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CLUB

MARION ELLENA

El color del polvo

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In 2025, during a trip to Peru, Marion Ellena began *El color del polvo* [The color of dust], a project about her family memory, its silences, and the forms of transmission that surround them. To avoid approaching this documentation too directly, Ellena starts by filming her trip, which lets her multiply the narratives around what she is trying to recover.

Back in France, she photographs screenshots taken from her footage on film. First in black and white, the images are then printed in color on expired papers with expired chemistry. Forms emerge only through faint color contrasts: some are almost erased, others crossed by stains and tremors. Cropping, assembling and blurring create zones of silence, and their succession produces a choppy, jerky, incomplete rhythm. Each photograph thus carries several temporalities: that of memory, of the journey, of the shot, and then of the development and degradation of the print. This process of altering photographic tools questions the function of preservation usually attributed to the image, undermines its authority, and makes it possible to transcribe gaps, voids, forgetting. These operations reveal her process in the darkroom. Along the edges of the prints appear paperclips and handprints, traces of a process carried out by feel: those of an artist who searches, who unrolls the paper in the dark, and which recall the instinctive movement of her hand on light-sensitive paper.

These experiments with the plasticity of photographic medium, along with the choice of formats, evoke a flow of materials and chemistries, as reactive and sensitive as skin, in the manner of Lotus L. Kang (b. 1985, Canada). This attention to matter extends into the way the images are presented in space, where their stretched formats and arrangements are fully part of the experience of the exhibition.

The prints unfold from the wall to the table, between unspooled images and surface for consultation. On the wall, the prints from the *El color del polvo* series are attached with magnets to long metal strips, in a display closer to a research board or a filing system than to a traditional hanging of framed photographs. The prints take different configurations there: a long roll, a single image, several images in succession, or groups of images gathered on a single sheet. The choice of works and their layout in space are conceived as a unique, site-specific installation, and echo the work of artist Jochen Lempert (b. 1958, Germany), whose scientific training as a biologist remains at the foundation of his artistic practice and installation systems. On the table, the artist shows an earlier project, *Flor (lo que se va)* [Flor, what goes away]. The fragments that make it up can be moved, brought together or recomposed. Both laboratory and worktable, the display shows the scale of Ellena's photographic output, driven by a refrain, a form of obsession with the image.

The prints are often unique, but the images return, repeat, reveal themselves from one print to the next. The portraits of her mother are one example: made during her first trip to Peru in 2018, they give rise to several prints from a single negative, until the image becomes a motif. It is a trembling, agitated, deliberately blurred image: a portrait from behind, facing the immensity of the city of Lima, phone in hand, looking for an address. Marion Ellena also photographs the hands of her aunt Fernanda, who accompanied her to the library, as well as the family images shared with her by her aunt Mirtha and her cousin Jessica, among which she discovers images of her mother as a young woman for the first time. To these are added screenshots of WhatsApp video calls, the last exchanges with her grandmother before her death this summer. All these images express grief tied to such great distance, and the powerlessness of being part of these bonds. At the same time, Marion Ellena's photographic matter is populated by fauna, flora, landscapes and figures that evoke idols, including a Moche [mo. tʃe] sculpture. Sunsets abound, often inverted, and the tones of the prints are orange, bluish, twilight. A way of unsettling time, disturbing the hemispheres, searching for the green flash, a kind of magic on the horizon. "The dog, the owl, those are things I filmed because they also appeared, almost magically, in that daily life," she says.

"It's that time of day
when the musty smell of dust hangs in the air
mingling with the scent of orange blossoms.
Dogs sprawl in the heat
tongues loll, drip saliva,
flanks ripple off flies.
The wind shifts.
I smell mesquite burning.

[...]

I left and have been gone a long time.
I keep leaving and when I am home
they remember no one but me had ever left.

I listen to the grillos more intently
than I do their regaños.
I have more languages than they,
am aware of every root of my pueblo;
they, my people, are not.
They are the living, sleeping roots.

I sweep up mesquite leaves,
thorns embedded in my flesh,
stings behind my eyes."

Gloria Anzadúa, Nopalitos
in Boderlands – La Frontera,
The new mestiza

In Borderlands, Gloria Anzaldúa speaks of those who live between two worlds, at the border between cultures and languages. The border does not delimit spaces, geographic or symbolic; on the contrary, it creates new territories. This thinking allows us to extend the reading of Marion Ellena's work, whose images also bear the traces of displacement, multiple belongings and distance. Her practice is part of a continuous state of instability and flux, like the experience of exile: of bodies in motion. She thus confronts archival work with this experience, through two opposite movements: one that would fix, the other that would displace. But both stem from the same way of searching, of making one's body an archive. This exhibition plunges us into the interstices, the voids, the geographic, linguistic and memorial distances, at the heart of her borderlands.

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