

Erlea Maneros Zabala

September 16-November 6, 2011

The pictures that make up the Ken and Jenny Jacobson Orientalist Photography Collection at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles are, like most pictures of this variety, historically adrift and have little contextual information to ground them. They are images captured under the supervision of a colonialist program in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Most often, the origins of these pictures are unknown and the world they reveal is one without specificity of place, time or subject. Here, the "Orient" merely poses for the photograph and is made to adhere to painterly conventions of the picturesque.

Within this collection, genres such as the still life, the romantic landscape, the nude and the self-portrait emerge as tropes carried over from one mode of representation to another. As a group of images, the Jacobson Orientalist Collection gives shape to the fraught conditions under which these early photographs were made, if only because the pictures now convey an uncertain relationship to the subjects and cultural objects they were once employed to represent.

Initiated by a period of extensive research into the Orientalist holdings at the Getty Research Institute, Erlea Maneros Zabala's exhibition at REDCAT examines the materials that surround and frame the experience of images within this particular archive. In an attempt to overemphasize the strategies of collection and display, the sculptures and their accompanying images are bred out of a response to the ideological practices involved in the mediation of pictures. Maneros Zabala exposes a selection of these photographs to strategies of re-photography and re-contextualization in order to underscore the lack of any coherent system of classification to surround these visual documents and introduce this lack to an aesthetic experience of the images themselves.

Throughout Maneros Zabala's installation, groupings of images attempt to identify themes that are left otherwise opaque or undefined within the archive in which they are housed. While many of the pictorial categories illustrated in the exhibition are easily recognized as extensions of traditional painting motifs--landscapes, odalisques and figure studies, for example--other types of images disclose the nature of the relationship between the European photographers and their ethnic subjects. One selection of images features artist self-portraits in traditional Arab costume, while another set of images presents men dressed in women's clothing, recurrent themes that Maneros Zabala has identified as part of a larger tendency toward performance and theatrical staging within the archive.

More than anything, the images in the Jacobson Orientalist Collection provide evidence of a widespread fascination with the ethnographic "other," whose construction reached its greatest height through the lens of photography. Maneros Zabala's process considers alternative display scenarios for a selection of pictures that have become merely specimens within the material conditions of an archive. By reorienting the relationship between historical photo-documents and the mechanisms and materials conventionally used in the display of photographic images, Maneros Zabala's installation at REDCAT reasserts the material presence of pictures and attempts to give shape to the experience of looking.

Erlea Maneros Zabala (b. 1977, Bilbao, Basque Country) currently lives and works in Los Angeles, where she received her MFA from the California Institute of the Arts in 2002. She has been included in such notable exhibitions as *Manifesta 8*, Murcia/Cartagena, Spain; *Immaterial*, Ballroom Marfa, Marfa, Texas; *Picture Industry (Goodbye to All That)*, Regen Projects, Los Angeles; and *After the Final Simplification of Ruins*, Centro Cultural Montehermoso, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain. She has had solo exhibitions at Stiftelsen 3,14, Bergen, Norway; Museo Experimental El Eco, Mexico City; Carreras Múgica, Bilbao; Redling Fine Art, Los Angeles; Seamen's Art Club, Hamburg, Germany; and Abstract Cabinet, Sala Rekalde, Bilbao, Basque Country.

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REDCAT

631 West 2nd Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012
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Gallery at REDCAT aims to support, present, commission and nurture new creative insights through dynamic projects and challenging ideas. The Gallery presents five exhibitions every year, often of newly commissioned work that represents the artist's first major presentation in the U.S. or Los Angeles. The Gallery also maintains an active publishing program producing as many as two major monographs per year. Proceeding from the geographic and cultural specificities of Los Angeles, its program emphasizes artistic production of the Pacific Rim—namely Mexico, Central and South America and Asia—as regions that are of vital significance to California. The Gallery aims to facilitate dialogue between local and international artists contributing to a greater understanding of the social, political and cultural contexts that inform contemporary artistic practice.

Gallery at REDCAT is open Tuesdays through Sundays from noon to 6:00pm or until intermission. It is closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission to the Gallery at REDCAT is always free.

REDCAT is located at the corner of W. 2nd and Hope Streets, inside the Walt Disney Concert Hall complex in downtown Los Angeles (631 West 2nd Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012).