

It was from the flow of the Linmat River in Zurich that I began to know the city.

To walk from my home to the river, I had to cross several traffic lights. The roads sloped downwards. One road passed several bus stops, the 46 and the 32, and crossed two traffic lights. The other road required only one traffic light. The two paths converged under a bridge above the river.

One path involved descending a circular staircase, hidden between the bridge pillars, leading to a playground for skateboarders, connected to a sandy beach volleyball court and a terraced makeshift bar. The bar is no longer there because of the epidemic. The open space and facilities extended down to the riverbank. The platform could be crowded in good weather.

In previous summers, there was hardly any space, and the crowds occupied the sunny parts of the riverbank. Those on the bank would inadvertently make their way to the river, swim against the current, then float downstream to a spot where they could climb out, drag their wet bodies back to where they had been resting, lie down, and enjoy the sunshine. They would repeat this a few more times.

On the other side, a staircase going straight up and down led past a modern architectural church. A bus bar extended towards the other end of the river. With the river on the left and a small bridge over the power station on the right. Under the big bridge or by the small bridge, besides the party, there were dogs, swans, lovers, ducks, and lake gulls. The water was clear to the bottom, and sometimes fish could be seen swimming at the surface. As lazy as the people were, the birds and animals here were also laid back.

This was the beginning of my time in Zurich, experiencing the river flowing through my body, both in control and out of control. The river, the birds, the animals, the summer sun, and the people jumping off the bridge created a scene both familiar and strange. Following the river upstream to Lake Zurich for a boat ride, the hills and scattered buildings on both banks felt both familiar and foreign.

Is this my home?

A new place, some new people, something new. The world, the landscape, seemed as familiar to me as the emotions, demeanor, and destiny of the people. I would walk a long way past many places and people, past buildings and weather, past emotions and history. Sometimes I would stop because of the people, the graffiti, the circulating crowds, or the flowing river.

Around 2010, I began to understand the state of being a guest, a traveler, a nomad, and I also called myself a Mongolian, making the journey my home. At the time of writing these words, we had not yet met: Catherine Gfeller lives in France, was born in Switzerland, and her friend Michele Sandoz was also a friend of mine. Because of the epidemic, we could only communicate via the internet, and looking at her online portfolio felt like looking at my own career as a guest in Zurich, and everywhere on a journey.

From the landscape to the people, constantly meeting and parting. As during the epidemic, people and events dissipate from the picture of the world. The familiar and the alien, the historical and the present, the images and information that remain in the digital world as the epidemic leaves or adds to it.

This is the time and the people I see in Catherine Gfeller's work, from the gaze on the landscape in her early earthy photographs, through the march of the female body, to the women and events - all both familiar and foreign.

Li Zenhua, Zürich, 2021