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América Latina 1960-2013

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The history of Southern America in the last fifty years or so encompasses a stunning variety of phases across the nations of this huge territory. *América Latina 1960-2013* covers this rich and long period providing an organic collection of documents achieving its objective. Mostly centred on photography, though including different multimedia, video and filmic materials, the exhibition aimed at mirroring the continent “tumultuous past as well as [the] reflections of its conflictual present” (Compagnon, p. 13).

Specific artistic movements were interwoven with a basic reconstruction of the historical, political and cultural situation of the continent during the long period taken into consideration. This enabled the *connoisseur* to stand side by side with the novice, and guaranteed wide access to a differentiated public. Content-wise, this idea was strengthened by coupling a fine choice of images with a timeline providing a contextualization of their production circumstances, reasons and cultural insights. Therefore, far from flattening the deep variety of the selected artistic interventions, and thus echoing the great heterogeneity of territories, cities, situations, cultures, identities and traditions quite vaguely labelled as ‘Latin-American,’ the exhibition successfully highlighted the essential ambivalence between similarity and differentiation that characterized South American countries from 1960 to 2013 on diverse levels. The four sections composing the expo worked in this direction trying at the same time to present four thematic areas that respectively offered a well-structured path throughout the concepts of territory [1], city [2], informing/resisting [3], memory and identity [4].

Located on the first floor, sections 1-2 welcomed the visitor providing a detailed geographical, urban and landscape map, able to frame the exhibition in spatial-temporal terms. These images showed the endless rural plain, the primitive shapes of the Amazon rainforest and the fascinating Andean scenery with its indigenous populations, as well as the overcrowded cities depicted during the economic crises, or as places of chaotic development and consumerism or, again, just as colourful environments for daily life. Unveiling the ambivalent facets of a region that appears in its dense conflicting nature, such images very often adopt a

sociocultural and political tone, as it happens clearly in Luz María Bedoya's series *Pirca* (1998), Claudia Andujar's series *Horizontal 3*, *Marcados*, and *Health cards of Yanomami* (both 1981-3), in Facundo de Zuviría's series *Siesta argentina* (2003), Carlos Ginzburg's *México, Los viajes de Ginzburg* (1980), or in the video *Every Building on Avenida Alfonso Ugarte – After Ruscha* (2011) by Claudia Joskowicz.

Benefitting from the structure of the exhibition space, sections 3-4 were located underground and opened up a more intimate space betraying a mirroring process between the setting and the displayed works.

Compared to the glass-walls of the first floor that enabled a sort of continuity between the landscape depicted and the physical urban context, the cities portrayed and Paris, level -1 conveyed a sense of closure, which metaphorically evoked the shift to personal images, to the identity and memorial value exercised by the photographs on display, and to the narration interlacing private and public, ritual and political elements put forth by the exhibition.

Section 3 presented a series of works mostly produced to denounce violence, inequality, repression and above all the 'politics of disappearance' that characterized the years of dictatorship in several Latin American countries. Often mixing photography, newspapers and official documents, works such as Juan Carlos Romero's installation *Violencia* (1973-2013), Oscar Bony's series *Suicidios* (1998), or Johanna Calle's series *Pie de fotos* (2012) explicitly dealt with those themes, whereas section 4 proposed a more specific attention to the memory of atrocity, its elaboration and ritual/religious expression. The collection gave a visual voice to the relationships between emptiness/fullness (pampa vs. city, lack of documents concerning mass arrests and executions vs. omnipresence of police and army, i.e. Fredi Casco's series *Foto Zombie*, 2011), visibility/invisibility – and a-visibility¹ – most notably in the opposition between the exercise of power perpetrated by the dictatorships vs. the phenomenon of *desaparecidos*, i.e. Marcelo Brodsky's *Buena Memoria*, 1968; Juan Manuel Echavarría's video *Bocas de ceniza*, 2003-4), and expression/repression (Susana Torres' *Museo Neo-Inka*, 1999-2013).

These basic dichotomies presented the images of suffering and violence throughout the four section of the exhibition and constituted at the same time a "witnessing public."² Such witnessing attitude is also present in *Revolta(s)*, the film that the organizers commissioned artists Fredi Casco and Renate Costa that was screened in an *ad hoc* area of the gallery space, and is now freely available via the museum's YouTube channel. Thanks to the displayed works, the visitor was initiated to a conceptual itinerary crossing America Latina; such symbolic path found completion following the artists interviewed by the two filmmakers, and in so doing gave the visitor the chance to partake this journey becoming part of America Latina's witnessing public.

¹ Alain Brossat, Jean Louis Déotte (eds.), *La Mort dissoute. Disparition et spectralité*, L'Harmattan, Paris 2002.

² Meg McLagan, "Principles, Publicity, and Politics: Notes on Human Rights Media," in *American Anthropologist*, vol. 105, no. 3, 2003, pp. 605-612.

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The exhibition represented thus a device able to produce such audience,³ exorcising America Latina's past, and suggesting a way to re-appropriate the territory, the city, the resistance heritage, memory and identity through visual documentation practices.

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³ Leshu Torchin, *Creating the Witness: Documenting Genocide on Film, Video, and the Internet*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis-London 2012.