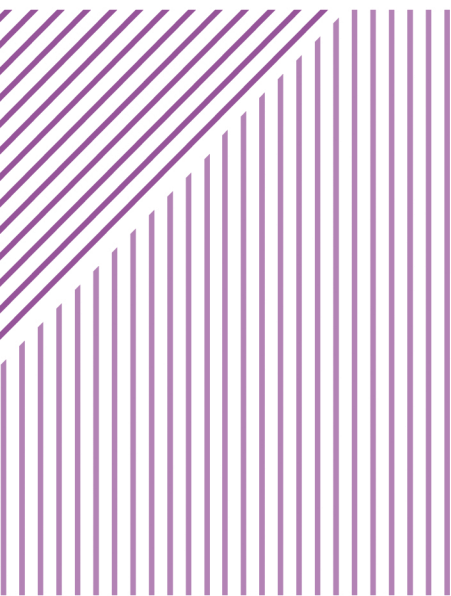


# LA PROFUNDIDAD DE LA SUPERFICIE

MAURICIO ALEJO



[ CUADERNILLO CURATORIAL ]

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## **La profundidad de la superficie**

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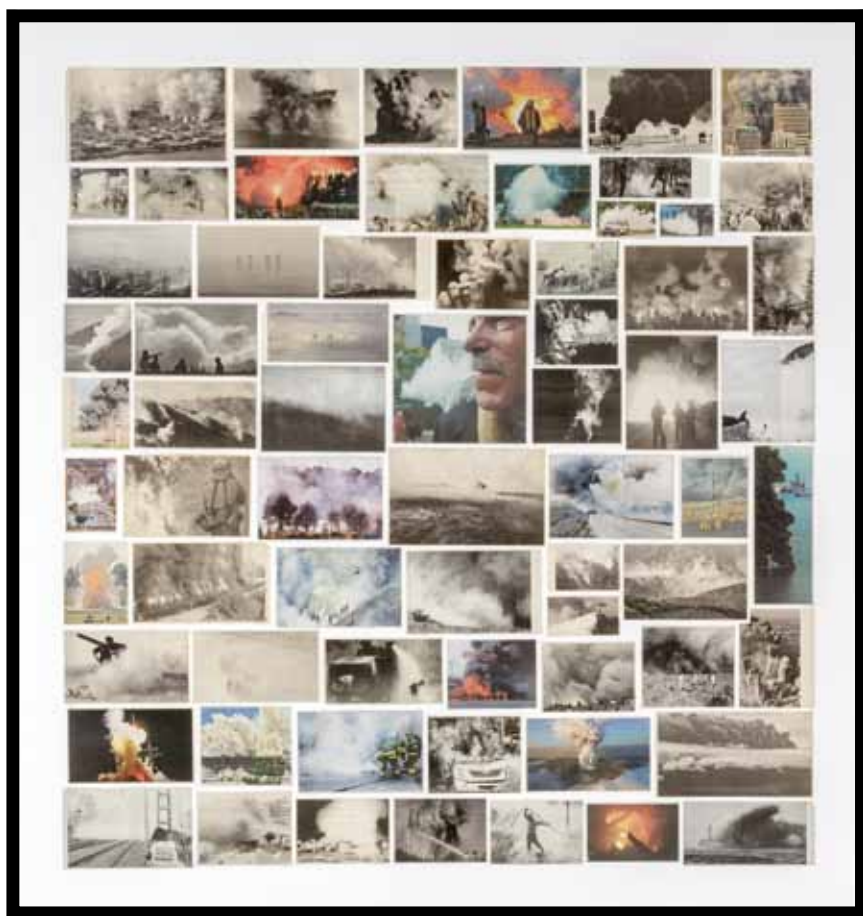
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**Jonathan Hernández.** *Vulnerabilia (Desaparición III)*, 2013. Recortes de periódico sobre cartón. Artista invitado por el curador. Imagen cortesía del autor y kurimanzutto. Foto: Estudio Michel Zabé.

