

Karina Beltrán's Polaroids: Following the Thread of New Days

In one drawing we can make out the sea of voyage. In others—it may well be that the artist is dreaming of Cy Twombly and miniaturises it—the image is a painted and drawn surface, a language of space, a landscape, an opening towards the mysterious sensorial discontinuity of the world. What is this imaginary we are faced with? What is the destination of these travelling images?

The threads are woven and strung together to create an openwork, interrupting the illusion of the presence of that other place we arrive at via drawing or the iPhone. They interpose in the frail body of the paper-skin, suggest folds and openings, and conjure up an indexical presence that rewrites the myth of photography as an instance of space-time fixed by light, yet for all that irretrievable.

The initial quest would have wanted to translate the formal conditions and framing of the photographed object in terms of the expressivity and the particularities of drawing. In *Polaroids*, the photographic image is expunged of all reference, process and form; the drawing is executed with a meticulous concern to give an account of the milieu in which a sensation is registered. Photography is refigured, its destruction is an opening towards vanished instants and now it is up to the drawing to recall and to reveal.

These drawings engage with photographic images and then let go of them. They have the quality of a vague memory, barely retaining something of the pixelated support they reproduce. That purported initial inspiration, the indexical image questioned by digital technology, is not only a trace: it is also what the drawing has forgotten. Drawing is a souvenir of the journey, an *aide-mémoire*, and the series it is framed in is an archive and an album of what has died over the intervening time, what has no memory because it no longer exists.

The images are polarised. The format of the drawings makes them more similar to the defunct predigital Polaroids. The immediacy is already announced in the metaphoric and playful warning of the title, but as the different situations follow one another, we perceive a greater openness to drawing. The initial question seems to fade into a paradox: what is the index of what?

Karina Beltrán creates works on paper that mime photography's processes of creation, reproduction and handling. Her drawings circumvent her previous formal inquiries and open up a process of reverse exploration. *Polaroids* is both a portal and an ironical provocation, for the series proposes a backward motion, a starting point that is pre-photographic while at the same time bordering on photographic practice. It blurs the effects of the indexical simulacrum to remind us that photography is also drawing and hiding.

Polaroids underscores the bold passivity of the gaze against the limits of the inhabited or transited space. The colour and the play of form and relief propose a singular framing in each drawing, the metamorphosis of a specific image at some stage along the journey. At the beginning of the series, the drawings are undercut by a tension, seem both calculated and powerful, repeatedly exaggerating the angle of vision as if the viewer wanted to reflect on the composition, the particular construction between angles and planes, colours and lights. The drawings exhibit the instant and transmute it; they are and, at once, are not "Polaroids".

Although the tiny topographies of the drawing suggest silence, here the colour is of a lyrical, extensive and varied kind, inciting us to imagine the sounds, voices and bodies accommodated in the interludes of the voyage.

Towards the end of the series, the stroke becomes more spontaneous, the threads capture our attention and shoot up like a new nature from the ruins of the photographic image. The innocence of the old polaroid is thus lost, if it is

photography that is lost or forgotten, but the barely audible mystery of drawing, its praxis and new voice, are the denouement of the journey that is born anew through the pencil. In consequence, in her photography, Karina Beltrán returns to and continues an endeavour that is prior, parallel and subsequent to photography and to those very digital “Polaroids” she references and archives.

Polaroids is not a return journey but a digression to the depth of Beltrán’s private relationship with the past present of her examination of the gaze, body and voice. Minimally ornate threads, doors, lamps, walls, fabrics, lintels and floors appear as explorations of the index and moments of tension of the longed-for place, suggesting a breaking through the reversible depth, provoking a rupture into the here-and-now of the past present.

Since the end of the journey, time has taken on an unstable quality halfway between forgetfulness and sensorial memory. If photography has often been considered as a mechanical butterfly net of the instant, the *Polaroids* series tells the story of an organic process, the discontinuities that are now the fragmented tale of a sensorial *parcours*, a journey following the thread of the days, the gesture of capturing what eludes mechanical reproduction.

The images are interwoven in the sensuousness of intimate spaces, those that matter to the body. Equally belonging to the body are the detachments, severed rhizomes, capillary extensions that stitch the paper. Origami, a thinking of borders and splits, vertexes and edges that interpellates the body. And the body witnesses and settles, while the work takes its place without withdrawing into itself, unremittingly set against the geometric heaviness of confinement, for it was made to continue the journey and to recount it following the thread of new days.

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