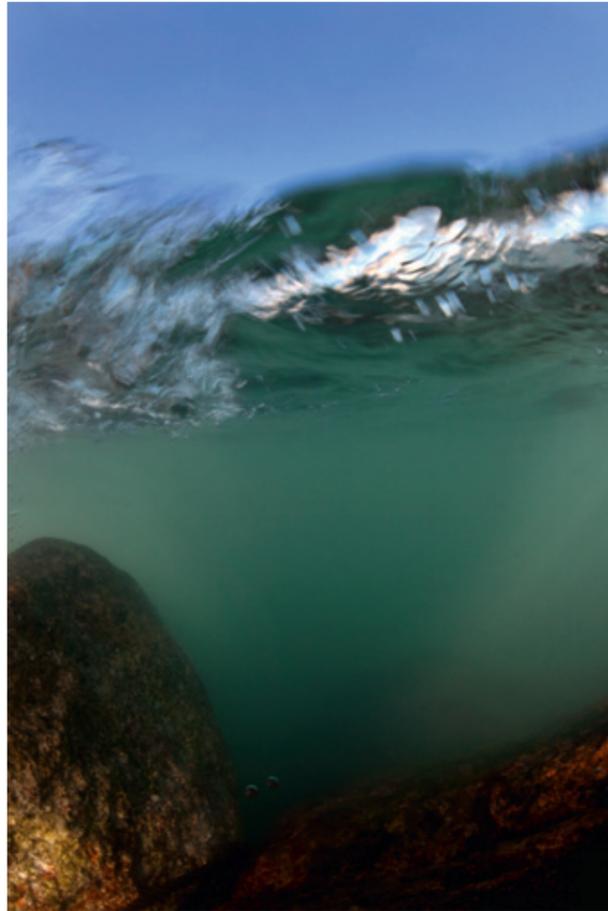
[Les eaux de Hong Kong]

Hong Kong Island. From a Boat near

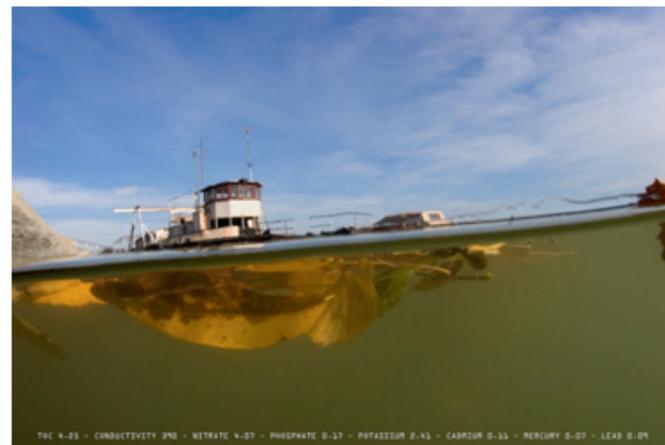
Causeway Bay, 2010

© Andreas Müller-Pohle

**Hong Kong Waters [Les eaux de Hong Kong]**  
New Territories. Rambler Channel, Tsing Yi, 2009  
© Andreas Müller-Pohle



**Danube River Project [Le projet Danube]**  
Budapest, 2005  
© Andreas Müller-Pohle

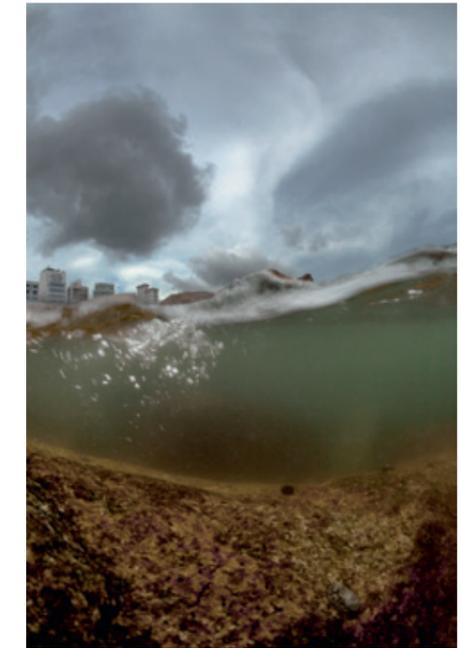


**Danube River Project [Le projet Danube]**  
Vidin, 2005  
© Andreas Müller-Pohle



**Kaunas upon the Rivers [Kaunas sur les rivières]**  
Kaunas Reservoir, 2017  
© Andreas Müller-Pohle

**Hong Kong Waters [Les eaux de Hong Kong]**  
Hong Kong Island. Ap Lei Chau, 2009  
© Andreas Müller-Pohle



**Hong Kong Waters [Les eaux de Hong Kong]**  
Hong Kong Island.  
Stanley, 2009  
© Andreas Müller-Pohle



**Kaunas upon the Rivers [Kaunas sur les rivières]**  
Nemunas, 2017  
© Andreas Müller-Pohle



**Danube River Project [Le projet Danube]**  
Tulcea, 2005  
© Andreas Müller-Pohle

## **IX GENERAL INFORMATION**

**The information provided below is subject to change depending on the sanitary conditions. Thank you for your understanding**

### **Pavillon Populaire**

**Fine art photography venue  
of the City of Montpellier**

Esplanade Charles-de-Gaulle, Montpellier

Tel. +33 467 661 346

### **Opening hours and self-guided tours**

The exhibition will be open from

Tuesday to Sunday from 10 am

to 1 pm and from 2 pm to 6 pm

(last admission 15 minutes before closing time)

## PRESS CONTACTS

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