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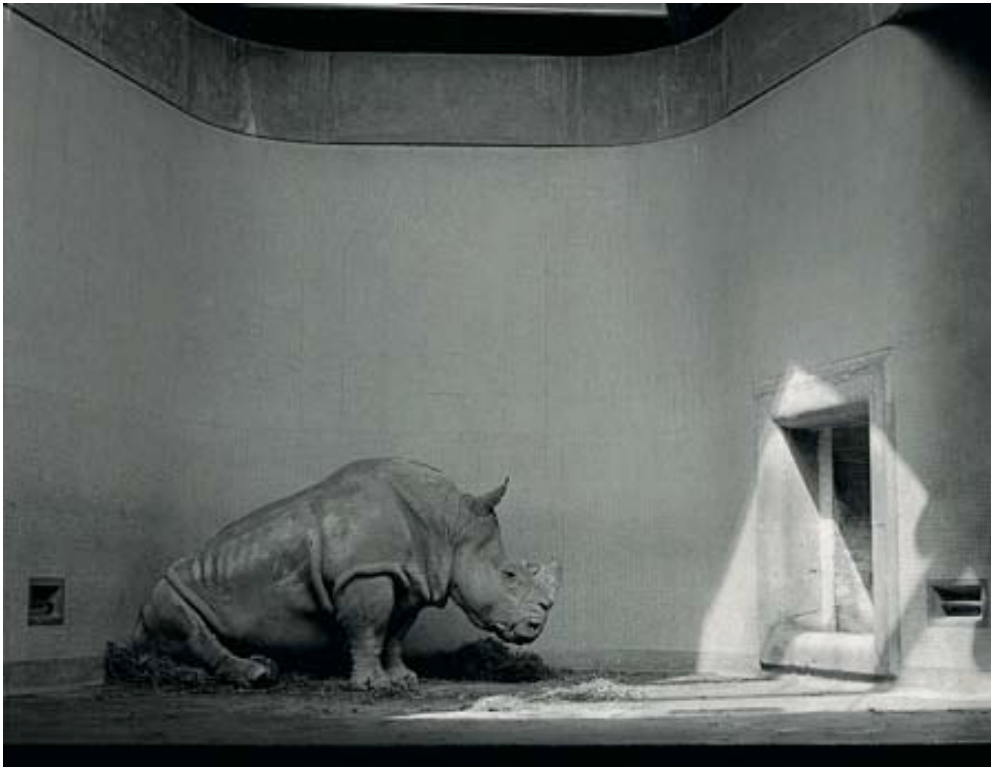
HUMBERTO RIVAS

Unpublished & Vintage photographs

16.09.2010 – 30.10.2010

Press Release

On September 16, Michel Soskine will present a selection of 20 unpublished and vintage black and white photographs by the late Humberto Rivas (Buenos Aires 1937 – Barcelona 2009). Centered around Rivas two main subject matters, portraiture and landscape, the exhibition will reaffirm the artist's concern for the passage of time and delve into the logic of the photographic medium.



"Photography is the way in which our time assumes Death" (Roland Barthes). A concern shared by other photographers such as Avedon, Arbus, Coplans or Mapplethorpe.

Known as the *photographer of silence*, Humberto Rivas captured the inner qualities of the people portraited, the soul of the places he carefully chose to record in a tireless search for reality and, within its cracks, always transcended the documentary realm.

Rivas compositions, simple in appearance, are impregnated with *the strange*. By contrast they are often bathed in a warm and deep light, accentuated by the deep blacks of the silver

prints. "In reality there is always some mystery, and it must be so because there is no interest where there is no mystery. In this ambiguity I want to maintain my work."

Looking at Humberto Rivas work, one is immediately struck by a feeling of honesty and authenticity : The accent here is on sobriety and no artifice. These portraits do not try to be iconic. To the contrary, their impact lies somewhere between the image of the subject recorded and its uniqueness within the human condition. Titles carry no surnames, they appeal directly to the person: María, Magda, Alberto.

In Rivas work, landscapes are places of absence : empty rooms and deserted streets. They exude an atmosphere of desolation, an unfathomable loneliness brought by the human traces left behind. "In Rivas photographs one senses an abyss that contains all mysteries, all the silence, all the solitude (...)" (Jaume Vidal)



In his images, Rivas seeks to capture the essence of the subject. It is a path towards nudity, a continuous shedding seeking the truth in places and people. Through them, the artist portrays the ambiguity of time, gender, and identity.

For Rivas, the portrait is always a self-portrait. Under the apparent simplicity of the image, there is a struggle. "In a portrait, both photographer and photographed, fight to win. The photograph works when the photographer wins." It is well known how Rivas used to play tricks to get the expression he wanted, dethroning the models from the pose they assumed.



A polished craftsman and technical master, Rivas never fell into precious formalism. Not a kind of instant hunter he was rather an *image builder*, where nothing is left to chance. Until the end, he worked with a high format camera. In exterior shots, and with the caution of a topographer, Rivas was often armed with precision instruments including the compass, in order to calibrate and predict the time and place of lights and shadows. Like Man Ray, Humberto Rivas work do not linger on technical dexterity. His intention is to concentrate on imposing an idea "so that the observer is not thinking of *why* rather than *how*."

Just as his references were August Sander, Irving Penn or Anatole Saderman, since the early 70's he also became a bastion for other photographers: Upon his arrival in Barcelona in 1976, Rivas started to head a group of photographers (Xavier Miserachs, Toni Catany, Joan Fontcuberta and Manel Gate), and helped them overcome Spanish avant garde crisis of the time. After a period of rejection of a certain photographic realism as well as an hegemony of the techniques of manipulation, Rivas returned to the representation of pure reality.

Humberto Rivas passed away last year in his adoptive Barcelona, a few days before receiving the Gold Medal for Artistic Merit of the city. This recognition was preceded by the Award from the Arts City of Barcelona in 1996 and the National Photography Prize in 1997. Previous museums exhibitions include the MNCARS, the Círculo de Bellas Artes in Madrid and the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago.

Public collections include: Televisa Cultural Foundation (Mexico), the Museum of

Contemporary Art in Mar del Plata (Argentina), The Los Angeles Country Museum of Art (U.S.A), Chicago Museum of Contemporary Photography (U.S.A), La Bibliotheque Nationale (Paris, France), la Maison Européenne de la Photographie (Paris, France) and in Barcelona Fundación La Caixa (Barcelona, Spain) and the MNAC (Cataluña National Museum of Art).



Selected publications :

The Photographer of Silence, catalog from his 2007 retrospective at the MNAC (Cataluña National Museum of Art).

Humberto Rivas, Photographs 1978-1990, solo exhibition at the Fundación La Caixa de Barcelona in 1991. In October 2010 La Fabrica Editorial will re-edit a previously published pocket book now out of print.

The exhibition will remain until October, 30 at Michel Soskine, calle Padilla, 38. 28006 Madrid. Tuesday to Saturday from 10.30 - 14.30 / 16.30 -20.00

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