# THE DEPTH OF THE SURFACE

MAURICIO ALEJO

I use the surface as the subject and leitmotiv of this exhibition because the latter features different artists in whose work I see a clear assimilation of a process by which the relationship between reality and photography has been upset. This undermining of the photography/reality relationship manifests itself in current art practice as an opacity. That is to say that depth is often eliminated, creating a tension on the surface by bringing visual or conceptual relations to the fore. Thus, access to the referent becomes secondary and one's attention turns towards structure itself and the meanings or experiences it produces. At other times, this opacity is not metaphorical but literal, i.e. there is a loss of spatial depth, whether through its concealment, the destruction of the photographic surface or a superposition of materials.

With all the artists I present here, I see projects that are not based on the power of reality to manifest itself in photography, but rather on photography's power to project its reality onto the world. The artists assume this as a discourse and utilize strategies that betray the way in which photography constructs truths; these strategies are historical, as in the case of Jonathan Hernández, personal, as with Salomé Fuentes Flores or Eric Scibor-Rylski, or based on a fictional version of the historic, as with María María Acha-Kutscher.

In Iñaki Bonillas's case, the archive is not used to analyze the circumstances of a family history: instead, it is family history in the shape of an archive that is used to analyze and dissect the circumstances of the photographic.

It is a fact that photography is not self-evident, i.e. it does not explain the meaning of what it is explaining, or to quote Okwui Enwezor, "it appears quite the case that a documentary can record something that is true but fail to reveal the truth of that something."<sup>1</sup>

We often forget that the legibility of a photograph, its "truth," comes from a meta-text (a caption, whether written or spoken) that lends it a place and a meaning in the historical continuum. Mexican artist Jonathan Hernández's series *Vulnerabilia* is especially eloquent in this sense. Hernández plays a game of dismantling photojournalism

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1. Okwui Enwezor, "Documentary/Vérité," in *The Green Room: Reconsidering Documentary and Contemporary Art #1* (Berlin & New York: Sternberg Press/The Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, 2008) 94.

by stripping it of its historical referents and turning it into material for collages. Here, the clear understanding of the photographic image as surface and ambiguous referent of reality establishes formal resonances and semantic dissonances that circulate inside the images and extend into reality, transforming the world from which they come into something equivocal and absurd.

It seemed important to me to invite other Mexican artists like Hernández who have a strong international presence, have contributed to the understanding of photography, and yet have stayed outside of the Mexican photography milieu, not because they wanted to exclude themselves but because their concerns did not coincide with the dominant discourses in Mexican photography. I included them because their critical approach, as outsiders to the milieu, contributes much to the analysis of the phenomenon of the photographic and explains some of the new forms of practice that are emerging today.

This is precisely the case of Iñaki Bonillas, who takes part in this exhibition with a project that posits the surface as a site of reflection and as an aesthetic event. In these pieces, initially made for Printed Matter, Bonillas broadens the research he had been doing on the reproduction and distribution of painting in art books. Though it is considered a secondhand experience, no one escapes this way of first coming into contact with famous paintings. Without judging in any way the relevance of this means of contact with art, Bonillas understands it as an experience in itself, which he intensifies by printing pictures of well-known paintings in black and white on either side of thin sheets of paper. He decided to do this after accidentally coming across this form of presentation in his research. Light coming through the thin paper blends the two pictures together, producing an evocative confusion that seems to allude to a mental place in which it is impossible to distinguish the original from its reproductions.

Another artist I invited, Diego Berruecos, has been working on a long-term project that, like Bonillas's and Hernández's, is based on the fundamental principle of the archive. Here, Berruecos presents the project *No Border Dividing Words from Thinking*, a series of silkscreens of the covers of *Proceso* magazine showcasing one of the most active and critical periods of the writer-reporter Julio Scherer.

With a work method that bears similarities to Sarah Charlesworth's projects from the late 1970s, which consisted in erasing text from newspapers and only leaving pictures, Berruecos eliminates the texts and obscures most of the images by overlaying them with blocks of solid color, but he does not modify the magazine's original layout. The result is a formal, geometric and chromatic game that reduces the cover to the basic discourse of mid-twentieth-century modernist formalism. The new surfaces that Berruecos's intervention proposes seem to be a critical reminder of the promises that the Mexican project of modernity and progress was never able to fulfill.

