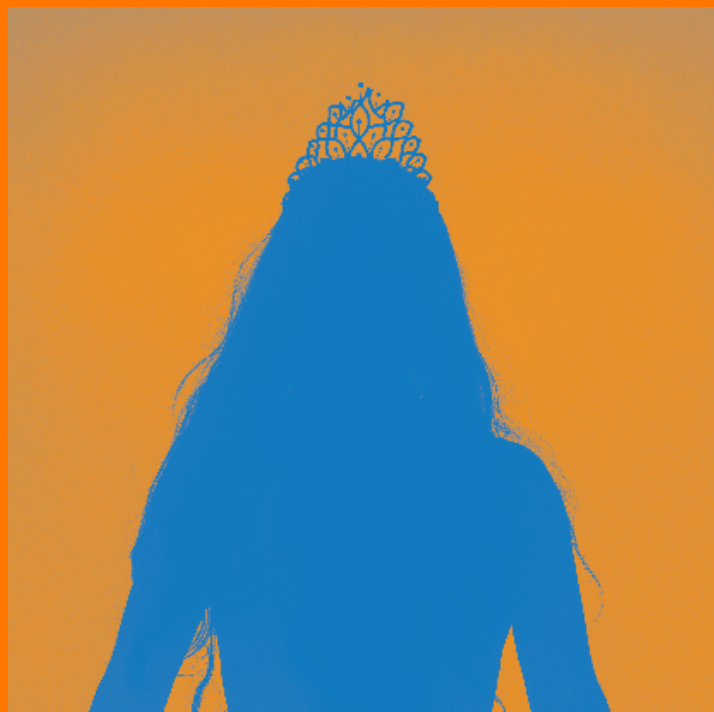


⁷ Juan Pablo Echeverri



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Foreword

For twenty-two years, every day, wherever he was in the world, Juan Pablo Echeverri took a self-portrait. A moment of action, followed by five minutes of waiting. His life was active, restless, multifarious—but the daily ritual of facing himself in a photo-booth, this constant thread, was never skipped.

The genre of artists' self-portraits has a rich and well-documented history—think of the eighty that Rembrandt made in his lifetime—and within the history of photography there is a whole lineage of artists who have interrogated the serial self-portrait at the core of their practice, embracing the transformative potential of a fluid understanding of identity. Artists like Claude Cahun, Cindy Sherman and Jo Spence come to mind.

Self-portraits, paradoxically, have a peculiar quality of transcendence as they point beyond the self. They address and involve various aspects of picture-making, of control, of the psyche, and of portraiture as such, not only as an artistic but also as a human and social activity. Self-portraits are as much a distillation of the now as they are a record of what will be passed tomorrow. They are always pictures against our disappearance, our vanishing. Each one is a performance and construction of the self. They answer to the maker's and the sitter's desire to play a role, to create and face one's persona for this moment in time, allowing for it to be seen and witnessed in the contemporary and into posterity.

I like artists who have an *even though* sensibility in their approach to making, a drive and dedication to make their work against the weight of art history. Echeverri could have thought that the photo booth self-portrait has been well explored in the twentieth century, but instead, he dug deep, and made it a territory all his own. Echeverri's distinct negotiation of the lens, the very act of looking back with an unflinching expression suggests being in control of the image of himself; of his *self*.

Begun in 1998, *miss fotojapón* was an ongoing process of self-affirmation that spanned over 8,000 days. During this time the project evolved from very much staged and thought-out

photos—for which he would meticulously plan his outfits and appearance, also considering the pictures to fit in a larger grid of time (sometimes repeating the same outfit at a specific day of the month, for instance)—to more spontaneous photos that sought to capture the opposite, the improvised and uncontrolled, the indefinable quality of his being and living.

Echeverri grew up in the 1990s in Bogotá in an era when civil war was raging in parts of Colombia and, although his hometown wasn't directly affected, a sense of personal safety was nevertheless a daily concern. Growing up as a young gay man in the conservatism of a Catholic society left little room for his identity and added pressure to develop further personal defenses. He did mention to me the terror of boarding the school bus and being picked on as gay years before he knew for himself that he was.

Instead of retreating, he deployed a practice of wit, charm and humor—and exaggeration: a formidable artistic tool often used to uncover 'truths' buried under cultural conventions and misconceptions. His own set of references was certainly formed by the Latin American popular culture, while also having a sharp personal take on the offerings and desires of US-American, British, and Spanish pop culture. His in-depth understanding of communication in its visual and linguistic forms made him a seismograph of

larger trends that would soon dominate culture in general and image consumption in particular. Superficiality, for him, was not a flaw but a quality: a human characteristic to be dissected and to harvest for joy and transcultural understanding.

Echeverri wanted to trace life, tracking contemporary ways of living across cultures in the modes du jour. A man of great and unfiltered empathy, he observed his fellow human beings, in his own country and abroad, with warmth and an acute sense of the absurd. He would portray stereotypes as well as individualists who would catch his attention at a local supermarket, a bus stop or just passing by. Despite, or maybe even because of the specificity of his approach, a strong sense of universalism was at the core of his practice.

Echeverri's work has to be understood in equal parts as the innumerable *miss fotojapón*¹ passport photo self portraits, and the over 30 distinct series of larger format photographs and videos produced of him as actor of various personas. These series were meticulously staged by himself and with the help of collaborators. Being an obsessive collector whose entire life was pre-production for future projects, he took pop cultural samples wherever he traveled to and

1 Named after the Colombian photo lab chain Foto Japón.

turned them into props for scenarios that took shape in his head long before they were realized in short, frantic periods of shooting.

These series take a magnifying glass to highly generic as well as specific angles of human appearance, sometimes even drifting into the fantastical and post-human. In this way, hair came to play a central role. In 2006 Echeverri created *MasculAdy*, a replica barbershop street sign fusing traditional Latin hair styles with what he observed as a new generation of metropolitan male vanity. The *MUTILAdy* (2003) photographs—its title playing with the word “mutilate” in Spanish (also meaning bad haircut)—show Echeverri in nine stages of transformation from a full-length rockstar mane to a shaved head, while his upper body is painted with a glance of the muscles located just beneath his skin.

Visits and residencies in Mexico offered inspiration for the series *Mucho Macho* and *Mariguís* (both 2008), as well as the astonishing *Identidad Pagasa* (2017) double portraits. The sixty-piece *futuroSEXtraños* (2016) series is a melancholic meditation on the anonymizing black-and-white silhouette displayed in the profiles of social media dating apps of those who don't want to or can't reveal their real faces, for any variety of reasons. The honeycomb shaped *PRES.O.S.*, made a year later, takes a sharp look at 37 identities Echeverri culled from his memory of seeing people in public,

1 The making of IDENTIDAD PAYASA, 2017



lost in interaction with their mobile phones, the title is yet again a play on words (here, the Spanish word for prisoners).

The photographic languages used by Echeverri—and there were many—often employed an anti-aesthetic approach that questioned established values of taste, going beyond even the common visual repertoire of campness. He never fully revealed his personal position within the visual firework he unleashed, between parody and the social documentarian, the self-analytical and the hilarious. Not everything was readily digestible and his works could easily throw you in a *does he really mean this?* way. The subversive quality of this, however, was meant not to blow everything up, but to bring us together.

In a recent conversation about his video works, Juan Pablo's close friend, the artist Sofía Reyes, described him as "invasive"—a characteristic that he took with him to every city he visited for his video project *Around the World in 80 Days*. Proudly a citizen from the Global South, his suitcase would burst open with the props he carried with him. In each place he would inject himself into the larger community, unafraid of any looming cultural misinterpretations. It is unusual for "invasive" to characterize a positive trait. One might add "infectious"—positive throughout, not least due to Echeverri's incredible skill with both the English and Spanish languages.

Too subversive to indulge in the politeness of puns, he launched assaults at good taste and language as a whole. He would disarmingly throw you off guard with a cascade of word plays, rhymes, inflections, and cross-language mistranslations; always delivered with a twinkle in his eye that gestured the faux unawareness of the wildly funny insanity he had just created. Again, exaggeration served as a powerful tool for him to demonstrate how shaky some of our certainties can be.

His work *Identidad Pagasa* with street clowns in Mexico, who he in turn invited to transform him into copies of themselves, perhaps cuts closest to the vulnerability, resilience, and joy that drove all his life. So I spare myself from writing a last heartfelt sentence about missing him badly, as he surely would have jumped in to complete the sentence in a lovingly twisted disruption.

**Russell Martin
in conversation with
Juan Pablo Echeverri**

**The following exchange was originally recorded in
2012, edited for publication.**

Russell Martin

Let's start with an overview of your practice. It's not something that just happens in a studio; it is a daily practice and something that happens continuously. It seems to me, from knowing you for a few years, that it's something that's always playing in the back of your mind. You're always on the lookout for objects or things to take pictures of. It's continual.

Juan Pablo Echeverri

Well, I've been doing a daily passport photograph for 11 years now. This is a practice that started from a written diary that I began around 1995. Around that time I was changing hairstyles, growing up, getting piercings, starting to have a beard. And yeah, I was writing in my diary like, "Dear diary, today I got a piercing..." Then I thought it would be a lot more interesting to just take a picture and put it in the diary, to make it kind of illustrated, because it was really boring to see just writing.

