

27 Years, 8 Months, 14 Days. A Dialogue between darkness and conscience/

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Vida Yovanovich's photographic work might indeed be understood as an extended social documentation project. Over the years, the photographer has focused on the experiences of different groups of women—teenage mothers, senior citizens at nursing homes, prisoners—subjected to some form or other of social exclusion. In her pictures, Yovanovich records events in the private lives of women entailing a situation of vulnerability or disability in terms of the community in which they live. Like many documentary projects, Yovanovich's calls the viewer's attention to problematic social issues whose discussion, affected in her case by the portrayed women's marginalization due to gender, class or age, tends to be overlooked by the community to which they belong.

Presented in the art world through well-articulated and channeled narratives, her photographs transcend—and transgress—the documentary intent. Employing means that emphasize the image's subjective, constructed nature, Yovanovich leads us to the realm of an aesthetic experience. And it is in this sensory and emotional dimension of photography as art, rather than in the apparently objective, rational space of the document, where we face what is portrayed. With our senses as our only recourse, we are forced to establish a dialogue with that which is painful and lies at the heart of the images themselves.

How does Yovanovich achieve emotional closeness with what she portrays? A first device she resorts to is a mobile, flowing point of view. This allows her to distance the images of *Resonant Solitudes* from the studied, stereotyped pose of bourgeois portraiture, as well as from the rational, scientific aim of forensic photography. The “real effect” of her portraits of women is also produced by means of atypical, unplanned framing: by leaving part of her subjects' bodies out of the image, the photographer makes us feel that the situation depicted is accidental. Far from following the classical strategy of documentary photography, which seeks to capture decisive moments pregnant with meaning and graphic effect, Yovanovich's project focuses on the representation of the ordinary. Her photographs do not seek to reveal life's heroic quality, but rather the inherent bountifulness of the commonplace, the everyday.

The fact that the photographs are unpremeditated is significant: it is a conceptual approach taken by an artist who chooses to shift the weight of

documentary evidence from the visual context to the context of sound, discourse and space. If, faced with *Resonant Solitudes*, we have the feeling that it is not the photographer who constructs the testimony and the work, but also the women portrayed, in *Abyss of Absence* it is the inmates' meager belongings—a broken mirror, old sandals, a bowl containing a meal's leftovers—what seems to form an involuntary still life. These fragmented fortuitous prints of the subject matter lead us to confront the installation piece, *27 years, 8 months, 14 days*: a space dominated by imposing portraits of inmates whose life is marked by the countdown of their days in prison. Dimly lit and slightly larger than life-size, the full-body portraits dominate the installation's space: it seems like the women portrayed are the ones staring at the viewer and not the other way around.

In *27 years, 8 months, 14 days*, a twofold condition of exclusion can be observed: one that eradicates the condition of the art world's social sphere, and two, the fact that these women have been physically removed from their community for having disobeyed its rules. Transcending the dominant canons of documentation and beauty, Yovanovich's work exhorts us to reintegrate what we, as a community, have excluded. Transformed into images and words, into sensible experiences, the women living in the shadows become points of interlocution. Facing us, and through aesthetic means, they implore us to initiate a dialogue between obscurity and conscience.

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