

Chasing the light of childhood.

In *escenarios, constelaciones, polaroids*, Karina Beltrán manages to convince us that the places we recall, those we return to once and again, are not those that attract our attention because of their beauty or spectacularity, but those small, subtle spaces of affections where we once were, where we once loved and sought comfort. This exhibition contains skies and seas, clouds and flowers, branches and boats. Yet withal, beyond the fragments of landscape, the path the artist sets out on is an inward journey towards the geographies of the soul. A quest to reconcile herself with the colouring of childhood, those bright colours she once abandoned for the spectrum of grey. "Maybe, having lost that light, the need to recover it re-asserted itself with the passing of time as a way of finding out who I really am, where I started out from" she says. In this exhibition, drawing and photography rub shoulders and engage in a stimulating dialogue with a view to "conveying emotions, feelings, atmospheres".

Where does this exhibition fit in within your career? While there is an obvious connection with your previous project, *El hilo de los días*, here you seem to move in another direction while at once returning to essences from the past.

This is unquestionably my most mature exhibition to date and marks my return to drawing. And though the photographic installation does bear a close relationship with *El hilo de los días*, the truly new shift is my return to drawing after a period of ten years. This return has a lot to do with personal changes in my own life. After spending thirteen years in London, I came back to Spain, more specifically to Madrid, where I am sharing home and studio with other artists. Here I regained a desire to sit still, to recover a calmer pace. Photography guides you to many images at the same time while drawing lets you remain with just one for hours and hours. The truth is that I'm really enjoying combining these two languages.

It's fascinating to see the strong connection between your current drawings and those from your beginnings: those interior, architectural, impossible, magical spaces.

R.- I agree. There is a lot of going back, to something that was still there. At the time, my move to photography had to do with a need to enlist the human figure into the composition. When I arrived in Madrid, I started taking photos with my mobile of the rooms in my new home as a way of coming to terms with the change I was going through. Those photos reminded me of my drawings from before, and I realised the potential of the material I had in my hand. It was a natural way of bringing both fields together. The process is visible in my exhibition at CAAM, in the projection of the images taken with the mobile, showing you how drawing allows you to go a step further, to change planes, colours, to introduce threads and sewing onto paper.

There are precedents for this in your career. Again, there's a kind of looking back in search of reaffirmation, in order to move on.

In a series from 1992 the canvases were pierced with needles though I didn't use thread. And I've also made fabric sculptures sewn by hand. Yes. This

exhibition leads back to my origins. Now everything comes together again in one single whole. There are no boundaries.

Coming back to *El hilo de los días*, there the images were more carefully prepared, more theatrical so to speak.

True. All the people in *El hilo...* posed for the camera and I directed them. I chose the costumes and instructed them on how to hold themselves and the actions that they had to perform. In *Constelaciones*, the images are spontaneous, more like findings, like little everyday miracles. There was much greater flexibility and freedom. You can even see this in how they are mounted, in how the pieces are arranged. *El hilo...* was like a line being unfurled in space. *Constelaciones* is much more chaotic, taking the shape of a galaxy or a constellation, responding more to chance, to the way in which the photographs came about.

Could you tell us some of your constants, the motifs that recur throughout your creative practice?

There's the sky, light, the sea, the beach... And also the house, a subject running through my work from the very beginning. Home, the interior, the nest, the refuge, the familiar. A space opposed to nature, to the outside, to the journey.

How important are cities to you? How does each scene, each fragment of landscape, adapt to a specific emotional mindset?

There is a particularly close relationship with cities in my work. Who are you in a specific place? How does your time, your life, unfold? There are many cities in this show, but the island—Tenerife, the Canaries, the origin—is at the centre of everything, leaves an indelible mark. When you are an *island being*, as the poet Dulce María Loynaz used to say, you carry that in your soul even when you live in the big city. And when you are away from your island, you look for that special light, the light of childhood. And that is what *Escenarios, constelaciones y polaroids* is about. But there is another obvious reading. We all are islands. In one way or another, we all are alone.

Tell me about the colours, the light in this exhibition. In some of the photographs, it emerges in an unexpected, almost magical way.

There is a strong component of colour in both series, the drawings and the photos. For the latter even the layout within the exhibition hall follows a chromatic order: whites, pinks, greens, blues and greys, finishing in black. But a black that allows light to filter through. A black with hope. Sunshine piercing dark water; light passing through the dense foliage of trees. As Leonard Cohen says in one of his songs: *There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.*

When you mention the search for light, are you referring to a feeling of harmony, plenitude, happiness?

