

MASKED BALL

by Ariel Authier

Antonietta

Virginia Elisabetta Luisa Carlotta Antonietta Teresa Maria Oldoïni, 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 not only became 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 the photographer Pierre-Louis Pierson she reinvented herself in more than 400 images that she carefully sent to acquaintances and admirers for years. Posing as the "Queen of Hearts", as a cloistered nun, as Egyptian Empress, as Roman goddess, as Medea, or simply as "the divine Countess", Oldoïni 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 in 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 supposedly originated them. The 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 look tries to check through a possible caress, that is facing something more than an illusion. As if the hand would like to lift that veil that the eyes are facing. But again, appearances triumph, beneath that mask, there is nothing else than another mask.

Teresa

In the dream within the black and white dream of STILL, the materials metamorphose, the shapes rotate on themselves, elude the gaze, immersed in their own corporeality, in their own space. Those paintings that through photography became sculptures, pretend that they only look at themselves, absorbed by their own look 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."