

Erlea Maneros Zabala

Originally trained as a painter, Erlea Maneros Zabala has developed a conceptual practice that analyses and deconstructs how images are put together, while concurrently addressing the contemporary cultural implications of the diverse forms and mediums she engages. Her works address abstraction, but often through the use of figurative material. They involve appropriation, reproduction and seriality. These production strategies challenge traditional emphasis in painting placed on the creation of a unique, authored object. Imbedded in her investigations is a critique of conventional values placed on art, particularly romantic notions of beauty, the sublime and art as a spiritual experience.

With her project for the Museo Experimental El Eco the artist requested the opportunity to investigate the archive of Mathias Goeritz, currently housed at the National Center for Investigation, Documentation and Information on the Plastic Arts (CENIDIAP). In reviewing this material, which includes slides, photographs, newspaper and magazine clippings, Maneros Zabala was particularly drawn to a set of images and related materials by Michel Zabé. This photographer documented the work of Goeritz in the fifties and sixties, including several images produced during the opening days of El Eco. The archive includes contact sheets and notes by Zabé on these photographs. Through the croppings, edits and other aesthetic negotiations revealed in these materials, a particular voice is articulated within the archive, one deeply involved in the imaginary constructed around Goeritz. Maneros Zabala was interested in giving presence to the normally hidden role of the documentary photographer, as a way of demystifying the “master” Goeritz and destabilizing his centrality within both the archive and the Museo Experimental El Eco, the commissioning site for her production.

A hand-written note by Zabé becomes central to her project, two index cards that address his envisioned user of the archive, the phantom viewer of his photographs. With underlined words and exclamation marks in various sections, this short text emphatically describes how any reflections of light one might see on the surface of the Goeritz mural recorded in the images, is indeed intentional and an integral part of the conception of the artwork. The text goes on to share anecdotes about the strong character of the German artist and his aesthetic convictions. For Maneros Zabala, in form and content, this note reveals several conditions. While its tone is condescending in relation to the possible misreading of these slides by his public, it displays an extreme reverence to the author of the source material, an importance demonstrated by Zabé through his emphasis on the truth conveyed in his photographic images, how they are able to convey the genius of the artist. The elevated manner in which Zabé positions Goeritz, places himself in a secondary or subservient role, a structuring that Maneros Zabala seeks to invert through her appropriation and elevation of his comments within her new artwork. For this project, she transforms a digital image of these index cards, which she took while at the archive, into a photographic negative and prints them in a traditional photographic format. Through this analog process, she symbolically transports the text of the photographer back to the medium of its referent. Through this analytical and abstract process, Maneros Zabala both layers and conflates form and conceptual content.

In a similar move, for another work, the artist reproduces two versions of a single image produced by Zabé. A black woman, with a coat spread over her shoulders, stands by the

sculpture *Serpent*, produced by Goeritz for the courtyard of El Eco. During the opening of El Eco in 1953, the African-American dance troupe Walter Hicks performed a piece choreographed by the film-maker Luis Buñuel, during which they moved around and through this large sculpture. This now mythical event was recorded and promoted photographically with images of the troupe in tropical costume, taken from above and from ground level near the *Serpent*. The *Zabé* image appropriated by Maneros Zabala most likely portrays one of the members of the Walter Hicks group. In this photograph however, the sculpture is secondary, with only the detail of its form recorded to the lower left of the frame. It is this woman who is central, with her back turned to the camera, gazing down at the sculpture. Maneros Zabala has reprinted two copies of the image, one that displays cropping marks made by Zabé, editions that are not evidenced in the second, repeated image. As an "unofficial" photograph and one in which the production of Goeritz is not central, this image depicts Zabé's own subjectivity and as such becomes another significant moment within the overall Goertiz archive when the supportive or peripheral role of Zabé is altered and his vision becomes the protagonist.

These photographic works produced by Maneros Zabala have become elements within a larger installation that engages the architectural character and history of the Sala Mont where they are exhibited. Through these displacements, reproductions and formal recontextualizations, the project complicates the chosen target of the artist, the sanctified legacy of Goeritz. Her forms challenge this cultural construct, critiquing the works and spiritualist ideology of the founder of El Eco through their materialist investigations of the institutions, substructures and individuals that have helped sustain the art historical position of Goeritz. Through such inquiry, Maneros Zabala seeks to establish an unromantic view of the production of this artist and in doing so, maintain its contemporary viability. Her works additionally seek to activate both the vision and analytical capabilities of the viewer. They demand that we move beyond the immediacy of the images given to us, to look behind, around or through them, to acknowledge the cultural and political structures they perform.

Curated by Tobias Ostrander