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The Body is An Other

To be there—*really* there—that is the only question. Are we sure that we exist, directly? Are we capable of *not* simulating our presence? Of living the instant in its fullness—that is, of possessing a soul and a body?

The market impedes this freedom: it petrifies bodies and requisitions their nudity toward a continual consumption that degrades them, perfecting perversion to the point of selling the body's own degradation back to it.

The bodies photographed by Ariane Lopez-Huici, by contrast, resist the kind of pasteurized (in other words morbid) absorption that satisfies the criteria of control: they overflow with existence, they are *there*, excessively there, and want nothing more than to be there. The presence they manifest is in complete carnal disaccord with the petrification to which bodies are subjected in advertising. A relentless aesthetico-disciplinary propaganda reduces, strips, and privatizes them. Ariane Lopez-Huici accomplishes the opposite: she frees them.

In fact, flesh—if it is there—fights back in its own way. And in the photography of Ariane Lopez-Huici, flesh is quite evidently there. It brings with it voluptuous pleasures that do not announce themselves frontally, that escape the criteria of profitability. Flesh overwhelms, it is always *too much*.

Bodies that reveal and embrace themselves, that struggle, that exult; bodies that tear themselves away from the metrics, programming, and norms of fashion images; bodies with insolent tranquility, fleshy and rebellious, in crude postures, with disturbing joys; bodies that aren't afraid of their suffering, their fat, their aging; bodies that can know themselves, that project their excess just as easily as their lack, that don't keep themselves from existing; bodies that affirm time and their final destinies, and the courage to live in nudity in a living present: *there-bodies*.

Look at these women: they tear through the screen of convention, they are just not "right," as one says in the U.S. Their solitude is a splendid combat: that of bodies that see themselves rising up, that breathe forward, smiling with their shoulders. Their backs breathe, their hair is thinking. Breathing and thinking ground a freedom for each irreducible body.

Look at Dalila Khatir—take in her exuberant, goddess-like stature. She moves like a plump Sibyl, with her primordial hilarity, her all-consuming arms reaching toward the invisible and conferring weird, perhaps sacred knowledge, that transforms the eternal all-devouring girl into a woman armed with the know-how of living, loving, and dying. The echo of time deepens in her every breath; a dark voice

lives in her mouth. There is no psychology here: only direct modeling, and carnal knowing.

Look at these African apparitions: Kenekoubo Ogoïre, the ultimate Dogon, who dances to convey to you the timeless loss of his vision. Is photographing a blind man a sacred act? I do not know, but we who receive this man's fantastical spirituality through seeing are thereby summoned by the transmission itself, which passes from body to body, and displays to us the truth of what we do with our own.

Yes, what do you do with your body? That is the question that runs through these photographs in which men and women put theirs in play with the courage of simplicity: a sexual courage that knows suffering and desire, that knows the jubilation of overcoming suffering, and of deepening desire.

This is how, through a population that dances, time reinvents itself—and we fall in love with it. Here is time, in the forms it takes, in black and white. Time loves one thing only: the body—that of women, and that of men. Ariane Lopez-Huici understands this, like all artists. The silence of her photographs is intense; it is the silence of the excruciating spasm, of victorious wetness, of pleasure achieved. If the backdrop is blackness, this is because this kind of gift is not produced in petty pleasures. This pleasure consists in traversing the negative, in confronting one's own abyss, in the intimate embrace of the absence that kills you. This is how the wall of puritanism breaks down.

Consider these models in their fleshiness, with its folds and openings. Come up close to the butts, the breasts, the pubic mounds, the cocks, as Ariane Lopez-Huici photographs them. This flesh is not sad, and it is not untouchable—it is there, alive, and free of charge. It is made for your hands.

Among all these bodies, there is one that I gaze at more than the others: that of a woman named Priscilla. I cannot stop contemplating her. She is blond, her back seems an entire world, her hair is a river, and her shoulders a smiling horizon. Her bust and muscles form a trembling sculpture that reminds me of certain Rodins, or of Degas' dancers. She is at three-fourth profile, she turns slightly, she leans on a cane; her rotation is incredibly modest.

I finally realize that she lacks an arm, a leg, a foot. But no, that's not what it is; Ariane Lopez-Huici's photographs ask me to correct my prejudice: Priscilla's body lacks nothing. A biological gaze might say that she is handicapped, but these photographs pronounce another truth, like a victory: *the body exceeds the laws of biology*. Anyone who does not want to understand this understands nothing about art, and less about the art of living.

For Priscilla is not excluded from her body: everything in her proclaims this gracefully. Her body is calmly that of a warrior: it is desirable. It makes me want to say, transforming Rimbaud's discovery, *the body is an other*.

Yes, I understand, thanks to her, that the body is capable of overcoming its own torture, and of achieving a delayed enhancement of its own gestures: movement thinks, its shadow is dazzling, its weight becomes clear, and its density lightness.

Priscilla's photographed body necessarily confronts whoever gazes at it with the violence of their own limits. But Priscilla's courage is modesty itself: she doesn't want to do too much, or to show too much; she knows that we are not all prepared to understand what her body has discovered on its own, and which emerged from the transgression of torture.

To transgress ones own torture: it is possible that such an act escapes reason, and that, in it, vertigo, violence and rapture, and ecstatic rage mix together in a troubling way.

No one can go unscathed in such an act; no one can turn away from Priscilla's photographed body. Gazing at it leads us to what is most unknown in ourselves, or in other words to our own capacity, always incomplete, to endure our own amputation.

This gesture that transgresses a limit (Priscilla's decision to expose her body) reaches a point where knowledge is absent; no flailing about on our part can make up the lack that persists in the place she exhibits. What is barely illuminated are the abysses that allow thinking to live, which thinking may not be able to tolerate, but which keep it from dying. The amazement that we feel before the beauty of Priscilla's body threatens to destroy our faculties.

Fragility is a force. Nudity vibrates with possibility. Women summon the invisible. The black background reminds us that experiencing pleasure is first of all a combat: the human adventure consists in a daily fight against the enchantments that subordinate us, in substituting for our wound a desire that undresses loss and transforms it into a rage for life.

Bodies experience pleasure against a black background, they encounter light that fills out their contours and lets them be seen. Does their experience of pleasure pay them back? Expenditure is always limitless, it seeks nothing in return. Thus it is that the gaze reveals only an obscurity: what troubles us has no name.

You understand that the bodies photographed by Ariane Lopez-Huici show themselves to us as they are secretly: stronger than society, which *wants* us to be handicapped, diminished, weakened, *incarcerated*.

To take pleasure [Jouir] is to discover the attitude, the gesture, the method that dis-enchants existence; every instant that breaks with our programmed captivity becomes a victory: and even if the accidents of life have damaged your

body, triumph remains possible, frightening, and sublime; it is affirmed here, in the black and white lightning flashes of Ariane Lopez-Huici.

Translated by Philip Barnard.