



NUL SOLEIL. MAIS LE FEU

ALAIN WILLAUME

22.05 – 05.09.2026



STIMULTANIA
STRASBOURG

Pôle de photographie

EDITORIAL

This exhibition is dedicated to the memory of Anne Testut, whose light has faded but whose radiance remains.

The exhibition is organised by Stimultania in Strasbourg, co-produced with the Hôtel Fontfreyde in Clermont-Ferrand, Lumière d'Encre in Céret, the Carré d'Art in Chartres-de-Bretagne and the Nicéphore Niépce Museum in Chalon-sur-Saône, and is presented as part of the Villa Kujoyama post-residency programme, with the support of the Institut français, the Institut français du Japon and the Fondation Bettencourt Schueller. With technical support from Fujifilm France.

Tour of the exhibition within the Diagonal network: Stimultania in Strasbourg (summer 2026), Lumière d'Encre in Céret (spring 2027), the Hôtel Fontfreyde in Clermont-Ferrand (autumn 2027), Carré d'Art in Chartres de Bretagne (spring 2028)

The entire series is published by Éditions de l'Atelier EXB, with texts by Ryoko Sekiguchi and Véronique Brindeau, with the support of the Sasakawa Franco-Japanese Foundation and Nippon Express France.

Photo credits:

NUL SOLEIL. MAIS LE FEU, 2024

© Alain Willaume / Tendance Floue collective

The wind began to blow in the Atlas Mountains near a fragile ochre-coloured office and ended up resonating within the Tibetan horns. Powerful. Deep. As it passed, it ruffled eyelids, roads and fists. Perhaps this is what the day before happiness is like. A vibration to match the sheer scale of the journey. And an immense sadness.

Alain Willaume goes where the roads end, to the edge of chasms and horizons. For him, 'the ends of the earth are occupied either by the military, or by monks, or by madmen, or by people who long for peace.' He says he is a bit of all of them at once.

The residency at Villa Kujoyama, in the hills above Kyoto, is one of those journeys of which he would later say that he was on the edge of light and its tremors. It was so cold there that the blood gave up. Nul soleil, mais le feu

Perhaps that is what the day before happiness is like.

A day when the photography of the greats is nothing but poetry, a shiver and music.

Céline Duval.

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NUL SOLEIL. MAIS LE FEU

NUL SOLEIL. MAIS LE FEU is the result of the work Alain Willaume undertook during the winter of 2024 whilst in residence at Villa Kujoyama in Kyoto. This project reveals a feverish journey through the heart of a land where no sun shines. Built around an enigmatic and poignant child's jacket, NUL SOLEIL. MAIS LE FEU is composed of landscapes marked by faults and tremors. We encounter enigmatic figures – oracles? lookouts? survivors?

This Winterreise traces, through the meandering paths of a twilight Japan, the territory of a faltering 21st century. On the fringes of a mental yet undeniably real space, it is in the folds of the low winter light that the wavering of certainties lies in wait. This work on the void feeds on the distorted waves of a telluric power bearing disasters and millennia-old myths.

The result of a collection of clues, mirages and facts, the composite sketch of a country-abyss emerges from the shadows, from the beauty and the formless material of reality. This sequence of images, edited like an imaginary film, awakens to the existence of unspeakable notions, distant and yet familiar. Also appearing is a *boro*¹, a small piece of clothing whose unsettling power and extreme fragility evoke, in a single breath, the most extreme cold, catastrophe and destitution, yet also the love carried by generations of mending mothers who thus managed to preserve a little comfort for their children.

Setting out in pursuit of an elusive chimera (the photographic representation of the concepts of *wabi* and *sabi*²), Alain Willaume ultimately paints a melancholic portrait of a harsh land beset by seismic upheavals and the ceaseless wavering of certainties.