As time went by, I kept on changing, kept on taking pictures, and as I kept on taking pictures, I kept on changing. I got to a point where it was a vicious circle, and I didn't really know if I was changing for the pictures or taking pictures for the changes. I'd started to hold these photographs

in a little box but around May 2000 it just got full. So I was thinking, "Oh, what am I going to do with the pictures now?"

I spread them on the floor and saw I had 118 photographs that I had done from '95 to 2000, and I realized there was something here. I was already in art school, but I had never considered that part of the work or anything because it was really private; it was a diary. But I started putting them in an album and in the process I realized that I had taken 28 portraits in a month. I'd missed two days. That's when, in June 2000, I decided to do it every day. I'm still doing it, I just haven't been able to stop.

Russell Martin

So you're doing it because it's just something that you do?

Juan Pablo Echeverri

Yes. Like an addiction, I guess. If I smoke, I smoke. Period.

Russell Martin

Within those daily photographs, other works started to emerge as well.

Juan Pablo Echeverri

Yes. On the side of this activity, in 1998 while in school I had this teacher... I have to say, it's her fault that I do self-portraits only. She really emphasized how photography could be super personal and could be something that belongs only to you, and how you can tell your story through photography. People think that photography is something that anybody can do. But then she showed us art artists like Nan Goldin, Cindy Sherman, Dwayne Michaels, Diane Arbus.... I mean, this generation of artists that work with photography and it's really strongly related to their own lives. That really captivated me completely. We were supposed to do a final work in which we had to work within one theme, and I chose the self-portrait.

So I did this piece that is actually the first piece I consider part of my work, although it was done in school, in which I just disguised myself as couples in ten different situations. A man and a woman in wedding dresses, the gay couple, the lesbian couple, and the result was satisfying for the public and for me. That's where it all started. That's where it all made sense for me.

All these changes that I was having in real life kind of suggested characters that I could just go to. So it was like, oh, I'm growing this beard. I might look like this Harley Davidson person, so

why not grow it more and completely transform myself into this character. From that moment on, I've been from the Harley Davidson guy to lesbians, to superheroes, to gay characters, to... I can't even remember.

Russell Martin

When did video work start to become a part of your practice as well?

Juan Pablo Echeverri

Pretty much at the beginning. The reason why I haven't actually, how do you say, produced the early video works is because at the beginning, I never had a video camera, so I always used borrowed cameras. Friends would lend it for a weekend and I would, I don't know, film all weekend long. I tried to do diaries and I have ridiculous amounts of tapes that I think I'll never see. So I think this will be just something somebody will have to do in the future for me. I would love to but I think I would go mad. I would have to stop working to start working on that. But I would really love to see what it is that I was doing back then when it was really authentic and really zero pretentious. I think that it would be amazing to go back to that material because that's where the essence of all the work must be.

Russell Martin

Do you think that your work's got less authentic as it's gone on?

Juan Pablo Echeverri

It's really tough. I don't know what to think. But yes, you contaminate yourself with so many things along the way. What do people want to see? What has had success, what hasn't? Really it's inevitable. Whoever says that it doesn't affect them is super fake because success is interesting. I mean, why not? Why am I going to do something that nobody wants to look at? I want my work to be something that people want to see, that people enjoy seeing and think is beautiful and inspiring. I mean, I'm not there to create controversy or to shock people, although maybe sometimes I have.

Russell Martin

You have, yes. But that's more about those people than about your intentions. And once you make something and send it out into the world you're not in control of how people receive it anymore. You do it for your own reasons and because of your anticipation of how the audience will accept it. But that's not necessarily how it's going to be.

Juan Pablo Echeverri

Absolutely. And I think that my work is, in a way, a reflection of the world I see and the things I like. I think it does tell a story about being in the world. My work can be inspired by an ad that I see on a magazine and I say, "Oh, I have to be this thing." It's kind of eating something and throwing it up. This has been inside me, and now I give it back to the world.

Russell Martin

That's one thing that really struck me about your work is the immediacy of it as well. You don't really seem to make drafts of things. It's you. You'll come up with a project, it is fully formed, and you do the project. You don't test things out, really, the projects are a test in themselves. Is that right?

Juan Pablo Echeverri

Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. And that's something that I've always thought of—it's like I never allow myself to make mistakes, which is wrong, because I always want the thing to be the thing. I do it once and if it fails it's gone. I'm not going, "Oh, I'm going to do this series, so I have to do some tests first to see how this is going to come out." I would have to say that that's where the performative aspect of the

work comes out. Like, I'm going to do this series of superheroes in which I'm going to body paint myself as nine different superheroes. In order to achieve this, I have to shave my head three times. I have to *blah, blah, blah*. So it's something that I don't really want to repeat. Instead I try to plan every single aspect as much as I can.

So when it happens, it comes out right, but I never know what it's going to look like. And I think that that's always been something that I love and I hate about my work. It's always a surprise for me. It's like I never know how things are going to look. Until 2006 everything I did was analog and I never got a chance to see anything until I went and developed the film. It was always shocking. It was always like, *Really? Is that what I did?* I wanted it to be a lot more whatever, and there's always something missing. But that's what keeps me going, I guess. Even though I work with digital photography now, I really never look at it. I mean, I do look at it in the moment to see if it has focus, if the light is fine, but I don't analyze it.

There's a certain rawness in my work that I simply cannot get rid of. I always just let it be how it is. It looks cheap. Well, it is cheap. I mean, if it wasn't, maybe it wouldn't be as interesting. So I don't know. With time, things have gotten a bit more professional, inevitably, because I think that you grow and-

Russell Martin

Your standards get higher. And is that what you were talking about before when you said that an artist contaminates themselves with their previous work or something? I suppose, in a way, they start to perform as an artist and therefore make work that looks like an artwork and it has a level of professionalism and a certain standard to it.

Juan Pablo Echeverri

Yes. I can't be the same person I was in 1998 when I was holding a camera in my room, being myself and talking to the world. There's no way I could; I would be acting.

Russell Martin

Is it that archive of early work that you keep referring back to, or not really? Is it sort of on its own path now?

Juan Pablo Echeverri

It's on its own path. I would have to say that is history that happened, and there's no way I can go back to that at all. Yeah, it's a totally different era. In that time, I would never have thought of myself going out on the streets and performing a

song and doing a music video with people around me. It was all super intimate. I was in my room with myself and the camera was kind of a window to the world. I guess that, yeah, there might be a point when I kind of go full circle and start back again with the intimacy, with things that are more personal, I don't know. I would love to do something like a film or something more serious.

Russell Martin

With the photographs that you make and some of the films as well, you don't actually operate the equipment, do you?

Juan Pablo Echeverri

Not anymore, no. The first time I performed in front of somebody was when I did this video called *m̩i̩əˈmɛrɪkən ˈlaɪfz*. That was the first time somebody shot me. Although it was a close friend, it was really strange, really difficult to do. But now I actually don't care who's operating the camera. And I like the fact that that influences the work. I mean, I do like people to have a certain notion of how to operate a camera, otherwise they would mess up my work.

Russell Martin

But to operate it technically or artistically?

Juan Pablo Echeverri

Technically. Okay, actually I think that when there's an artistic knowledge, that's when it starts going wrong. I'm not so keen on somebody being artistic about my work. It's just: operate the camera. Follow me. Yeah. It's basically being a moving tripod or a living tripod. Five or six different people have shot me in different places and I love the result because it's super different. And they're always super concerned about what I'm going to think, or they don't want to mess with it, so they don't go too artistic on it.

Russell Martin

I just wanted to move on as well to talk about residencies, which are obviously quite an important part of your work. You've done residencies in the UK and in Cuba and in Mexico. Does each place that you go change your work in a way?

Juan Pablo Echeverri

I would have to say that the thrill of going abroad is letting the places affect your work. It would

