

WORKING IN ARCHAEOLOGY

▶ **“WHAT IS YOUR JOB? – I AM AN ARCHAEOLOGIST”**

This unusual answer to a common question can leave both speakers puzzled. It suggests a very wide range of possibilities for which there may be no shared mental picture. The discussion may then continue around the nature of archaeological practice: “Do you dig?... with a brush?” “Or like Indiana Jones?” “Or to find out about a particular culture – the Romans? – or a particular site – the Pyramids?” To which the archaeologist may actually be able to say very little because it isn't their speciality. These conversations are often too brief, but we can expect a passionate discussion, because Europeans find archaeology and archaeologists fascinating.

BUT WHAT REALLY IS AN ARCHAEOLOGIST? WHAT DO THEY DO? WHAT IS THEIR JOB?

This exhibition of photographs suggests some answers and, going beyond the cliché, provides a photographic impression of what archaeologists do on a day-to-day basis. It explores the diversity of archaeological activities, the diversity of the periods studied, the objects discovered, the tools used, the techniques involved and the many ways of showing or doing.

▶ **A DISCIPLINE, A SCIENCE, A PROFESSION**

Archaeology is not a job but a discipline, part science, part art, and at the same time a professional occupation; a discipline because it considers the relationship between societies and their pasts; a science because it is about creating a body of knowledge with precise methods for researching the past; an art because it tells a story; and a profession because it takes part in an economic and social system and combines multiple jobs, specialities, and practices.

▶ **THE EUROPEAN ARCHAEOLOGIST**

This exhibition is also a reflection of the diversity of European archaeology today because the images come from seven countries: Belgium, Germany, France, Greece, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. In these countries the photographer, Pierre Buch, travelled to meet working archaeologists, and photograph the various stages of their activity. Through him, this exhibition is the result of the collective work of thirteen institutions which comprise a European archaeological network, supported by the European Union's 'Culture' 2007-2013 programme. This network “Archaeology in Contemporary Europe” offers European archaeologists the opportunity to think about their profession, its practices, its relationship with the public and to describe themselves through the artistic representation of their work intended for all audiences.

▶ **THE CONTEMPORARY ARCHAEOLOGIST**

The photographs displayed here sketch the images of the modern archaeologist and archaeology. Indeed the profession has undergone deep changes over the past three decades. If the reasons for these changes are multiple, we can however expose the most important ones: The European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Malta, 1992); emergence and expansion of the preventive archaeology: archaeological research that ensures the detection and the study of the archaeological heritage threatened by building works; deep changes in the European university; the reinforcement of public attachment to heritage... These changes in the field of training, research and spreading knowledge led naturally to the rise of archaeology as a complete and complex profession.

▶ **A POSSIBLE READING OF THE EXHIBITION**

Each one of Pierre Buch's photographs is independent and can be seen as a unique work. However, each picture is also accompanied by a keyword which helps categorise a facet of the archaeologist's work and to guide the visitor:

EXCAVATING because the archaeologist is often digging amongst buried remains even if they also work on standing buildings and monuments.

RECORDING as the excavation destroys its subject of research, recording finds has to be precise and systematic.

ANALYSING because to answer a defined research question, archaeologists have to make the remains in the laboratory “speak”.

PRESERVING because we have to conserve remains in order to study and present them now and to preserve them for the future.

TELLING because the first aim of archaeology is to elaborate and disseminate knowledge about the past, even if it is constantly changing.

A BEAUTIFUL CHALLENGE

A photographic exhibition showing the real face of contemporary archaeology in Europe! From prospection to the museum through excavation, restoration, preservation, storage, studying and publication... exciting but not easy.

Although excavated objects can be magnificent, the tools, the machines and the laboratories are not especially photogenic. Indoors, outdoors, uncertain lighting, little time, each shot has to be understandable by everyone! Even with much experience, to illustrate without trivialising, to consistently mix aesthetic and content was a beautiful challenge.

The thing that you can't see immediately through the pictures is who the archaeologists themselves are. Passionate about their work, accepting often difficult and sometimes insecure conditions of employment, they compel admiration through their commitment. They can't be aware of this fact, but it is obvious to anyone who has worked with other professions: they are welcoming, warm-hearted, modest...you can't feel anything but friendship toward them. It was a pleasure to work with them and so to pay tribute to them.

Pierre Buch

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This exhibition is presented in the UK by the Archaeology Data Service, a service hosted by the Department of Archaeology at the University of York and dedicated to supporting research, learning and teaching with freely available, high quality and dependable digital resources and directed by Professor Julian Richards, Head of the Department of Archaeology, at the University of York.

www.ace-archaeology.eu

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