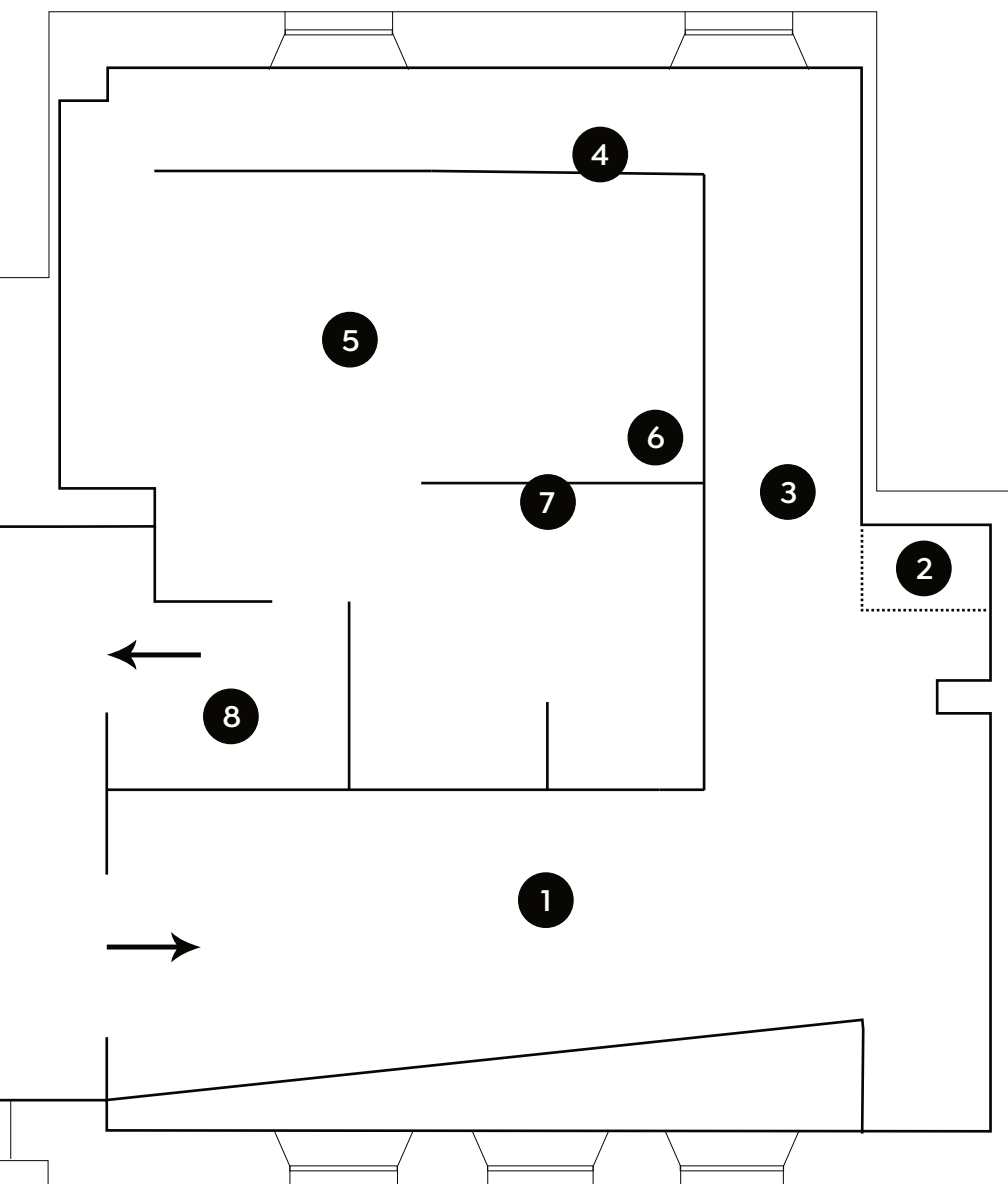
Between enigmas, flashes of brilliance and a sense of catastrophe, the images in NUL SOLEIL. MAIS LE FEU sketch an atlas of uncertainties that opens a gaping void echoing the immateriality of wabi-sabi. The recent earthquakes that struck Japan during the photographer's stay seem to have affected the very 'skin' of these images and rekindled the sense of vulnerability that the blindness of the Anthropocene still attempts to mask... The unsettling shadow of the world to come lingers, and the wabi-sabi perspective compels us to confront the paradox of the beauty of imperfection. The photographer's work is deliberately imbued with semantic ambiguities, shifts in

form and meaning, and formal imperfections. This awareness of the distance from reality and his fascination with shadow might perhaps sum up both his artistic approach and explain his attraction to this 'grey area' conducive to questioning, which does not hinder knowledge but, on the contrary, broadens it.

