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To paraphrase a comment by Bruce Nauman on the Kassel 1992 Documenta, we could say that Photoespaña is too big to be taken seriously. This observation should in now way reflect negatively on the artists, the individual shows, or the show as a whole. It simply reflects a law which is applicable to any form of art: beyond a certain size, it is pointless to try and seek absolute coherence in a proposal, no matter how hard we look, or the efforts made to attain it.

The subject of this edition of Photoespaña, curated by the very respectable Gerardo Mosquera, is portrait, the most popular and popularised genre in photography, whether private, public or for the media. This is so true that this edition of Photoespaña has as its flagship the Roman-Egyptian Fayum wax and tempera portraits (Anthropology Museum), described by the general media as the "first photo booths in history". This excellent publicity slogan makes everything possible, such as, for example, joyfully leaping into Photoespaña, allowing oneself to be carried away by the images, without worrying about whether or not they fit into a certain context.

It is true that there are many portraits, identified under title *Interfaces*, in black on yellow. Part of them are, let us say, documentary in origin. Some of them are fascinating, such as those by *Ron Galella (Paparazzo Extraordinaire!)* in such an unusual and appropriate setting as the Loewe store or the nearby Circulo de Bellas Artes. These early *paparazzi* sought different instants, which were not necessarily scandalous in themselves, but which, because of their improvisation or immediacy, offered images of the truly famous which were very different from the highly retouched official pictures monopolised by the media. Apart from Jackie Onassis with her hair in the wind, a snapshot which made its author famous, it is worth mentioning a photo of Liz Taylor with an unconcealed moustache, a couple of blemishes and a pound of emeralds and diamonds around her neck and hanging from her ears. It is not surprising that this has been chosen as the promotional image, along with the Fayum pictures, as its gaze captures viewers.

In this territory of the documentary/journalistic we can also mention the moving *Haiti 34 Seconds Later*, with heart-breaking photographs



FRANK MONTERO COLLADO Frank, 1920.
Courtesy: Galeria López Quiroga (México DF), Comunidad de Madrid, Fundación Telefónica and PHE

by Emilio Morenatti and, Marta Ramoneda combined with equally harsh videos. The worst thing is that we know that everything is still the same in Haiti as in these photographs, which, despite having been taken in November, are still a testimony of the present. A reflection of another catastrophe, which is unfortunately endemic, is *Peso y Levedad, fotografía latinoamericana entre el humanismo y la violencia* (at the Instituto Cervantes). It is a fairly extensive collective, where police documentation is combined with less objective views. Another gaze, in this context, is offered by *Cámara Ardiente, Prostitutas de Fernell Franco* (Circulo de Bellas Artes). Its author returns to a classic theme (Cartier Bresson) with an artistic twist which takes it from document to creation.

The series *Bello Público* by Ajo boasts a tender *costumbrismo*; portraits of minor celebrities and anonymous faces captured from the box office in the Teatro Alfil, on show at Matadero, which also displays *Hombres sentados (Sitting Men)*, the overhead videographic portraits of somewhat bald men, an intervention by Carlos Rodríguez-Méndez which does not really fit in a space better known for its brilliant series of site-specific installations.

Another very interesting exhibition, by the general curator Gerardo Mosquera, is on show at Alcalá 31 under the title *1000 caras, 0 caras, 1 rostro*. These are two extensive series from the first phase of Cindy Sherman's career (*Complete Untitled Film Stills 1977-1980* and *Bus Riders, 1976-2000*), as well as two rooms showing the *Portraits* by Thomas Ruff and a small space for Frank Montero's photos, supposedly

produced between 1855 and 1925. Sometimes exhibitions do not work on the basis of similarities, but contrasts. The extensive simulation series by Cindy Sherman, in black and white, in a small format, and where nothing is what it seems, while also generating their own truth, could not be more different from the large and objective portraits by Ruff (which, by the way, have earned him the prize in this edition). Going from one to the other forces a dramatic change in retinal perception, emphasising their respective proposals. If to this we add the 23 hallucinations by the Mexican artist Montero, self-portrayed again and again in photos where he describes those improbably situations, the effect is a certain sense of commotion. And, as we all know, the most an exhibition can aspire to is for viewers to leave it somewhat changed.

If one wishes to understand, in a single visit, the objective sought by this edition of Photoespaña, perhaps the best suggestion would be to visit the Fernando Fernán Gómez Centre and see *Face Contact*, the closest to a general view of the photographic portrait in the –more or less—contemporary time (there are works with five decades of history behind them) through 31 artists selected by Gerardo Mosquera. Apart from this, there are spaces which present portraits which are not really so. It is wonderful to see at Caixaforum a classic like Lartigue making past history more or less beautiful, or the display on *Tarjetas de visita* at the Fundación Lázaro Galdiano. Or the Panama *Mundo feliz* by Carlos Endara (Casa de America) which is similar, and establishes a distant dialogue with the prostitutes of Fernell Franco. It is interesting to compare these exhibitions, because Lartigue displayed, from the beginning, a series of artistic pretensions which he successfully fulfilled, while the cards and patriotic portraits remain firmly anchored in the artisanal realm. The only difference is that in a time of relational aesthetics (social, let us say) the artistic and artisanal possess increasingly blurred interfaces.

Beyond this, the rest is displayed in a friendly chaos, which might offer another guiding thread: the architectural, one of the greatest motifs of photography. It is worth noting the huge amount of fieldwork carried out by Richard Pare on soviet architecture until the late 1920s (CaixaForum). Utopias turned into impressive buildings which were later abandoned, if not demolished entirely. The exhibition not only shows these photos, but also plans, original documents and even paintings and engravings from the time (the last days of Suprematism and Constructivism). The exhibition at the MNCARS, *Fotografía Obrera*, fleshes out this time.



COLECTIVO MR. Centro cultural, San Isidro, Lima - Perú.
From the series: *Si no existe el mas allá, la injusticia del pobre se prolonga eternamente*, 2006. © Colectivo MR. Courtesy: Teatro Fernán Gómez, Centro de Arte Fundación Banco Santander and PHE

Another vision of the East comes from Bucharest, where utopia never reached day-to-day and only affected large official masses, as we see in *Bucharest, Paradoxical City* (Romanian Institute for Culture). Or even from Warsaw, with *Tales of Modernism* by Nicolas Groszpiere at the Polish Institute for Culture. This architectural approach, although in a different way, can also be found in Llorenç Ugas Debreuil's photography in *Mapping Space* (IED Madrid) transit spaces presented almost in the same way as Ruff's objectivised portraits.

In the face of such a large-scale event, it is always acceptable to wonder whether it is worth it. The answer can only be in the affirmative. Although it only reaches the sublime on a few occasions, there are more than enough sources of enjoyment for an audience which has been driven by advertising to enjoy the photographic event, whose codes it understands. Spectacularisation? That doesn't seem to be the case, because, since when was photography a minority discipline? It would be worth examining the proposed theme, but it must be said from the beginning that something of this scale cannot be measured with a ruler. We do not see any new directions, except in very specific cases, and neither do these offer a view of the state of the matter. It is very simple: Photoespaña is there so that we can all treasure whichever memories we wish.