

# Cazadores de sombras

Shadow Hunters

10 October - 16 November 2007

Opening: 9 October, 6 pm

Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá (MAMBO)  
Calle 24 No. 6-00  
Bogotá, Colombia

Spain is the guest of honor at Fotográfica Bogotá 2007, the Second International Encounter of Photography to be held in the Colombian capital.

The State Society for Foreign Cultural Action (SEACEX) and FOTOMUSEO, in collaboration with the Modern Art Museum of Bogotá (MAMBO), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain, and the Ministry of Culture, have organized the photography exhibition "Cazadores de sombras - Shadow Hunters."

Curated by Rosa Olivares, "Shadow Hunters" presents works by Mario de Ayguavives, Sergio Belinchón, Tomy Ceballos, Javier Codesal, Manel Esclusa, Pere Formiguera, Amparo Garrido, Germán Gómez, Dionisio González, Anna Malagrida, Alicia Martín, Begoña Montalbán, Rafael Navarro, Concha Pérez, Xavier Ribas, and Juan Urrios. The idea behind choosing the work of these 16 Spanish artists was, in Rosa Olivares's words, "to show what seems to be but is not, to display doubt, ambiguity... and, above all, the shadow."

To the popular belief that photography is based on reality, many artists answer –through their photographs– that there is nothing more believable and more similar to the truth than a lie. In the development of current photography –not only in their best techniques but also in the easiness and freedom of their use– the images offered to us are not so much those of the "precise moment," but those indicating or suggesting facts, situations or moments that have not yet taken place, or even that are merely insinuations or suspicions.

Like cinema, photography has gone beyond the obligation of being narrative, gaining in emotion and intelligence in the process. Truth has given way to possibility; certainty to uncertainty. Photography thus constructs an unlikely portrait of people and places, a document of something that does not exist. The shadow becomes the protagonist of a photography that is suggestive, subjective, full of lyricism, and at the same time, full of narrative possibilities.

Organizes:

Sociedad Estatal para la Acción Cultural Exterior (SEACEX)

<http://www.seacex.com/>

Foto Museo (Bogotá)

<http://www.fotomuseo.org/>

In collaboration with:

Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá (MAMBO)

Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y de Cooperación

Ministerio de Cultura

Embajada de España en Colombia

Press:

Departamento de Comunicación de SEACEX

Ruth Fernández

[r.fernandez@seacex.es](mailto:r.fernandez@seacex.es)

Jorge Rodríguez del Álamo

[jralamo@seacex.es](mailto:jralamo@seacex.es)

## Artists

Mario de Ayguavives

The city is the natural landscape of the 21st century dweller. It is our artificial nature, the only one we have been able to inhabit. A strange place, full of lights that guide us in its dark nights, in the mystery of a wild jungle, so dangerous and yet so attractive. An ever changing landscape in which we move based on clues such as traffic signs, advertisements, bar signs, doctors' surgeries, shops, light signs, windows that personify cold and remote buildings.

But, what would happen if these signs disappeared, erased by a mysterious hand? The result would be that we would lose our way. If the lights went out in the urban night, we would be lost, stunned by the dark, the silence, the loneliness of being in a strange place, like someone who doesn't know how to be guided by the stars lost in the forest. In the city there are no stars, and in the cities photographed by Ayguavives, the signals have gone, the signs have been erased, the windows are blind, there is no one behind the curtains, no one can see us, the buildings are shut tight and the city is empty, deprived of recognizable features. Lost place, unnamed city, which is the one we live in, known exclusively by its perishable, changing signs. The lack of safety, the uncertainty of the urban landscape becomes threatening, foreign, unrecognizable.

Sergio Belinchón

The absence of the individual in the landscape characterizes part of Sergio Belinchón's photographic work: places, cities, landscapes that have been built and inhabited by men whose very absence emphasizes the silence, the futility, a certain impossibility. In his video "Sombras" [Shadows], the only thing appearing is the shadow, it is the only thing we see, and the only thing we hear is a confused racket of voices, impossible to decode: crossed conversations, unconnected sentences... just noise.

The shadow is the sole protagonist of this video: in inverse shapes, against the ground, imperfect in its elongated forms, retreating in the light, distorted in the nooks and crannies of the surfaces. Connected to the bodies that cast them by the feet, that link in perpetual motion, impossible to separate, shadows could be detached, however, in classic literature, at the feet level using a green stone knife under the shade of certain tree. Those shadows represent the modern individual, always in motion, always anonymous, in crossings of intermediate spaces, where no one has a name, no one has identity. Bodies and shadows have never been so alike, never been so leveled. Perhaps shadows have already freed themselves from the heavy load of their human bodies and they are the ones that fill the building hallways and the streets in modern cities.