¹The *boro* presented here was acquired in its current condition by Alain Willaume. Spotted on dealer Tore Kura's stall on 10 February 2024 at one of Kyoto's flea markets, it deeply moved the photographer. It finally came into his possession in June 2025 following a chase that spanned Japan and France. The term *boro* (literally 'rag' in Japanese) originally referred to a piece of fabric or a garment that was heavily worn and patched, sometimes over several generations, by poor peasants in Aomori Prefecture. It seems that this 'tradition', once a sign of extreme poverty, was rediscovered in the 1960s by the ethnologist Chuzaburo Tanaka, who began collecting them. A text by the researcher Véronique Brindeau explains its origins in the closing essay of the eponymous book published to mark this exhibition.

²*Wabi* and *sabi* are Japanese terms referring to an aesthetic concept, or a spiritual disposition, derived from Zen Buddhist principles as well as Taoism. They have two meanings that could be simplified as follows: *wabi* (the effects of time, the decay of beings and things, the patina of objects, a taste for worn objects, etc.) and *sabi* (solitude, simplicity, melancholy, nature, sadness, asymmetry...). *Wabi* refers to the feeling one experiences when faced with things in which the workings of time or human hands can be discerned, and *sabi* to the sense of humility one may feel in the face of natural phenomena.

EXHIBITION LAYOUT



1 THE HALL OF HANGING FACES

2 BREATHS

Video loop. Filmed by Alain Willaume in May 2024 in one of the *koi* ponds in the gardens of Todai-ji Temple in Nara (Japan).
Editing | Stefan Richter.

3 CORRIDOR OF DISRUPTIONS

4 HANDWRITTEN QUOTE

Written in white chalk: (...) There were those who ran away. There were those who had to stay. In the end, they all went the same way.
– Brian Eno, «There Were Bells», album «ForeverAndEverNoMore», 2021

5 HALL OF EARTHQUAKES AND FIRE

6 BORO

7 WALL OF CONFUSING DIVINATIONS

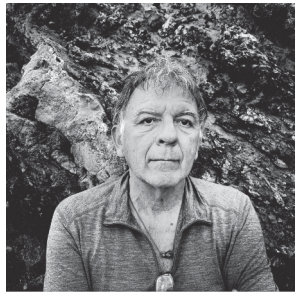
Negative reproductions of *omikujii*, fortune-telling strips (poorly) translated by the camera function of the translation app on Alain Willaume's mobile phone. *Omikujii* are 'fortune-telling strips' printed on strips of paper that are drawn at random in exchange for an offering at Shinto and Buddhist temples in Japan.

8 READING ROOM

View the book published by Atelier EXB edition.

A page from a herbarium purchased by Alain Willaume at one of Kyoto's flea markets in the winter of 2024.

ALAIN WILLAUME



Alain Willaume © Patrick Tourneboeuf
/ Tendance Floue collective

Alain Willaume, born in 1956, is an independent photographer and has been a member of the *Tendance Floue* collective since 2010. His artistic approach resembles a 'personal cartography' shaped by his extensive travels, particularly to India, which he first visited in 1979 and where he lived from 1999 to 2003. Deeply haunted by reality, his work explores the violence and vulnerability of the world and the people who inhabit it. He does not view fiction as opposed to reality, but as an alternative mode – a combination of commitment and mystery – whose power lies in the restraint and taciturn intensity of his images.

He won the Kodak Prize for Photographic Criticism in 1979 and First Prize in the Portraits category of the Sony World Photography Awards in 2011. He has been nominated for the 2025 Prix Pictet.

Alain Willaume has published several notable monographs. These include *Bords du gouffre* (Éditions Textuel, 2003), a retrospective presented at the Rencontres d'Arles; *India Now: New Photographic Visions of Contemporary India* (Thames & Hudson / Textuel, 2007), the result of his INDIA exhibition project at the Rencontres d'Arles; and *Coordonnées 72/18* (Éditions Xavier Barral, 2019), nominated for the Prix Nadar. In 2022, *Un réalisme hanté*, a collection of interviews conducted by Fabien Ribéry, was published by Arnaud Bizalion éditeur. In 2027, Éditions Delpire will publish *Les interstices du songe* with an unpublished text by Wajdi Mouawad. As a preview of this book, the 2025 Rencontres d'Arles invited the two authors to a public screening and reading at the evenings at the ancient theatre.