I find it relevant to mention the participation of several sculptors whose submissions were also selected by the jury. It seems to me that this is a natural consequence of the awareness and sensibility they have of photography as an object and ultimately,



**Diego Berruecos.** De la serie *Sin frontera que separe las palabras del pensamiento*, ciudad de México, 2013.  
Serigrafía. Artista invitado por el curador.

as a material surface. Alejandro Almanza Pereda shows *The Less Things Change, The Less They Stay the Same*. With the rigor of a systematized record, it presents us with a grid of fifty-three photographs of possible permutations and transformations of a black aluminum shelving unit. The photos are black and white, similar to the simple, concise documents made by conceptual artists of the 1960s. With its transformations, the shelving unit is reminiscent of Alexander Calder's mobiles. I mention this because Almanza shares with Diego Berruecos and other participants a visual affinity with the geometric rationalism and elegant cleanliness of the modernist project.

Though Almanza's grid presents us with strict documentary pictures of a process, the interesting thing about it is that it is not about the particularity of each record, but rather about the image that these permutations create as a whole. There is indeed no sequence, but rather a simultaneity and interdependence that obscure the depth and negate the individuality of each shot; again, it is more about willfully creating an image than presenting an observation. The black photo corners that mimic the shelving unit's black interruptions of the white background—as they hold up each photo on this side of the image—contribute to this effect. The sculpture becomes a drawing more than an event. *The Less Things Change, The Less They Stay the Same* is more of an object than a photographic record.

Another kind of complexity is introduced by Ramiro Chaves's project xxxxxxxxxx, displayed on the wall as the product of the development of an archive exploring the imagery of the letter x in the foundation of Mexican identity. Chaves explicitly deals with this exploration from his personal point of view: instead of attempting an encyclopedic approach, he tries to establish connections between individual and group identity. The images on the wall are not so much the final result, but more just a part of the process of this participative project, whose life on the Internet is a much more active as it proposes to generate a collective archive based on people's experiences of the letter x. Chaves looks to architecture as the detonator. One of the architects he refers to is Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, a champion of Mexican modernist architecture, responsible for designing some of Mexican modernism's most emblematic buildings. As I have said, this period of creation is referred to repeatedly in many of the participants' projects.

For her part, Fabiola Menchelli, with a simplicity that could only be called elegant, takes the process of analyzing the image to a very controlled place where she forces us to observe and participate in its sophisticated dissection. Looking at her work, what we see are black-and-white abstractions whose form and style reproduce the geometric purity of high modernism. At first glance, we are not sure whether or not her images are photographs: they seem instead to be colorless drawings bereft of any historical indicators—mere surfaces that lead us to an experience whose only aim seems to be formal contemplation. What follows that first moment is an enigmatic jumble of planes, reflections, distances and surfaces.

In more than one way, Menchelli's work has a kinship with early-twentieth-century Vorticist photography, which added mirrors to the camera's lens to form a kind of



kaleidoscope, though in her case there is no visual prosthesis. What we are actually looking at are real geometric cutouts or objects made by the artist on which she projects more geometric shapes with a digital projector. In many of these constructions, it is difficult to gauge distances, to tell light from shadow or reflection from material. The photographic surface denies us entry to the real event, and in this sense, to clarity—this is not to fool us but rather to show us again that the image is constructed. In this surface, Menchelli invents a physical and temporal intersection where the real sculpture takes place in the mind of the viewer.

Carlos Lara Amador is an artist better termed a sculptor than a photographer. His work's formal results are very different from Menchelli's, though both artists play with the awareness of the two-dimensional character that seems to exist prior to physical space. Lara Amador has the singular ability of creating constructions or presenting discoveries that prefigure their existence in photographs; indeed, he does not make sculptures in order to photograph them, but instead produces collages in space. As in Menchelli's case, light is an essential element in the making of the work.

The use of a flash, which expresses immediacy, spontaneity and irreverence in Lara Amador's work, functions as a tool of formal transformation: it homogenizes depth and causes the foreground and the background to collapse onto one another, juxtaposing them to form a single level where objects, colors and textures coexist in disorderly fashion, like they do in a collage. The flash turns everything into a surface. Reality is pre-configured as an image.

