

Featureless faces *

Rita Ferrer

*(The series of a group of portraits of Latin Americans that make up the body of pictures with wooden frames and tar pass-partout with a variety of glitters, and lines that meet on the horizon of the spectator's gaze as he takes in the exhibition from right to left from the entrance of the room. These portraits are the interior of other systems that structure **Te devuelvo tu imagen**, an artistic occupation by Juan Castillo, the occupation of my interference: Just like many of the faces in the exhibition, they have no features that make them identifiable. They resort to the same questions. Why does Juan Castillo rob them of their identity? Why does he take away the features from these faces?).*

If collecting photographs is collecting the world; the archive then becomes the inexorable tomb of photographic image. Our uncontrolled feeling for mundane suction has precipitated events to such an extreme that in a century and a half we have constructed a history of the face that has developed between the poles of the honorific portrait, that supplants the traditional pictorial portrait, and enlarges it, as an enthusiastic Jeremy Bentham said: *"for the greatest happiness of the largest number of people"*. The other pole would be the typification of the face of *the others*. Those who must be watched.

It is not easy to be a foreigner. And nobody seems to doubt that what is unclassifiable gives rise to suspicion, if not to fear. But in art, there still exists the latent possibility to untidy the archive and obstruct the work of the archivist.

At one time, the marks of time and life which pretended to give a face a certain intensity, a feeling of a certain deep truth existed, and Juan Castillo makes them disappear. He sacrifices every possibility of identification as a last resort for remaining undetected. He reminds me of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the feminine character who, like Abraham, sacrifices her beloved daughter and kills her, not for love of the Father, but because death is better than her own abject enslavement.

On his part, Juan Castillo thwarts any possibility of recognizing the Latin American subjects, all of whom he knows, and who are suspects from the start; giving them back faces that the archivists are unable to classify. As a manoeuvre of the occupation of a foreign landscape by faces who effacement cannot but relate to a possible space for freedom.

*A text included in : *Te devuelvo tu imagen* by Juan Castillo, Galería Gabriela Mistral 1998. Texts by: Guadalupe Alvarez de Araya, Fernando Balcells, Eugenia Brito, Pedro Celedón, Ricardo Cuadro, Diamela Eltit, Rita Ferrer, Justo Pastor Mellado, Ernesto Muñoz, Carlos Ossa, Nelly Richard, Matías Rivas, Adolfo Pardo, Luisa Ulivarri.