



TOTALMENTE ROSTRO

Valentina Alvarado
Matos and Carlos
Vásquez Méndez

23.03 – 26.05.2024

totalmente rostro is an exhibition about film image that tells us of a personal memory marked by distance. It is a poetic and documentary story made through the dialogue between two films, in which an affective and telluric belonging in relation to certain landscapes highlights a shared experience: migratory transit and its effects on life.



Ajuntament de
Barcelona

[LA VIRREINA]
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DE LA IMATGE

In one of the first conversations I had with Valentina Alvarado Matos (Maracaibo, 1986) and Carlos Vásquez Méndez (Santiago de Chile, 1975) about *totalmente rostro*, both artists told me about the film material that now forms their exhibition in Space 0 of La Virreina Centre de la Imatge. At that time, I had not yet seen the films, and they wanted me to be able to situate myself in their morphology. I remember that they used that concept to refer to the theme and the style of the images. Using words, the oral medium, they narrated to me the morphological elements that seemed to define the films.

First, they told me about the stone, the volcanic rock, its recesses, tones and textures: lava stones. Second, they described a back. They told me about the body of a woman, an elderly woman, who is rubbing her back calmly. They also told me about the presence of water falling over her body. Then they told me more about the camera movements: the close-ups, the micro-details, the blurs. They told me about images that arise through reflections, through mirrors, in which the rebounding light incorporates a certain abstraction. While listening to them, I sensed a kind of choreography of the images, of performative latency linked to the act of filming, almost a ritual. Finally, that conversation culminated with various emotional allusions to telluric forces, to symbolic and affective belonging in relation to a certain place, and to what it means to feel these correspondences as identity. As I was leaving, we returned to the title: that “entirely face” landscape that Rainer Maria Rilke talks about.

When I got home, two literary references came to mind, and I wanted to share them with Valentina and Carlos. The first was *The Living Mountain*, by the Scottish writer Nan Shepherd, the wonderful essay that she dedicated to the Cairngorms mountain range, her place in the world. “I have walked out of the body and into the mountain. I am a manifestation of its total life, as is the starry saxifrage or the white-winged ptarmigan.” The second was *The Writing of Stones*, by the French sociologist Roger Caillois, a book in which he addresses his fascination with the mineral world. “It’s a matter of scale. Every stone is a potential mountain.” Since then, I fantasize about substituting words. Perhaps every landscape is a potential face.

totalmente rostro involves a continuity, or rather the reverse, of *el otro aquí*, the exhibition that the two artists are presenting at La Capella from February to April. Both exhibitions show a visual archive arising from a personal memory, which is in turn marked by a shared experience: migratory transit and its effects on life. I mean everything involved in leaving; its desires, its returns, its distances.

Whereas La Capella presents a highly fleeting relationship with images, employing a system of rhythmic fragmentation based on multiple screens, La Virreina presents a complex exercise of synthetic coexistence of films. It seems that *totalmente rostro* aims to condense the archive into certain essential, primal gestures. The stone and the back; two documentary and poetic records that do not develop a fixed narrative sequence but remain suspended in time. Thus, *totalmente rostro*

offers a visual development that pulsates, that advances, without a starting point, without a final objective. We are now faced with images that are playing out.

In addition to the filmic aspects, *el otro aquí* and *totalmente rostro* also share the way they exhibit the moving image. They share a staging that defends cinematographic artifice—the sculptural presence of analogue projectors, their sound, the interplays of light, the free-standing screen—and that also establishes a close relationship with the architecture. In *La Capella* everything happens in a large, open space, where the first vision invites you to understand the visual fragmentation that marks *el otro aquí*. On the other hand, in *La Virreina* the images reach us in a more complex, even capricious way, which is related to the layout of the building and its division into four small rooms. Therefore, *totalmente rostro* does not offer an overall vision that advances the filmic experience, but, in fact, it guards and protects the images to make them depend on the route required by the rooms. At once a technical challenge and a conceptual intention, this decision sustains a precious gesture of cinematic referentiality and adds a performative condition attached to the physical act of moving through the exhibition. In other words, visiting *totalmente rostro* involves following the light from the projector to the screen through a precise interplay of mirrors, flashes and rebounds. It also involves interfering with light, crossing it, being part of it, either because you cover it or because it blinds you.

And although a significant part of the research of Valentina Alvarado Matos and Carlos Vásquez Méndez is carried out in the field of experimental cinema and, by default, in the habitat of the projection room, *el otro aquí* and *totalmente rostro* are also based on intense spatial experimentation, in which the filmic nature of the exhibition is not imposed as the main register. Their films expand towards a sculptural, installation-based conceptualization that bifurcates the filmic towards formalizations connected to other types of artistic heritages and interests arising from the cinema. This is done through small light boxes with negatives, half hidden in the corners and intentionally located on a second level. This visual and plastic sensitivity also shapes the fourth and final room of the exhibition, where the artists included other more liberated and intuitive morphologies. This is a recapitulation, an epilogue that bids farewell to the exhibition through a subtle archive of complementary images.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to the use of the initial lower case defended and expressed by Valentina Alvarado Matos and Carlos Vásquez Méndez in both titles: *el otro aquí* and *totalmente rostro*. Obviously, this is a political decision, a tribute to bell hooks, a key African American writer and activist in race, class and gender studies, but it also corresponds to a poetic literality that precisely and beautifully defines their way of generating images. The statements do not begin, do not impose themselves: instead, they transit, migrate, take place between here and there, between a landscape and a face.

LACAPELLA

Curator: David Armengol,
artistic director of La Capella

#totalmenterostro

“The landscape stands there without hands or face,
or else it is entirely face.”

—Rainer Maria Rilke

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La Virreina Centre de la Imatge
Palau de la Virreina
La Rambla, 99. 08002 Barcelona

Opening hours:
Tuesday to Sunday and
public holidays, 11 am to 8 pm
Free entry



@lavrreinaci
barcelona.cat/lavirreina

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Hospital, 56. 08001 Barcelona

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