

FANTOM

PHOTOGRAPHIC QUARTERLY
ISSUE 08 - AUTUMN 2011

IT €12.00 CH CHF28.50
DE - A €19.00 CH (T) CHF27.50
ES - FR €17.80 UK £18.50 - NL €16.50
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Truc Trang Walls Simon Castets in conversation with **ADRIÀ JULIÀ**

With his works *Truc Trang Walls* (2006,) Adrià Julià (b. 1974 in Barcelona, Spain, lives and works in Los Angeles, California) collates the personal history of a Vietnamese man, Diep Nguyen, with the grand narratives of colonialism and war. A non-linear documentary of sorts, *Truc Trang Walls* records on film the construction of Nguyen's home in his native village, after his thirty-year exile in the United States. Expanded with photographic records of Nguyen's belongings, the video's fragmentary aesthetic mirrors the recalcitrance of an individual story to the larger historical scheme.

SIMON CASTETS *Your work is often structured in groups of pieces that expand each other's narrative potential. How would you characterize the relationship between the photographs and the film for Truc Trang Walls?*

ADRIÀ JULIÀ The photographs do have a cinematographic character. This is the result of their 'composition,' which is made up (or built up) of multiple frames over a period of time. The cutting between the frames, however, is obscured, as in all the elements are presented on a single plane while the photomontage element remains concealed. In other words: as all the elements in the photograph remain perfectly in focus, there is the illusion of a documentary. This effect is achieved through compositions based on different focal lengths (and thus inherently different time frames), which are then digitally montaged. There is a seamless logic to the picture plane that leads to the 'illusion' of transparency. However, rather than making it easier for the viewer to assess the information one way or the other, this accumulation of detail, all of it having equal weight within the image, produces an overwhelming effect where the viewer is forced to sift through every detail in order to determine significance. The lens does not provide the comfort of focus manipulation, and the ensuing transparency actually renders layers of opacity to the meaning.



Like in La Villa Basque, Vernon, California, the cinematography of Truc Trang Walls studiously lingers on details and creates a piece by piece portrait of a situation. How does the alternation of this scrutinisation with wider views construct the narrative?

The films invert the strategy that I just described in the photographs. Whereas the photograph, when considered from a 'cinematographic' perspective, enables the various planes of the picture plane to be presented simultaneously and achieves a deceptive transparency, the film narrative -precisely because the frames are not presented simultaneously- heightens the fragmentary nature of the position of the camera within the scene. The use of close-ups denies the spectator an over-all sense of space. The camera does not travel from one detail to the next within a continuous space, but rather leaps from one discontinuous place to the next. The tension between different spatial locations is doubled in the dialogue, as multiple narratives in different languages collide. I would like the narrative to be built from these elements that, strictly speaking, cannot be resolved. I am particularly interested in these fissures between the elements, the languages and spaces they attempt to articulate.

The same could be said about the content of the glass cabinets, which mix personal knickknacks with portraits of Bill Clinton and Lenin, among others. On top of the overwhelming number of objects, heightened by your composition, their overwhelmingly disparate origins create a number of 'fissures' that call for interpretation. John Baldessari said, "When two things are brought into some sort of magnetic proximity, [...] meaning occurs. Two words, two images, two objects, whatever it is. Whether there's universality, or agreement on the meaning, I rather doubt it. That's probably pretty cultural. But it fascinates me that people want things to mean."¹ In Truc Trang Walls' film and pictures, that instinct to create meaning is particularly stimulated; do you think it can be satisfied?

I'd say it can be over-satisfied, which, curiously, leaves you in the same place you started. The glass cabinets clearly fail to synthesise meaning. On the contrary, they are saturated wells of information. But of course it doesn't leave you in the same place you started at all; there is no such thing as square one. I am only enhancing the un-quantifiable nature of meaning: in fact, how can we accurately count something that involves a variety of subconscious mechanisms? This is grounds for an entirely new discussion, but let's say the proximity of the objects to each other in these images creates an almost infinite collection of simultaneous knee-jerk referential reactions in the viewer; but in reality you need no more than one object



for meaning to rejoice in the 'fissures' of 'disparate origins.' This creates a space in my work where the personal and the universal tend to coexist as non-opposites.

Throughout your work, the use of sound is deceiving, unpredictable, you don't allow the viewer to rely on it to understand what is going on. In Truc Trang Walls, partial translations, sometimes covered by laughter and construction machinery noises, create a disruptive soundtrack. It deceives expectations created by the history of cinema and participates in creating a somewhat refractory filmic object. Would you say that your use of sound mirrors that of cinematography?

The short answer here is simply yes. The sound mirrors or refracts the fragmentary character of my cinematography. The sound serves to disrupt and pervert, but also to extend, expand, and access what is being perceived. The viewer should be compelled to question the relationship between what is being seen and heard, and will hopefully develop the strong sense that this puzzle cannot be put back together seamlessly, as some of the pieces are missing: irreparable holes in the narrative or the story.

Maybe these 'irreparable holes' also pertain to the identity of the main protagonist, Diep Nguyen, who builds a California style house in Viet-Nam? How would the postcolonial framework help understand his project and how do you situate the piece in that respect?

This work maps Diep Nguyen's journey and offers different points of entry into his life. These different objects and details only make sense together through him. The dolls, clams, tourist souvenirs and mementos are all part of his personal history - which itself is a political history as well, a history of returned migrations and de facto political affiliations. Only he can bring in and out of focus the cadre of the remembered, the recounted and the still ongoing. Rooted in places like Little Saigon, CA, and Truc Trang, Vietnam, the work presents a whirl of back and forth and lack of chosen focus, materialized in fact in the palpable conflicts that arise in this re-enactment of sorts: the inherent clashes of an endless lineup of settlements where it remains increasingly unclear which action digresses from what purpose, to the point of effacing any opposition between inalienable concepts like exile, memory, colony and home.

Opening spread Untitled (Truc Trang Walls,) 2006, *Photocollage*, cm 140 x 178. *Left* all Truc Trang Walls, 2006, *stills from 16mm film installation, color, sound, 14 min loop*. *Above* Untitled (Truc Trang Walls,) 2006, *Photocollage*, cm 140 x 178. *Pages 96-97* Untitled (Truc Trang Walls,) 2006, *Photocollage*, cm 140 x 178. All images © the artist, courtesy *Galería Soledad Lorenzo, Madrid*

¹ From 'Paul Pfeiffer and John Baldessari in Conversation' in *Paul Pfeiffer*, exh. cat., (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2003.) pp. 35-36

