

## 'Passage': Extracts From A World In Between

Keeping an image slightly out of focus was already discussed from the very first introduction of the medium of photography, but the direction in which it should be taken has always been under scrutiny – until this very day. At the heart of that discord was its dual character: the capacity of photography to produce a subjective (or even poetic) expression on the one hand, and its ability to capture a dry and descriptive document of reality on the other. It is exactly at that corridor that we can find **Virgilio Ferreira**, a century or so after the initial experimentations, as he diligently pushes the boundaries of the medium.

Why? Well, first and foremost, to investigate the relationship between photography and the representation of what is, in essence, reality. While experimenting towards subjective impressions occurred in most of the arts, leading works into becoming abstractions of the mundane experience was not so widely accepted in photography at first, and although the winding path has been covered by the many by now there are still plenty of sideways to be explored. For Ferreira, this has everything to do with the fluid transition from one state of being to the next, and the attempt to capture the liquid moment between presence and disappearance.

With the support of a camera, he wishes to open new doors – if only to prevent the passage between the objective and illusory from a final closure. While that might sound vague, it is inevitably so and it explains why his images are so amorphous or intangible in their subject. Unlike the expeditionary ambition to uncover the unknown territories of our world (recognized in the documentary approach to photography), what we are dealing with here is a more passionate desire to deny a formal vision and to alternatively explore the 'terra incognita' of our psyche. This hunger, this longing for the exclusion of a regular focus, reflects from Ferreira's work.

This is an appetite or even a lust to see the outside from within, to unmask and to discharge the subdued elements of our existence. An urge to reveal something by going in the seemingly opposite direction of making things blurry. Technically, without revealing too much about the process, there is something fundamentally paradoxical about his approach, as it deals both with recording information while also including the urge to destroy it. In other words, what we are looking at is the securing and denying reality at the same time.

Importantly to note is that these push- and pull methods (here, in this series, related focus and double-exposure of the negatives) are activated at the very moment of capture. This means that all transformations occur inside the camera and are thus not a matter of post-production. But most significantly, it is the approach itself that is the object of proximity, that which lingers at the heart of the matter. For if one limits oneself to what one sees, one simply misses the point. Or, as the Slovenian psycho-analytic/ philosopher Slavoj Žižek explains when describing the paradox in Lacan's 'les non-dupes errent': it is only for those who do not let themselves be caught in the symbolic deception (or fiction) and thus stop to believe their eyes to approach the real from a bit more up close.

There is no fixed expressive translation for the plasmic ground that nourishes the undefinable traces of the human condition. Or to put in in another, more simplistic way: symbolic fiction structures our perception of reality and Ferreira has recognized that powerful potential in such a way that it allows him to make drastically out of focus pictures without letting them become deprived of meaning. By contrast, tuning away from the short

circuit relationship between what is in front of him and what the camera depicts may lead to less indexical or descriptive images but at the same time it leaves the essential structure of the photographed to be untouched.

What we thus look at is the symbolic emission of the matter at stake, which in this series comes down to the expression of ambiguity in contemporary society or what the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman coined as the 'liquid times.'

So there you have it. Ferreira makes blurry photographs in extrema, an aesthetic strategy that allows him to address that we, the modern people, are in flux and to evoke the emotions arriving from our state of vulnerability, bewilderment and impermanence. What he aims to record are preconceptions of the undefined space between the real and the illusive, the visible and the invisible, and he is doing so by breaking the boundary between a subjective registration and objective documentation of who we are and of how we are managing ourselves in this world.

This is not an easy task. Capturing anonymous people in their metropolitan surroundings has been done many times over and even defines a certain genre (generally known as 'street photography') but Ferreira was never interested in the anecdotal reflection of daily life in the city. Instead, Ferreira's images are deliberately indistinct, to be seen as a visual translation of modern life at its core. Blurry and removed of their initial descriptive quality, these pictures remind us of the undetermined state of our being.

Erik Vroons, Amsterdam  
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