

MSV432

The artist's task was not a simple one. How to impart perennality, singularity, to a process that foresaw the construction of a political narrative of a house undergoing restoration? How to take this proposal – a desire of third parties – and make it something of his own? Rafael Adorján came up with a wise response to these questions. From the moment he agreed to take up the task, which foresaw the making of a photographic essay on the changes in the “little house” that was to become the new facilities of Galeria da Gávea, up to the moment that this book was being finished, Adorján knew how to bring a personal approach to a project which in other hands could have easily become distant and bureaucratic.

Since the outset it was clear to everyone involved that this was not about recording a “before and after,” that is, a house in a state of dereliction that was then totally restored. The idea was rather for the photographer to know how to infiltrate himself into the flow of the changes of a property constructed in 1881 at the end of the street called Marques de São Vicente, in the district of Gávea, in Rio de Janeiro's south zone, and officially designated in the 1980s as a cultural heritage site. To this end, the artist undertook a routine of bimonthly visits throughout one year, between May 2016 and May 2017. Seeking to enter as discreetly and silently as possible, Adorján approached that previously unknown environment. Using both digital and analog photography, video and collages in the form of notes written in a notebook that sometimes served as a diary, the artist managed to achieve what to me always seemed to be the most challenging aspect of this project: imparting a personal and singular character to what was proposed to him by third parties, in a way that took the experience of recording the restoration of the “little house” and brought it into his own territory of questionings.

Between the image that opens the book, showing the huge, intact boulders that existed in the house's basement, and the one that closes it, of the façade still in transformation, what we see is a gaze dedicated to observing and valorizing what is commonly fated to be born, to live and to die in obscurity. We live in an era that gives constant praise to the result, to productivity. The omnipresence of the word “focus” in our daily life reveals the obsession for the correct path, straight and without distractions. In this mindset, the important thing is to move forward, avoiding detours, and to be able to show the world the result of this journey. Always revealing the happy, successful face of the path taken. A look at any Instagram account is enough to readily prove this. Entering a house undergoing restoration is to inhabit a gap where everything is still in a state of disorder. A continuously changing hiatus. Between the conception of the project and its completion, what exists is trial and error, a series of hits and misses. Among stones, cement, bricks, scaffolding, rubble, tools, and pieces of workers' clothing, Adorján bore witness to the collective efforts to leverage an age-old preexistence, lending it perennality.

But before this, before the inauguration, before the opening, there is a time destined for anonymity. It is precisely this time that we find in Adorján's photos. A time experienced chronologically, but shown

labyrinthically. Because, between the stones that dwelled in the basement and the façade that links interior to exterior, the way that the artist moves through the space breaks down any hierarchy or attempt at linearity. Rather, it is a spinning in circles within a space of straight lines. A gaze that lingers on that which is pure transit, while attentively exploring an architecture underway. Amidst the noise of the construction, the quietness of the photographer stands out. Adorján inhabited that space at his own pace, which ran opposite to that of the restoration works and that of the hectic and haste-driven existence of our daily lives. In other words, in the apparent banality of the act of recording a house in mutation, there are countless tiny gestures which subvert various imperative aspects of an era that aims to be fast and efficient. A time that seems to give importance only to what arises in an aseptic and well-finished way. Today, everything that is brought before the public is expected to be edited and Photoshopped. On the other hand, what the images of *MSV432* convey to us is life in its raw state, at the moment of that inner and silent weaving which is essential for anything to come into the world. Moreover, while everyone at a worksite needs a clear aim, to finish it, to arrive at the result and deliver it, heading toward the next step, Adorján was interested in the exercise of stopping, knowing how to dwell in the present instead of immediately imagining what is to come. Above all, he was not afraid of “wasting time,” not wishing to gain time, but rather to relearn the patience of looking.

“Whoever seeks to form an impression of historical time in everyday life should notice the wrinkles of an old man, or the scars in which a former fate is preserved. Or, the conjunction of ruins and rebuilt sites can be recalled, noting the obvious shifts in style that lend a profound temporal dimension to a simple house row.”¹ This passage by Reinhart Koselleck is relevant here for linking a simple house row, between *a conjunction of ruins and rebuilt sites*, to a larger time frame. And isn't that just what we see in *MSV432*? Between the house in a state of dereliction and the finished gallery, there is an interval that inspires us to think about entirely novel forms of resistance, subtle twists that can contain an unsuspected political content. At this point, it is important to underscore that the commission extended to Adorján involved a gamble. By hiring an artist and giving him *carte blanche* to record its new facilities, however he saw fit, the gallery was betting its chips on a process whose outcome was always, for everyone, an unknown. This simple gesture contains the trace of a valuable bet. In a text written in the 1990s concerning the uncomfortable situation of philosophy in the contemporary world, philosopher Alain Badiou stated: “our world does not like gambling, randomness, risk or engagement. It is a world obsessed with safety, a world where a person should, as soon as possible, calculate and protect his future. A world where chance is dangerous. A world where we should not abandon ourselves to the encounters.”² In its on way, *MSV432* affirms the artist as someone who blazes a territory in which the element of gambling is preserved.

