

## *Essence of Place:*

Rosario López, Miguel Ángel Rojas, Fernell Franco

Curated by Rodrigo Orrantia

28 September - 10 November 2012

This exhibition brings together three artists from different generations working in Colombia and interested in exploring the themes of identity and place through the use of photography.

In the 1970s a generation of Colombian artists sought to separate themselves from the established modern canons of art that were taught at universities and hung in museums. Figures such as Antonio Caro (b. 1950), Oscar Muñoz (b. 1951), and Miguel Ángel Rojas (b. 1946) stood at the forefront of experimental visual art practices in Colombia during the 70s and 80s. Their concerns converged on the search for a notion of self through the continuous questioning of their immediate surroundings, a sense of self found through a connection with place.

Their search was practical as well as conceptual, challenging the way in which art was produced, displayed and received. The 60s witnessed the arrival of pop culture in Latin America, and by the 70s its influence was undeniable in every aspect of culture, especially in the arts. Experimental art practices using photography and printmaking were a stand against the better-regarded techniques of drawing and painting, taking direct influence from pop art, music and the drug-infused hippy revolution.

*"What helped you "slide" towards art? Was it The Beatles records?*

*That was the music of the moment, but above all, its spirit, the spirit of change that swept in, in May 1968."*

Gutierrez, Natalia, *Miguel Ángel Rojas: Essential*, Editorial Planeta with Paralelo10, 2010, p54

Miguel Ángel Rojas' works from the 1970s are evidence of a voyage of self-discovery through the meticulous observation of himself and his surroundings. His practice at the time encompassed photography, drawing and printmaking, experimenting with their intersections to discover a language of his own.

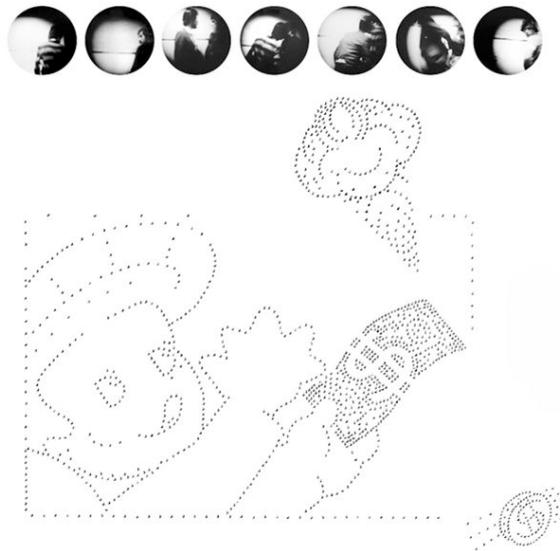
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Miguel Ángel Rojas, *Faenza*, Series of 6 photographs, 1979/2010

Amongst his best-known works are the series of long exposure photographs taken at B-movie cinemas where anonymous encounters between men took place. They later became the basis of two key installations entitled *Via Lactea* (1981) and *Paquita* (1997). Rojas' work with photographic reductions and installation is not only a search for personal identity and belonging, but also a poignant revision of the voyeuristic gaze. His installations bring back a lost intimacy with the photographic image and ultimately with photography itself.

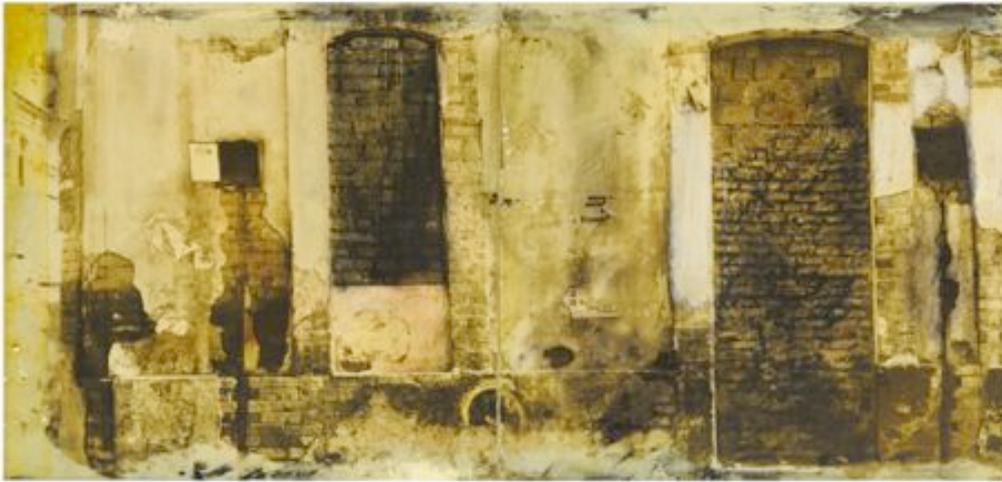


Miguel Ángel Rojas, *Paquita Compra un Helado (Paquita Buys an Ice Cream)*, Installation of photographic reductions, 1979-1997

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One can find a number of connections between Rojas' images and the works by Ferrnll Franco (1942-2006). Part of the same generation of artists, Franco lived in a different city, Cali, a smaller and much warmer place, but also more open and daring than the capital Bogotá. During the 70s Franco worked as a commercial photographer, but at the same time he explored the grimmer, undiscovered aspects of the city. His best known series are *Prostitutas* (1970), *Demoliciones* (1989) and *Amarrados* (1976-94).



Fernell Franco, *Demoliciones*, C-Print, 1989

*Demoliciones* is a series about the construction and defacement of Cali and its relation to the drug trade, which made the city a war zone during the 1980s and 90s. Through a very personal photographic practice that involved an elaborate and experimental use of the darkroom, Franco was able to get under the skin of the city, finding its elusive spirit.

Twenty years later one can find connections with the work by Rosario López, a representative of a generation that was either taught, or heavily influenced by the aforementioned artists. Her art practice, a consistent questioning of the nature and essence of space, evidences the inherited concerns connecting her work to Franco and Rojas. Lopez's work gained recognition in the international art scene with her appearance at the 2007 Venice Biennale with her piece *Abyss*.

In 2000, more than a decade after Rojas and Franco's gaze on the city, López produced *Esquinas Gordas* (*Fat Corners*) using photography to approach a series of space alterations in Bogotá.

Part local resourcefulness, part public policy, "fat corners" were a way of preventing homeless people from setting up shelters in the city's central *candelaria* borough and using the corners of its buildings as lavatories. The cement filled spaces were later assimilated into their surroundings, painted over or even decorated. The consistence of her approach transforms the images into a dialogue with space, and how its essence is defined by spontaneous interventions.



Rosario López, *Esquinas Gordas (Fat Corners)*, C-Print on paper, 2000

It is interesting to view all the works as different approaches to the same concern, especially when it constitutes an act of resistance and divergence from the more commonly associated topics of political violence and geographical idiosyncrasy in Latin American art. To enter into a close dialogue with a place is at the same time an introspective exploration, a definition of self through a disciplined and conscious observation of the world.

Photography is a common ground where the different generations can establish a dialogue of peers. As photographic images, these works share an exploratory nature; they are the record of a time and space but also of a spirit, a mutual affection between *ser* (to be) and *estar* (to be in).

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