

Prison of Dreams / Andrés de Luna

Chronos is a glutton who devours existence. His vicious bites and relentless gnawing reduce us to the crones that we are: itinerant beings who survive trapped in a body that decays from day to day. The mouth is reduced to a dark hole, leg strength vanishes, and sexuality is nothing but a memory. The elderly are social pariahs: a kind of anchor or weight that some look upon with pity, while others simply ignore them.

Prison of Dreams (CNCA, 1997) is a collection of important images from Vida Yovanovich's body of work. It shows the destructive Chronos, who uses his razor-sharp teeth to grab onto the misery and abandonment that live in a home for old women. There is something of a strange blend in these ruined anatomies, in these faces where pain is the expression that finds its home among the wrinkles. The world dances while everything else collapses; all becomes destruction and ashes as part of that inevitable reality.

And yet, Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt, and many others saw tremendous expressiveness in the aging. Outside of the classical canons of beauty, what remains in an elderly face is a map of time: the coordinates of a life experience that emerges and asserts itself at that moment when everything seems to be moving relentlessly toward death. Vida Yovanovich's photography does not remain on the surface of these beings submerged in their old age—far from it. What she seeks is the interplay of relationships, environment, and atmosphere surrounding her subjects, with whom she shares the weight of years and the illicit burden of pain. Weaving through the book are contexts that lend a dramatic quality to her images. Yovanovich never gave in to the temptation to make this reality an exercise in facileness. What she does is frame her elderly subjects in ways that show old age in all its rawness and desolation. The grimaces, lethargic movements, and unfocused gazes combine to create a universe that Vida Yovanovich is responsible for revealing, to assume the fact that if there exists any beauty in the world, it must be charged with emotion, instilling it with other tones and nuances. The journey must be against the current, and that is Yovanovich's vision: even discovering elements of great beauty within such close quarters, such immediate surroundings. The book's cover perfectly illustrates this: a woman eating in front of windows full of daylight. Everything seems strange—a wasteland, to use Eliot's word—but when all things seem to be waning in the leadenness of time, a young dove

appears, bearing the virtues of the bird in the midst of the Great Flood: it is the suggestion of hope.

This is a magnificent edition of *Prison of Dreams*, allowing us to enter into reflective dialogue with these images by Vida Yovanovich, an artist at the height of her career, who confronts old age to realize that her art is a vital force and a breath of fresh air in a time of miserliness and bland artistic expressions. In this sense, a book such as Yovanovich's is a good example of the evocative powers of photography, where one theme is composed and recomposed in order to allow us to contemplate a reality that awaits us all.

Andrés De Luna, "Cárcel de los sueños," *El Financiero*, March 10, 1998, p. 54.

Translated by Michelle Suderman.