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EL INTRUSISMO DEL INSPECTOR

LEANDRO FEAL

25/01/2019 > 30/03/2019



Everything that follows is a contravention

1

I see that Leandro is interested in the top model, he follows her around the bar, tries to convince her with sign language (a photographer doesn't need words), they turn into a dark corridor, he prepares the camera suddenly, when, just as he's about to press the shutter in a paparazzi style burst, the top model pronounces in perfect English: I don't speak with photographers. There's a misunderstanding that lasts a thousandth of a second, but Leandro's finger follows its automatic inertia to the shutter and, in a gesture no less automatic, the top model begins to pose before the invading blast of the Canon 5D Mark II. A scene so natural, it shows that both have been born for this.

The artist is Leandro Feal, the top model is Rianne Ten Haken, and the place was Bar Roma. From street level one could never imagine that the beautiful and dilapidated building of the old Hotel Roma in the centre of Havana could house a bar with the same name. Even less likely to imagine was its incredible rooftop, which dominated almost a third of the old city. The bar was open all hours, you could stay on the premises without having to buy a drink. Chris, the former manager and founder, says that his goal was to create a mixture between the most exclusive place in the city and the most democratic.

For the last three years, in Havana (with the exception of the usual reggaeton concerts) what have been called "extraordinary events" in military jargon have taken place. We have received with applause the President of the United States, Barack Obama, we have seen from afar a Chanel catwalk show, we have been the set of one of the most corporate and inconsequential film sagas in Hollywood (Fast & Furious). We still can't believe we've heard Mick Jagger and Keith Richards live, the living legends of The Rolling Stones. We have discovered the cultural impact of the market.

2

Bar Roma concentrated that frivolous and cosmopolitan spirit of quick and touristy but nonetheless impressive events: the new private economy, the sexual liberation of a generation, the institution of the night as an ecosystem, the peaceful crowd of techno music fans, the interest of tourists for a fashionable capital, the "naked city" that never sleeps, the incipient desire to turn what's cool into a lifestyle. Just like Larry Clark, Leandro gets involved in that community and his camera often shifts his focus towards himself (it exposes) into the hands of someone who has already been portrayed before. The texture of his photos in "Hotel Roma" (2017) has impacted so much in the visuality of other products about Cuba that it's unclear whether he has fixed or invented the imaginariums that complement contemporary perception of the island.

But Hotel Roma, in fact, is a film, influenced by the contact of Chris Marker and Agnès Varda with Cuban cinema at the beginning of the 1960s. "La Nouvelle vague," comments Néstor Almendros, "marked the moment of this change. [...] The fact of working in natural settings was not only for economic reasons (these were low-budget films), but also for aesthetic reasons. [...] It was curious that the bureaucrats wanted to impose upon a revolutionary cinema all the common techniques of old Hollywood photography".

The sociology of the film exudes stories. As a veteran of the Havana scene, Richard, a local worker in his forties and coming from a time when homosexuals were called "entendidos", is quick to tell me one of them: "At that time, at the end of the nineties, clandestine transformista house parties were common. I even had one myself called The Talisman, but the most famous one was El Periquitón.



“El Periquitón was right next to the military school on Avenida 51. It was a fairly large courtyard with a mango bush in the middle, surrounded by a dance floor with tiered seating, at the back it was bounded by a pigsty. I remember it's last night very well. At that time, our references were Pedro Almodóvar and Reinaldo Arenas, I was astounded to see the first of them there, Arenas, sadly, had already died. But in addition to Almodóvar Bibí Andersen or Bibi Fernández and Jean Paul Gaultier were also there. What happened was that at the height of the night the police came and Lola Montes was on stage, a transvestite who now lives in Spain, everyone was caught unaware by Emigration services and the Special Police Brigade. With that shock, some people even fled through the pigsty.

“They put an East-German style typewriter in the middle of the dance floor, with the machine they interrogated everyone, the owner had everything confiscated, and we were taken to the Marianao police station, where we were detained until three in the afternoon the following day, and given a fine and a warning. After that El Periquitón didn't open again. It was the best gay nightclub in Cuba. Roma was also an incredible place, and it didn't have censorship, thanks to the modernity of the 21st century. These young people are lucky not to have lived through the bust at Hotel Capri² in 1968.”

