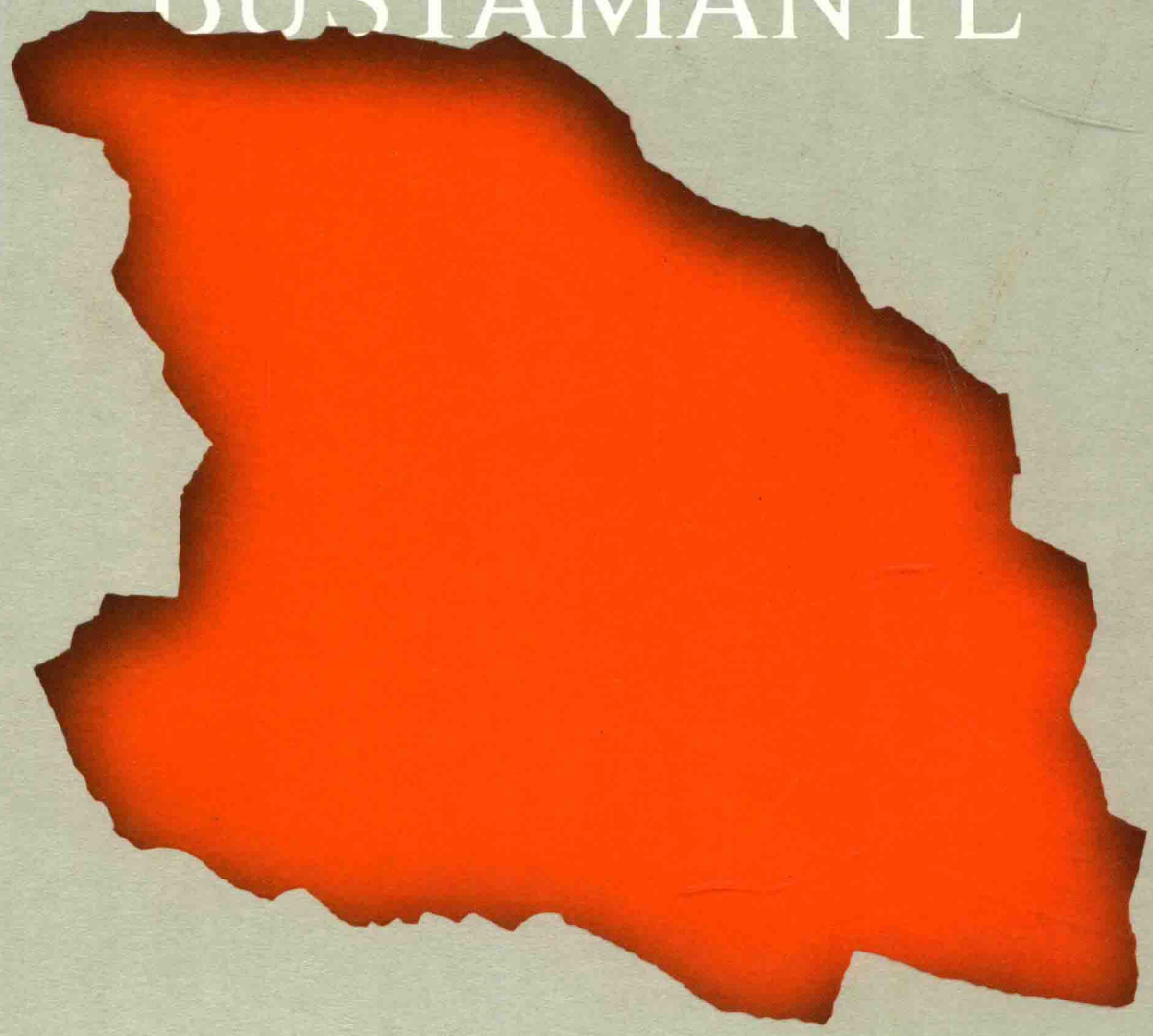
Jacinto Lageira

JEAN-MARC

BUSTAMANTE



ACTES SUD

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CRYSTALLISATIONS

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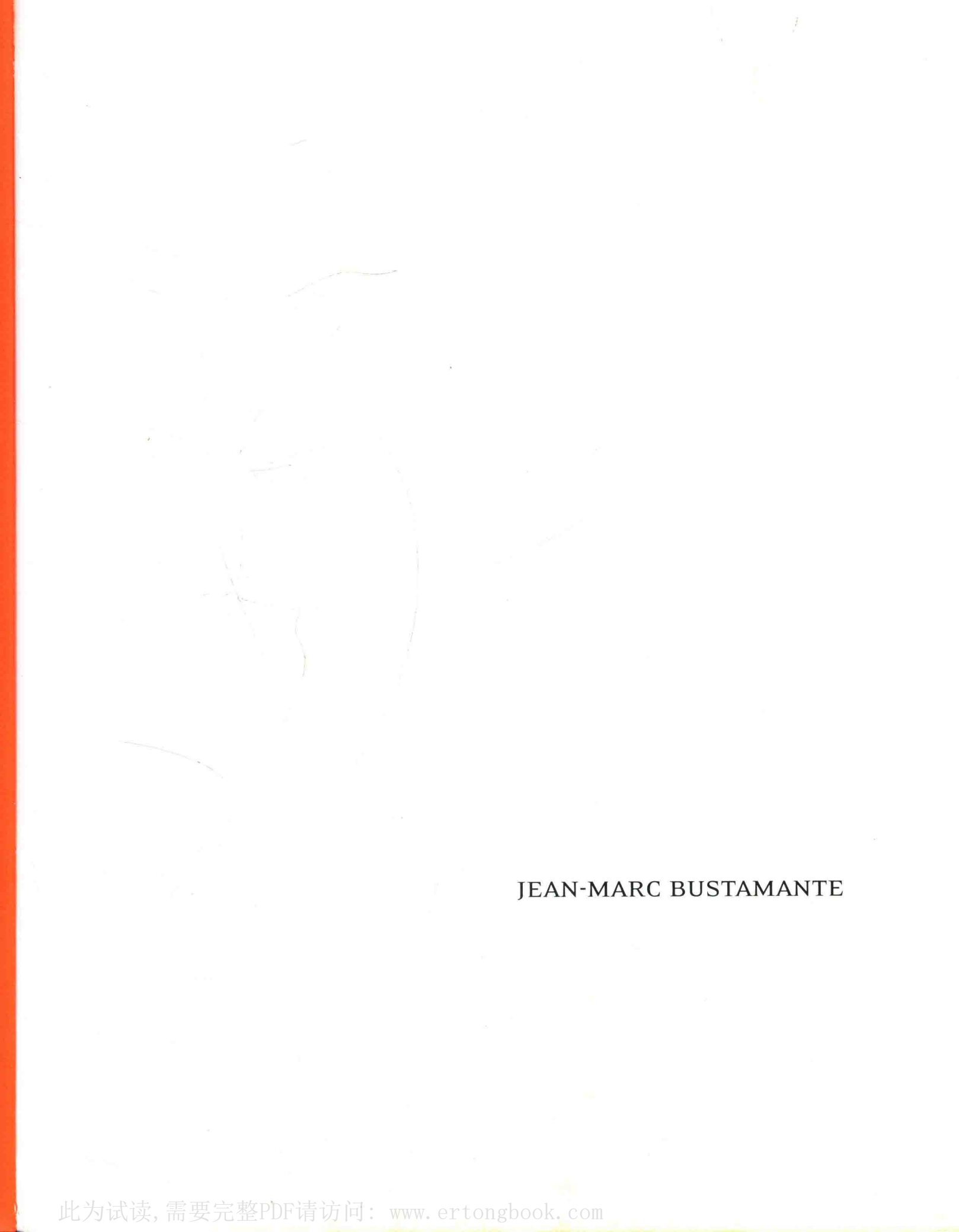

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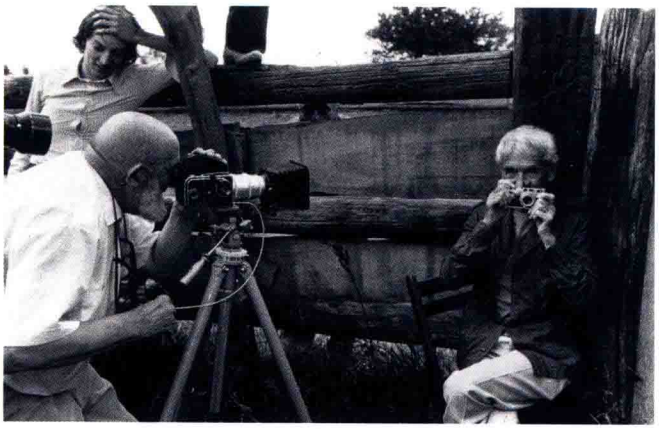
ON THE MONOGRAPHIC PACT

If we consider the definitions of the monograph as being, by implication, complete, detailed and concerned with a single subject, any attempt to transpose such a notion to the field of art is bound to prove extremely problematic, by virtue of the very nature of artworks, which, individually as well as collectively, can never be understood, grasped, interpreted and judged once and for all. To think that a monograph about an artist, whether living or not, will somehow cover all the ground is to succumb to a banal epistemological and aesthetic illusion. Works of art are not made and described, given and received in a single act that puts a limit on the experience of their presence. On the contrary, their existence and their continuation are subject to a process whereby our reception, attention and critical discourse are being continuously updated.

