

— an anti-ironic attitude first developed in mid-1980s music and now reinvigorated to name an emergent openness to issues that postmodern irony and pastiche had dismissed as no longer viable or attainable. This sincerity, known by several other names, brought insistence on emotional feeling and the importance of vision as a lived experience.

There is an argument to be made that perception is not only a cognitive process — the often heralded phrase that the eye is part of the brain — but also remains as an embodied organ that bears the all too human burden of emotional responses required by the return of a sense of embodied reality that has been a bit destabilized, if only momentarily, by virtuality.

The Surrealist wanted to “see” with their eyes closed, to see with an inner and sometimes savage eye to fuse mind and animal. Unlike music, which was the experiential model for abstract form in early modern art, the experience of an embodied experience brings a rather refreshing and perhaps renewed sense of self as present to a fuller degree; an affirmation rather than the denial of body usually associated with the experience of abstraction. No longer an either/or proposition, the physical experience of Herrera’s works, perhaps unrecognized, is the simple yet timely and renewed assertion of arts traditional strength — that we are and need to be in this world as a fusion.

RICHARD LESLIE

Jorge Tacla Cristin Tierney Gallery

During the civic-military dictatorships in the Southern Cone, the technology of extermination not only consisted of assassinations, disappearances and torture, but also involved book burning. The erasing of the other, then, occurred in both the body and the epistemologies that disobeyed, before and during the regime, the military model and its analog: the market. In the so called “National Reorganization Process” in Argentina, for instance, where the dictatorship linguistically transformed a massacre into a patriotic duty, book burning became known as the “cultural reconstruction plan of the nation.” And, in Chile, as demonstrated in the famous scene of the documentary titled *La Batalla de Chile* (The Battle of Chile, 1975-1979) by Patricio Guzmán, an agent of the DINA (National Intelligence Directorate) told the man behind Guzmán’s camera not to speak with the soldiers and not to ask them why they burned books. This agent spoke English and French, and did so in a calmed manner, with a soft voice and a smile that betrayed his pleasure: his knowledge of high culture. One of the most prominent exponents of the New Latin American Cinema, Guzmán left Chile with his movie, which was not shown there until 2006.

A while ago in New York City, Jorge Tacla (Santiago, 1958) told me about a winter evening during the 1980s when he attended a screening of Guzmán’s documentary at the Film Forum. He recalled the profound feeling of affection that the long line amid the snow to buy the tickets elicited in him, describing an image that combined absence and representation, just as it occurred with the censorship and the exhibition of *La Batalla de Chile*. It is precisely this representation of an absence—or, in other words, of the same repetitive design to erase, burn, and disappear the books—the very thing that we are faced with in Tacla’s most recent exhibition at the Cristin Tierney Gallery. In fact, it is not strange that in his latest series Tacla focused on books, considering that two years ago he burned two of his own notebooks at the paradigmatic Pedagogical Institute of the Universidad de Chile, referencing the destruction of books during

the dictatorship—a theme that he took to a “more universal” level in his current retrospective at the CorpArtes cultural center in Santiago.¹ Yes, in modern space-time books have always been hidden, as demonstrated by the famous case of *La Primer Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno* (The First New Chronicle and Good Government, 1615), a denunciation of the Andean crisis that followed the conquest, published in facsimile only until 1936.²

Titled “Sign of Abandonment,” the exhibition by Jorge Tacla at the Cristin Tierney Gallery consisted of five paintings that showed empty libraries in blue and red tones. Empty, yes, but of bodies not books. As is recurrent in his pictorial process, he transferred photojournalistic images using a combination of oil painting and cold wax, and he did so at a time when visibility and concealment coexist. In this manner, once the image has been transferred to the canvas (still wet), he drowns the image “almost completely hiding it [...] in order to, like a surgeon, cut the layers and reconnect the spaces until only a very thin and vulnerable skin remains.”³ This skin, which Tacla also calls “the skeleton of architecture,” is allegorical of the visibility and concealment occurring in his libraries. As result, form, content, and time become a single narrative: to make the absence of the body visible in spaces that, while not destroyed like the majority of his paintings, are, strangely, not habitable. Something similar occurs in the empty libraries of German photographer Candida Höfer. But in Tacla’s libraries order, orthogonality, and permanence are in themselves ambiguous concepts addressing spatialities that could eventually disappear, or that have already disappeared—like the public library in Detroit that was destroyed in 2011 following the financial crisis in that city.

