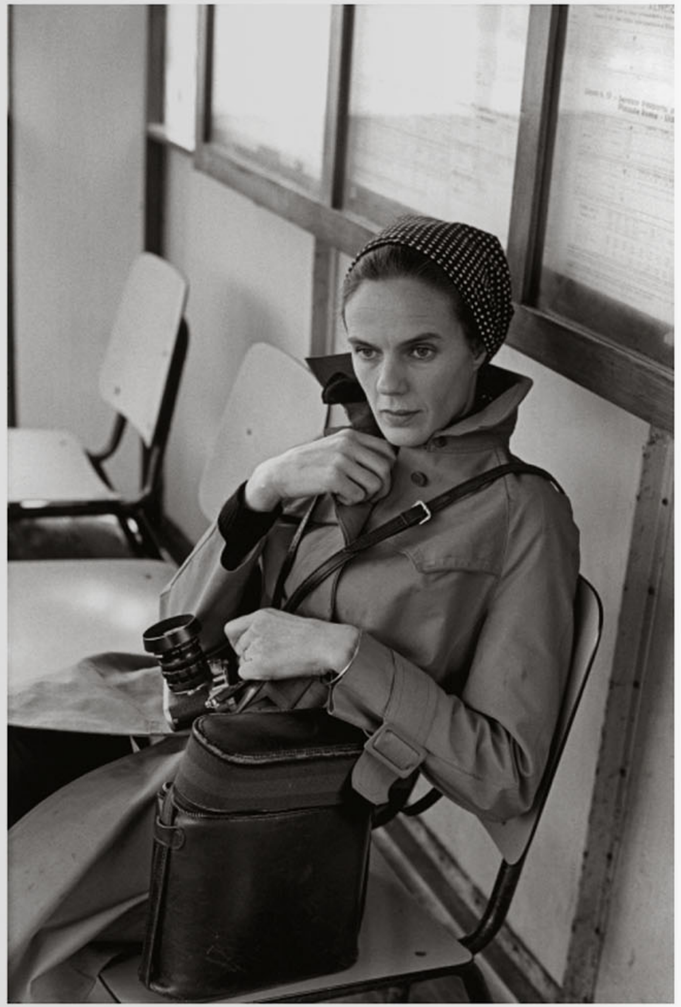

working there. She assured me that she would always be present, that she was happy with the idea of being absorbed into the universe and that her grandchildren were beautiful. She knew how to make me strong, she had great confidence in my taste and thanked me for introducing her to artists of whom she was unaware. I shared my questionings and she listened with infinite patience and generosity.

We agreed that her book should have a chronological structure, something she had never before attempted with her work, and that it should be accompanied by texts by different contributors. She added some less well-known images selected with care and made the decision to record a long conversation, general and subtle in content and to be published in the book,[4] with her writer friend Dominque Eddé, who then became one of its contributors. She also chose to include her vast body of work with the Théâtre du Soleil in the long, illustrated chronology, the result of an ongoing project she had devoted to it, deeming it to be a collective work.[5]

There was a lot at stake: compiling the book required a great deal of thought, it was a contextual process taking into account often very disparate elements, images such as a street demonstration, an interior portrait, or the sobriety of a landscape. Martine wanted to show how the various elements of her daily life came together. It would be a summary of sorts, attempting to show a life whose goal was to be a small stone in the edifice of society, as she explained: 'A drop of water in the river, but I believe in it. To be a photographer, you have to have a good eye, a sense of composition, compassion and a sense of commitment.'[6]

A committed photographer, certainly. Martine Franck found exclusion repellent: the exclusion of women, of Tibetans, the elderly, refugees, the inhabitants of Tory Island. She became an activist in support of many of the causes she photographed, demonstrating great courage in a well-brought up young woman who had been taught not to cross boundaries. She explained: 'The camera is itself a frontier… and to cross on to the other side, you can only get there by momentarily forgetting yourself.'[7]

She often photographed people – with no pretension, and whether famous or unknown – in later life, as if capturing a face lined with age were of more interest than one with the plump, smooth skin of youth; she seemed to peel away anything that was not essential. However, not everything can be photographed, as she explained: 'There are times when suffering and human degradation take hold of you and you stop.'[8] Sometimes her integrity would make her appear austere but it was how she managed to distance herself from the extremes of photojournalism with which she did not agree.

In this celebration of life, the unexpected comes from movement, from children jumping for joy, a bird perching on a monk's head, waves and clouds. The eye open. Photographing landscapes was a meditative exercise for Martine, far removed from a systematic topographical approach, an artform of shape and light whose origins may have lain in her detailed knowledge of sculpture, her first love, as revealed in the remarkable landscapes of stone, rippling with light, at the end of the book.