Tomy Ceballos

Images created without a camera, bodies that construct the subtle poetics of absence. Through the direct technique used, which eliminates all technological mediation and takes the direct image of the object, it's as if the soul is taken out of the body. Tomy Ceballos offers us a world of shadows. Beyond what we see, there is a real world, but with these images, we go through that mirror we believe we're seeing and we find ourselves in a place in which bridal gowns float devoid of a body, a shadow of what they were or what they will become, and the bodies, directly developed, never photographed, become the shadows of themselves and reach a different life, they are now autonomous, perhaps finally free.

Close to abstraction, Ceballos creates his images with fragments snatched from reality, obtaining shades of color, impossible to photograph shapes, all thanks to the immediacy of a technique that transforms the photograph, the emulsified paper, through direct contact with the bodies, with the

objects we will later see changed into a representation of themselves, into a suggestive and full of shades black and white, into a shadow plucked as if by magic through the spells of a photographic lab.

### Javier Codesal

The power of the moving image adds the properties of poetry to those of photography. In "El Monte Perdido" (The Lost Mountain), Codesal, in four videos, brings us near an always incomplete narration about all those things we can't say much about. He speaks without words, with the subtlety of a hand slightly touching the most delicate subjects: absence, disappearance, death. But death does not entail complete disappearance; it becomes a path full of footprints, of shadows we sometimes fail to recognize. As when we walk through the mountains of our childhood, the paths trodden so many times, yet every time they are different. Nostalgia, the following of all those footprints left by the loss of the people we have met, a flow of living shadows, through flower remains, through hands that speak with silent music. This is what fills Javier Codesal's work, between music and poetry, between cinema and literature, always closer to an intimate, untranslatable narration than to contemporary epics.

### Manel Esclusa

As others hunt wild animals, Esclusa one day set out to hunt Nature's shadows. But unlike what happens in Gothic stories, Esclusa did not pact with the bushes, the wheat, the treetops, in order for them to give him their shadows in exchange for coolness, or peace. He did not plan to take that incorporeal part of their existence away, but instead give them their shadows back. Those shadows lost in the thickness of the undergrowth, in the darkness of the wet and wooded lands.

One day, leaning against a tree reading a book, Esclusa discovered that a shadow was cast onto the white pages of his book, but when he moved the book away, the shadow disappeared. He came back with white sheets of paper to put between the branches and the ground, so the shadows of each bough, each bud, each leaf could exist, could recover their body, even perhaps their soul, leaving it forever printed in paper, and at the same time, to show each tree, each bush, each branch, that its existence was always accompanied by a personal and individual shadow, that was there even if nobody saw it, as eternal companions of wild existence, just waiting for a shadow hunter to recover them for eternity.

### Pere Formiguera

The alterations through time or any other seemingly simple action, like closing your eyes, changes the identity of a portrait. Formiguera has worked many years with the alterations imposed by time to the bodies and faces of his models, people always close to him. He has seen them as something foreign to his artistic intentions, even foreign to the decisions of the people portrayed. Time is really what alters things, what shapes those faces, those bodies that, as it turns out, are us.

The face has always been the most faithful sign of identity: that gaze that survives time, those features through which we manage to recognize those friends we left behind long ago, those relatives almost unknown that emerge from our childhood, those lovers of our youth that return, as if to say goodbye, in old age. But Formiguera portrays his models (all of them well-known people in Catalan culture) with their eyes shut, as if closing the windows to the outside world, preventing us from probing their minds, their feelings. Close-up portraits of faces with their eyes shut, as if refusing to establish a connection with the viewer. With the eyes shut, it seems as if the soul

cannot come out. It seems we can hide, even from ourselves. It's as if the face was no longer a sign of identity.

### Amparo Garrido

In this series, "Ventanas, papeles y el hombre del saco" (Windows, Papers, and the Bogeyman), 2000, several subjects that converge in the individual are suggested. On the one hand, our everyday environment, those rooms in which we live, that here are defined by the painted wallpapers that decorate them. On the other hand, the idea of watching and being watched, synthesized by the open window, as a peep-hole through which we observe our environment but from which we are also inevitably observed. Windows are sometimes like Russian nesting dolls, as one opens up to another until there is a television screen, the supreme window, the ultimate window of our times. And finally the fears, the ordinary fear of the unknown, but symbolized by that childhood fear of the bogeyman, a faceless shadow that haunts us and all of a sudden can pounce on us and put us into his bag to never let us out.

Fear, that shadow we see next to us but it's not our own, a shadow without a body, the idea of evil, of impending but undefined danger. That shadow that slides over the walls of Amparo Garrido's room speaks of fear and impending danger, fed by the deepest dreams that inhabit our solitude.

