ACT 3: TWENTY FACES AND THREE CROWD

30.09.2021 – 08.04.2022

The oldest portrait in the world is held at the Moravian Museum, Brno. Made 26,000 years ago, it is not an idealized image, but the face of a particular woman carved into the tusk of a woolly mammoth. Between that piece and the latest Instagram selfie lies a story of how human beings look at one another, and also a genealogy of our manners of interpreting. A face always 'needs' to be decoded by someone else; it always 'demands' confrontation. Even the self-portrait confirms the double nature of the game: the sight of our own faces in the mirror prompts the question, "Who am I, what is that?"

Estrangement and voyeurism, mythology and politics meet in the ways art documents faces. There are visages whose beauty can do nothing but arouse an aesthetic response, while others generate social indignation.

Ever since the gods punished Narcissus for flirting with his own reflection, and psychoanalysis typified the excess of self-love as narcissistic pathology, the question as to what a face can tell (us) has navigated uncertain moral waters. In another, not so distant direction, medical and police archives have disconnected the face from the soul (as popular knowledge would have it), meaning that that as well as being used by painters, photographers and filmmakers, the face was also put to use by reward-seekers, jailers and the creative directors of election campaigns.

Twenty Faces and Three Crowd takes a look through the Suñol Soler Collection, attempting to find a MacGuffin – the face as a culmination or apocalypse of art, faces that return us to certain primordial lessons; among them, that a constant, unavoidable basis of aesthetic contemplation is curiosity, to lead the face into a collective use, deliberately displaying – or erasing where necessary – the differences between what we are and what is seen of us.

This journey between the falsely basic to the ironically epigonic is exemplified in the works of Rosa Amorós –*Uap*– (2007) and Fred Forest –*m² artistique* (1976)–, and also by the metaphor linking a featureless, though highly expressive skeleton's face to the tongue-in-cheek face of the artist-manager smiling after clinching the latest deal. One face is missing from this dialogue: the owner of the artistic m² being looked at by Forest – Josep Suñol.

The collector is also present by absence in the video *Retrat de Pep Suñol* (1976-2009), in which Muntadas has composed a Beckett-like piece: Godot, the man whom everyone refers to, whom everything is arranged around, never comes onto the scene, and acquires the physiognomy of an evanescent being or entelechy.

Roman Buxbaum's *Cabezas* (1991) also have no faces, although the two men are well-dressed and repeated. Their neckties and well-buttoned shirts, superimposed with a word simulating an order, remind us that power does actually tend to lose its head.

Robert Llimós' *Àliga xarleston* (1966) takes on a specific meaning if we focus on its date. We should remember that there was a time – not so long ago as some would have us believe – when the imperial eagle and the crown of the empire combined as –One, Great and Free–, the emblem of the Franco dictatorship. Llimós has adorned the eagle with a necklace and the typical Charleston dress from South Carolina, which symbolized the optimism of the twenties and was a prelude to the great financial crash of 1929. The eagle can dance 'til he drops, but never lose his talons.

Another icon of bohemian life and the roaring 'twenties in Paris is *Masque de Kiki de Montparnasse* (1928) by Pablo Gargallo. Unlike Man Ray's famous portrait likening the model's silhouette to a violin, the sculptor focuses on two of her features: her bowl haircut and kohl eyeliner - one of the most ancient types of makeup we know of.

The face of the artist transforms in Inge Morath's photo *Albert Giacometti Studio, Paris* (1960), as in Darío Villalba's *Uno roto* (1976), Pep Duran's *Les sabates de Picabia* (1988) and Zush/Evru's *Art segle XXI* (2008). It travels from the studio to public immolation, from the pulpit and rest spaces to the place where it becomes Prometheus.

In a photo by Ouka Leele from 1979-1980, Zush is lying in a bathtub with his face on the surface, staring directly at the viewer. Floating next to him is a *tucar* bill – the fictitious currency in his *Evrugo Mental State*.

Pablo Picasso's *Buste de femme au chemisier jaune* (1943), and Andy Warhol's *Ladies and Gentlemen* (1975) are the two vertices mentioned in the opening of this text. The expression of the woman's profile in

Picasso's work shows a kind of estrangement; whereas in Warhol's image the gimmicks of gender stereotypes are reproduced, but manage to blur the categories that uphold them.

Guillermo Pérez Villalta picks up on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 AC) and Corregio's version of the myth of Jupiter and Io (1532) in a vaguely camp version of the story, in which Jupiter transforms into a cloud and steals Io's virginity. Contrary to the Corregio version, where Io is sunken in erotic rapture, in Pérez Villata's work she tries, stupefied, to break free of the god's embrace. In the background, a solitary skyscraper stands in the Málaga bay – perhaps a premonitory vision from 1979 of the Costa del Sol's later development.

Antoni Miralda's *Éssais d'amélioration* (1978) critically reviews the sentimental iconography and propaganda of the anti-war movement, where the figures of the family, mother, and forsaken child play a key role. In a deceptively simple move, the artist changes the characters clothing, adding a toy soldier like those Miralda has used in much of his work and short-circuiting the viewer's reception with the contrast between the threesome's facial expressions and their dress.

La mosca (1948) by Joan Ponç and *La bouche de ma sœur est un bourgeon* (1971) by José P. Jardiel both explore ways in which the human visage is animalised or objectified. In each of the images the viewer's gaze fixes on an organ – the eye in Ponç's work, the mouth in Jardiel's – which excites his or her subconscious.

The enigma, or more precisely, what is confidential, underlies Eduardo Arroyo's collage, *Servicio secreto* (1990), where the artist unfolds folded notes written 'in spy handwriting', superimposing a generic face onto a sort of encrypted novel. The face resembles a graphic logo of a young man, perhaps an aspiring inspector.

Two 1984 portraits of Fernando Vijande by Robert Mapplethorpe show the gallerist in theatrical yet spectral mode, as if breaking out of the two suprematist circles. In one of them a black aura appears to surround Vijande's head; in the other, his bust is thrust outwards as in Baroque paintings where the subject thrusts a hand or foot out of the scene, supporting it on the painting's frame.

Vijande was a close friend and reference to Josep Suñol and one of the first people to support the young Mapplethorpe before his rise to fame.

Finally, the three crowds mentioned in the exhibition title are Richard Avedon's *Andy Warhol and members of The Factory* (1969), a panoramic view f the brazenly unashamed community of Warhol's Factory; *Trío gris y vinagre* (1976), a large painting by Luis Gordillo which takes up the Romantic allegory of the *doppelgänger*, adding a third face that might not be perceived should we disregard the "trio" in the title; and *125* (1971), where Juan Genovés refers to Muybridge's experiments and the photo-finish sports scenario, superimposing a male body running towards a finishing line, but being pursued or even becoming the pursuer as he does so. Unlike the aforementioned works, in this one, the man, who is many men in one, is featureless.

Valentín Roma

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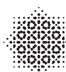

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