



The interlocking planes of primary colours recall the work of abstract painter Piet Mondrian. Yet this is a photograph, one that depicts a paper collage made solely for the camera. The series title 'Looking at something that does not exist as if it did' leads the viewer to question where reality lies, if anywhere. Bertin's imagery is rooted in painting and sculpture, but photography grants it conceptual punch.

#44

GASTON BERTIN

2000

Gaston Bertin (1965–) started out as a street photographer, inspired by such legends as Henri Cartier-Bresson (see pp.44–45). However, this changed when, as a student in New York, he came under the guidance

of a new tutor. Lillian Bassman, the well-known fashion photographer and influential art director at *Harper's Bazaar*, set the class an assignment that radically altered his approach to photography. He explains: she asked them 'to photograph "origin"'. The project took him into the realms of abstraction. He spray-painted an egg cobalt blue and set it against a blood-red background. 'To get rid of the material surface . . . I started to play with the focus of my camera.' Looking through his viewfinder, the object began to lose its foothold in reality and seemed to dematerialize into simple shapes and hues. He recalls, 'The colours started to interact and something magical happened.' The result, *Blue Egg* (1989), he describes as 'the beginning of my journey into non-figurative photography'. From there, it was a small step to abandoning everyday objects in favour of creating ephemeral paper sculptures. Yet despite Bertin's artistic shift, he couches the process in terms of street photography: 'I am still looking for the perfect moment, the magic incident or to quote the words of Cartier-Bresson "the decisive moment"'



Bertin admits to being inspired by the Minimalist art movement of the 1960s, via paintings by Ellsworth Kelly and sculptures by Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt and Donald Judd. However, the artist who influenced his work the most remains Piet Mondrian, and in particular his abstracts such as *Composition II in Red, Blue and Yellow* (1930).



Over the years, Bertin has amassed a vast collection of different types of paper. Using simple tools, such as scissors and glue, he transforms paper sheets into three-dimensional handmade collages that play with colour, scale and shape. He photographs these constructions with natural light, adjusting focus and depth of field to obliterate their surface and materiality. New images are informed by old images; the paper sculptures and their photographic traces slowly mutate, like a gradual but thoughtful evolution.

📷 Nikon F3, 105mm macro lens



#1, from the series 'New Now', 2009

#4, from the series 'White Now', 2010



*Photography is about reality: if one decides not to represent reality, the central subject in photography remains reality.*