### Germán Gómez

Until now, our identity was closely linked to our faces. Not only the face was the mirror of the soul, but that face represented who and what we were. That's why the portrait genre has reached, both in painting and in photography, an undisputed relevance. However, the portrait is no longer –if it once was– a way of identifying an individual, and beyond that obviousness, it has also ceased to recreate any real identity. The series "Compuestos" (Composites), 2004-07, by Germán Gómez, straightforwardly shows the absolute uncertainty behind a face and the end of that idea of identity. His portraits of men are "composites" of fragments of other faces, of other features, of other men.

Their parts cut out and substituted with other fragments, each face is a combination of pieces from four faces, four different identities. Put together they don't generate a new identity but rather a decomposition of the previous individual identities. Each portrait is the face of someone that doesn't exist but is part of four identities, of four different realities, unrecognizable but present nevertheless. The combination of a forehead, two eyes and a nose makes a face. Their loss decomposes an identity. The certainty of knowing who we are is shaken as we see that, just like the scissors and the photographer's camera, the surgeon's scalpel adds and takes away parts of ourselves, creating, recomposing a being of which we are a part, but not the whole.

### Dionisio González

Is it true everything we see? To what extent can we even say that we are completely sure of what we see? The landscapes that González creates based on the ruins of real city buildings are as real as the viewer believes they are. And this is not because the technologies applied to photography can put on paper or film anything the artist can dream up in his mind. In the case of Dionisio González, this romantic notion of recovering buildings that are in ruins due to political negligence or economic collapse started in Havana. He rebuilds fragments of the building with prefabricated elements made of glass, wood. Elements which although have nothing to do with the building, with the landscape, are nevertheless totally believable, as if "they could be". The line between what's possible and what's impossible has been erased.

This project continues in the *favelas* of some cities of Brazil that are being destroyed due to a process of political cleaning. The artist suggests options of rehabilitation digitally reconstructing the images, adding non-existent elements, and, in his latest works, he adds people, who are obviously foreign to the place. A way to recover the landscape within the uncertainty of reality and of possibility, a Utopian reconstruction of places that are impossible to save unless it's done in the artistic terrain of dreams and wishes.

#### Anna Malagrida

We're all intrigued by shadows behind a window. When we watch a city at night and see so many buildings with the lights on, it's impossible not to think about the stories that are going on behind every one of those windows. The lights are on, then they are off, leaving behind a trace of mystery. The façades of the buildings presented by Malagrida are like geometric nets in which every window, lit or not, has great narrative capacity, and invites us to actively participate in the work. The interplay between indoors and outdoors is permanent in these images, which are like dollhouses inhabited by some small beings. These beings are real and we snoop into their lives in brief and undecipherable intervals.

The darkness of the indoor portraits is also suggestive, full of literary dreams. Like those suburban landscapes, where the city breaks into dirt roads, and the space opens up so that nature can fill all the gaps of urbanism. In those badly lit areas, the light coming out of a lone and isolated open car startles us, and that woman walking alone at dusk through a place that is neither country nor city with a thousand ill omens lurking in the dark fills us with anxiety. The city, in the background, is still the unavoidable witness, the backdrop of an unresolved scene, growing in our imagination and making us see and think far beyond what we actually perceive.

#### Alicia Martín

There are objects we use so much that they become a representation of people and acquire human qualities. Like shadows, they keep us company, guard us and protect us. Among this kind of objects, books and furniture are the ones closer to humans. By using it, a book stops being a book and becomes a story we live and dream. A chair, a sofa, becomes the mold of the body that inhabited it, like a bed... or in the end, like any object or place that man inhabits or wears; any object with which we share our bodies, and also our souls.

In the series "Sordos, ciegos, mudos" (Deaf, Blind, Mute), 1999, Alicia Martín works with a series of objects, pieces of furniture we use everyday, but which are estranged from us, detached. They are blind, deaf and mute in their relationship with people. In fact, they are disappearing, they are losing the physical material structure that defines them and gives them shape. They are losing their soul; they are shadows of themselves, with an existence that is coming to an end as they are no longer useful. They have become disposable in spite of the history of encounters they have witnessed and in which they have also taken active part. Far from sharing loneliness and conversations, they disappear leaving behind only a trace of their bodies in the photographic image.

#### Begoña Montalbán

The architectural space, an empty space, can be compared with that mental space in which we build our intimate stories. Dreams and nightmares that take place in spaces away from reality, as if they occurred on the other side of the glass. In this case, it is about stairs facing each other in displaced fragments. A place inaccessible to the individual yet built to be used by him. Reality and dreams; unreality and everyday life. In Montalbán's work, the bodies and the anthropomorphic

structures are built in spaces with no shadows. All her work seems to be placed in a virtual space in which objects are three-dimensional but never real; they don't cast shadows onto those spaces in which they are placed.