That library is represented by Tacla in *Señal de Abandono 24* (Sign of Abandonment 24, 2017), a vertical painting measuring 181.6 by 124.5 cm, created with blues, greys and white paintings. Unlike Höfer’s libraries and, to a certain extent—but because of a different framing or visual field—to some of the other paintings in the exhibition—like *Señal de Abandono 22* (Sign of Abandonment 22), which shows the Trinity College Library in Dublin—in *Señal de Abandono 24* the floor and the stair steps resemble books, as if books and the architecture had the same materiality. Tacla seems to suggest here that the books are

Jorge Tacla. *Señal de Abandono 22* (Sign of Abandonment 22), 2017. Oil and cold wax on canvas. 80 x 80 in. (203.2 x 203.2 cm).



forced to disappear because of an economic crisis or, in other words, as result of an economy that surveils them and other subjectivities. "It may very well be your art, but this is my wall," remembered Tacla when I asked him about the exhibition, alluding to what Nelson Rockefeller told Diego Rivera during their famous disagreement over the content of Rivera's mural.⁴ In this manner, it is not that libraries in particular and culture in general are being threatened by the advent of the digital era—as it has also been mistakenly and famously suggested about the photographic medium. It is rather about a much broader criticism that, through the use of concealment and visibility as aesthetic strategy reveal, always foggily, in the skin of architecture the unavoidable relationships between the market and culture, in this instance in the form of libraries.

NOTES

1. See <http://www.umce.cl/index.php/noticias-dir-extension/item/1687-exposicion-tacla>, and <http://artishockrevista.com/2017/12/12/jorge-tacla-entrevista/>
2. Rolena Adorno, Guamán Poma and his illustrated chronicle from colonial Peru: From a century of scholarship to a new era of reading. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, University of Copenhagen: Royal Library, 2001.
3. Jorge Tacla, interview by Amy Ingrid Schlegel, PhD, director of the Art Gallery of Tufts University, January 1, 2016, interview, document.
4. Interview with the artist. January 10, 2018.

FLORENCIA SAN MARTÍN

PANAMA / PANAMA

Iraida Icaza

Museo de Arte Contemporáneo - MAC Panamá

The exhibition "Iraida Icaza and the Forgotten Museum" refers to more than one collection or one place. The idea stems from photographs she took in Panama's old Museum of Natural Science, which has since closed its doors to the public. For several years, Icaza photographed its unusual interior spaces and its collections in the fields of geology, paleontology, marine biology, and entomology. The small museum also had sections that displayed vertebrate animals and foreign fauna, as well as its own taxidermy laboratory. In the exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Icaza presented those images

Iraida Icaza. *Untitled*, 2017. Color photograph, archival pigment print. 16 x 20 in. (40.5 x 51 cm). © Iraida Icaza.



together with photographs taken in other museums she has visited in Europe and the United States over the years.

The concept of a museum as a collection of things or images from the past or the present also relates to Iraida Icaza's photographic archive. She has explained that, although she lets intuition be her guide when she takes a photograph, creating her images involves a detailed subsequent process. It is based on the careful classification of her images, which she later edits and combines to produce her prints. She recomposes and resurrects photos taken in earlier phases because she sometimes discovers that they foreshadowed ideas that germinate at a later date. She is a meticulous researcher, a refined artist, and an incessant collector of images; her organizational tenet is on the basis of long-term concepts, rather than time-restricted series.

Displayed in the exhibition spaces on the MAC's ground floor were black and white photographs that reflect Iraida Icaza's lifelong fascination with science and nature, and constitute parts of her own personal, carefully curated museum. She showed views of monumental Mexican landscapes with unusual geological formations, as well as dark, dramatic pictures of caves and Etruscan tombs that she discovered in southern Italy. It was also there, specifically in Sicily, that she photographed an unusual series of carved stone heads with grotesque faces that reveal different personality traits, that she refers to as *Mental States*.

Although some visitors thought it resembled a retrospective, the exhibition was more like a variety of collections linked to a museological theme. The artist showed part of her *Darién Project* with scenes from the jungle and herbal specimens, as well as compositions that she has gathered under the title *Forensic*. They are works in which she records traces of human activities or fortuitous compositions she discovers in nature. Other photographs reveal her interest in capturing the ephemeral, for example, the way in which tracks in the sand are erased by the elements, or how ice slowly vanishes. At times, she photographs random splashes of light in amorphous spaces, creating compositions that are almost abstract.

In Icaza's oeuvre, the contrast between light and shadow is both visual and subjective. She seeks "the magical moment that holds the unknown, when lights and shadows fluctuate between positive and negative...I explore the space between reality and illusion." That dream-like space to which Iraida Icaza refers can be seen in some beautiful photographs she took of veiled and mysterious plastic-covered statues in some European museums, such as a sculpture of *Eve* by Auguste Rodin in the cellar of the Southampton Museum.

The conceptual links between real objects and photographic prints continue on the museum's second floor, where visitors enter a magical space that recreates the feeling of an old museum. It included a collection of color photographs that Icaza took inside the closed-down Panamanian museum and at other international institutions. Her images of dioramas are striking, a perfect example of that space between the real and the imaginary that she seeks to capture. There are striking photographs of preserved animals, from splendid birds to large mammals. The installation also included some three-dimensional specimens borrowed from the Panamanian museum: an antelope, a raccoon, a macaw, and a tamarin monkey all add depth to the exhibition. There are strange and nostalgic photos of the taxidermy lab and other parts of the Science Museum. There is a surprising photograph of an embalmed heron exhibited above a white washbasin, as well as images that record some of the overfilled and heterogeneous exhibition rooms.

A deer's head is mounted on the wall in another part of the exhibition, in an installation next to a curious photograph that Icaza took of the same animal in the old museum where it was mounted next