Should we see in her passion for Tibetan Buddhism a search for the absolute which the family of atheist free thinkers in which she grew up left open to question? Should we see in this recurrence of stones in her work a mystical observation, an attraction for the noble material?

Viva! She would no doubt have replied.[9]

The launch of the Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson (HCB), in 2003, orchestrated so brilliantly in collaboration with her husband and their daughter, was the culmination of Martine's achievements as a photographer. She explained that it was the moment when she finally felt proud of her family's legacy: 'Since setting up

4 | Conversation with Dominique Eddé, p. 269.

5 | 'I have always considered theatre photography as separate work. You are shown something that you actually have to record. The lighting, the action, it's all given to you. But it's an interesting challenge.' Interview with Céline Lecocq, July 2011, not published.

6 | Ibid.

7 | Conversation cited in book with John Berger.

8 | Michel Christolhomme, *Gérontologie sans frontière*, no. 164, October 2012.

9 | Martine Franck came up with the name of the Viva agency.

Opposite: Martine Franck by Henri Cartier-Bresson, Venice, Italy, 1972

preserving a distance from the photographed subject in order to reflect her position as an 'external observer': 'a photograph isn't necessarily a lie, but nor is it the truth; it's more of a fleeting, subjective impression'.[23]

Martine pursued her work independently of the issues regarding the documentary photography of her day. She favoured the isolated image that is self-sufficient, whose perfectly balanced composition captures the existential reality of the subject, stripped of any anecdotal aspects. The human subject lies at the heart of her work, which prefers to explore everyday life by adopting a 'documentary humanist approach'.[24] Studying her contact sheets reveals above all her great respect for – and even a certain humility towards – her subjects during the selection process.

Old age

'In this book [*A Time to Grow Old*], I want to show different aspects of ageing in various environments, looking for similarities from one image to the next, irrespective of where they were taken. I was trying to find out why old age is unsettling and how people are affected differently by ageing. All of which made me think hard.'[25]

In 1979 Martine Franck began to devote herself to her first private project – ageing – a subject that had appeared very early on in her work, particularly in the portraits and scenes of life that she captured during her travels and in her 1973 coverage of the community living in St-Pierre-de-Chaillot. She pursued this chosen topic – one that was very close to her heart – throughout her career. She was in effect confronted with the question of ageing prematurely, choosing as a life partner a man thirty years her senior. While ageing may be universal, it remains a taboo subject, and Martine aimed to address the various feelings raised by old age – fear, disgust, admiration, tenderness, hope, boredom, isolation – through the reality of many different experiences. She became a regular at hospices and retirement homes, meeting independent and self-reliant old people, and attended demonstrations and events organised for senior citizens. She covered both rural and urban areas, and expanded her horizons still further during trips abroad to Japan in 1978, Florida in 1979 and China in 1980, revealing the contrasting approaches to old age of cultures in the West and East. Everyday scenes or images of specific events, individual or group portraits combine to provide a varied exploration of the subject: loneliness, instability and degeneration are captured without pathos or gloomy negativity, while the vivacity of the eyes and the vitality of the expressions captured reflect strong individual personalities (pp. 77–89, 171). Martine was particularly sensitive to the outward signs of ageing, a kind of fingerprint left by time, and excelled at celebrating the wrinkles on faces and hands, sculpted by natural light: 'The wrinkles on these beautiful faces indicate the past just as the lines on your hand can predict the future.'[26]

Her portraits of older people are generally rooted in their surroundings: the interiors are decorated, indeed sometimes even swamped, with memories and souvenirs; photographs and objects reveal the individuality of the subject and the way they lived, together with their relationship with time and ageing (pp. 77, 82–83). Martine took a number of photographs of cemeteries, both at home in France and on her travels. Her images reveal the specific nature of each, shaped by the culture and faiths of the countries she visited, but importantly also their atmosphere. The detailed views of commemorative monuments – sculptures, inscriptions – seem to embody a desire to defy time and keep the memory of the deceased alive. She also captures the activity that occurs in places otherwise reserved for the dead: scenes of contemplation, but also of couple kissing (p. 122).

Martine Franck was interested in generational change and family history. She wrote: 'I have always been fascinated by family albums. What we do over time

23 | *Martine Franck, One Day to the Next*, a conversation with John Berger, Thames & Hudson, London, 1998.

24 | Clément Chéroux, 'La reconfiguration du monde', *Henri Cartier-Bresson*, Éditions du Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2013, p. 235.

25 | Martine Franck, *L'Hospice d'Ivry*, 1981.

26 | Luc Vezin, op. cit.

27 | Martine Franck, 'Famille' manuscript, Martine Franck Archives, Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson.

Opposite: Three generations of women, Reillanne, 1979


NEUF MILLIONS DE GRÉVISTES