

Watching from a crooked angle: A conversation with Iñaki Bonillas

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Iñaki Bonillas, *Secretos: Huellas 1, El triunfo de la vida solitaria en ProjecteSD*, Barcelona, 2016.

After teach all the nooks and nuances of family archives, we can think that Iñaki Bonillas has no secrets. But it is never yours. If *JR Plaza Archive* comminuted albums and diaries of her grandfather, this time he has explored every corner of the home studio of Luis Barragán (1902-1988). Only Mexican architect with a Pritzker Prize, known for his rationalist austerity, its lush gardens and its famous pink, Barragan, according Bonillas is the same and is another.

Bonillas entire work is a set of contradictions that coexist in harmony. In his workfind the paradox intrinsic to photography to show the shadows of light, fleeting impression that decontextualized and fixed forever in the dark negative. And the paradox, too, what some have called the postphotography, that comfortable feeling between the images of others, to bring out the vague identity of the means without firing a single shot.

In *The Triumph of the Solitary Life*, the exhibition could be seen from 28 September to 16 November in Barcelona ProjecteSD gallery, Bonillas has done it again. He has returned to tour the spaces of the privacy of others, but this time he has done photos. Maybe that's why they are not easily accessible. Sets of mirrors, reflections inverted, negative, crosswords ... all through a constellation of references, details of an imaginary where Barragán not know where begins and where Bonillas ends.

Take years exploring every corner of the home studio of Luis Barragán. Where did your interest and how you got it?

Barragan's architecture has in Mexico a place of worship and awakens true passions (hate and love alike), as was seen recently with the picturesque episode ring made with the ashes of Luis Barragan. I started thinking about this house after inviting me to participate Hans Ulrich Obrist in a collective intervention to space took place in 2000, *The Air Is Blue*. As with this kind of almost sacred precincts, the invitation was

paradoxical: we should intervene house, yet we could not touch. I could not change any color, or move really place any object. Nor, course, it was allowed to pierce the walls, and do, in short, nothing to seriously alter the perception of place. So he had to contrive to work. There were those who decided, for example, compose the old record player, so they could go back to playing vinyl collection Barragán. I was of those who later got an idea. And all started with a nail. In the famous hall of the house is the corner of your Barragan, perfectly illuminated by the light that filters through the window that is half floor above. In that space, where a small chair and a wooden shelf with handset and a vase rested, there at that moment I also discovered a nail. It looked like it had been unused for years, since it was repainted with the same white wall. In a couple of archival photos I could see that, at some time, in fact, that nail had a use and, at times, an image accompanied the corner of the house. I decided then that there had hang something. I did not know what, but something. So I started to look a partner for that nail and finally ended up putting a photograph I took in college. Although it was not a building Barragan, it could well have been, it had one of the essential characteristics: heavy walls, painted in bright colors; elements, course, have already hundreds of post-Barragan constructions. addition, the school gate lay a blackboard, for taking the picture on Sunday was completely empty, which generated an interesting tension within the image. That was the first time I entered the world of Barragan, from my work.



Iñaki Bonillas, *Secretos: Linterna mágica*, ProjecteSD, Barcelona, 2016.

Just as we enter the exhibition *The triumph of the solitary life* in the gallery ProjecteSD, the slide *Magic Lantern* is a welcome to Barragan's home from your prism, an enigmatic look, because it is a projection of the details and crannies that has found your camera the dark, with only a flashlight. Why the mystery?

Arguably *magic lantern* emerged quite naturally, the subject I chose to approach this room again: the secrets. Last year prepared a rather general intervention in the spaces of Casa Barragan, who bore the title *Secrets* -where also went photographic series presented in autumn in ProjecteSD. Casa Barragán draw attention at first glance, the colors of the walls, the peculiar way they are divided spaces, with low walls and screens, the careful manipulation of light inputs, finally, the skill with which Barragan was back