3

Every night it was frequented by artists, writers, intellectuals, businessmen, state and private millionaires, local and international celebrities, ordinary people and tourists. Hotel Roma knew how to 'cross-dress' its actors in a kind of sexual and political promiscuity, where everyone consumes something of what they are missing. The conservative was surrounded by liberals, the millionaire by poverty, the tourist tastes the local flavor and the communist experiences dissidence. While in “¿Y allá qué hora es? (2015-)” Leandro pursues the modern and cosmopolitan face of Havana through the exodus of Cubans in a selection of international scenes, in “Hotel Roma” he concentrates on a single element of the city to show us the world.

“Nevertheless,” wrote Susan Sontag, “the reality of the camera must always hide more than it shows.” The showcase effect of film is one of the most self-referential acts in respect to insular political language. This showcase effect is the opposite of events of another nature. In the last three years we have also experienced the death and pompous funeral of Fidel Castro, a human being that the “Revolution” believed to be eternal. We've seen how Raúl Castro and Donald Trump have undone what Obama and Raúl Castro himself propitiated, and how President Díaz Canel 'runs over' Spanish grammar in his new Twitter account, classifying, as if it were still 1943, those “badly born by mistake in Cuba” Cubans who have political differences with their government. We have accumulated uncertainty before a constitutional project that played with democracy with the popular vote refusal of same-sex marriage, but one that ensures the totalitarian nucleus of the government for the decades ahead. We have fought against Decree 349, a dystopian law whose objective is to curtail the political content of art as a condition of the economic rights of artists.

¹ The Instituto Técnico Militar (ITM) is one of the university centres of the Cuban Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR).

² In 1968, under the influence of the Invasion of Prague and the French May 68 events, the revolutionary authorities carried out the so-called “Capri Collection”, a police raid to “clean up” the surroundings of the Hotel Capri in the Havana neighborhood of Vedado, famous as the meeting place of homosexuals and young people who were interested in American pop-rock music and its lifestyle.



There are two levels of interpretation which explain these facts, one public and one private. The first is "the preservation of socialism" and the second is the maintenance of absolute power. But preservation has more to do with museums and wildlife reserves than with real life and living culture. Leandro's work clarifies this distance, revealing an artificial political language permeated by the citizens' demands for freedom and prejudice. The bow that tightens the existing string between these two realities is "De la Reforma a la Contrarreforma" (2016), a series of photographs which show, on the one hand, the Chanel catwalk show, the Rolling Stones concert, that's to say, the public correlation of the hedonist experience of Bar Roma, and on the other, the death of Fidel Castro.

The images of this death are a nucleus of important work in their own right, they are also as abundant and extensive as the funeral itself: nine days of mourning, intense processions, prohibition of alcoholic beverages in shops and bars. Beneath the spiky nerves and the repressive air there was also a relief, like the prelude to a party without music and smiles, but one that promises to last forever. In the end what happened was more the result of what happens with all totalitarian gatherings, some went to dismiss the remains of Fidel Castro as if it were a "botellón" (street party). To the compromised look of the national cameras Leandro opposed the coldness of a paparazzi. Faced with the compromised vision of the national cameras Leandro displayed the coldness of a paparazzo. The military clothing kindly naturalized by nationalist propaganda restored its strange hardness. In the face of the honesty of the old communists he displayed the opportunism of political theatre. He sprinkled the military funeral with the festive enthusiasm of the youth that was in attendance.

In some respects, he continues the work of Alberto Korda, whose camera captured the beginning of a social process personified by "vital" and "legendary" bearded commanders. On the other hand, Leandro's camera portrays the physical decadence and the end of that process, where the revolutionary "epic" is inevitably mixed with its own taboos: the themes of Constantino Arias (a local noir photographer) who immortalized the perverse environment of celebrities at the Hotel Nacional during the 50s, or those of Sabá Cabrera and Orlando Jiménez Leal in PM³. Something akin to a symbolic reconciliation, after so much time, of two opposite ways of understanding Cuba. The independence that Cuban society has generated in respect to state institutions is the Achilles heel of the government. If there is a movement, it is independent, although, paradoxical as it may seem, its impact is reduced to less than 5% of the economy's income, the rest remains state-owned. If there is a movement, it's also a very small one.