Yes. I am reminded of *The Tree of Life* by Terrence Malick, a film that moved me so deeply that I felt I had to watch and study all his other films. I was already working on these series, and it really fascinated me. I recognised myself in his gaze, in his photography, in the idea that, no matter what the setbacks, there is

always a light, a logic, a magic that is there, in nature. You just need to stop and learn to search for it. To learn to look.

Is a change of scene, of direction, a good way of stimulating and injecting new life into the gaze, shaking it out of everyday routines and convention?

Absolutely. As a matter of fact, the idea for the exhibition came to me on a very long journey through Europe all the way to Turkey during the shooting of a film I was lucky enough to be able to photograph. In some ways, that journey was a voyage of initiation for me, an encounter with myself. It meant many days and long hours of work within a large crew. But there were also many hours of solitude in close contact with nature and the landscape. I can't draw while travelling because it requires stillness. But I can take photographs, lots of photographs. Some of the interiors I captured in Istanbul and in other cities in France led to many of the drawings included in the "Polaroids" projection. But there are also pictures of my home in London long before I closed it, before I left. London was the place where I really matured as an artist and as an individual. It was where I did all my postgraduate studies, where I started out on the path of photography, made contact with teachers and colleagues who helped me a lot. All the cities I have lived in or I travel to frequently are here, starting from the origin, from the islands—Tenerife, of course, but also Gran Canaria and Lanzarote—not forgetting Madrid, where I have been living for barely one year but which has already propitiated my reencounter with drawing; and my latest discovery which is Istanbul, where I visit quite often, a sort of treasure that has re-stimulated my gaze, where everything has a different flavour to that of Europe.

Cities, atmospheres, sensations. In short, an all-embracing vital journey.

That's it. When I started to look for the images for this exhibition I rummaged through archives from 2010 and 2011, which included over 7,000 photos—I'm very compulsive and I keep shooting all the time. Of these, around one hundred are on show at CAAM. For me, that process of reviewing, of remembering, was a really intense and emotional experience. I rediscovered moments and things I had almost forgotten and was able to recover. I eventually chose certain photos and discarded others. It was almost as if I were sewing, spinning, or piecing together a big jigsaw. In the end, rather than a closed image, the result was just the opposite. What I am looking for is not to supply answers or concepts, but to stimulate, to move.

The path you propose could be construed as a journey forward, but above all, backward, towards the territories of childhood. How much of a reconciliation with the past is there?

True, you could talk of a reconciliation with childhood. When I left the islands, I was tired of the light, of the bright colours, of the intense sunlight. I needed a different colour range, of greys, and I found that in London. However, there was a moment when everything pointed towards a need to recover that light, to learn who I actually was, where was I coming from, what my desires were and what I was looking for. In some images the return to childhood is particularly visible: the one with the little girl running on a beach in southern Turkey, or the boy entering the sea in Lanzarote.

We've seen the connection with *El hilo de los días* but how much is there from *Apariciones*—a prior series, and one that is key when overviewing your whole body of work?

I am still interested in the instant of capturing people, in that reflective moment of self-absorption, almost of bodylessness. In point of fact, most of the characters are seen from behind, as if removed from themselves. Having said that, there is a huge difference, a big gap between the two. *Apariciones* was all about exploring the other side and I placed myself behind the camera waiting for something to happen. It was a series located on the very border between the real and the unreal, the familiar and the unknown. It had to do with a concern about death, whereas this exhibition is a celebration of life, something you can see in the chosen scenes and above all in the use of colour.

Looking back, that reflection about death you talk about is keenly present in *Mi cuerpo jugando a morirse*, where all the images revolved around your own body lying in different scenes.

Yes. Years ago I used to be far more self-tormented, constantly asking myself questions about life and death. All that was on view in that particular show and in the previous one, *The Next Room*, which explored the passage to the other side. With the passing of time I have gradually shed my fears, lifting a weight off my shoulders. You could say that I have ended up connecting with the positive side of life, with the enjoyment of the moment. Those other exhibitions contained a quest for meaning, something that is now absent. Here there is a more Zen philosophy. When you are worried about finding a meaning you are projecting yourself into the future and you miss what is going on in the present, in the now. In *Constelaciones* I portray moments, and by doing so I make them mine, I become more aware, take pleasure in them. This exhibition is a celebration of life, a journey towards the light, in a search for that happiness which reveals itself only fleetingly. Which is why knowing how to live those moments is so important.

Emma Rodríguez