spaces and warm and pleasant. But at second glance, closer, there an element that begins to be very present, and that is the almost delirious number of doors (more than ninety!) Having: doors leading some quarters to others, cabinet doors , bathroom doors, closet doors, roof doors, doors hidden behind curtains, doors because of all sizes and colors.addition to them, or with them, are closets: the other silent presence but surprisingly constant of the house. At some point it became clear that if what is sought is create perfectly controlled spaces, such as where each element has a specific function, and where nothing that does not harmonize or combine can be accommodated, then, necessarily must have for some a sort of negative side or double Barragán House; ie a considerable amount of hidden spaces where they could go to stop all the leftovers, all things outbursts, all the clutter, all eventually secrets. This thought made me look again the house with an almost detective mood. Which, among other things, allowed me to connect with the film *The Secret Beyond the Door* of Fritz Lang, which, curiously, an architect who soon married starts to behave strangely appears, which makes suspect his wife that perhaps hiding some secrets. The film is basically finding those secrets and the threat posed to her look. And *Magic Lantern* is, in that sense, and partly a kind of homage to Lang and black film are images of this' Well home- extremely photogenic, and therefore ultra photographed, but viewed from an odd angle where things do not look things but perhaps strange inhabitants of the house, empty since the death of Barragan in 1988.

"strange people" who leave *footprints*... Tell us about this series.

Like magic lantern, *Footprints* is consequence of point sleuthing view from which I decided to look Barragán House. Instead of the tourist gaze or expert in architecture that goes into holy place to verify that the images of the book are fulfilled in reality, and the pink wall is there and the thin, straight mythical wood has not moved place, I tried to see everything from a crooked, weird, different angle to which we are accustomed. So I discovered, for example, under the dining table there are several timbres, for which I came to find out I Barragan designed a complicated code of rings, where two could mean "bring the champagne" and three "call me urgently as the conversation is getting very boring. " And once crawled I realized also that the thoroughness with which Barragan accommodated every table, every chair, every object must have some physical consequence because they were years of things on, to millimeter, in the same place, immovable. And indeed, when I remove a chair, I saw that the carpet bore the imprint of that he had walked for decades. Then I imagined a kind of architectural plan of footprints made furniture. As if the life of the house had been stamped on the floor and could only watch reconstruct itself with the careful choreography of cabinets, chairs and all kinds of goods that was taking place over the years -for table that was maybe a couple years in the opposite corner, which still appears a faint footprint there. To make this series we had to, with all care and help of restorers, move all the furniture in the house, which was wonderful: to display the empty house, as a tabula rasa. And was curious find out there, at ground level, and thanks to a super powerful camera, a whole universe of things and tiny inhabitants who have conquered the floor of this famous purple dust,course, but not only gray, but color amazing, blues, lilacs, finally, particles whose diversity had not imagined possible;addition,course, flies and other bodies of insects, pieces of paper, etc. But nothing showed me more clearly over time to the profound change in tone between the fragments of carpet were under furniture, bright yellow, pure white, and the rest of the rugs, faded and, at times, almost frayed. This kind of marks,course,not only houses as obsessive and meticulous characters, as was Barragán, and therefore, *Footprints* is also a metaphor, or I want it, how life transforms space and it leaves traces and scars on things. It is as if these hollow shapes that leave the legs of tables and chairs on the carpet were not empty, but full of what once was there.

Both the exhibition and the Barragán House of ProjecteSD coexist different times. Is the time of the

house, who has been arrested to become a museum (almost a mausoleum ...), but there also a lively time, accumulated, that "full" spaces and objects, as you say. In this sense, is said that the evocation of memories and emotions can alter the spatial perceptions. But what the reverse? To what extent do you think the space and emotional knowledge are affected?

I'm clear that life, itself, creates forms and alters spaces. Now I think the only place that remains unchanged is a crypt. Beyond that, the simple fact of living or transit transforms a space. Just look at those heavy marble stairs of the old buildings, whose steps have been refined nothing more than by the daily traffic. Barragan lived in the same place for forty years, and although it is likely to imagine that one day, because it is him, his house could acquire the status of museum, for anything he lived well. It was his home and his studio, so he used it very thoroughly. He was made known for dinners and parties, people visited him, the workshop was extremely vital. It is also known that he used this house as his main space for experimentation, since there could prove architectural solutions used in different constructions later. So, of course, layers of memories and dust have accumulated over the space. And you see traces of it everywhere. In the photographs there; the combination of objects (such as African ritual artifacts with reproductions of Georges Rouault); in the choice of size (smaller than the standard single size, which, for a man of 1.90 is a curious decision) beds; lectern in the great room, which Barragan filled with all kinds of images that was rotating. Images, I think, that it inspired, which brought memories and to awaken various associations; photographs of the singer Grace Jones with his admired Picasso drawings or photos of architectural details next to landscapes from magazines. Not that the objects are memories themselves, but containing, I think.

