

MASKED BALL

By Ariel Authier*

Antonietta

Virginia Elisabetta Luisa Carlotta Antonietta Teresa Maria Oldoini, Countess of Castiglione became a sensation as soon as she appeared in the Parisian social milieu of 1855, where she arrived from her native Florence to secretly and "In the way she preferred", get the support of Napoleon III for the cause of the Italian unity. Within months, the statuesque beauty would not only become Napoleon III's lover, but a fundamental celebrity in the ornamental dances of the Second Empire. The main shield of "La Castiglione" was, from the very beginning, photography: in collaboration with photographer Pierre-Louis Pierson she reinvented herself in more than 400 images she carefully sent to acquaintances and admirers for years. Posing as the "Queen of Hearts", as a cloistered nun, as an Egyptian empress, as a Roman goddess, as Medea, or simply as "the divine Countess", Oldoini was perhaps the first to perfectly understand the possibilities of the photographic masquerade. Nobody ever reached the "real" Virginia or Elisabetta or Luisa or Carlotta or Antonietta or Teresa or Maria. They were all masks, costumes. Even after the fall of the Second Empire in 1870, when she locked herself in her apartment on the Place Vendôme, and where she had her rooms decorated in deep black, where the shutters remained closed, mirrors were banned and she only ventured out at night wrapped in veils.

Carlotta

The veil covers and reveals at the same time. It shows, a little. Hides and forces one to look, it fetishizes. A veil transpires. In Turin, it becomes a shroud and is transmuted into an image. The image as an object of desire, the desire for a meaning that is known to be absent.

Elisabetta

Ayelen Cocoz's procedure in STILL is, even when disguised, ontologically photographic: she makes her bas-reliefs through "negatives" from which she gets "copies" that function as inverted and suspended traces of those fabrics that have supposedly originated them. Wax, as fragile as celluloid, is now responsible for the illusion.

Luisa

Photography, as sculpture, freezes. Removes a slice of space-time from its progressive development to put situations and things in its own limbo, turning them into pure presence. Detached, motionless, silent, in a permanent stillness.

Maria

Much like it happens with the photographic film, Cocoz's works respond to light. According to the path of luminous impulse, they change their shapes, their accents, their memories. In these molds everything folds, unfolds and folds once again. And the eye tries to double check for a possible caress, that is facing something more than an illusion. As if the hand would want to lift the veil the eyes are facing. But again, appearances win; beneath that mask there is nothing but another mask.

Teresa

In the dream within the black and white dream of STILL, materials metamorphose, shapes twist in place, elude the gaze, immersed in their own corporeality, in their own space. Those paintings that, through photography, have become sculptures pretend now to look upon themselves, absorbed by their own reflections in the mirror. In their own theater of mirrored looks.

Virginia

Meanwhile, through the closed windows of the grand ball at the Place Vendôme one can still listen: "Give a mask to painting and she will tell the truth."

* Ariel Authier is an artist, art critic and curator. He has developed projects in relation to the photographic image in collaboration with the artist Gabriela Schevach. His work has been exhibited in galleries and museums in Argentina and Europe. As a curator, he explored the relationships between things and their doubles, between solid and liquid, between light and matter, between time and its representation, and between image and fetish. Since 2015 he is the co-director of the Nora Fisch gallery in Buenos Aires.

This text was written for the solo exhibition "STILL", held at *La Ira de Dios*, Buenos Aires, in 2015.