

Iván Argote *A million friends*

From March the 22nd to May the 31st, 2013

In his first exhibition in Barcelona, Iván Argote presents at ADN Galeria *A million friends*: an approach which focuses on the experience of encountering the other and the joy of sharing. Curated by Albertine de Galbert the solo show evolves around the "fair distance" portrayed in his works. Thus, the artist becomes an activist of contact and relationship.

From the outside of the gallery we can observe few lines of lights which hang from the ceiling. The installation represents the sentence written by Borges: "Who has not, at one point or another, played with thoughts of his ancestors, with the prehistory of his flesh and blood?" transformed in Morse code, which now illuminates the entire space (2013). Inside the gallery we encounter the piece *Extracts* (2013), which reproduces a street wall section. The urban space sheltered by the gallery becomes a container of individual voices gathered by the artist and transcribed into the sentence: "if hunger is law, rebellion is justice" that we can read on the wall. Next to it, we encounter the photography *Dándole peso a los besos* (2012), in which the graphic intervention appears in the public space aiming to be fossilised. The artist impregnates with kisses a rock located next to the Supatá River in Colombia; the intention is to perpetuate a presence in a specific time and space and give weight to an otherwise fleeting moment. Locating again the action in the public realm, the video *Caricia*, filmed in 2012, shows a loving couple in the Parc des Tuileries of Paris. In their bodies, we can observe the shadow of a hand stroking their figures. The intruder and tender contact does not happen in actuality, but it is present and participates of the couple's intimacy.

Indeed Ivan Argote's actions escape their common staging to contaminate other spheres. It is the case of *Un día al año* which recuperates 35 Polaroids of birthday's celebrations (an archive of a project realised in the Centro de Arte Dos de mayo -CA2M in 2012.) The images assemble an action, which consisted in celebrating every day a birthday of a different person every day until the end of the show. The result is a compendious of scattered individual stories, photographs of diverse people who commemorate their birthdays with friends and family: a million of anonymous friends frozen in these images and paralysed in time and space. The artist transforms an intimate ritual into the real protagonist of the artwork offering it to the public gaze.

Another ironical and irreverent project is *Make me happy, make me sad* (2013): a note of 5.000 Spanish pesetas depicting the face of King Juan Carlos I positioned on top of a pedestal. Depending on the angle from which the figure is seen, the King has a smiley or a sad face. *Turistas: Isabel handing in a contract and Cristóbal pointing the South* (2012) relates to two photographs of the sculptures of Queen Isabel and Christopher Columbus presiding over the square "Monument for the Catholic Kings" in Bogotá. In the images we can observe that the two figures wear "ruanas": ponchos from the Andes; an action that the artist undertook with the same group of people with whom he organised an ephemeral community in the context of the project *La Estrategia* (presented in the last room of the gallery). The urban space becomes again a battlefield where any corner can be container for statements.

The exhibition also includes *History of the Humanity* (2011) where the artist and his family reconstructed "great moments" of the history of humanity shoot on a park. They made together a script resuming in 8 chapters the "history of Humanity". Then they act and improvised each one of this chapters: "Homo Sapiens", "The First Agricultural Societies", "First Civilizations", "Wars", "Love & Hate", "Colonization and Post Colonization", "Nation States" and "Uncertain Future".

Entering now the back room, we find the project *Activisisim!* (2013) where the participation of others in Argote's artworks, either in a passive or direct form, as a leitmotiv that travels along almost all his creative projects is more literally materialised. The project groups, through multiple slides, a workshop with kids aged 5 to 7 that Argote did in the Museum MAC-VAL (2011-2012), where he provided the children with tools for demonstrating. The images are accompanied by a transcription of the phone conversation in which he explains the project to his mother. Moreover, the piece settles a bond with the artist autobiographical past since his father, a Colombian syndicalist and schoolteacher, usually taught his scholars to demonstrate. The singular canvas that can be seen in ADN Gallery: *Huelga estudiantil*, is a site specific installation of one of the "protest classes" that his father did in the 70s.

In the opposite wall we can find a monitor screening the video untitled *Geometría* (2012) which shows two girls in the jungle, both holding a revolver that is activated every time they explain where they come from, where they studied or any other information related to their place of origin. The answers are always: "over there" or "over here" while shooting to the direction they are pointing at. The artist wants to play with their unclear explanations and reflects on the connotation that hangs from these questions, as they have a direct impact on the current socio-political system.

The last work presented in **A million friends** is the medium length film *La Estrategia* recently exhibited in the Palais de Tokyo in Paris and which compiles few pieces already described. It reveals a dive into the past. The artist collected an enormous number of anecdotes from some militants of the 70s in Bogotá. They used to live in clandestine communities and Iván Argote formed a group of people to whom he passed on all these stories and together built a community, where they lived during two weeks under this "system of truth" so proclaimed by the militants of the past. Through this reconstruction and with a critical lecture, they constructed new anecdotes trying to re-enact in their own flesh a part of the history, with the aim of transporting the past to the here and now. The dynamic of the group was expanded to the relation with the city, the monuments, the nature and the landscape.

Iván Argote raises questions addressed to the spectator under a tender curtain while looking forward for an eventual outcome. Art becomes here a research's mechanism: a constant inquiry willing to modify the present in a movement from the very private to the very collective. In that sense, the artist represents an art which takes place outside the borders of any conventional frame; its mobility and evanescence resist to be controlled.

In colaboration with Gallerie Perrotin Paris, Hong Kong and D+T Project Gallery