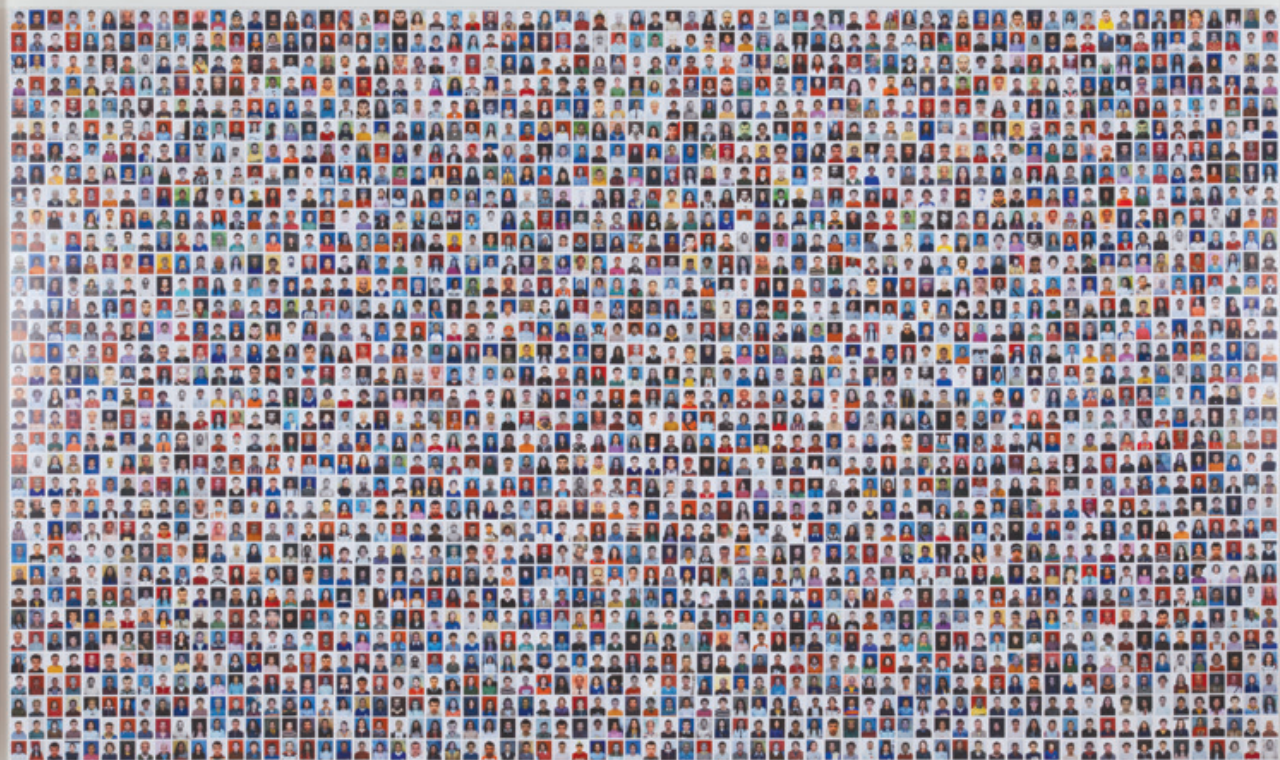
make no sense to go, I don't know, to Rio and work on, I don't know, something that you could work on anywhere else. The idea is to actually be affected by the whole surrounding and let that change your work. Since I started traveling, I started doing a series of videos that are portraits of the cities I've visited, and I try to portray the city and the feeling that I get of the city. At the beginning when I started traveling, I didn't know how that was going to affect my work because my work in a way feels very hermetic and closed. It felt like it would be very difficult to actually influence it or for it to be influenced by a place or something like that. Being in different places, I've realized that it's actually the most changeable thing. Yeah, it's about being in another place so that anything can happen.

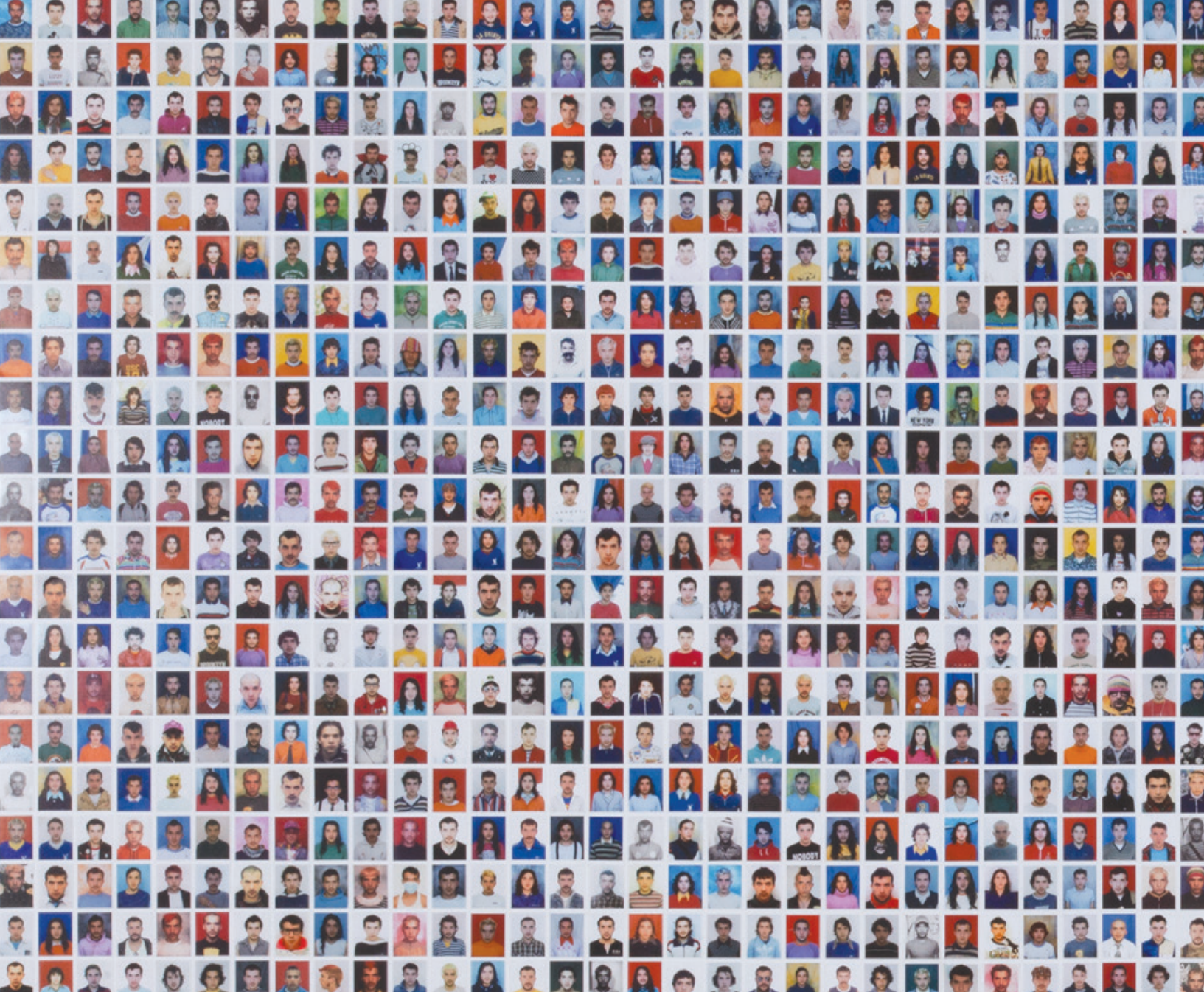
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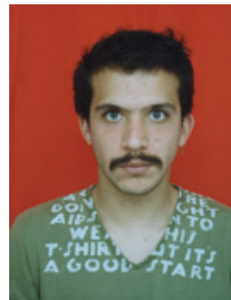
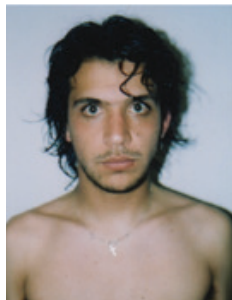
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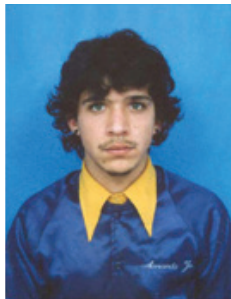
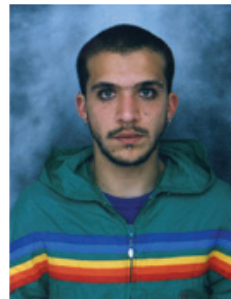
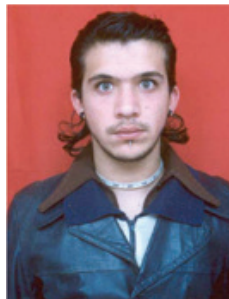