4

The death of Fidel Castro was the trigger that set off the Counter-Reformation. Non-governmental alternatives have been the target. They have closed some of the most successful small businesses, they've further restricted the economic rights of citizens and have ensured that the emerging and tiny private sector does not generate content as independent as its economy does. The direct consequence of the above is a decree such as the 349, which has set alarm bells ringing amongst the local and international art community.

³In 1961, Sabá Cabrera Infante and Orlando Jiménez Leal made the short film PM, produced by the cultural magazine Lunes de Revolución, which was created by a group of democratic left-wing intellectuals. The reception of the film scandalized those in power because of the popular and festive images of the night as opposed to the alarm of war caused by the military tensions with the United States. The controversy unleashed by the documentary was the excuse for a meeting with Cuban intellectuals where Fidel Castro defined the cultural policy of the new government through the following phrase: "with the Revolution everything, against the Revolution, nothing". The magazine was closed that same year and the film censored.



Contravention is the preferred legal aspect of the decree. With a rapid denunciation of artists, officials at the Ministry of Culture began a counter-offensive. Where the document spoils freedoms and rights (it is considered a breach he or she "who provides artistic services without being authorized to perform artistic work in a position or artistic occupation" in state and private spaces), they say that in fact protects artists of a term created by bureaucratic rhetoric: "professional intrusion". Where it legalizes censorship (the decree is deeply concerned with contents, the real ones: "the use of national symbols", etc. and the possible ones: "any other that violates the legal provisions that regulate the normal development of our society in cultural matters"), they say that it is against the vulgarization of society, a fact that, on the other hand, was promoted by the system itself. The last time the government was concerned with "protecting culture" (as dictated by the official slogan of the decree) was in 1971; the result was the purge of the Soviet-style intellectuals that produced the darkest years of our art.

The elite troop that will guarantee the fulfillment of the fateful decree will be the "inspectors", who will be able to "immediately suspend the spectacle or the projection in question, and propose the cancellation of the authorization in order to exercise self-employment activity, as appropriate." Ideally, what the 349 seems to say is that artists should dedicate themselves to landscape painting. The corruption and incapacity involved in the exercise of this arbitrary power is enough to classify the inspectors as the real intruders. The police jargon of the section dedicated to inspectors is proof of this: warnings, fines, confiscation of "equipment, accessories and other goods."

The decree has reinvigorated tension in the Cuban cultural spectrum. The debates that it has raised are evidence of two exclusive languages: one democratic and the other totalitarian. If there's one thing in common that defines intellectual tradition in Cuba, it's an agonizing struggle against the mediocrity of context. The continuity of a conservative culture and the cosmopolitan logic of the avant-garde. There are, at least, three indisputable pieces of evidences of this. Lezama Lima writes to Rodríguez Feo in 1948: "The situation of the country is the face of Juno. On the one hand, a purpose of rectification: on the other, the Cuban style of forever, ordinary and vulgar". In 1989, Reinaldo Arenas spoke about "the flat tradition and the daily vulgarity that has characterized our island". Leandro Feal doesn't need to explain it, in contrast he presents "El intrusismo del inspector", a show to challenge inspectors wherever they are, an exhibition that Decree 349, without any doubt, would have censored.

Text: Abel González Fernández (curator)



BIOGRAPHY

Havana, Cuba, 1986

Leandro Feal (Havana, 1986, lives and works in Havana) is a contemporary artist interested in all dimensions of photography. His ambition is to build up the cultural collective imagination of the winds of change sweeping through Cuba in the specific context of Cuban society. With this objective in mind he works in the realm of the photographic essay and uses all possible means to expand on it.

He has held exhibitions in: Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wilfredo Lam, Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), Galleria Continua Les Moulins, Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes of Havana (MNBA), Museo de Arte Moderno de Santo Domingo, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno (CAAM), Artium, Centro-Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporáneo, Laznia Centre for Contemporary Art in Gdansk.