We know that the cartography of ruin, of rubble, has become one of the main themes of countless contemporary artists since the beginning of the 21st century. Even though the debate that unleashes this sort of visuality is not present in *MSV432*, there was a danger that the work, even unintentionally, could be associated with this sort of aestheticized, mannerist visuality. But the restraint with which Adorján captured the house in mutation gives rise to a sort of ethical boundary, through which we do not see in these images any attempt at forcibly aestheticizing the prevailing noise.

¹ Reinhart Koselleck. *Futuro passado: contribuição à semântica dos tempos históricos*. Rio de Janeiro: Contraponto/Editora PUC-Rio, 2006, p. 13.

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Comment [1]: This quote existed in English for the most part on Internet, but needed to be adapted at the end, to include the idea of the house row (this should not be a problem as it was originally published in German, and the source given is a text in Portuguese).

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Comment [2]: In the footnote I used a comma before the "p" of the page number, to avoid the problem of whether the p should be capitalized as the first element of a sentence, or not.

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Comment [3]: I could not find a previously published quote of this in English -- he wrote it in French, and here I translate the Portuguese to English.

If the photos instate a sort of discreet silence amidst the cacophony that characterizes a work in its real face, the video presented in the exhibition, also entitled *MSV432*, bears another temporality and another volume present in the work in process. In long takes shot by a fixed camera, Adorján records the coming and going of workers and reveals a noisier dimension of the process in play. The photo-book that we have in hand does not contain still frames from the video, as this publication never aimed to be an exhibition catalog. I nevertheless deem it important to call attention to the role of this work within the overall poetical fabric woven by Adorján.

If we go to the dictionary, the first definition of the word “work” that we will find is “that which results from an effort, an action.” That is, a fundamental part of every work lies in those people who bring it about. If, in the photographs of *MSV432*, these men appear subtly, in the video we see a striking presence of the workers and their continuous and repetitive actions – as though the movement proper to this language were necessary to capture the place of these individuals fundamental to the construction of the future gallery in an integral way, and therefore with less risk of falling into the danger of aestheticizing. Throughout the video we witness the duration and density of the work. They are raw images, made with a fixed camera, which respect the delay, the tiredness, the effort of each action carried out there.

From Walter Benjamin we learn that every monument of culture results from the efforts of an anonymous multitude. Carrying out research for one year on a worksite, while completely silencing the presence of the workers, would have slightly disregarded a part of the process, in keeping with the cruel situation pointed out by the Jewish philosopher. And although by paying attention to them we do not modify this fact, the artist’s gaze does dispel the total invisibility to which they are always condemned. In Adorján’s images there is a rawness and a sort of fair distance that portrays the workers without tricks, without falsely implying an inexistent greater proximity. There is no populism or demagoguery here. The balance found by Adorján is ultimately revealed to be a careful one, delicately supportive of his discretion.

The artist’s dialogue throughout the 12 months of visits to 432 Marques de São Vicente took place, above all, with the inanimate world that exists there: the walls, the cement, the tools, the scaffolding, the construction fences, the stones, but always knowing that “the houses are of people who were made by people and who have within them the possibility of making people.”³ *MSV432* thus constitutes a gesture that inaugurates a new space dedicated to art, underscoring the capacity of photography and the moving picture to be not only depositories of a memory, but producers of active meanings that point toward the future. I hope that the sense gambling, of risk, of the possibility of giving attention to that which appears to be a mere hiatus between past and future, present in the photo essay made by Rafael Adorján, will guide the path of this place that has now come into the world. Always remembering that art, like houses, is made of people and contains the chance to make people. In other words, rather than being mere merchandise, artistic gestures are poetic acts addressed to the world, able to change the way we see the time in which we dwell and, at the same stroke, who knows, transform it into a place closer to what we imagine when we hear the word “house.”

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Comment [4]: There is no translation on Internet, so I did this on my own.

Luisa Duarte
Curator

¹ Reinhart Koselleck. *Futuro passado: contribuição à semântica dos tempos históricos*. Rio de Janeiro, 2006. p. 13.

² Alain Badiou. *Para uma nova teoria do sujeito*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, 1994, p. 13.

³ Matilde Campilho. *Jóquei*. São Paulo: Editora 34, p. 116.