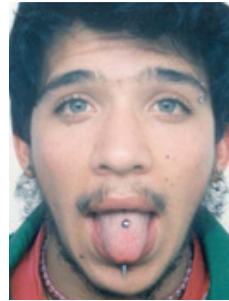










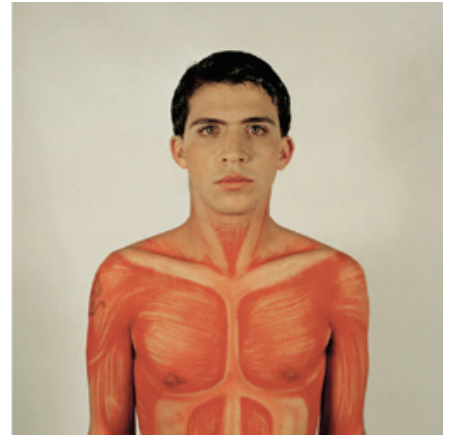


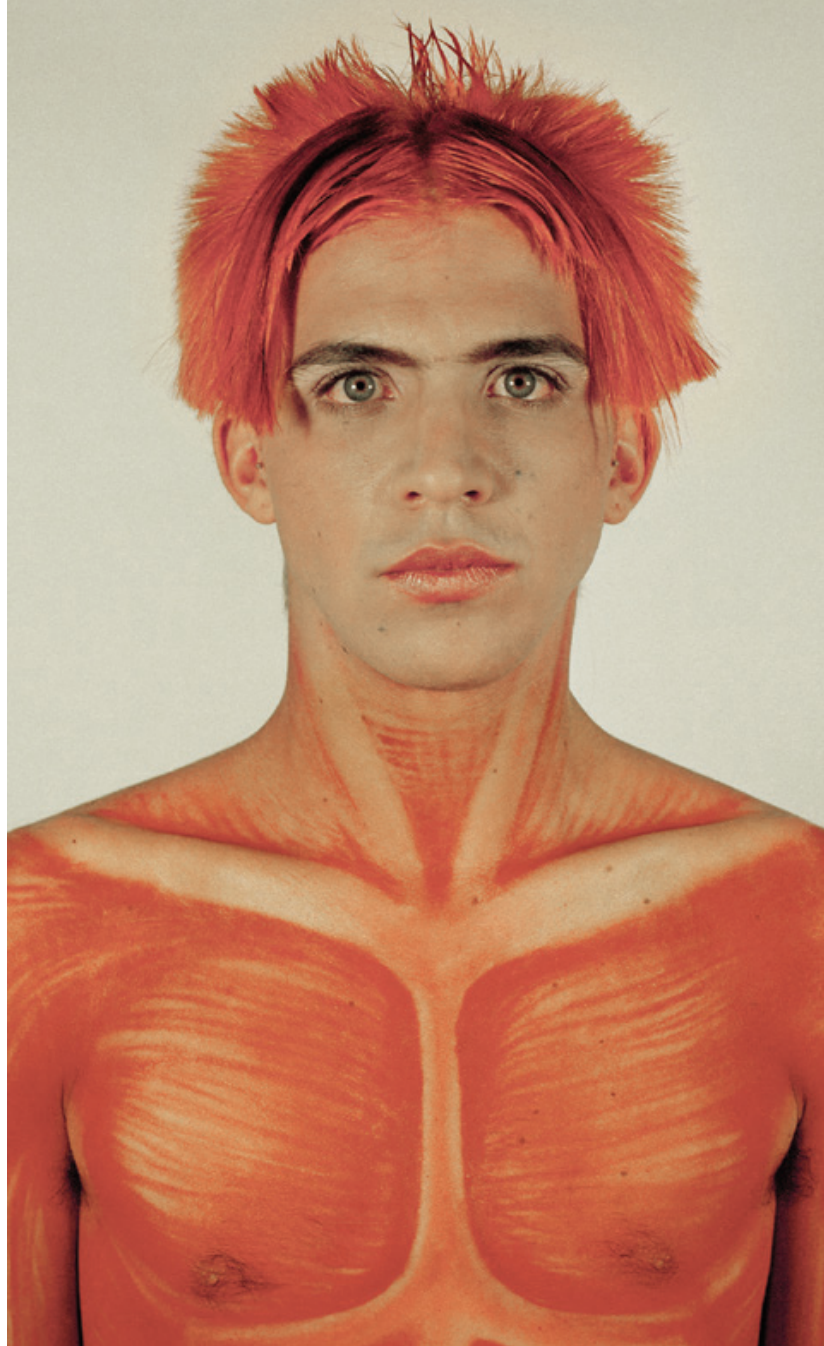


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3 Masculinity 2006



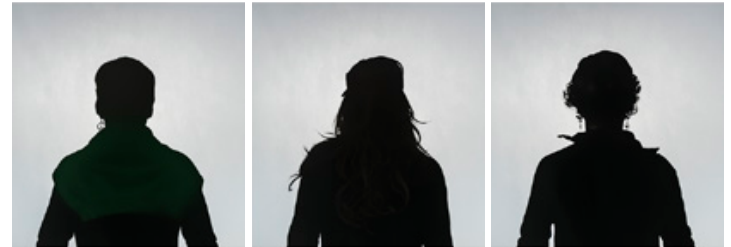
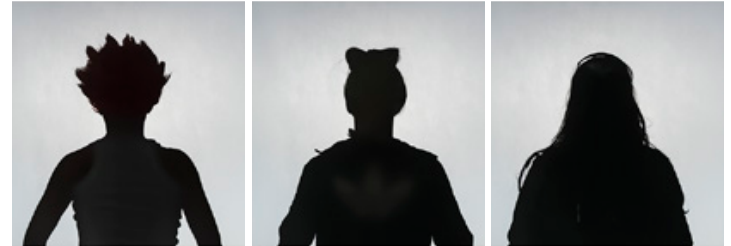
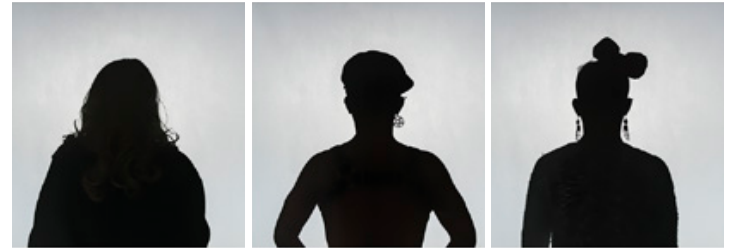
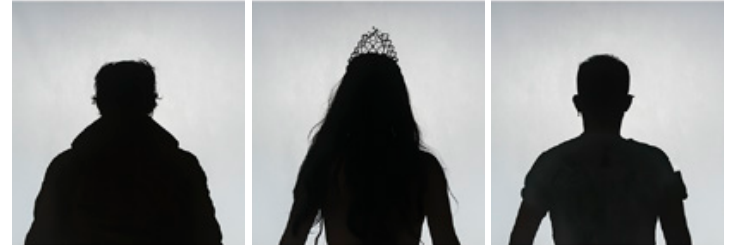
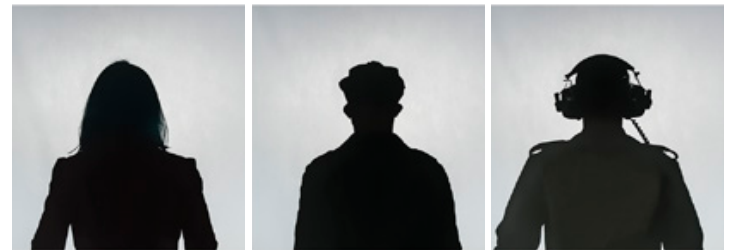
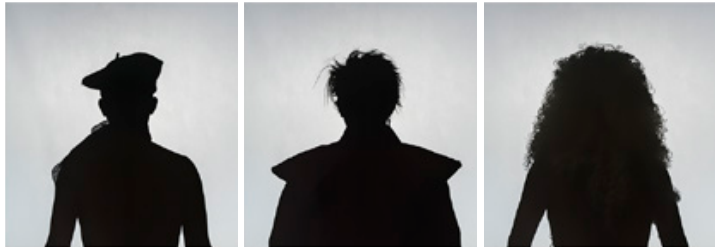
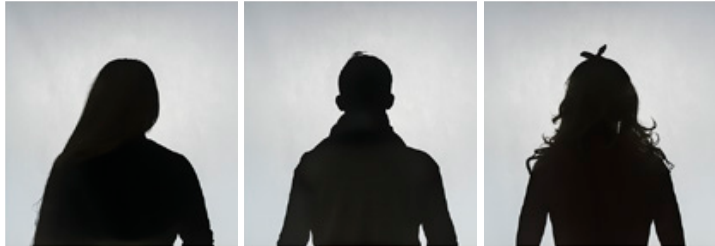
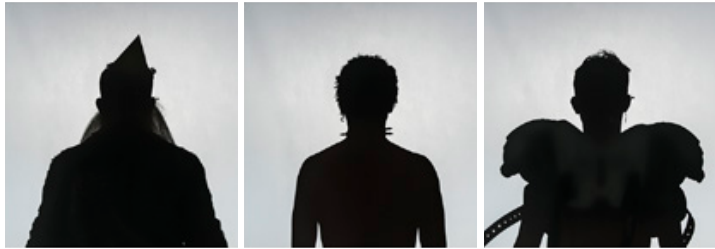
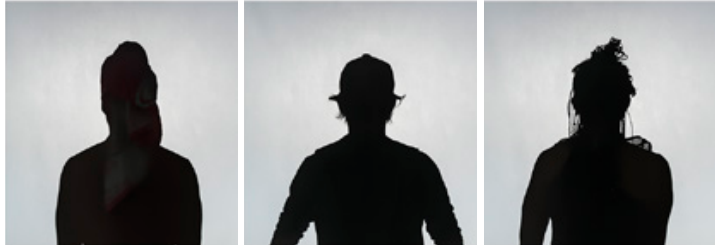
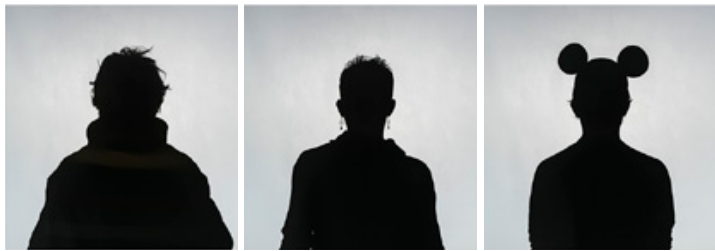