Lara Amador belongs to the *zeitgeist* of the global city in the way that he combines immediately available materials, concerned with nothing but their form. There is no such thing here as natural or artificial. With these artists, there is a continual feeling of collage, of the fragmentary superposition of reality—an atomization of perception and an experience of the world that refuses to be formulated as a coherent whole. This generation of artists is more familiar with the image in its electronic state, whose logic of agglomeration comes from the Internet and raster graphics editing programs like Photoshop.

Another example of the opacity of images is the work of Aglae Cortés. The piece she is exhibiting is a polyptych that cleverly generates a constant tension between what it reveals and what it conceals. The perfect exemplification of this is her photograph of a frame taken edge-on. From this angle, we cannot see the framed image but merely the non-descriptive edge: it expresses nothing but its condition of rectangle and its only relevance is its repetition as a geometric shape in other photographs of the polyptych, whether as a plywood surface or as a windowless wall. And yet, the latter are less pictures of a building or a piece of plywood than of obstructions in the landscape. The barrenness of the surface of these geometries functions as an obstacle that arrests our gaze and redirects it, superficially, towards other images in the series; it facilitates the transition between the rectangles represented and the rectangular photographic format—including the green mass of foliage that takes up the entire frame and ultimately also camouflages a figure...



**Fabiola Menchelli.** "Section Cut", de la serie *Constructions*, Boston, Massachusetts, 2012-2013.  
Archival Pigment Print. Premio de adquisición de la XVI Bienal de Fotografía.



En ambas páginas: **Ramiro Chaves**. De la serie *XXXXXXXXXX*, México, 2013. Inyección de tinta sobre papel bond.  
Mención honorífica de la XVI Bienal de Fotografía.

We are, visibly, witnessing an obliteration of the represented. In this impenetrability, a language of forms begins to contaminate another language and to discharge its meaning into it. For instance, the cowlick on someone's head is taken from the same angle as the shot of the trees; it even reproduces the strategy, allowing the person to be seen while not being seen. Whatever is happening in this piece, it is not happening in reality but only in the relations within the surface itself.

Like many of the other artists, Alex Dorfsman resorts to the archive. And yet, this is an archive that he himself has created; however, he does not treat it with the familiarity of a personal narrative, but rather with the distance of someone who perceives it as alien. This detachment allows him to create contexts that imply a critique of the image, where the goal is not to reconstruct one's experience, but rather to reveal all the mechanisms behind this construct.

For the Biennale, Dorfsman presents a rigorously gridded polyptych in which the images are nonetheless distributed arbitrarily—the same arbitrariness with which the experiences depicted seem to have been uprooted from the continuum of his existence. The grid structure, which supports the fragmentation of the world, does not manage to reconstitute it, but only serves to emphasize its random nature. Thus, without anything to latch onto, the images, which are mostly surfaces and textures drawn from nature, are something in between contemplative observation and a log-book. Nonetheless, the whole, which seems to evoke an experience (of traveling), serves more to evince the inaccessibility of the real through memory; in this way, the images begin to function as phrases lacking in context that introduce the possibility of a narrative in which time has collapsed. As an observer, I cannot be sure about any reality, and as the narrator, I share in the possible experience, whose cohesion comes from the arrangement in a grid and the harmony of the colors. By accumulation, the multiple images are interrelated and create a discourse in which the surface becomes the guiding principle.

With a minimal amount of refuse—including things like lint, saliva, hair and blood—Gabriela Lobato makes photographs that deal with family settings and individual memory with emotional intensity. As macroscopic shots of garbage gathered around her home, the images successfully avoid producing a mere record and, with lyricism and free of inhibitions, end up settling in a territory more akin to painting. What saves these pictures from revisiting 1990s body art and its propensity for scatology is the honest inclusion of brightly colored artificial fibers that add a range of unusual colors to the mixture of elements. Shot with very little depth of field, the ground and the surface of these images acquire a softness that makes them enter a limbo of fragility, though they still produce an intense reflex of repulsion in the viewer. The interesting thing in this series of images is the aesthetic tension that issues from two qualities of the photographs: their painterly quality generates a force of attraction, while their power to invoke the real keeps abjection present and generates a force of repulsion. With no possibility of reconciliation, these two forces remain active, creat-



**Aglae Cortés.** De la serie *Aforismos visuales (Paisaje N° 7)*. México, 2012-2014. Inyección de tinta sobre papel de algodón. Artista seleccionada de la XVI Bienal de Fotografía.

ing a tension that—like a parabolic trajectory—maintains these images in the orbit of abjection and beauty.