His involvement extends to numerous international exhibitions (Fondation Cartier/Paris, CACP/Niort, Fotografia Europea/Reggio Emilia, FIAF Gallery/New York, Festival Portrait(s)/Vichy, Mulhouse Biennale, Rencontres de Bamako, Lux-scène nationale/Valence...) and his works feature in collections such as the Fondation Cartier, the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Mulhouse and the MAMC in Strasbourg. Since 2022, his photographic archive has been held at the Musée Nicéphore Niépce in Chalon-sur-Saône.

From January to May 2024, he was a fellow at Villa Kujoyama in Kyoto, with the support of the Institut français, the Institut français du Japon and the Fondation Bettencourt Schueller.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Adèle Frémolle and the teams at Villa Kujoyama and the Institut français, François Hébel, Bénédicte Alliot (Cité internationale des arts, Paris), Patrick Delat (CACP – Villa Pérochon, Niort), Céline Duval (Stimultania – Pôle de photographie, Strasbourg), Sylvain Besson and Sébastien Jouanny (musée Nicéphore Niépce, Chalon-sur-Saône), François-Nicolas L'Hardy (Hôtel Fontfreyde-Centre photographique, Clermont-Ferrand), Claude Belime (Lumière d'encre, Céret), François Boucard (Le Carré d'art, Chartres-de-Bretagne) and the exhibition installation team at Stimultania.

To Cécile Dazord (Musée national des arts asiatiques-Guimet, Paris), Floriane Pochon (Phaune Radio), Fabien Ribéry, Nathalie Siegfried, Pascale Richter, Yoann Hector and the agency Richter architectes et associés.

To Joraku Ogawa, Akiko Shintsubo and Tore Kura, Michio Shibata, Pierre Carniaux, Stefan Richter, Alain Walther, Béatrice Fraenkel, Fred Mery, Sarah Moon, Kazuko Narita and Jacques Soullilou, Sophie Refle-Miyashita, RongRong and Inri, Axelle Testut, Georges Heck and the group Kukengundai feat. Junya Noguchi.

Finally, thank you to everyone in Strasbourg, Paris and elsewhere who has supported me for so long with their kindness, generosity and high standards: to Clément Regard and my dear friends at Tendance Floue and Atelier EXB, to Ryoko Sekiguchi and Véronique Brindeau and to Corinne App.

FURTHER READING

SELECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHY BOOKS

- *Coordonnées 72/18*, Alain Willaume, Actes Sud, 2008.
- *Un réalisme hanté*, Alain Willaume & Fabien Ribery, Arnaud Bizalion Éditeur.
- *Fragiles*, Tendance Floue, Éditions Textuel, 2022.
- *Nul soleil. Mais le feu*, Alain Willaume, Atelier EXB, 2026.

SELECTION OF BOOKS

- *In praise of shadows*, Junichirô Tanizaki, Vintage Classics, 2025.
- *Wabi-Sabi: for Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers*, Leonard Koren, Imperfect Publishing, 2008.
- *Wabi-Sabi: further thoughts*, Leonard Koren, Imperfect Publishing, 2015.
- *A single rose*, Muriel Barbéry Pushkin Press, 2025.
- *One hour of fervour*, Muriel Barbéry, Pushkin Press, 2025.
- *Face's End*, Gérard Haller & Alain Willaume, L'Atelier Contemporain, 2024.
- *Images traversées*, Philippe Lamiral Poirier, TCPC Édition, 2025.