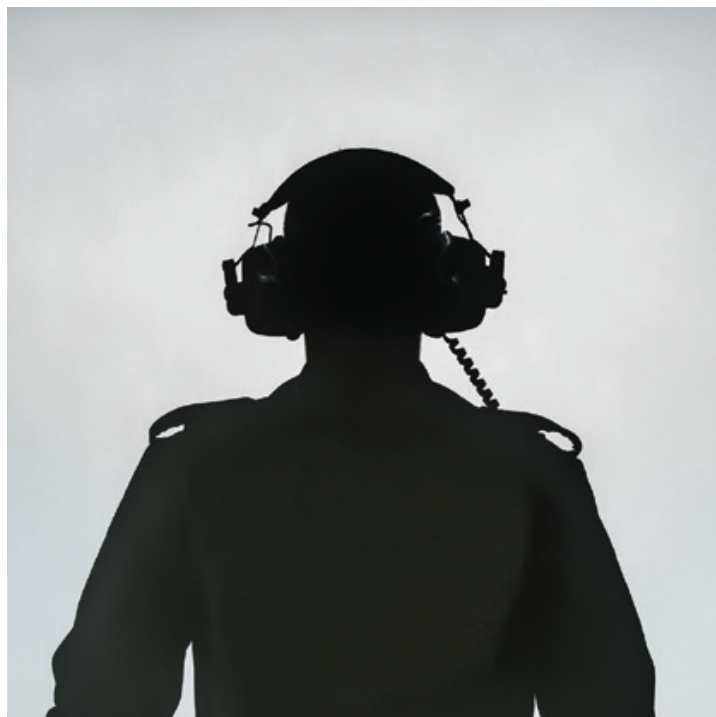




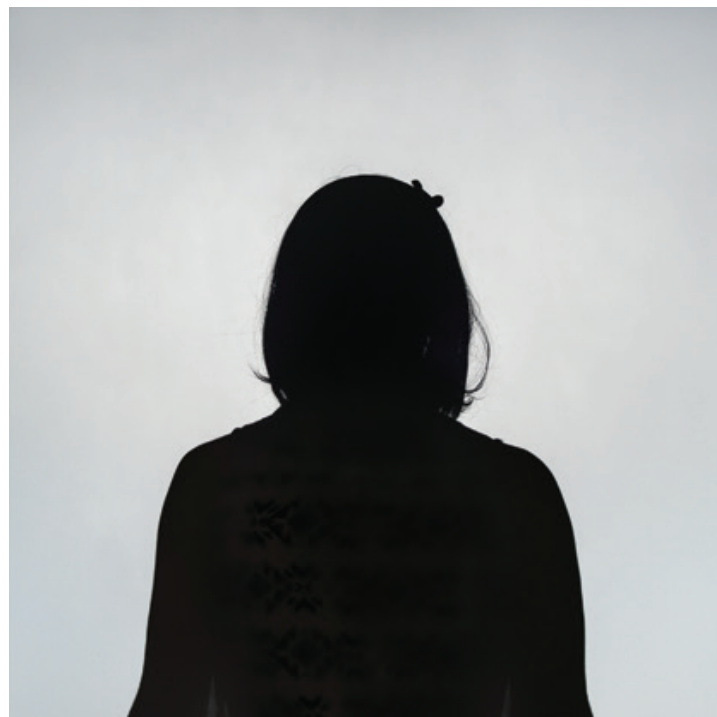


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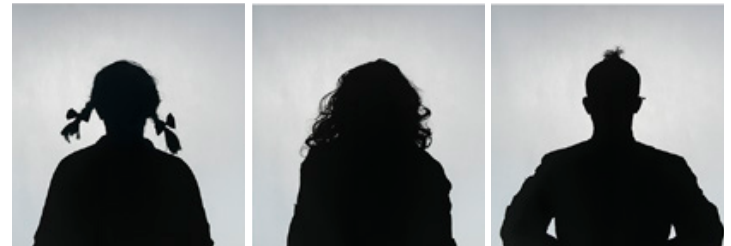
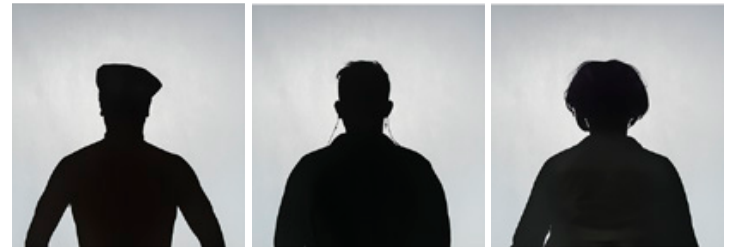
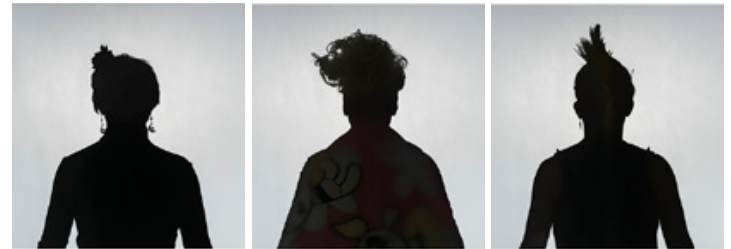
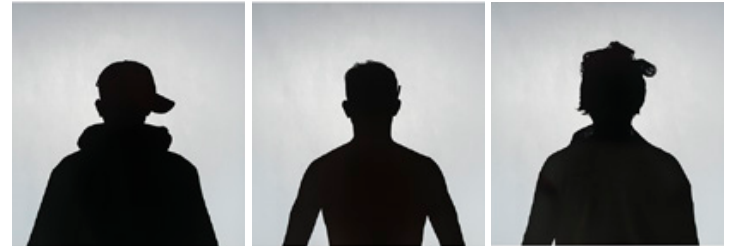
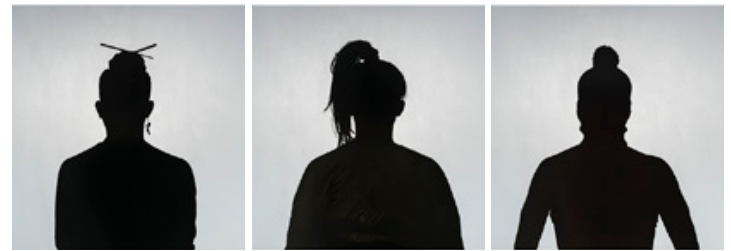
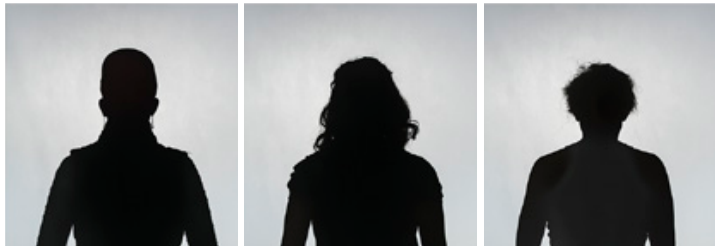
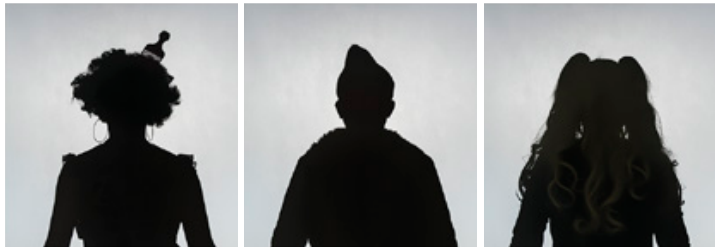
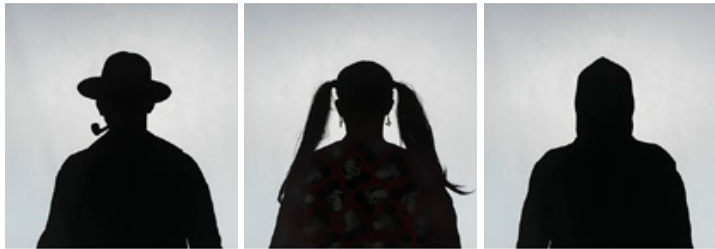
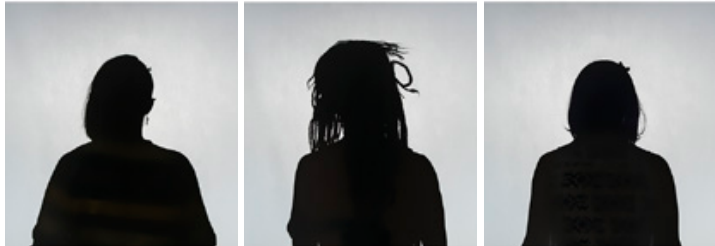
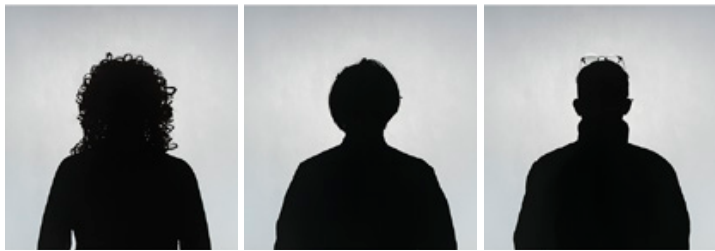