Paradoxically, Alejandra Laviada's sculptural ability can be attributed to the fact that she possesses an even more extraordinary painterly clarity. This can be seen in the very first pictures she took where, using straight photography, she managed to tame and transform dissimilar objects found around her studio into colors, forms and geometric relations. In a second stage of evolution in her work, in the *Photosculptures* series, Laviada began to create the objects she was going to photograph. These were spontaneous sculptural constructions, which casually used available objects to produce photographic records of a unique visual intensity. It is a fact that these sculptural arrangements were even more enigmatic in the photographic surface than as objects. However, this allowed Laviada to explore this space and its intersection with the space of the photographic image.

It is not surprising that, in this process of exploring the surface, the depth of the physical space represented would be flattened until it became, in Laviada's last project, more of an abstraction than a presence, in a style that also has much to do with the geometric abstraction of modernism. In these recent photographs, the only space that continues to exist is the photographic surface; here, the volume of the objects represented acquires a ghostly presence due to the use of double exposures, as if it were about the distant memory of the physical space that they came from. In this manner, the real event we are witnessing happens only on the surface of the negative. Reality vanishes and the construction, in this new site, is no longer made in space, but instead in time.

It is difficult not to approach María Luz Bravo's work through the filter of the photographic tradition of the American road trip. Though there is a certain influence of the ubiquitous "Düsseldorf School of Photography," especially in Bravo's first landscape pieces, she adds subtlety to the rigid frontal shots, interjecting formal comments that translate into more spontaneous visual discoveries. This is not an experiential work, and if we were to look for its influences, we would have to refer to the rigor of Stephen Shore, with hints of the visual skill of William Eggleston. The matter of the landscape that Bravo represents imposes its theme as a desolate terrain—whether this desolation is due to violence, as in the case of Mexico, or due to an economic slump, as is the case of the pictures entitled *Reclaims* that she presents in this Biennale and that were taken in the United States.

I would like to comment on two photographs in this series: one shows a red post, which in Bravo's eyes seems to become a substance that contaminates the landscape, and another depicts a fountain with green water that, in its state of abandonment, seems to be the origin of all the color in the landscape. Bravo's work provides the ideal place for these visual discoveries to inhabit the photographic surface.

Carlos Iván Hernández's work displays a clearer influence of the Düsseldorf School. Based on a rigorous frontal grid divided by strong lines, his discourse is very

far removed from mere observation without commentary. His topic is the desert landscape but also *Rubble*, which is how his series is titled. In a sense, unlike the Bechers, who presented industrial typologies at a time of booming development, Hernández seems to show us the decline of these dreams. The desert, in Hernández's work, is not only a landscape, but a powerful force that destroys the civilized. It is another version of the barbarity that, in the imaginary landscape of the tropical, takes the shape of an exuberant nature that encroaches upon and reclaims any territory conquered by civilization.

The desert is absence, the horizon and negative space. Forgotten, demolished or just decrepit, Hernández's constructions recover their monumental sculptural dignity when he empties them into the mold of the frontal shot that isolates and reconstitutes them based on their geometric forms.

Salomé Fuentes Flores presents three videos that are especially appropriate for this exhibition. Loaded with a confessional spirit, they function as rituals of making in which an exorcism of personal history is performed based on the image's surface. One of the videos consists of six shots of circular photos from a family album lined up against a black background. We have the feeling of looking at the colors through a kaleidoscope: the chromatic aberration and the blurriness charge these images with the aura of a child's game, the remote past and nostalgia. Towards the center, there is a single picture featuring a paternal figure. The video could simply be depicting printed photographs, but the video's random, flickering colored lights remind one of the material quality of the slide. They turn the image into a membrane through which the past seems to filter; an action where the subtlety of the light lends a very tangible quality to the surface of one's memories, and at the same time, sparks the emergence of a complex, unexpected feeling—a festive celebration mingling with overwhelming sadness.

I situate Eric Scibor-Rylski alongside Salomé Fuentes Flores because there are at least two things that make them similar, though they use different media. One of these things is the use of the image as a means of narrating a personal story, and the other is the use of narrative as a temporal sequence.

Unlike other polyptychs presented in this show, Scibor-Rylski's features an arrangement of images whose legibility is tied to film. There is—or there is a simulation of—an apparent evolution in time. This is not actual time, but rather a proposed sequence that is presented as a movement in space in the form of travel. In this case, the form and the content refer to the artist's journey to go see his sick father. Time is simulated and subjective. It serves to organize the images in space, with an interdependence that does not indicate reality but rather a subjective experience of the world.

Pamela Zeferino is another artist who works primarily as a sculptor. Entitled *Erasing the City*, her series deals with the simple action of excising the urban to conjure up the hypothetical. What happens if nature reclaims the territory? The result is a suggestive series of images in which the power of the gesture—quick, energetic, decisive marks—obliterates manmade structures. I should mention that in the process



**Gabriela Lobato.** "Marzo 22" y "Restos de febrero", de la serie *Deshilando*, ciudad de México, 2013. Impresión digital.  
Artista seleccionada de la XVI Bienal de Fotografía.





**María Luz Bravo.** De la serie *Reclaims*, Estados Unidos: Detroit, Harlem, Queens, New Heaven, 2012-14.  
Impresión digital por inyección de tinta sobre papel de algodón. Artista seleccionada de la XVI Bial de Fotografía.

of scratching out the city as referent, Zeferino leaves another trace: that of a self-as-gesture that turns the surface into a site, a conjuring up of possibilities, a projection of the imaginable.

I especially like two images from Zeferino's sketchbook: they are notes rather than pieces, but they reveal the visual and conceptual synthesis that takes place in the making of her work. In a minimal, evocative action, Zeferino once again uses photography as a kind of magic spell, cutting up and straightening a fallen tree. It is a gesture that restores its dignity but that also acknowledges the difficulty of transformative action.

The other image is a record of a fence recently painted white; due to someone's carelessness, plants next to it have been covered in paint. This candid picture of reality displays a visual process that comes out of Zeferino's particular work method, revealing metaphors coded in the surface. The white paint thus becomes the substance of urban development while at the same time it blots out nature.

Andrés Felipe Orjuela Castañeda is a Colombian artist who has lived in Mexico City since 2008. The two pieces he shows in this exhibition are photographs taken from an archive, which was lost and subsequently found, of the Bogotá-based *El Espacio* newspaper. The re-photographed, blown-up images depict a seized marijuana shipment and an arrested drug trafficker. The pictures have artificial-looking pastel shades, which are the result of the artist's intervention with oil paints that have been used since the mid-nineteenth century to color black-and-white photographs. These pictures correspond to a time when evidence was generated in the press to satisfy, among other things, the United States' demands for a crackdown on drug production, consumption and trafficking in Latin America. Over time, these kinds of images have become a model, a formula for turning violence into entertainment, transforming the arrests and seizures into momentary altars where the figure of the drug trafficker seems to acquire a heroic role.

Orjuela reflects on this mechanism of image production. His work does not deal with violence per se, but with the cultural product generated by the media's depiction of violence. By blowing up archival images and painting them using a technique that even in its heyday was pretentiously aestheticizing, Orjuela invalidates the pictures' function. With a painterly contrivance situated somewhere between fascination and irony, he disengages these images from their historical past as a newspaper document and lends them the patina of an ambiguous past which ties them to an indefinite universe of images that belong to the nostalgic realm of the family album.

Orjuela places the small original photo, with its back to us, in the same frame in which he exhibits the hand-tinted photograph. This gesture is more about the sculptural, the presence of the document as object, though the act of flipping it over means ignoring the original image, allowing us instead to see the publisher's handwritten notes, including dates and specific facts. In other words, Orjuela lets us see the meta-text, the field of meanings to which the image pertains, and he gives us the possibility of returning it to the historical continuum.

With this series, Orjuela shows the complexity of photographic representation. On the one hand, he underscores its iconic quality by aestheticizing it through the use of artifice. This same iconic quality is the raw material that nourishes the media's depiction of violence and produces the phenomenon of spectacle. But Orjuela does not let the image go in that direction, and instead anchors it to the actual object: the text and aura lend weight and historical density to the whole, introducing a reflection about the making of images based on a critical interpretation of surface.