By a curious habit that no doubt dates back to Sainte-Beuve, for whom a work of art reflected and could only by explained by the life of its maker, monographs on artists thus comprise a detailed account of their life, their manias and greatness of soul, as if it were proven that everyday life, actions, positions, words, refusals and engagements, on whatever scale, had a direct impact on the work. But even if such matters may help explain certain aspects of their art, we are not interested in Marcel Proust because he was asthmatic, in Pablo Picasso because he loved bullfighting and women, or in Fernando Pessoa and Francis Bacon because they were alcoholics. It is their art that matters, more than anything else. Jean-Paul Sartre would never have spent ten long years writing thousands of pages on Gustave's neuroses (*L'Idiot de la famille*) if Gustave had not been Flaubert. For better or for worse, the man and the work are two distinct if not totally watertight entities. To explain one by the other would open the door to excesses of all sorts. But this debate between criticism in the manner of Sainte-Beuve (the life as key to the work) and in the manner of Proust (the work as distinct from the life: *Contre Sainte-Beuve*) is anything but backward-looking, certainly if we judge by the enthusiasm for the approach taken by Arthur Danto, the great American philosopher



From left to right:
Jean-Marc Bustamante, Ansel Adams, Jacques Henri Lartigue, Arles, 1974.

and eminent art critic, who considers that the only true interpretation of a work of art is the one given, or that could be given, by the artist himself.[1] Intentionalism and the biographical fallacy are mutually sustaining in this quest for the deep, ultimate essence of the artwork, and are so intimately interwoven that it would no longer be truly possible to say – and Danto indeed refuses to do so – if the artist's true interpretation of the work has to do with his life or his aesthetic intention. The thorny problem being, indeed, knowing what part of the life it is that goes into the art, what part of existence goes into the work, especially since the maker's artistic and aesthetic personality is sometimes the raw material of what he makes, which only compounds the difficulty for an outside observer.

While some elements of the artist's life do inevitably slip into the work, to a degree that depends on the situation and context (and especially on socio-political factors), the fact remains that what receivers are ultimately faced with is not the creator's personality stripped bare, but a very different kind of reconfiguration that exists more on the level of autofiction than on that of a document that might corroborate this or that aspect of the work. The artist's confirmed intentionality, which is necessary both to the work and to its reception, is essentially aesthetic, and therefore to be understood in terms of his imaginary or semi-imaginary life, since in the final analysis the work is not a report on its maker's psycho-physical state. Our aesthetic and artistic judgement is exercised not on the producer's psychic existence but on the works he has made. In this sense, the process, such as it is, tends to work in the opposite direction: the imaginary, fictional work ends up colouring the everyday, insignificant elements of its creator's biography. Even if it is possible to detect fragments of psychobiography in the works, they are important to the receiver only if they concern their artistic or aesthetic qualities. As has been said and repeated so many times, good artworks are not made with good intentions or with psychic conflicts. What is left of the person of the creator in his work is less a hidden or cryptic intimate biography than elements of a humanity with which we can identify, because the language spoken by the artist is accessible to all, not just to a few. Rather than a monograph, it is a matter here of *monographemes*.

As regards Jean-Marc Bustamante, the scattered *biographemes* – transformed here *de facto* into *monographemes* – of note are that his interest in art began in his teenage years, when he saw a large number of exhibitions in Paris. After a

1. See Arthur Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986; *After the End of Art*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992; *After the End of Art*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Left: Ansel Adams présenting a portfolio of Jean-Marc Bustamante's works, Arles, 1974.

Right: William Klein and Jean-Marc Bustamante, galerie Baudouin Lebon, Paris, 1982.

short period studying economics in Toulouse, his home town, he turned to photography thanks to his friendship with Michel Dieuzaide, son of Jean Dieuzaide, an esteemed photographer who worked in a variety of fields as well as on his own personal projects. It was the latter who introduced Bustamante to photography and trained him in its techniques. This was his first concrete experience of the practice, even if it was not exactly an artistic one.

The artistic dimension came into play through the intermediary of another photographer, Denis Brihat, based in Bonnieux (Luberon), for whom he worked in 1972 and 1973. Here he become more fully acquainted with what at the time was known as "creative photography", going on to discover photographers such as Walker Evans, Edward Weston and Ansel Adams, to name but a few. Having acquired considerable knowledge and technical skill, Bustamante was committed enough to install a laboratory in his Parisian apartment. He did printing for a number of famous photographers, including Robert Doisneau, and saw a good deal of Claude Nori, editor of the journal *Contrejour*, to whom he suggested an article on William Klein. While working on this piece, he met Klein himself who, in the course of their exchanges, offered him a job as his assistant and printer. Bustamante held this position from 1978 to 1981.

The period was not particularly conducive to what we now think of as artists' or conceptual photography, and the creative figures using the medium at the time produced a form of "art photography" that was very different from what has become contemporary photography. The young generation occupied a position between militant, documentary "art" photography in the traditional sense of that word, and the use of photography by conceptual artists, for whom it was a tool more than work in its own right. At the time, however, Bustamante, who had not taken the usual courses at art school or in any other institution, had no connection with the art world. And, although he started making his own work in 1977, with the series that came to be known as the *Tableaux*, it was not until 1980, at the Paris Biennial, that he entered the art world as a recognised artist. Spotted and supported by the critic Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, he also came to the attention of other important figures, such as the gallerist Baudoin Lebon, who gave him his first solo exhibition (the *Tableaux* series) in 1982.

This show made quite an impression. Not only was the gallery outside the usual circuit of photography galleries, but the works themselves were a surprise: