

**Yovanovich: Abyss of Absence / José Antonio Rodríguez**

Everything here is shrouded in gloom: in those deep blacks that surround it all. Dense shadows that expand and suffuse the composition, barely allowing us to distinguish tenuous glimmers of light. In this darkness which becomes a fundamental presence to reveal emptiness, or a fall into the abyss (based on that “threat of the precipice that black exerts,” following Victor Stoichita’s ideas in *A Short History of the Shadow*). Here I have yet more evidence of our desolation, of everything we have abandoned: it is *Abismo de ausencia* (Abyss of Absence), the latest exhibition by Vida Yovanovich, a master of documentary photography who has managed to painfully exhibit other people’s distress (or even her own: “*Vida* examining my life in others’,” she once stated).

And objects become impregnated with memory, as the residue of abandonment: a rag left on a delapidated floor; a toilet in which the *Santa Muerte* was once worshiped; threadbare sockets that provide no illumination; a woman’s under shorts thrown away like a ravaged life; showers in makeshift bathrooms that were seldom cleaned; a narrow cot above which hangs a young girl’s shiny, delicate dress, about to be engulfed by a voracious shadow; altars in tiny spaces for a prayer whose petition was refused before it was even made; tin cans made into ancient kitchen utensils. All of them, objects that reveal a lack of means, now in a state of utter dereliction. And also a metaphor for a time, the present, oblivious to other times. The oppression of the prison, where only these telltale signs of an absence/presence remain. Nothing but spent time —what already seems to be Yovanovich’s trademark.

The use of these objects as a reference to memory has undoubtedly been a device that current Mexican photographers have mastered (we should mention, for instance, Mauricio Alejo and his *Objetos ajenos*, 1999; or Laura Cohen’s reconstructions of other people’s objects), but in Yovanovich’s work, they become a circular narrative about her obsessions: solitude, time, death, abandonment, the coming of old age. Her work makes no concessions to lyricism or peacefulness. On the contrary, what you see here are settings that convey fears experienced in a specific time and place. This is why her body of work is a concatenation of very diverse pieces. If in *Soledades Sonoras* (Resonant Solitudes)—shown this same year at the Centro de la Imagen—viewers could get to know and listen to the life experiences of inmates at women’s penitentiaries (which could have been any prison in Mexico), now in *Abismo*

*de Ausencia*, it seems like we are viewing the actual spaces where these women have lived. An element of this had already been presented in *Cárcel de los Sueños* (Prison of Dreams, 1997)—another painful look at old age, in which Yovanovich scrutinized a retirement home and its visual signs of abandonment. For this reason, this artist's highly diverse documentation seems to establish a cartography of desolation, beginning and ending with corners.

But not only this. Renewing as she has various forms of visual syntax, Yovanovich has managed to work with space and transform two-dimensional photography into a three-dimensional environment that envelops the viewer. This was the case of her installation *De frente* (Up Front, Museo del Chopo, 1998), in which she confronted the elapsing of her own temporality; or of *Gastado el tiempo* (Spent Time), a kind of farewell ceremony. And this too, is the case in *Abismo* or abyss, where the viewer looks at an image—*e.g.* a modest table, like a sanctuary of emptiness—and then becomes absorbed by it, by that poignant darkness where the only glimmer of light lies in the fragility of a few white flowers. Total emptiness in this abysmal absence.

RODRÍGUEZ, José Antonio. "Yovanovich: abismos de ausencia," *El Financiero*, Mexico City, November 17, 2005, p. 43.