Today, we are surrounded by quick images, easy to read. With your work you are looking to slow the breakneck speed that we look at the details. ¿Looking is a job?

Should be. At least in art. I am not at all a nostalgic images before mass consumption and fleeting time, but certainly work with images and I like that they can take the viewers to take a little break. I worked with the idea of detail and photographic series I made from my research at Casa Barragán, indeed, I looked something like: dwell on the less visible aspects of the house. So I decided to get all the exposure in closets, precisely because I wanted to be not constantly negotiating with this space as iconic; I was more interested what people were discovering little by little, and only to the extent of their curiosity and interest, parts of the exhibition. For some surely it went completely unnoticed; others, however, came into play detective and rushed to open drawers and doors trying to find the next clue. Clear me that, in this way, at least, had a very different house that usually visitors regularly approach.

get the same with the colors. Barragan is associated with pink, but this yours approach to the house reveals other tones. How was your color research?

It was primarily focused on two photographic series: *Footprints* and *Investment*. In the first, as I said, I was interested in stopping to observe the contrast of the original colors of the rugs with those currently seen; the first, almost garish compared to now. Which it was fascinating, because Barragan left nothing to chance and here, the discovery of such intense yellows and browns, did see the house with eyes. Almost as when they restored the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel and suddenly the Mannerist colors of Michelangelo were almost shocking. Except here, the emergence of a new range of colors is best understood in relation to pink and yellow, too vibrant, worn some walls. And *Investment* also went somewhat curious, as the original vase that I photographed is green, but I decided to print photos negative, and was not until I got my hands I could recognize a pink unexpected Barragan, who had emerged as negative that green. I should have known, perhaps, but I admit that I surprised. And I also worked a lot with black and white, just to try to cancel the expectation of Barragan's colors in order to concentrate on other aspects of the house, as I did in *Magic Lantern*.

Already in your series *The eyes*, in which you selected those portraits of the family album that had their eyes closed, pointed out that sometimes what is seen is the negative of what you want to see. Do you think there are things that never be in sight for much to be taught?

I think the condition of the look is changing and there are times when, for various

reasons, certain aspects of things remain veiled, even though they are in sight. I have been interested in working with these areas, if they are well within the image, do not seem to attract the eye, not to be sufficiently attractive or being in the background. One of the series in which more clearly I explained this was, indeed, *A Storm of Secondary Issues*, for which I chose a group of photographs of the film that I inherited from my grandfather and decided to concentrate on what happens behind or one side of the scene main characters or the photographer intended to portray. And it was a very interesting exercise, because really when you look at what should not be fixed, start all sorts of curious and funny business appear. As voyeurs who see happen to the couple, Chuck bike on the floor, the picnic is taking place under the umbrella behind the girl in bikini intentional image. *Secrets* also tried some point to these areas: the footprints under furniture, the recesses are observed only light lantern, etc.



Iñaki Bonillas, *Secretos: Tela 1*, 2017.

Casa Barragán people who came to see the exhibition had to find. In the gallery ProjecteSD this search has moved to your work. In images as *crossword # 9* or *fabrics1*, for example, exploration is complicated. What is your relationship with Barragan?

Crossword series always part of a template crossword I take the newspaper *El País*. From there what I do is a mix of images, style, *collage* it seems to me that together create a more interesting than each separate image. *Crossword # 9* is a tribute to the solitary life, which alludes to the title of the exhibition at ProjecteSD, as it is two very evocative images of solitude, but solitude weighs but triumphant loneliness, desirable. In this crossword precedes another, that placed in one of the least popular house walls Barragan, as it is to a hallway leading to the bathroom. What I did there was mix a typical image Casa Barragan, in this case the roof terrace, with a picture of my personal file that of a man with his face blurred by the light coming through a window Alhambra, against which he has decided photographed. I chose the anonymity of the character, which could well be the Barragán himself, whom the Alhambra, and generally Mudejar art, influenced him tremendously. I liked, then combine both, accentuating and erasing

them at once.

And the issue of *Fabrics* series is not so different: in one of the closets Barragan I was amazed to find a series of black plastic bags that hid a wide variety of textiles, whether embroidered Mexicans, as seen in *Fabrics 1*, which is a hand embroidered rug or wool fabrics to reupholster the chairs or even fabrics with colorful prints that I did not think they had much to do with the style of the house. Among the "secrets" Barragán, this seemed very mysterious. Why keep all that cullet fabric? And I decided to cross this idea with another: that the rights of Barragán House are heavily protected, making it impossible to publish photos of the house without permission due. Others have worked with this obstruction, but I liked the ability to block the most famous views in the house with own collection of fabrics Barragán. At the same time, too, a way of paying homage to the architect of the -sucesiones layers of low walls and panels that what they do is prevent full view of space, which is given by time, in a game of opacity and transparency very interesting and characteristic of him.