His work features in The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA – US), Cisneros Fontanal Art Foundation (CIFO – US), The Modern Form Collection (United Kingdom) y The Coppel Foundation (Mexico).

He has presented his work in Parasol Unit, London and the Japan Foundation in Tokyo. He has taken part in international events such as the XXXI Pontevedra Biennale and the Kochi Muziris Biennale 2018. He has also been artist in residence at the Azkuna Zentroa in Bilbao as part of the program Artista X Artista.

He has held individual exhibitions in London: Havana, Siegfried Contemporary; Havana: *Yo no hablo con fotógrafos*, Galería Servando (2018) and *Blow Up, Blow Up* (with Joan Fontcuberta), El Apartamento (2016).

WORK



EL INTRUSISMO DEL INSPECTOR

Instalation

- ID card of the registry of the creator of applied plastic arts
- Official Gazette of the Republic of Cuba 2018 num. 35
- Vinyl of decree 349

Variable dimensions



Hotel Roma

Video Full HD

2/2 AP + 5 ED

Duration 52'31" - Loop



(Funerales de Fidel Castro)

Fom series "De la reforma a la contrareforma"

Ultrachrome imprint/Baryta paper 310 gr

ED 1/5 + 2 AP

112 x 175 cm



Tres lindas cubanas

Ultrachrome imprint/Baryta paper 310 gr

ED 3/5 + 2 AP

Triptych 175 x 112 cm (each work)

Variable dimensions



Serie “Ya la vida cambió”
 Instalation (75 photographs)
 Ultrachrome imprint/Baryta paper 310 gr
 7 x 10 cm o 10 x 7 cm

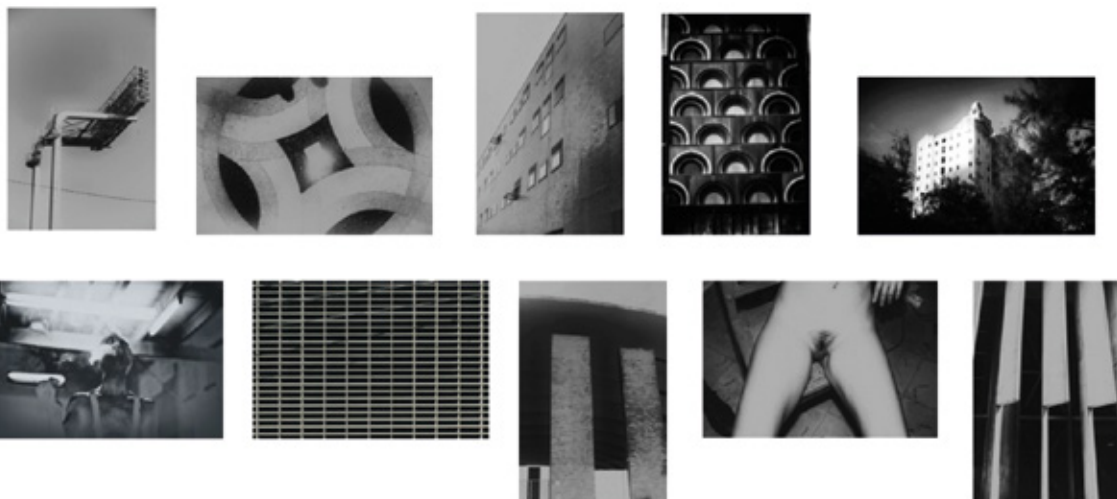


Series “Ya la vida cambió”
 Ultrachrome imprint/Baryta paper 310 gr
 7 x 10 cm o 10 x 7 cm
 Details



“Doce estudios para una femme fatale”