SELECTION OF FILMS / DOCUMENTARIES

- *Strasbourg Est. Portrait robot d'une ville d'occident à la fin du siècle*, Alain Willaume & Georges Pasquier, France 3 Alsace, 1988.
- *Phare Ouest. Chroniques d'Extrême-Europe n°1, Île de Fer – Territoire espagnol*, Anne Testut & Alain Willaume, Les Films de l'observatoire, Eurocréation Production, Testut & Willaume, 1991.
- *Alain Willaume, portrait robot au bord du gouffre*, Baudouin Koenig & Fulvia Alberti, SEPPIA & France 3 Alsace, 2004.
- *POESIS*, collectif Tendance Floue, 2016.
- *Les interstices du songe*, Wajdi Mouawad & Alain Willaume, Les Rencontres de la Photographie d'Arles, 2025.

SELECTION OF MUSIC

- *Night Owls*, the evening programme of Phaune Radio (10 p.m. – 6 a.m.).
- *Pour un 21 mars*, playlist curated by Alain Willaume.
- *Trop de lumière*, Philippe Lamiral Poirier.
- *Reprises*, Floriane Pochon & Alain Willaume (archive.phauneradio.com/creations/AW/reprises).



Stage design | Alain Willaume in collaboration with Céline Duval.

Prints | Sébastien Jouanny – Musée Nicéphore Niepce.

Large formats | Photon, Office Dépôt (Fateh).

Frames | Cadre blanc, Strasbourg.

Sound design | *Reprises* of Floriane Pochon, Phaune Radio.

Reprises simply *revisits*. A shakuhachi, stones, shadows, glimmers. Presences, absences, and a few breaths from elsewhere, shared. All of this woven together, left open enough for us to see through: what has been, what is missing, and the tenderness and strength we have poured into it to make it hold together. Right down to the very fibre. – F.P.

The shakuhachi piece is performed by Michio Shibata and recorded by Alain Willaume during a performance dedicated to him at the Villa Kujoyama auditorium on 8 May 2024. The shakuhachi is a Japanese flute of Chinese origin, with five holes, straight, made of bamboo.

STIMULTANIA

33 rue Kageneck
67000 Strasbourg

Exhibition: free admission
Wednesday to Saturday
2 p.m. – 6.30 p.m.

www.stimultania.org



POUR UN 21 MARS, PLAYLIST COMPOSÉE PAR ALAIN WILLAUME

- *There Were Bells*, Brian Eno, album *ForeverAndEverNoMore*, 2021.
- *Fólk fær andlit*, Hildur Guðnadóttir, album *The Echoes of Women*, 2025.
- *Silouans Song*, Arvo Pärt, 1991.
- *L'irréel*, Alain Bashung, album *L'imprudence*, 2002.
- *Alien Moonspace*, Luke Howard, album *The Sand That Ate The Sea*, 2019.
- *Valse crépusculaire*, Miklós Rózsa, musique du film *Providence* d'Alain Resnais, 1977.
- *The Repetition of History*, Field Rotation, album *Fatalist: The Repetition of History*, 2013.
- *Three Short Pieces* pour orchestre à cordes, Charles Ives, 1903-1935.
- *Petroglyph Canyon*, Jeff Grace, musique du film *La dernière piste (Meek's Cutoff)* de Kelly Reichardt, 2010.
- *Whale Overture*, Gabríel Ólafss avec la récitante Hera Hilmar, album *Polar: Traveler's Log*, 2025.
- *Komm, süßer Tod, BWV 478*, J.S.Bach. Arrangement pour chœur de Knut Nystedt, ensemble Accentus dirigé par Laurence Equilbey, 2017.
- *Vernal Equinox*, Jon Hassell, album *Vernal Equinox*, 1977.
- *Aeolus*, Theo Travis & Steven Wilson, 2024.
- *Symphonie n°3*, dite *Symphonie des chants plaintifs (Op. 36)*, Henryk Górecki, 1976. Soprano Beth Gibbons & Orchestre Symphonique National de la Radio Polonaise, dirigé par Krzysztof Penderecki, 2014.
- *Crossing*, Julia Kent, album *Stories from the Sea*, 2021.
- *Innocent and Vain*, Nico, album *The End*, 1974.
- *Burst Policy*, Kukangendai, album *Tracks*, 2023.
- *Lament: 3. Pater Peccavi*, Einstürzende Neubauten, album *Lament*, 2014.
- *Il voyage en solitaire*, Gérard Manet, album *Y a une route*, 1975.