

**The loose threads of history,
by José Augusto Ribeiro**

The title of Johanna Calle's fourth exhibition at the Marília Razuk Gallery, *Textiles*, refers not only to the material (fabric), but also to the procedures used to produce the work. The title encompasses the recurrence of the weaved forms, the labor of the artist using two or more means to produce the same work, as well as the possibilities of a plot and a meaning that arise through these intertwines – between different surfaces, between different images, between specific systems for producing images, between visual repertoires considered contrasting, between image and text, on the whole, in the various allusions that the production makes, simultaneously, to a range of time and space.

The show has eighty new works, in six series, which were produced over the last three years, with fabric, yes, but, above all, playing different roles (which are significantly important in Calle's elaborations), photographs, drawings and typed texts. Notwithstanding the heterogeneity of the techniques and materials, the exposition reiterates, from one work to the next, a definition of the word "textile" and how that can transform in and with threads and lines – which can be braided, overlaid or, even, frayed and broken. In fact, weaving Always means, here, some kind of undoing, if not of the material, of previous meanings because something in the structure of the things and the dialogues that Johanna Calle gathers in the world and makes use of falls apart (or disappears or changes) in operations of successive deconstruction and construction.

In this exposition, there are analogue photographs, produced between the end of the nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century by professionals and amateurs, personalities and unknowns, which were, previously, part of family, public and corporate archives, which, for example, circled through news agencies and communication agencies (the so-called telephotos). Also in the show are papers from an old office or agency, with parts of legal, literary and journalistic texts. The fact is that, during the construction of the works – which, in general, requires precise and miniscule manual labor –, the several time references that are intertwined (the past, the present and some future projections) are compressed and interlace.

Also due to the webs that Calle weaves, the items that are immobilized here lose clarity and uniformity at the end of the processes, to the

extent it is difficult to recall or guess the nature of each one: whether it is fictional and documental, discursive or graphic, figurative or abstract, welcoming or impersonal. In short, the artist's actions confiscate the premise of categories and classifications in several areas of knowledge, including that of art.

Born in Bogota, Colombia, in 1965, Johanna Calle was projected to the fore of the local artistic scene in the 1990s, and her path led to wide international acknowledgement in the following decade. Well identified, from her beginnings, with research related to drawing, to fabric and sewing, to photography, to writing and the suggestion of narratives, with linear works, in which emptiness plays an active role, Calle's production maintains connections, for example, with artists like Mira Schendel, Eva Hesse, Gego and León Ferrari.

The group of works that now give the title to her most recent exposition come entirely from operations of subtraction. In cotton fabrics, Calle allows us to see ruled paper with margins, or similar surfaces with monochromatic, white paintings, in which tonal variations reveal subtle lines and rectangles, mostly horizontal and long. The appearance of such elements is on frayed areas of fabric, through meticulous efforts of unstitching. Where the weave has been unstitched is where the artist's structured (or de-structured?) figures appear – often visible via the shine of the fiber.

Spatially speaking, in the gallery, the show begins with the series Photographic fabric (*Tecido fotográfico*), in which the artist has cut straight segments of black-and-white photographs (both analogic and copies of telephotos) and intertwined them with Other pages (blank and square) and, thus, superimposed what seems to be a series of geometric shapes in scale, but irregular, and images of orchestral musicians, architecture, urban spaces, work places, an office, or even, as it is common, of a scene that is no longer recognizable in the strips that are pieced together on the paper. The photographic amplification, therefore, does not fail to reproduce something, a happening, a phenomenon; it is the printed image that stands out, now transversally, in a methodical vertical weave through a simple geometric yet unstable structure, with the broken remains of political, economic and social spaces of the past – which, somehow, still ring true and resonate today.

Something similar takes place in the series Intertext (*Intertexto*), when Calle transfers photographic images originally printed in sharp contrast of light and dark for drawings on silk paper (those used to protect photographs in albums), drawn only using vertical and horizontal lines.

The spaces, the objects and the beings recorded in these images end up converting, in the drawings, into blots and blotches. And, again, that is where the grid, the web, decomposes and becomes part of a record in the empirical world, now a visual enigma, which, in the end, replaces the phantasmagorical aspect of photography, which remains printed, as an image, on the bidimensional plane for memory and keepsake, who knows until when, things that are no longer here, in the present, as they were one day.

IN the collection of works entitled *Obandos*, Johanna Calle suggests a compression of times by showing panoramic photographs of Colombia at the turn of the twentieth century, accompanied by typed passages of the Land Law (also known as the “law of victims and restitution of land”), enacted in the country in 2011. The legal text recognizes, officially for the first time, the existence of armed conflict in Colombia in the dispute for land and detrimental to the native peoples. The letters of the law appear, here, out of order, cut, repeated on opposing lines with minimal spacing, if not overlaid, as if they were printed purposely over and over and over. The misalignment of the text produces graphic blots that fill the void and invade, now and then, the area of photographic images with elements that mark the print or change the outlines passing outside their own limits. Such visual solutions suggest to the observer an open space for interpretations on the distances and proximities (temporal and socio-political) between the law and the images of the land.

Also in the series, which is perhaps the most lyric of the show, the artist’s political motivation is predominant. In *Large Tree (Gran Arbol)*, Calle “draws” while typing verses of the poem *Reflections (Reflexões)*, by Qiu Jin, writer, poet and revolutionary, feminist leader who lived in China between 1875 and 1907. Written by Jin during her travels in the Chinese territory at the beginning of the twentieth century, *Reflexões* brings together aspects of the standard of living and the historical struggle for women’s rights, at the time of the fall of the Qing imperial dynasty: “Sun and moon have grown dim/ Heaven and earth have grown dark / (...) Unbinding my feet, I have washed away a thousand years of poison/ Filled with blood, I summon the souls of the hundred flowers / Alas, my scarf woven of mermaid-silk/ Is half-soaked by blood and half by tears.” With the mechanical print of these words typed on a typewriter, Calle invades, over the edges and corners, several pages of an old notary public registry for property deeds in Colombia with types of shadows from tree branches, as though she were trying to show them being “re-born.”

Meanwhile, in *Neologisms (Neologismos)*, other photographs in black and white are almost totally covered by a kind of green cape, with a circular hole in the middle, through which the image can be seen. Through this opening, it is difficult to make out what each photograph reveals, what is a person or an object, for example; what is a crease in a human body or the foundation of a building, whether they are actually legs and why they would be, as they seem to be, inverted, suspended with their feet in the air. With these obstructions, the work seems to require the observer to look erotically, seduced, over the fragments of the image in efforts to guess and imagine the continuity of the spaces and the extent, the texture and the sheer volume of those bodies and those things that are covered.

Just under each of these photographs, there is always a slip of paper, that reproduces, also typed, a phrase by Jorge Luis Borges: "All words were once a neologism." So, it is in fact a bit of this that the exposition seeks: the chance to confer these materials that have carried time – things that belong to the past, as much as they are, now, participants of the present – the condition of doubt, of unforeseen appearance, involved through interrogation, for an existence prior to the designations and presuppositions? This may be the perfect circumstance for reflections on cutting and reconnecting with this or that fabric of history.