The house as spatio crossroads is very photographic. In fact, like a camera obscura it was there almost a forest in the backyard that enters through the objects in your series *Investment & Garden*. How did you conceive this dialogue with nature that is so characteristic of Barragán?

Barragán for the garden was not just the backyard of the house, it was the house itself. As was also landscape designer, garden understood as a continuation of the living space, so in your garden we see layers of bushes, and at home there are layers made with low walls. And only let in nature in the interior space with great discretion, especially through a series of vases that the lady who was like his housekeeper (and to date still living in the house) adorned with leaves, flowers garden and lemons (and still does). But also on the windowsill of the room are a pair of glass vases Barragan asked to have water halfway, so that light with the sun and reflect the garden. What happens to look across the water of the vase is that the garden is reversed, head, something that surely noticed Barragán himself. And that idea could spun with everything else, because what I tried to do with this research was to represent Barragan House inverted. Hence it arose investments. with the series *Garden* went something like: tapanco in Casa Barragan I found a curious object shaped polyhedron made of mirrors. is not known how he got Barragán, or why he aroused particular interest, as he put in a privileged corner, so that could repeatedly reflect the space, as he liked to do the mirrors, for example, of the various spheres glass that had spread through the house. To me what I liked about this artifact was how much he leaves to one the rest of the decor, sober and opaque. But I used to fulfill that desire Barragan, melt the garden with the house. And so I took him outside and did a series of shots of the object in the middle of the jungle *barraganesque*. In each of the images is changing the focus of the camera, so that progressively we will showing a detail than the context: in the center is the object itself, the other is a small sheet, in the following the background and thus different depths and layers of the landscape.



Despite this dialogue layered Barragan's house has views of the street. The house ascell, vital and creative refuge has been a topic discussed in art history, from Dürer to Louise Bourgeois. Today, do you think we can separate private life and public sphere?

That was the dream of Barragán: isolate the inhabitants of the house from the madding crowd. He hated the houses / modernist glass boxes, it seemed that there was something obscene about the need to show intimacy outward. Let also remember that he was a very religious man, and for him a house should have some cloister. However, they were not cells, but space is open, but to the garden. In this I think I look a bit like him (all stored ratio), because I also prefer privacy occur indoors. This separation is becoming less possible: the world puts us in every corner, digital and any kind. But try, to the extent of my ability, my house, which is also my study is that: a shelter. And then I love to go out and go to the movies and bookstores. Really I enjoy walking the streets of Mexico City. But I always come home with enthusiasm.

The title of the exhibition is taken from a ProjecteSD taxed sixteenth century Flemish painter and sketcher Maarten de Vos. In the book *On the idea of a community of loners*, Pascal Quignard writes about the loneliness accompanied reader or fraternal and extempore religious congregation. Something that conveys Barragan's house and you run for it, full of his references (Josef Albers, Max Ernst ...) or yours (Fritz Lang, Lope de Vega ...). But Quignard also mentions Spinoza and his "dream of a community of rare, difficult, secrets, atheists, open, luminous (...). Antidemocratic found a closed club priests, judges, philosophers, politicians, columnists, teachers, gallerists ... ". What is for Iñaki Bonillas *The triumph of the solitary life?*

Well, it's not something autobiographical, because my life is very lonely to say. But certainly he interested me that aspect of the house of Luis Barragan, showing him as a person who, although he received visits from time to time, he had everything ready for the perfect life alone: each of the rooms of the house, for example It has a record player, so he could listen to music at all times, no matter where he had decided to spend the morning or afternoon, probably reading or drawing or thinking. So I decided to put that title to the exhibition of ProjecteSD, where I met the photographic series I did there. I think the loneliness that inspires this house is a condition almost say disdained today, but very necessary for the creator: those moments of solitude in which, just so, one achieves focus and unleash the imagination. For Barragan solitary life triumphed over the rest of the things, I do not doubt; others must settle for those little triumphs few but treasured, where solitude allows us wallow in their own research ideas or own moments.