

Fragments as a Whole / Olivier Debroyse

Photography is an image-capturing device—everybody knows that—and yet the shapes that are frozen in time, fixed, replicated on a sheet of paper are almost always imbued with emotions, temporal connotations. Fleeting faces, buildings in ruins, ways of being that have disappeared, periods of time that have definitely passed—all these things are stored in photographic archives, both private and public.

Vida Yovanovich may be one of the Mexican photographers who is most aware of this process, and her use of photography reveals this obsession about time—or better said, her extreme sensitivity to the wear and tear of time. This was particularly evident in the raw images of an extensive series that Yovanovich presented to the public a few months ago, documenting life in a retirement home; people trapped in a kind of manmade limbo (the home's common room) between life (depicted in many images by the characters' relationship with their own collections of photographs) and death (the decay, the wearing out of flesh, revealed, exposed with uncommon violence).

In an attempt to conclude this body of work, Vida Yovanovich is now showing a series of photomontages in which she manifestly assembles two images (*i.e.* two times) in a single composition. In a reflection on her own practice, a skilful way of distancing herself, Yovanovich “mounts” her own image, her own face, on top of selected photographs she has already shown. This literal intervention by the photographer, no longer as a witness, but as a participant in a lengthy process, distorts the meaning of the document, situating it in her own here-and-now. A strange inversion: the document ceases to be something extrinsic, coldly exhibited; photographs cease to be an eyewitness's account.

Unlike traditional photomontage artists, who show the cut-and-paste, the disjunctions, the changes in scale and point of view, Vida Yovanovich places the various fragments on the same level or plane, concealing the divisions to a certain extent, yet far removed from any sort of “magical realism”; the shocking union of a “before” and an “after” in a single image evinces the medium's fragility, but also the falseness, the essential hypocrisy of the photographic process: the photomontage seems to be saying, in the manner of Jorge Luis Borges, that all times are one and the same.

DEBROISE, Olivier. “Fragmentos completos,” Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 1994.