Ultrachrome imprint/Baryta paper 310 gr
ED 4/5 + 2 AP
61 x 80 cm each work

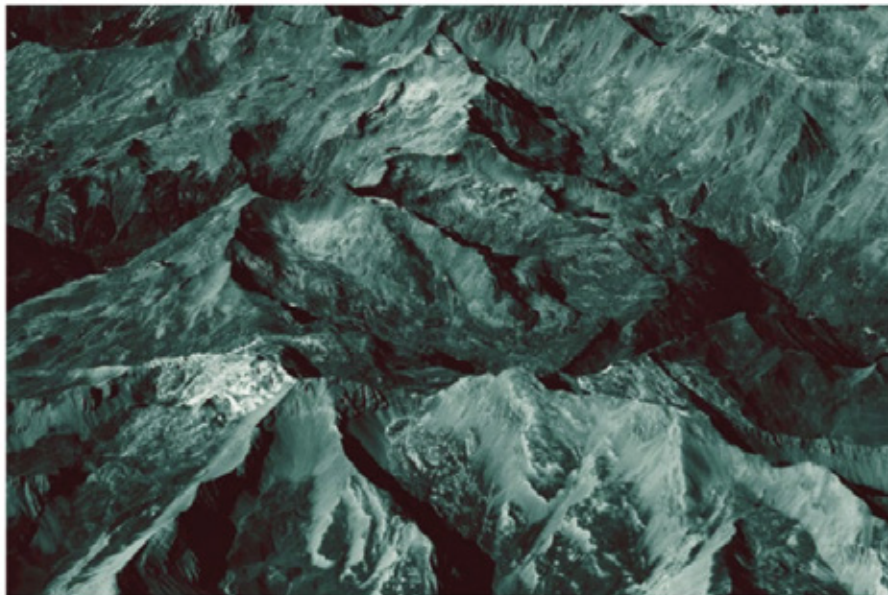


Series “¿Y allá qué hora es?”

Ultrachrome imprint/Baryta paper 310 gr
7 x 10 cm or 10 x 7 cm



From series “¿Y allá qué hora es?”
Ultrachrome imprint/Baryta paper 310 gr
AP 1/2 + 5 ED
112 x 175 cm



From series “¿Y allá qué hora es?”
Ultrachrome imprint/Baryta paper 310 gr
ED 1/5 + 2 AP
112 x 175 cm



From series “¿Y allá qué hora es?”
Ultrachrome imprint/Baryta paper 310 gr
7 x 10 cm or 10 x 7 cm



From series “¿Y allá qué hora es?”
Ultrachrome imprint/Baryta paper 310 gr
ED 4/5 + 2 AP
50 x 61 cm



CV

STUDIES

2007-2008

Instituto Superior de Arte, La Habana

2005-2007

Cátedra Arte de Conducta, dirigida por Tania Bruguera, (Instituto Superior de Arte), La Habana

2002-2006

Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes San Alejandro, La Habana

1999-2001

Centro Experimental José Antonio Díaz Peláez (23 y C)

Exposiciones personales

2017

Yo no hablo con fotógrafos. Galería Servando, La Habana, Cuba.

Nadie lo sabe todo (with Taxio Ardanaz), Azkuna Zentroa. Bilbao, Spain.

2016

Blow Up, Blow Up (with Joan Fontcuberta), El Apartamento. La Habana, Cuba.

2015

Lugar común, lugar extraño. Bilbao Arte, Bilbao, España Vivir la fotografía sin vivir de ella. Luz y Oficios. Centro Provincial de Artes Plásticas y Diseño, La Habana, Cuba

2013 Donde nadie es exclusivo. Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, La Habana, Cuba

COLLECTIVE EXHIBITIONS

2018

Feria Internacional de Arte Contemporáneo ARCO Madrid 2018, Feria de Madrid. Madrid, España.

2017

La noche redimida, Estudio Figueroa-Vives y Embajada de Noruega en Cuba. La Habana, Cuba.

Atalaya, Galería Taller Gorriá. La Habana, Cuba.

Artissima Art Fair, Turin, Italy. (Stand Galería Servando, La Habana, Cuba)

Cuba mi amor. Diez años de Galleria Continua en Francia (2007-2017). París, Francia.

¿soy Cuba?: I nuovi Caraibi a Milano, Teatro Franco Parenti (Galleria Continua). Milán, Italia.

On the Horizon: Contemporary Cuban Art from the Jorge M. Pérez Collection, Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM). Miami, Estados Unidos.

Dobleplay. Fotografía cubana de hoy, Foto Museo Cuatro Caminos, Lomas de Sotelo, Naucalpan, Estado de México (Mexico).

