

Amazograms, 90 meters of Bahuaja Sonene

Since his appearance on the visual arts scene, photographer Roberto Huarcaya (Lima, 1959), stood out for the ambition of his projects, in which the photographic medium has often been linked to other means of creation in combinations of great solvency that has aroused intense responses from different audiences. His proposals have frequently revolved around the construction of an individual and collective identity in the face of situations that range from the banal-everyday, to the erotic as a turning point of freedom, to reaching the political, that is, what, because it is relevant to the development of responsibilities, rights and obligations of individuals in life in society requires attention, consideration and discussion in order to clarify the ideal of the common good.

In recent times, Huarcaya's projects have routed to questioning photography without violating the support of the image itself, but rather attracting the attention of the public towards its own configuration. Attention is powerfully drawn to how the artist manages to intersect the role of witness (the committed gaze) with that of the anthropological observer (the watchful eye on the development and textures of a human situation while safeguarding its integrity). These recent proposals of the artist have used, for example, cameras classically indicated for a clear and sharp work in the presentation, but that in the intricacies slows down and advances towards its term without announcement of conclusions.

In the direction of Peruvian society, Huarcaya's gaze in recent works such as "Private Beach / Public Beach" or "Pamplona / Casuarinas" is so honest that one may wonder how it is to avoid the pamphlet. The answer lies in the distance he keeps with the topic to be photographed and, certainly, the subject Huarcaya photographer-citizen recognizes in himself the potential of a look positioned at a distance that is obviously not quantifiable but verifiable, within a society marked by the discrimination in various orders of things. A bit like Aldous Huxley's analysis of El Greco and his characters, Huarcaya seems to be invisible in the environment without being completely swallowed by an opacity that could erase his photographic trail in response to a critical experience. What he does to assume the questioning location is to take a nuclear place in the framework, within that social organism that regulates and, above all, brutally excludes.

The most recent photographic work of the artist seems to take a different direction, but only apparently, as will be evidenced. It is an installation of unprecedented dimensions in its body of work of 25 years. Presented at the Casa Rímac in the Historic Center of Lima, in parallel to the exhibition of a selection from the Jan Mulder Collection, also temporarily housed in the same premises on the occasion of LimaPhoto 2014, its Amazograms installation - 90 meters from Bahuaja Sonene is the more specific signaling he has made to this day.

Huarcaya has always been interested in reality as a space of creation and very often he has begun to pursue the definition of visual devices that will transform his reading and allow him to experiment openly and critically with the generation of signs and symbols. The poetic narrative in photographic sequences was a way to explore this terrain. Also those photographic reconstructions of works chosen from the history of Western painting.

For the realization of the Amazograms, he has turned his attention to cameraless photography and is producing 'photograms'. The 'photogram' is an image obtained through a process that prescind from the photographic apparatus and its optics, and in which the paper with the light-sensitive emulsion acts as a witness to everything that comes into contact with it, capturing its imprint on direct relationship to their physical presence and size through proper lighting management. The historical avant-garde in European art of the early twentieth century used the photogram as a radical way out from what was perceived as a complete crisis of representation. Roberto Huarcaya uses it to signal a crisis in acute phase in a territory that is in an absolutely critical situation within what we insist on calling 'national reality'. Once again, Huarcaya chooses to take distance (despite, paradoxically, the contact between the parts required by the photogram).

What he has done is to make three frames for which he has used the entire three reels of photographic paper. In nocturnal actions with proportions of independent film production (one cannot stop thinking about the comparable ambition of the Peruvian avant-garde Carlos and Miguel Vargas and their photographic Nocturnes, almost 100 years ago), he unfolded the paper, introducing it between the trees in sections of the Amazonian tropical forest in the Bahuaja Sonene national reserve, and lighting it with a hand flash, to which the moonlight was added, slowly and patiently generated the direct visual footprint, literal testimony of plant species of the Amazon on the surface of the support.

More than the simple direct recovery of the 90-meter linear footprint of the Amazonian tropical forest on the horizontal and vertical axes (one of the frames is of an entire tree, illuminated by lightning during a storm), the three Amazograms are triggers of perceptions and sudden reflections. We presage what emerges from the visual overturn on these monumental dimensions, because urgent needs arise in us to elaborate other discourses before the unfolding of this phantasmagoria, which is beyond doubt - due to the unique nature of the photogram - but which still appears as intangible. Not only because of the spectral impact that these tattered 'jungle' without color can have, but because, with a mixture of intuition and resonance, Huarcaya in these works allows us to renew the sensibility, which is like a palimpsest of our personal history, to an agitated sensory dynamic, in the chamber of consciousness. Exposing them is a political act.

Jorge Villacorta Chávez