5 PRES.O.S. 2017











6 IDENTIDAD PAYASA 2017









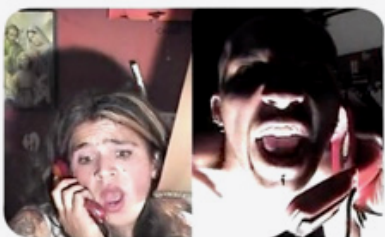


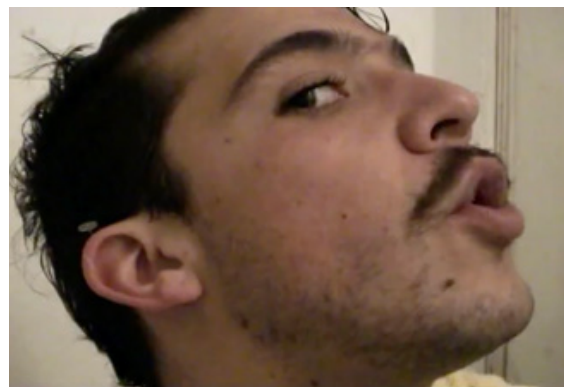
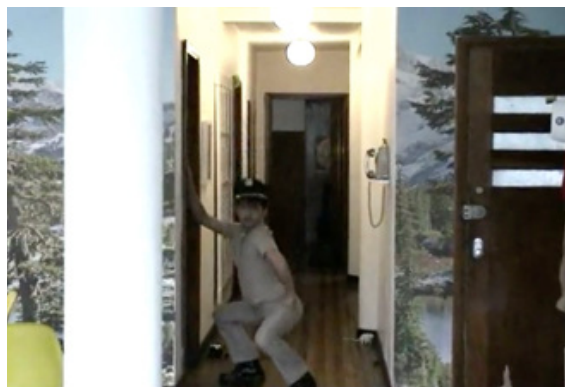
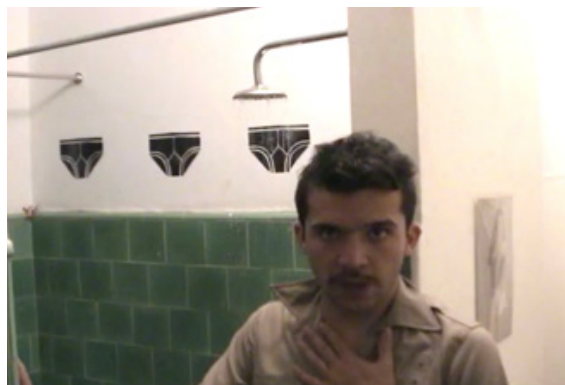


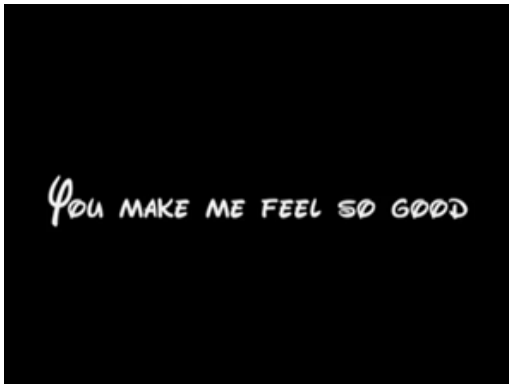


Video Works



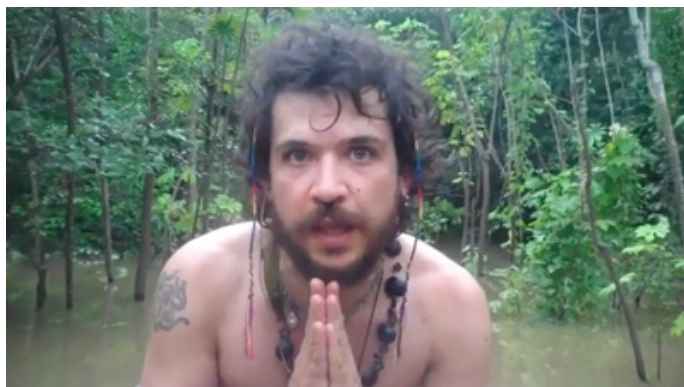
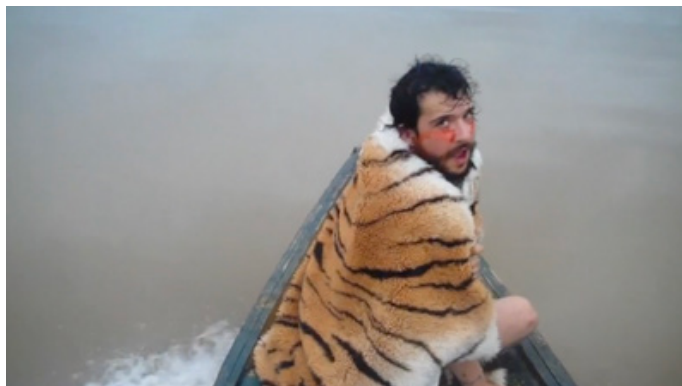


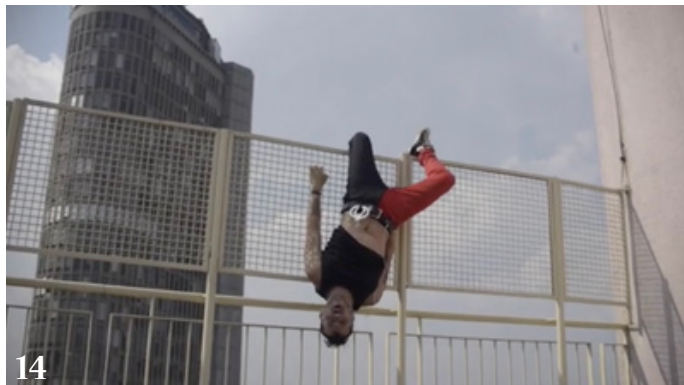
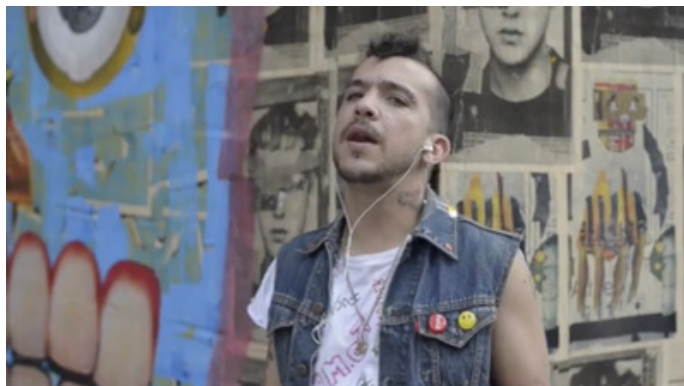
















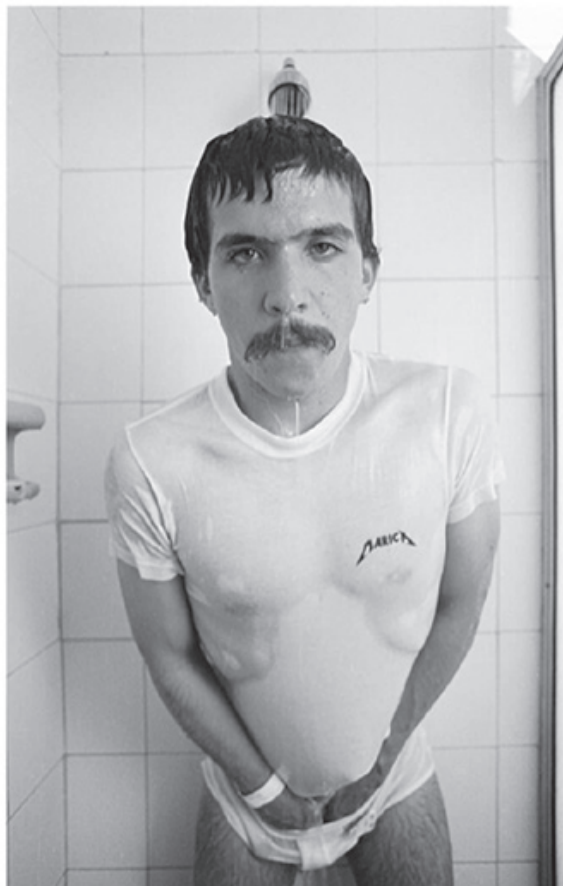




América, América, Marica, Mariconna

The first time I met Juan he was wearing a white t-shirt, which at a distance appeared to behold the Metallica logo. In fact it was the word *marica* (faggot). Created by the artist, this stamp across his chest was a classic Echeverri play-on-words: witty and cocky—the disobedience that forever inflected his unapologetic practice of self-portraiture. Remembering the linguistic hybridization of Juan's Metallica-Marica logo took me back to a homophobic childhood prank in Colombia during the 1980s and '90s, when boys would bully each other by trickery, asking: “A ver, ¿cuántas veces puede decir América?” (*How many times can you say the word America?*). As one repeated the word América out loud, eventually the brain tricked the tongue, causing a phonetic utterance of the word

1,2 From *En Cuerpo Ajeno*, 2003



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marica (faggot) instead. Laughter would burst out among the pack of boys, and if you were a closeted gay kid, as I was, shame and self-hate would seep in even deeper.

As a teenager Juan attended St. Carlos, an all-boys Catholic school in Bogotá where he was bullied heavily. It was also the place where he first experimented with creating alter-egos. In an article from 2014 Juan speaks of his trajectory, beginning in his teens when he would groom his hair and dress up *diferentlq*—as a ‘weirdo’, a misfit, but really as a form of protection, a decoy from homophobic bullying. Looking back, Juan reflects that perhaps those various juvenile identities were also his earliest artistic characters. Seeing Juan wearing that t-shirt was liberating to me. He created the possibility for shielding oneself from homophobic society, and at the same time allowed for new and infinite possibilities of understanding queer identity beyond the dominant representation of gay male culture of the time. In the same gesture, he subverted the derogative violence of homophobic language by queering the masculine roughness often associated with heavy metal.

