

GALERIAS MUNICIPAIS – GALERIA QUADRUM

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GALERIA QUADRUM

27.04–25.06.2023

Faro- Oeste

Pauliana Valente Pimentel

FARO-OESTE #1 - #38, 2021
Heavy banner fabric printing
Courtesy of the artist

to ignore otherness. We need to realise that to break out of this vicious circle of systemic poverty, out of the crisis of the crisis of the crisis, of existing just to work, we can also take these forms of existence to rebuild a collective singularity beyond and without the mediocrity of our condition as commodity.

Pauliana writes over apparent matter with light and photochemical solutions, creating a new exteriority that gives back to the impoverished nomadism of these Roma the unreality and intimacy that the bourgeois order confiscates from them every day, and it is in that gap that we realise what we will never manage to Be.

– Pedro Pousada

In the realm of the outcasts

In capturing the apparent, the photographic act comes face to face with the poetic act. They are concomitant, but not necessarily equal. Making the bell of reality ring in the imagination and making the dissonant rhythms of the imagination reverberate in reality are not the same thing, but they may become the same circumstance. The corollary of “knowing how” invents the aesthetics of the act, but it does not provide all the resources: the aesthetic energy of that which is named, that which is indicated, “captured” – that child, that woman, that old man, that dog – is another force entirely. What remains of the subject-object in the photograph is plural: its spectral side, unfinished, dissolved in the fluidity of the days; the opaque silence of the unrepresentable. And because this loss occurs in every representation, there is an awareness that the lived world has regions in which the image is no more than the confession of an incompleteness.

The poetic-documentary realism, the *plein-air* of the photographic series “Faro-Oeste” by Pauliana Pimentel, is an example of this reasoning. It captures not only the fruit of specialised intuition and the mechanics of a device, but also the space for the “conspiracy” of the pondered, contemplative gaze that still manages to be reflexive and, whether hot- or cold-blooded, will hierarchise, exclude, segregate, accentuate and choose. It thus places a recognisable and dissonant world within the reach of a multitudinous and indeterminate spectator; yet it does so without essentialism and without managing to overcome the distance and opacity that make both photographer and spectator perennial strangers to that world.

Photographic invasion is revelatory in nature. When we see ourselves as images, we feel different, sometimes unrecognisable. We are surprised (or incessantly disappointed, in our drive for “selfies”) because we see our body and, residually, our mind, there, outside of us, forever detached from what we know of ourselves when we look at ourselves without images or

reflections. I imagine that these people unaccustomed to being images – but very used to being unwanted – have had curious reactions to the results of Pauliana’s almost analytic, almost intuitive, but decidedly gentle poetics.

In these photos we sense that empathy that is both scrutinising and discreet, and which we can trace back to Gustave Courbet’s *Un enterrement à Ornans* (1849-1850), revealing how beautiful and difficult survival and life are for those who struggle daily to make their lives less frightening, less grotesque, less absurd.

That is what we see here in Pauliana’s photographs, in the melancholic colourism that eschews all drama and moral judgement. Photography (and its World) transforming the everyday banality of a Roma community into a contradictory biopolitical testimony.

Yet the inescapable, foundational contradiction of Pauliana’s testimony is that it questions the meaning of the exception – where does it fit? Where can it survive in this standardised, normative world? And it questions this in the valley of tears and smiles of one of the most elemental and polarised exteriorities of modern life: a Roma community abandoned on the edges of the tourist region of the Algarve, caught between rural despair and the paroxysm of urbanisation without urbanity.

This is a part of modern life that, through signs, symbols, presences without posing, creativity without hierarchies, tells us that it wants to escape the world that oppresses and excludes it, that it wants to get out of this world that ceaselessly reduces us to atomised, isolated, harmless producer-consumers, but that it still doesn’t know how, and maybe never will.

How can an impoverished, vulnerable, powerless and depoliticised Roma community aspire to escape a world that has rejected it?

Where, in that ecosystem of scarcity, in those expressions and bodies full of delicacy and uncertainty, is the proof of that desire that is already in itself a political power?

Just like the Palestinians eternalised in their refugee camps,

these human beings, these spurned Portuguese, build their aesthetic sovereignty, “working”, with very little, “on themselves.”

We see in these provisional huts improvised with tarpaulins, partitions and bits of wood that affection and aesthetic care for the few things they possess and we realise that everything here is heroic because it is survivor; because to possess an object here, a blanket or a chair, and to keep it, to transport it, and take it out again from the suitcases, the bags, the carts, and set up the house and clean it, before being a cultural act, is a political act. It is a political act to hold a broom in a place where the elements are stronger and entropy is all too rapid. And suddenly those subjectivities are not just referents of a fragile way of life, but the free will that survives in a gesture of domestic utility and which fights against reification, against the dirt of a dark world without horizons; that struggles with clothes laid out in the sun or tidied up and folded; with washed pots and pans hanging out to dry on precarious partitions; with chairs and benches and sofas of different nations and origins gathered in a circle by the fire to unite people in speech; to unite – like knots braided on a rope – the different subjectivities in agreement and in discord.

If this world we are in seems to be inching ever closer to its end, while also seeming never to end, perhaps these lives can teach us about the balancing act of existing in another way that is freer, more carefree (or is it all illusion, a fantasy of my own invention? Is the fear of the future hidden in those expressions?). Perhaps they can teach us, but we are unlikely to learn because a world with nothing is scary, uncomfortable and threatening. That’s also the contradiction: there is the humanity that is not allowed to be free because the gates of the city are closed; and, on our side, the humanity that, despite the gates of the city always being open to them, cannot be free because of a mortgage and bad credit. There will be no reconciliation between these worlds because one wants to stop being the exception and the other wants to stop being the norm.

Pauliana’s photographs also tell us that the world is too dangerous, too permeable to intolerance and prejudice to be able