Kunst x Kuba, Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen, Germany.

Asimétrica, El Apartamento. La Habana, Cuba.

Colección de archivos, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (MNBA). La Habana, Cuba.

El museo de las máquinas, Los Carpinteros' Studio. La Habana, Cuba.

Feria de Arte Contemporáneo Zona Maco México 2017, Centro Citibanamex. Ciudad de México, México. Película/Film (Open Studio)

Carlos Garaicoa's Studio. Madrid, Spain.

2016

Nido sin árbol, Unión Nacional de Arquitectos e Ingenieros de la Construcción de Cuba (UNAIC)- Galería Continua. La Habana, Cuba.

La suspensión del deseo. Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, La Habana, Cuba

Hoy desde de los 80s. Casa de México, La Habana, Cuba

La banalidad del mar. Museo de Arte Moderno, Santo Domingo, República Dominicana

Cuba al cubo. Evolución por Fugaz, Callao, Perú

La Pala (a la corta o a la larga). Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, La Habana, Cuba

Open Studio. Otro puto estudio, La Habana, Cuba



Tumbando. Evolución by Fugaz, Callao, Perú

Comercio de rescate. Galería Servando, La Habana, Cuba Iconocracia. CAAM: Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, España

2015

Colimadores - Cuba Im Blick. Kunsträume Michael Horbach Stiftung, Colonia, Alemania

Signos. Arte, industria y viceversa. Factoría Habana, La Habana, Cuba

Devenir-animal, devenir-intenso, devenir-imperceptible. Fábrica de Arte Cubano, La Habana, Cuba

Iconocracia. Artium. Centro- Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporáneo, Vitoria-Gasteiz, España

Pulso. Colateral 12da Bienal de La Habana, Galería L, La Habana

Open Studio. Colateral 12da Bienal de La Habana, Sometimes Art Space, La Habana, Cuba

Campos de batalla. Studio 8 y Punctum Espacio, La Habana, Cuba

Bodegón. Fábrica de Arte Cubano, La Habana, Cuba

El juguete rabioso. Fucina des Artistas, La Habana, Cuba

2014

Bice Bugatti Club. Villa Vertua, Milan, Italia

2013

DIY (Do It Yourself). Self Kitchen. Tokio, Japón

Politics: I do not like it but it likes me. Centre for Contemporary Art Laznia, Gdansk, Polonia

2011

Retrospectiva de Raymaluz Art Gallery. Raymaluz Art Gallery, Madrid, España

2010

XXXI Bienal de Pontevedra. Pontevedra, España

2009

Reina Número 39. Open Studio. Programación paralela a ARCO'09, Madrid, España

2008

Estado de excepción. 10a Bienal de La Habana. Galería Habana, La Habana, Cuba

Un ojo en la niebla. Sala Contemporánea de la Casa de las Américas, La Habana, Cuba

Si una noche de invierno un viajero. Galería del Instituto Superior de Arte, La Habana, Cuba

We are porno. Espacio Aglutinador, La Habana, Cuba Presentación personal. Fototeca de Cuba, La Habana, Cuba

2007

Bueno, Bonito y Barato. Close Up, México D.F., México III Bienal Nacional de Fotografía Alfredo Sarabia in Memoriam, Pinar del Río, Cuba

Impass. Facultad de Artes y Letras de La Habana, Cuba

2006

Bueno, Bonito y Barato. Casa particular, La Habana, Cuba 9a Bienal de la Habana. Presentación de la Cátedra Arte de Conducta".

Estudio de Tania Bruguera, La Habana, Cuba

2005

Irrracionalismo post-racional. Galería José Antonio Díaz Peláez. Academia de Bellas Artes San Alejandro, La Habana, Cuba

RESIDENCIES

2016

Artista x Artista. Azkuna Zentroa, Bilbao, España

2015

New York Film Academy. Los Angeles – New York, Estados Unidos

Lourdes Fernandez, es licenciada en Historia del Arte por la UB (Universidad de Barcelona), Máster en Museología y Crítica de Arte por la UIA, (Università Internazionale dell'arte de Florencia).

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