The shirt later appeared in Juan’s series of photographs titled *En Cuerpo Ajeno* (*In Someone Else’s Body*, 2003), a series of self-portraits in which he passionately lip syncs in the shower as his hard-on is revealed from under his wet white briefs. Another meaning is encoded in the

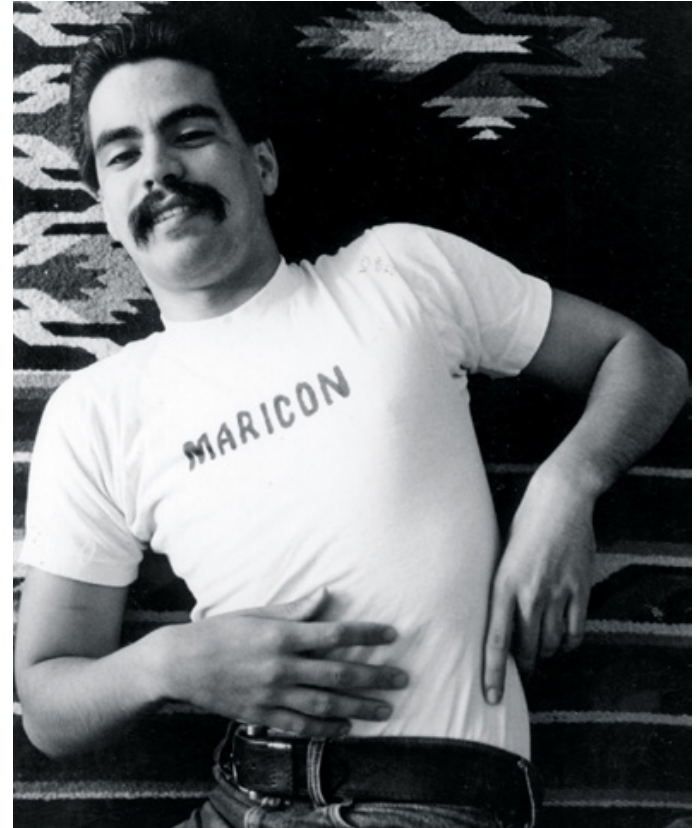
work’s title, which borrows the name from a ‘90s Colombian telenovela, *En Cuerpo Ajeno*, which aired the first non-explicit masturbation scene on national television featuring ‘bombshell’ actor Amparo Grisales touching herself, like Juan, while bathing. A decade later, in 2012 Juan’s *Metallica-Marica* would evolve into *Mariconna*; one of Juan’s many alter egos, in which the artist’s ‘faggot lexicon’ was now appropriating both Metallica and Madonna’s name through an amplified gay identity; given that *mariconna*, in English, would mean something like “uber faggot.” *Mariconna*, as a character, would become the singer of one of Juan’s most recognizable songs, *Papí soy Gay* (“Daddy I’m Gay”). By queer dubbing Madonna’s *Papa Don’t Preach* (1986), Juan created a coming-out song in Spanish: “*Papí soy Gay y no sé qué hacer.... Voy a salir del closet*,” with a music video shot on the streets of New York.

Throughout all of his work, Juan heavily borrowed from American pop culture (Hollywood, pop and rock music, even comics), always queering this visual language as well as the Spanish language through his cheeky titles for the works. He would implement this self-invented language of double, triple, and at times poly-entendre words, simultaneously subverting numerous modes of normativity. Juan’s work is therefore dislocated from regional (Latinamerican) specificity, and rather finds artistic ancestry in contexts of cultural hybridity akin to

those informing the Chicano artistic practices of Judy F. Baca's performances-for-the-camera and Jerri Allyn's disobedient creatures in *Laughing Souls/Éspirtus Sonrientes* (1979); or in the neo-Mexicanism of such queer self-portraiture as Julio Galán. It is perhaps alongside Joey Terrill's *Maricón* t-shirt, both worn among his community and as a form of protest art, that Juan's Mariconna shirt finds its most uncanny historization. Here the word *Maricón*, in Spanish, sees the same political effect as the English speaking adaptation of the word "queer" as a proud positive. Although these Chicano practices and LGBTQ+ movements are set within particular societal discussions in the United States, the practices that share similarities with Juan's work do so through both visual connections and subject matters, but more importantly through attitude and what Chicano writer Ybarra-Frausto refers to as a "visual biculturalism."

Although the history of artists adopting language as its own inventive medium is long, Juan's humorous wordplay finds its own queer artistic ancestry. Like Juan, Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica (1937–1980), for example, constantly invented neologisms that intimated facets of desire. Once such term was *Creiazar*—a fusion, in Portuguese, between "to create" (Criar) and "leisure" (Lazer)—used as a way to pinpoint the power of creativity and pleasure imbuing spaces of non-capitalist productivity. Another entry in

- 3 Joey Terrill wearing his *MARICÓN* T-shirt, 1975. Photo: Teddy Sandoval.



Oiticica's glossary is *Tropicamp*, first used in a text he authored on *Flaming Creatures* (1963), the counter-culture Jack Smith film starring Puerto Rican drag queen Mario Montez, as a way for Oiticica to locate the exotic tropes that imbued Smith's camp vision in shooting Montez's perceived ethnicity as a latino. Indeed, Montez himself symbolized a camp vernacular with his appropriation of Maria Montez, Dominican actress turned Hollywood star and sex symbol of the 1940s.

Juan's coded linguistic playfulness also manifested in his most iconic work, *miss fotojapón* (1998–2022); the daily passport picture-taking practice that he began in 1998 and carried out until the end of his life. Here, Juan swaps the word *mí* ("my" in Spanish) for miss, as in a beauty pageant contestant. Pageantry, and Miss Universe in particular, occupied the societal psyche across Latin America during this time, particularly in Colombia in the '90s when Miss Colombia was crowned second runner-up for three consecutive years. This mediatized obsession with female beauty queens (which became Colombia's trademark for export, a national value) inherently also centered heteronormativity. In *miss fotojapón* Juan appears radically different throughout, disorientating that oppositional dualism through an explosive multiplicity of genders, identities, and personas.

As a photographer, Juan hardly ever actually

held the camera. He was always performing-for-the-camera, delivering these endless possible forms of self-portrayal. Multiplicity and mutation of identity therefore accompanied every one of his projects. To some degree, his visual vocabulary and practice predicted the performative staging of reality that we live in today; with human behavior shaped by the realm of social media and vice versa. Juan's early videos shot in his bedroom at his parents' home, such as *yo soy R i a l* (2004), for which he played both male and female roles in his own faggot version of Jennifer Lopez's *I'm Real* ft. Ja Rule (2001), seems to preempt the mundane mobile video-making aesthetic of the present, a couple decades in advance. Perhaps we have become so desensitized to the oversaturation of moving-image today that it is difficult to perceive the ways in which Juan's practice had taken "home-video" to another level of consciousness of the camera's power as technology for self-representation. We should also bear in mind the nascent influence of reality TV at the time, with Big Brother first airing in the US in the year 2000, and its franchise in Colombia, in 2003. As Juan phonetically shouts "I'm real!" (*Yo soy real!*)—a fiction—this work in particular seems like a direct comment to that construct of "reality."

In more recent years, Juan had started to address social media directly and its effects on subjectivity and human behavior. In his series *futuroSEXtraños* (2016), an imprisoned individuality

emanates in portraits wherein the face itself—and therefore facial recognition—has been obstructed. In these images the subjects are backlit by artificial light and so their eccentricities of appearance change in silhouette. This particular work alludes to a certain emptiness and lack of an authentic personality—a sheer facelessness of these individuals who are trapped in their own image-making. The title of the piece, which translates as “future strangers,” also questions how that artifice of the self acts as an avatar within online sociability. How can we befriend strangers who come and go when they were truly never there? How can we appear to have large social networks yet at the same time experience extreme loneliness?

With *PRES.O.S.* (2017) it's as if these silhouette characters come forward into the light as Juan perhaps most explicitly embodied different archetypes, each clutching their mobile phone doom-scrolling, texting, or sexting. Every image contains a certain emotion, carefully art directed into an entirely different citizen (policewoman, professor, mechanic, goth, nun, high school student, and so on) and, more importantly, into a completely different mood-state: angsty, happy, creepy, worried, judgemental, distracted, horny... The tessellated grid in which the work is assembled mimics the honeycomb of a beehive. Through our enabled interconnectivity, technology has at the same time made us ever more individualistic,

narcissistic, and alienated, bound to the phone.

Circling back in time to *MUTILAdy* (2003), we locate another nucleus to Juan's faggot vocabulary. For this work, created over the course of a single day, Juan had grown his hair so that he could gradually cut and dye it into different styles for each take, accompanied by anatomical musculature airbrushed directly onto his torso. By superficially 'skinning' his body, Juan concentrates upon the cultural significance of hair as a defining marker of one's identity. His friends and collaborators Sofía Reyes and Santiago Monge remember that the work had two references: the tomboy look of Frida Kahlo in the artist's iconic *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair* (1940), as well as Robbie Williams' *Rock DJ* (2000) video clip, in which Williams strips both his clothes, skin, and flesh. For the title of this work, Juan once again hybridizes language by merging the words “mutilated” and “lady,” playing perversely with both femininity and the infliction of corporeal violence.

