

Vida Yovanovich/Scream in silence
Laboratorio de Arte Alameda
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Scream in silence

Vida Yovanovich has distinguished herself for creating poetic and compelling photo essays about subjects and spaces on which her gaze fixes for extended periods of time, capturing a substantial empathy and sensitivity - whether about social reality or intimate conditions - she feels towards situations that she confronts with an unveiled look fed by a deep sensitivity.

Her photo essays are always radical; they border on "something" that is not made obvious, but they make palpable the imminence of the present and the future of the subjects/contexts portrayed, in places silently inhabited by death, catastrophe, abandonment, loneliness, among other conditions and sequels of the unseen destiny of existence.

Using analog and/or digital media, her black and white photographs have always been technically impeccable. However, it is not solely this neatness and technical perfection that has placed her among the best contemporary photographers in Mexico; rather, it is her tremendously powerful aesthetic that attests to her visual compositions.

By analyzing the course of her work, this strength and dignity in the face of the devastation (always present in her images) is affirmed. It is the result of a solidarity and silent respect to the issues/subjects with which she has worked, distilling negotiations (conscious or unconscious) that stem (from) memory, history, witnessing, absence, pain, and the irremediable.

Scream in silence, her most recent solo exhibition at the *Laboratorio Arte Alameda*, is a project born and fed during a three-month stay in Austria and materialized over the course of four years. These are works that lurk on the atrocity of one of the historic genocides that destroyed the existence and sense of humanity *in* humanity - the Holocaust - which Yovanovich faces through her own insistent presence inside one of the deadliest concentration camps of World War II: Mauthausen.

This is the first time that Yovanovich has presented us with a project using exclusively video and audio installations. Displacing the immobility of analog photography, which has been her narrative medium thus far, in this exhibition, the aesthetic/ethical search makes masterful use of the temporality of video through shared events full of death, which are set before us as mute calls to action.

It is an unwavering dialogue between the eight works through which Yovanovich confronts us with visual temporalities whose confessional cadences are internalized by the viewer through layers of the unspeakable. Between the (in)visible horrors surrounding and inhabiting Mauthausen, the artist seeks traces, answers, 'something' that may still exist amongst the vast void emanating from the memory of the site.

Paul Celan said there was nothing to write after that brutal effort to extinguish the *others*. How is it then possible to narrate such an atrocity?

The only possible response that I can translate *through words* I have found in Jacques Derrida when (even if not referring to this precise fact) he stated that a narrative (*récit*) does not merely involve recalling the past, but also an awareness that this recovery of what happened implies a *promise* and a *commitment* to the future. *Scream in silence* reiterates this sense of the (un)speakable, while rescuing that *promise* and awakening the *commitment* to respond, as can only be done against that which belongs to the abyss of the unspeakable, acutely using the *experience-in-time* that video enables.

Yovanovich gives body and place to stories buried in the land, walking over corpses to create almost-dead videos of immobility that stand the test of time in a contained duration (*Memoria que se borra*); or 65 small trees planted and cared for by the artist in the course of four years (*Grita en silencio*), waiting in a side chapel as if to remind us of the fortitude of life; as the one listening to testimonies in as many languages as the many ones who stepped into the camp. Whispers emanate from the darkness of a cloister through a curved fabric wall under the panoptic projection of one of the checkpoints of the camp (*Torre de Control*).

But amongst the audio-visual experiences in the show, I would like to point out the cogency of the video-installation *Salix babylonica*.

Four looped shots of a lone willow tree are projected over the full expanse of four walls. They consist of static footage of the same tree made in each climatic season, they ravish - even knowing of the context and baggage that burdens the image, the tree, the site, the history -; as a kind of hypnotism. The four-times-tree pulls the body of the viewer into the center of the room. We co-habit the overwhelming silence that Yovanovich scoured hundreds of times trying to penetrate the material memory of Mauthausen. We are witnessing a temporary stand-still, passive, yes, but still alive. The willow survives with integrity and determination.

After an unquantifiable lapse immersed in the evidence of time and the resurgence of branches, we note that under our feet, there is a traced square indicating the dimensions of one of the gas chambers that exterminated at least 200,000 lives. Then suddenly, something moves in one (of the) tree(s): a bird flies out of the interior of the tree at a speed that makes it almost invisible. There is life in Mauthausen, despite Mauthausen.

Marcela Quiroz Luna