

Old Age According to Yovanovich / José Antonio Rodríguez

In her unique essay about old age, Simone de Beauvoir writes, “We do not want to believe the image that old people provide us of our future; a voice inside us absurdly whispers that this will not happen to us. Before it actually happens, old age is something that only concerns other’s.” This is why society tends to forget about, or “discard”—to use de Beauvoir’s more exact term—anyone who might seem unproductive, showing us a sign of contemporary society’s failure.

The beginning of this year marked the appearance of that account of bleakness which is *Cárcel de los Sueños* (Prison of Dreams)—the first book published by photographer Vida Yovanovich, who has by now spent much time observing old age. Images from the *Cárcel...* series were first exhibited to the public in 1989, and over the years, Yovanovich has shown us more and more fragments of this sad, painful universe of forgotten seniors. In the manner of a dramatic, somewhat expressionistic document, her book has exposed viewers to these terrible lonelinesses.

Paralleling the work of Pedro Meyer, who digitized his photographs in *Fotografía para recordar* (I Photograph to Remember, documenting his own loving farewell ceremony with his parents), Vida Yovanovich puts together a concise and effective installation piece very much based on feelings, objects and the flow of space. Like many other documentary photographers who have come to incorporate other media, Yovanovich has now resorted to the spatial organization of images to quite literally situate the viewer in another dying microcosm. The roots of this first installation, entitled *Gastado el Tiempo* (Spent Time), now on show, can be found in her exhibition *Fragmentos Completos* (Fragments as a Whole, Galería Kin, 1993), where she displayed her first photomontages and her special incursion into the day-to-day personal space of her mother Vera.

Thus, *Gastado el Tiempo* peers into the life of Yovanovich’s elderly mother—though the relationship is never explicitly stated—as the photographer takes a new obsessive and introspective look at old age and time. Visitors are welcomed by a round, low-lit room to face a circular photomontage of various fragments, pieced together into a sequence, depicting the elderly woman in her living space: softly lit and sometimes almost dark interiors, antique furniture and walls covered with memories. The circular, endless, lingering gaze attempts to eternally prolong the expected disappearance (the slow shutter speed transforming the elderly woman into a blur). If in *Cárcel de los*

Sueños, the photographer showed abandonment, poverty and pain as brutal signs of reality, then in *Gastado el Tiempo* she constructs one last memory of peacefulness. And in the end, in that long farewell, what only remains are ornaments, furniture, suitcases and melancholic music that envelops presence and absence in an inevitable past and present.

Thus, Yovanovich once again confronts herself with the wear and the deterioration characteristic of her time and the time of others, which she also assumes as her own.

Vida Yovanovich's *Gastado el Tiempo* closes this Sunday, June 28, at the Centro de la Imagen in Mexico City.

RODRÍGUEZ, José Antonio. "La vejez según Yovanovich," *El Financiero*, Cultural section, *Clicks a la distancia* column, Thursday, June 25, 1998.