It therefore seems natural to draw an association between Juan's “mutilated ladies” and the political violence and war of the country during the early 2000s, when particular paramilitary groups performed sadistic forms of assassination by publicly displaying mutilated corpses. Years later, this political undertone of the work would be amplified, beyond the control of the artist, when an edition of *MUTILAdy* was acquired by one of Juan's most committed collectors and supporters, former

Colombian president César Gaviria. It became common to see the **MUTILADY** work in the background of Gaviria's office—who is today the leader of the country's Liberal Party—during media interviews on political matters of the moment which, at times, by somewhat macabre coincidence, would touch upon massacres committed by the paramilitary. Indeed, within Colombia's political history, Gaviria is a crucial figure in the memory of the country's darkest era of terror toward democracy. As one of the only progressive figures to survive a series of political assassinations of presidential candidates between 1989–1990, he is the embodiment of that political memory.

But Juan's work was never that “serious.” The superficial refrain of his image-making made Juan an outcast from the ‘political art’ that dominated much of the aesthetics, curating, and discourse around contemporary art in Colombia and Latin America more broadly; heavily dependent on post-conceptual mechanizations of semiotics and metaphor to address political events. Yet it was perhaps this perceivable lack of seriousness, the banality in approach to image-making, that was not only the strength but the magic of Juan's work. However, there was also a real rigor to Juan's process: the daily commitment, planning and rehearsal, art direction, careful lighting, and the quality control of his prints are testament of a crafted practice.

4 Former Colombian president César Gaviria in his office with **MUTILADY** in the background. Image published in newspaper **El Tiempo**, November 19, 2006.



Perhaps one of his most ambitious series in this regard was *Identidad Payasa* (2017), a series of diptychs showing, on the left-hand side, a portrait of a street clown, characteristic of the *cultura popular* and urban subcultures in Mexico City; paired on the right-hand side with a self-portrait in which Juan visually replicates the identity of each—creating a double-vision effect. Juan's fascination with these clowns was arguably driven, in part, by how differently they operate from clowns in Europe or the US. These clowns in Mexico are perhaps closer in effect to cosplay or drag than to Bozo the Clown or Ronald McDonald. In the subculture of Mexico City they do not exist to entertain at children's parties or perform for spectatorship; they place their bodies in public space as a statement of existing in the world differently. The doubling that Juan incarnates using his own body actively carries out this possibility toward the multiplicity in being a payaso, in refusing conformativity with the rigid forms of identity presented in society.

The second life of Juan's work is something that became a sort of a personal revelation after his sudden death. Remembering Juan among friends, in person and chatting online, repeatedly it was revealed that Juan had gifted them a photograph or a print, sometimes signed and with a dedication, sometimes even mounted and framed. He had left us gifts, relics, and traces, now

dispersed throughout every corner of the planet. I have several myself, and the one I treasure the most is the image of him in that wet t-shirt, singing in the shower with a hard-on. I'll always remember Juan in this shower—it was in that moment that, thanks to Juan, I overcame a strange phobia I had toward cum; fear, angst, my own form of internalized homophobia, perhaps. I'm certain that his imagery, like that cumshot, will be liberating for many others like me out there.

Contributors

Juan Pablo Echeverri

Juan Pablo Echeverri (1978–2022) was a renowned contemporary visual artist from Bogotá, Colombia. Working in photography and video, his extensive body of work developed from daily self-portraits begun as a teenager into an exploration of how ‘other people’ construct themselves and are constructed in the sight of others. He was interested in how stereotypes coalesce around uniquely individual people, continually experimenting with his own appearance to reject a flattened, essentialist reading of identity. The quotidian ritual of daily photographs, taken in photo booths wherever he was in the world, fed and ran parallel to numerous photographic projects. Working almost exclusively in series enabled Echeverri to register the limitlessness of human diversity. Obsessed with the performativity of identity, his work queered fantasies of the self, oscillating between the point of view of icon and superfan. International travel throughout his career led to another ritual, that of a video work in the places he visited, frequently shot in one day. These pieces, often involving the artist lip-syncing to the most popular song in that time and place, act both as postcards to be sent back and souvenirs to be treasured: deflating the international artist ego into that of a tourist. Alongside his visual practice, Echeverri was devoted to music, being an accomplished guitarist

and vocalist. He kept multiple collections of carefully classified ephemera from popular culture in his unique art- and music-studio-apartment-gallery, a base that erased all distinction between living and working. Echeverri's art has been part of several group and solo shows in galleries and museums around the world, such as The Museo de Arte e Historia de Guanajuato in León, Mexico; The Photographers' Gallery in London, England; The Havana Biennial in Cuba; Itaú Cultural in São Paulo, Brazil; The Museum of Modern Art in Bogotá, Colombia; and PS1 in New York, USA. His work appears in Phaidon's *500 Self-Portraits* and *Younger than Jesus: Artist Directory*, among other publications, and is part of the art collections of Banco de la República in Colombia, CA2M in Madrid, Spain, Musée Français de la Photographie in France, as well as other private collections.

Inti Guerrero

Inti Guerrero is co-Artistic Director of the 24th Biennale of Sydney (2024) and tutor of the Curatorial Studies postgraduate programme at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts (KASK), Ghent. He was the artistic Director of BAP (Bellas Artes Projects) in the Philippines (2018–2022) and was the Estrellita B. Brodsky Adjunct Curator at Tate, London (2016–2020), curator of the 38th EVA International, Limerick (2018), and Artistic Director of TEOR/ética, San Jose.

Russell Martin

Russell Martin is an artist and writer from Glasgow who lives in London. His varied career includes stints running galleries, taking part in artist residencies, and writing for catalogs and journals. Since 2001 he has worked at Artquest, an artist professional development and research unit of University of the Arts London. In 2008 he met Juan Pablo Echeverri at a workshop in a castle in England, where they became lifelong friends.

Wolfgang Tillmans

Wolfgang Tillmans is an artist who lives and works in Berlin and London. Since the early 1990s he has created work that epitomizes a new kind of subjectivity in photography, pairing intimacy and playfulness with social critique and the persistent questioning of existing values and hierarchies. Tillmans has expanded conventional ways of approaching the medium and his practice continues to address the fundamental question of what it means to create pictures in an increasingly image-saturated world. His work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at international institutions including the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2022), Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien (mumok), Vienna (2021–22), WIELS, Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels (2020), Fondation Beyeler, Basel (2017), Tate Modern, London (2017), National Museum of Art, Osaka

(2015), Kunsthalle Zürich (2012–13), and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2006–07). Tillmans has operated the non-profit exhibition space Between Bridges since 2006. First located in London until 2011, Between Bridges reopened in Berlin in 2014.

Artwork Details

Series

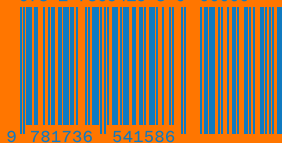
- 1 **miss fotojapón, 1998–2022**
Photography
Inkjet prints mounted on MDF box frame
Dimensions variable
Work in the exhibition: $37 \frac{3}{4} \times 40$ inches
Pages 34–37: Image courtesy Colección de Arte del Banco de la República, Colombia
- 2 **MUTILady, 2003**
Photography
9 inkjet prints
Dimensions variable
 $25 \frac{1}{4} \times 25 \frac{1}{4}$ inches each
- 3 **MascuLady, 2006**
Photography, drawing, object
2 inkjet prints mounted on MDF, wood frame with hinges
 $39 \frac{1}{4} \times 25 \frac{5}{8} \times 2 \frac{3}{4}$ inches
Artwork Photography: Jason Mandella
- 4 **futuroSEXtraños, 2016**
Photography
60 inkjet prints, framed
Dimensions variable
Work in the exhibition: $94 \frac{1}{2} \times 157 \frac{1}{2}$ inches

- 5 **PRES.O.S., 2017**
Photography
37 inkjet prints mounted on MDF, framed
Dimensions variable
Work in the exhibition: $48 \frac{1}{4} \times 43 \frac{3}{4}$ inches
- 6 **IDENTIDAD PAYASA, 2017**
Photography
12 inkjet prints mounted on MDF, wood frames with acrylic
Dimensions variable
Work in the exhibition: $44 \frac{1}{2} \times 31$ inches (each)

Video Works

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|--|
| 7 | Caigo bajo (en casa),
2002
Video, color, sound
05:42 minutes | 13 | GAY GONE WILD,
2013
Video, color, sound
05:19 minutes |
| 8 | yo Soy ri a l, 2004
ideo, color, sound
04:45 minutes | 14 | UN AÑO DE AMOR,
2013
Video, color, sound
04:08 minutes |
| 9 | mi american Laiff,
2006
Video, color, sound
03:50 minutes | 15 | ROAD, 2013
Video, color, sound
05:35 minutes |
| 10 | you make me feel so
good, 2007
Video, color, sound
04:27 minutes | 16 | SUPERMANCITO,
2014
Video, color, sound
06:27 minutes |
| 11 | holiGay, 2009
Video, color, sound
05:02 minutes | 17 | #YOKOHOMO, 2015
Video, color, sound
07:34 minutes |
| 12 | SEXUAL FORESTZ,
2012
Video, color, sound
03:32 minutes | 18 | C A R I G A T O, 2015
Video, color, sound
05:08 minutes |

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