"Los pasos perdidos" [The Lost Steps] shows us the impossibility to get anywhere, like a labyrinth. The truncated staircase represents the loss, the impossibility of finding a way out, a place of arrival. The lost steps of so many people that have looked for something which perhaps was only in their minds. Photography here has the power to suggest, and confronts us with the statement that it's no longer about photographing something that happens, an action, a real or constructed place, but photographing a sensation, a symbol, something that neither is nor happens, but is simply a wish.

### Rafael Navarro

Nature is the source of all man's fears. The shadows of the trees in children's stories -made huge by the fear of the child- kept in our memory, that infinite silence of the sea in calm weather, the shapes of the plants. The gap between cultural education and natural knowledge makes man feel a stranger before the elements of Nature and makes the sea to be perhaps the darkest landscape of all, alien to man, full of monsters that in fact simply symbolize our fears.

"Los miedos" (Fears) are photographic diptychs which Rafael Navarro puts in front of us as a kind of psychological test, like the Rorschach inkblot test, so that we can decipher those fears, the origin of the traumas, in order to face the monsters we think we see in the foam of the waves crashing against the rocks. The fact that they are done in black and white highlights the distance, the strangeness. The loss of that postal card beauty that keeps away the fear of the sea helps us face the beauty of the cliff with the vertigo of the fall, with that excitement in pure form that is fear, and there is no worse fear than the fear of the unknown, which is simply the unbridled fear of the monsters dwelling in our minds.

### Concha Pérez

We move through the indefiniteness of reality, with the certainty that everything could be different and the uncertainty as to whether what we deem real is perhaps not real at all. With this way of feeling everything that could define us, everything to which at other times we could resort in order to cling to the certainty of knowing who we are, vanishes. Genres, signs of identity, the appearance of our environment, impossible landscapes that man builds with his advanced technology and the wretchedness of superdevelopment.

Concha Pérez constructs nonexistent but possible spaces. With computing techniques applied to photography, virtually all is possible and the doubt over what's real and what's imaginary becomes a shadow covering any dreamed up sun. Cybernetic places that are familiar to us, living rooms in the middle of the street, the sea as a populated place, isolated chairs in a quarry... uncertain places to which man's presence gives certain logic, making them look as something possible though we're not sure to have been there. Places we thought we saw in a movie, perhaps in a dream, yet they work in our unconscious mind as preambles of future landscapes.

### Xavier Ribas

Those intermediate places, transit places, which don't seem to mean anything in themselves, or to exist, are the ones that interest Ribas the most. In "Umbrales" (Thresholds), 2001-02, he shows us a series of doors in the space immediately before a door in big financial companies. Nothing perceivable in the images tells us that we are at the entrance of those new cathedrals of power that

are banks, financial firms, where the money is. That exiguous but essential space, the small surface before the entrance, is symbolic. Its very existence speaks of the passing of time, of future events, of desperate situations... Everything exists in a space of a few meters that simply serve the purpose of harboring an imaginary story, hundreds of situations experienced by so many people that will cross those thresholds all over the world, a fine line separating wishfulness from reality, hope from despair.

The importance of detail, of that formal minimalism, that direct and thorough way of showing the place, without excesses, simply complying with a reality that speaks to us of imaginary stories exclusively based on all the literature the threshold can arouse in our mind. The threshold, that place we go through perhaps without giving it much of a thought, witness of steps, of stories, of frustrated wishes...

Juan Urrios

Origins, differences of race, gender, age... all become relative in a society that like never before accepts integration as a phenomenon of equality. Somewhere in between a documentary and a psychological analysis, Urrios proposes the idea of belonging in his series "Cantera" (Breeding Ground.) He analyses the phenomenon of emigration from a perspective that may seem superficial. He presents the immigrant as a person seeking acceptance, wishing to fit in more than anything else. He would probably sell his soul to the devil in order to be like the rest, to lose himself with the others in the indifference of the big city.

Twenty portraits of immigrants of different races, origins, gender and age, all of them wearing the shirt of the Barcelona soccer team –the Barça– the symbol of Catalonia. Not surprisingly, the Barça is considered "more than a club", because more than a club, it's a sign of identity. The people portrayed state in a brief CV where they come from, the reasons why they came to Barcelona, Spain, and express that they belong to the Barça, they are members of the club and therefore they are Catalans on their own right. In their efforts to get accepted, they mix up the colors and the distinctive features of the team shirt (symbol among symbols) and show one belonging to another team. People that have lost their identity and try and rebuild it based on borrowed symbols whose meaning they will possibly never fully understand.

(Translations: Marina Torres)

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