Hugo Lugo presents a performance in the form of a book of photographs, displayed in sequence in an accordion design. The book consists of twelve images of a landscape in which the artist turns like a kind of sundial in the center of a valley. In a narrative that is both sequential and circular, it seems quite appropriate to use the book placed in the space like a sculpture to reproduce an experience that initially had sculptural implications. Of all the actions that take place here, the most important one might be that in which the artist holds a small mirror which he uses to reflect the sun, thus very simply creating a visual metaphor where he is holding the sun in his hands. The action is not performed only so it can be photographed: indeed, it can only exist in this form, as its relevance is strictly photographic. Thus, using the bare minimum of elements necessary for the photographic action (lighting, the object that is illuminated, and the camera that records), Lugo relates these components to the universe by producing a constellation of three physical points: the distant sun, the artist who holds it as it emanates from him, and the photographic camera that is the witness. All of these are aligned in the direction of the image's surface, which displays this significant relationship whose crux is the artist himself.

Antonio Bravo Avendaño is a sculptor who uses the language of scientific documentation to present his own archive to us. This is a collection of rocks that are the result of a research process aimed at creating "the perfect stone as an offensive weapon." The objects were made following the methodology of industrial design, based on conversations with various specialists or people who had been involved in armed confrontations. What is interesting is the way in which the format of the photographic document subjects these rocks to the neutralizing authority of scientific observation. Thus, Bravo Avendaño puts these objects into circulation in the discourse of archaeology, associating them with similar objects from ancient times. In this relation, what stands out is the fundamental primitivism of these sophisticated blunt instruments—a primitivism that is accentuated precisely because of the methodological complexity of the making of the stones. The implicit prestige of scientific discourse casts a shadow of irony onto these objects, which have always represented the palpable struggle of disenfranchised people.

The work shown by María María Acha-Kutscher is a collage using archival images, which seem to be of real spaces from specific periods in history, thanks to her digital editing skills using Photoshop. Entitled *Womankind*, the series of four photographs of women resists the classification of "portrait." Set in an intensely personal space and



**Carlos Iván Hernández.** De la serie *Despojo*, Hermosillo, Sonora, 2013. Impresión digital sobre papel de algodón.  
Artista seleccionado de la XVI Bienal de Fotografía.

time, the women do not acknowledge the presence of the camera, and instead seem lost in a moment of reverie or self-absorption, a possible result of the freedom of spare time. The domestic space, which also plays an important role in this series, increases the sense of intimacy and yet paradoxically magnifies our feeling that the experience of each of these women is inaccessible to us. Nonetheless, the exuberant ornamentation and imagery of the settings provides us with something legible, counteracting these women's distant indifference and the specific hermeneutic opacity of some of the scenes' components.

These constructions, which simulate the weight of the real, are the product of the artist's intuitive accumulation as she interweaves meanings, based more on a coherent state of mind than on a specific discourse.

It is impossible not to be reminded of Martha Rosler's work from the late 1960s entitled *Bringing the War Home*, which also represented domestic space through collage. This was a functional space, in which the action of cleaning one's house reveals the violence of war invading one's own territory. In Rosler's collages, women appear to be subject to a command of production, while in Acha-Kutscher's, they seem to be in control of a time of glamorous leisure where the artist seems to be examining the residue of historical events that permitted the emancipation of women.

Like a scene within a scene, paintings on walls function as phrases excerpted from other texts. But the women are not models on display in real space as the mere matter of representation; instead, their self-referential state means that the artist can reconfigure possible histories of female representation.

If there is a way in which a photograph can become transparent, it is by obscuring its own surface, which is originally white, and mimicking the surface it reproduces. But Laura Meza Orozco does the opposite: she is not interested in transparency, but rather in the whiteness.

