

CARLOS LOBO

A THOUSAND LEAVES

Opening Saturday 10 July | 16:00

A Thousand Leaves deals with the representation of Nature. We think we know what that means. It is however much more complicated than it sounds. In part, everything is Nature: not just the rivers and marshes, not only the valleys, the slopes, the flora, the forest, the Le Gray bush, but also the flowerbeds, the walls, the paths, the surrounding villages, the power that organizes them, the birth rate that perpetuates them; the plebiscite, the rites, the antennas, the burials, the money. We are bunches of talking animals. At the limit, even photography exhibitions are Nature, an extravagant expression of a young way of life. From a sufficiently broad perspective, as Kant explained, all history is natural history.

On the other hand, perhaps very few or none of us, neither Rousseau, nor Thoreau, nor Le Gray, nor Carlos Lobo, nor any of the photographers represented here, have actually made contact with Nature: the sudden entropy facing the hiker loner who sees himself surrounded by wolves, the child who gets lost in the grotto, the castaways in the middle of a storm, the sandstorms that erase all references. Perhaps Nature is a loss of all human references. In that case, there is no such thing as “representation of Nature”, since where there are no people, there are no images. Except, of course, in the sense of photography exhibitions, where sometimes there are no people, although that doesn't cause us the slightest panic.

Having photographs in a room, even if they are “from Nature”, says how far we are from the mere possibility of contemplating it. By definition, looking at images and looking at Nature are opposite, irreconcilable activities. (Images do not grow on trees.) The outlines of the issue now become sharper. If Nature cannot be shown by images, in what sense can it be photographed?

Perhaps, applied to (these) images, the expression 'from Nature' is therefore a little misleading. It may be that, looking around, the visitor of *A Thousand Leaves* does not see photographs of Nature but photographs of Nature's representation. From a pessimistic perspective, it may even be that a photographer, even more a cultured and conscientious photographer like Carlos Lobo, is not able to represent Nature because he can no longer see it. He looks at this bush and sees a Le Gray; looks at that trunk and recognizes an Atget; look at that river and see himself somehow. In short: he looks at Nature and what he sees are images. In Lobo's photographs and from his personal collection — in the damage inflicted to the elements and by the elements, in the endless competition between vegetation and settlement, in the memories of nature in urban space and of urban space in nature; — one sees a close Nature, human, domesticated, untamable. Not only in the trivial sense in which Nature is everything that is human, starting with landscape transformation, but above all in the sense that representation is one of the forms of domesticating Nature; in the sense that an image of the natural world is a transformation of the natural world (any image of the landscape is the transformed landscape). So, this transformation does not take place in a vacuum; does not appear out of nowhere. The dialogue initiated here by the artist with his peers and with some of the heroes clearly testifies to the sense in which the photographer's Nature is always, already, a pictorial, poetic, photographic Nature. The nature of the photographer is photographic history: the images that he surrounds himself and that motivate him.

Finally, see how some of these images act out the presence in, or indeed a pacified contact with, the natural sphere. Haunted by images, the photographer who projects himself like that, deals with photography understood as a being-in-the-world, launched into the elements, an exploration outside himself, in contact with the non-self. Photography, in Lobo's words, is born from “a devotion for the real”. A metonymy of photographic activity, one could take such images about the presence in Nature as betraying an idea of photography as a way of evading the photographic and pictorial sphere. It would be an ironic gesture. However, I do not believe that this happens. There is never in Carlos Lobo's work any ironic tension between devotion to reality and devotion to the image. There is no tension but (if I can put it that way) grace and naturalness; a general sympathy for the mundane. *A Thousand Leaves*, we saw at the beginning, deals with the representation of Nature. But it deals no less with second nature: photography as a way of life.

Humberto Brito
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On view: July 13 to October 2 2021 from Tuesday to Saturday from 3pm to 8pm