Meza Orozco presents five simple pieces whose topic is fading, disappearance—the disappearance of the object and the blurring of the real. Working with the subtleties of the color white, the tame appearance of Meza Orozco's images is deceptive. In one of her photographs we see two glasses of water arranged symmetrically. There is nothing special in the repetition of a glass, except for the fact that one holds holy water and the other, "regular" water, as the caption accompanying the pictures explains. There is nothing in the photograph itself that allows us to perceive this reality. It is the text that, like a minimal energy that settles upon the water, establishes this truth in our minds. Very straightforwardly, Meza Orozco shows us that certain photographs convey their truths through an act of faith. Similarly, in another photograph, the artist displays a world map connected at the poles (this action produces a volume where there was only a plane). And yet the photograph hides this point of connection from our sight. There is evasiveness, a kind of absence, which is sometimes conveyed by words and sometimes by the surface of the whiteness itself, as in one photograph where a white net is so subtly outlined that it threatens to disappear into the ground.

In the videos that Adam Wiseman presents, nothing seems to happen while much is actually happening. Though the subjects posing are unaware of it, they are being captured on video before Wiseman takes their picture. He makes up some excuse to leave the room, leaving the subjects alone, in their own private space, artificially prolonging the conscious experience that leads to their becoming an image. With this simple strategy of exiting the space, Wiseman sets up the structure that undergirds the piece: the creation of a private space that is situated at an intense intersection with the public.

In the mind of the person being photographed is the certainty that they will exist as an image—the experience of a self that is about to transcend. This objectified self, which can be disseminated on social networks, constructs a public identity. It is with this conviction that the person being photographed acts out their role, expecting to create a proper version of themselves. Without the need for words, based on our own experience and because we are prone to empathize, we recognize the mental process of the person about to become this other self that inhabits the photographic image.

We have been invited to witness this moment, not as viewers but as voyeurs, as intruders in a genuinely private space. Wiseman invites us to surreptitiously watch someone who isn't yet fully "clothed" in their own image. From a privileged and slightly mischievous place, we witness this vulnerability—we observe someone observing themselves in their mind's eye.

Though still images clearly exist as part of Wiseman's process, they are not displayed in this exhibition. The power of his work lies in the fact that it is sustained by the immateriality of the image. It is in the absence of the final object that the process acquires the specific weight it deserves, where generating mental images becomes the actual portrait. A more complex portrait that not only shows the person candidly, but also points out the intricate mechanisms of self-perception and coded identity in photographic images.



**Antonio Bravo Avendaño.** De la serie *Estudio N° 5 para encontrar La Piedra Perfecta*, ciudad de México, 2013.  
Impresión digital C-Print. Artista seleccionado de la XVI Bienal de Fotografía.



**Laura Meza Orozco.** Sin título e "Intervalo vacío", ciudad de México, 2013. Impresión digital.  
Artista invitada por el curador.







# MAURICIO ALEJO

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(Ciudad de México, 1969) estudió la licenciatura en Ciencias de la Comunicación en la Universidad Intercontinental e hizo la maestría en Artes en la New York University, como becario Fulbright-García Robles. Ha desarrollado la mayor parte de su obra en fotografía y video, y ha tenido exposiciones individuales en Tokio, Nueva York, México, París y La Habana. Asimismo ha participado en muestras colectivas en el Wattis Institute of Contemporary Art, en San Francisco, y el Museo Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, en Madrid, entre otras sedes. Su trabajo forma parte de las colecciones de Daros Latinamerica, en Zúrich, el Art Museum of the Americas, en Washington, y el MUAC, en la ciudad de México. Entre los reconocimientos que ha recibido destacan la beca para la creación artística que otorga la New York Foundation for the Arts (2008) y una residencia en el Centro de las Artes de la Universidad Nacional de Singapur. Actualmente vive y trabaja en la ciudad de México.

(Mexico City, 1969) has a BA in communications from the Universidad Intercontinental and an MFA from New York University; he has also been the recipient of a Fulbright-García Robles scholarship. Most of his body of work has been in photography and video, and he has presented solo shows in Tokyo, New York, Mexico City, Paris and Havana. His work has also been featured in group shows at the Institute of Contemporary Art in San Francisco and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, among other venues. His work is in the collections of Daros Latinamerica in Zurich, the Art Museum of the Americas in Washington, and the MUAC in Mexico City. He was awarded a fellowship by the New York Foundation for the Arts (2008) and was artist in residence at the National University of Singapore's Centre for the Arts. He currently lives and works in Mexico City.



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