

The disturbing images of Gilbert Garcin

Even though somebody else would tell the story standing out other aspects, Gilbert Garcin was born in La Ciotat, which is a french site near Marseille, in 1929, and it is said that he devoted himself to the business of selling lamps until he retired at the age of 65. He then wins a photography award and is invited to take a workshop at Arles with Pascal Dolémieux, with whom he learns all the tricks of his new "trade". It is then when the *new* Gilbert Garcin is born: a surprising photographer for the sharpness with which he decides to create and develop a character out of himself pursuing one of the most thrilling and agile works of photography of the last decades.

It might be unnecessary to know how things happened; but it might be necessary in a few years, when somebody follows the tracks of his biography; what is certain is that a few decades later his photographies will remain necessary and timeless. This is because the images of Gilbert Garcin have the strange perspicuousity and intensity of a brief poem, a short story or a happy aphorism but they are, and know it, part of a fiction: they play the part of a character that asks himself about the nearness, the everyday, the meaning of things and its structure. They have a naive touch, esceptical, ironic and biting, funny and muddled. ASTARTÉ gallery shows in Madrid a selection of these disturbing

photographies, that turn into objects of worship and desire.

Gilbert Garcin has told this many times but it always seems the first time: "I make sketches and drawings of whatever I want to do but as I am bad at drawing, I finish up making a photograph. Once I have the idea I begin with the setting, just the principal elements. Then at my house's porch in Marseille, a quiet spot where nobody can see us, we take pictures of ourselves [Garcin and his wife, becoming a *mirror* of her character, following a not written rule of synthesizing and the highest economy of means] in the right position. I cut the silhouettes in those pictures and change my head with the character's and then glue it over the picture that has the set". The cutting of the figure is not, voluntarily, perfect: the manual pulse always leaves traces. In his images he seeks the multiple sense and prefers staying in the confused areas rather than telling us which direction to look, which is the reason why he feels reserved when the time for the work to be entitled comes, an action that he only agreed to do at his art dealer's insistence (fortunately, according to the results).

When concerning his works he doesn't like to talk about selfportraits although the face of the leading character is

the same as his, at 66, when he took pictures of himself with different gestures and positions, creating a useful *data base* since then. Thanks to this resource- as simple as conscious, lucid, far-sighted- his character`s face remains timeless in spite of the years passed. "Can you imagine Charlot, not Chaplin, old? Or Tintin?", says Garcin.

The starting point is, therefore simple, clean, revealing. Garcin claims that a certain craft and an easy esthetic project is what he wanted, something capable of surprising those looking sideways as much as the researchers. His works offer a different reponse depending on the intensity of the one who looks: they are not dramatic but efficient, nor closed symbols but pieces of an open story, evocations of the emotion caused by a surprise. This surprise is not the product of an unusual encounter but the result of gathering with curiosity, uneasy, the day life, its closeness. One of his wise moves is the rhetoric absence and the way he plays with the primary resources of the images. His photographs seem to ask naive and, at the same time, extremely wise questions. Choosing the black and white austerity weighs in his favour: it allows him to master the medium skillfully and puts his images within the heritage of films that tell stories and are based on a gesture, or a scape, a silence, a light effect, a stopped scene. His images have a connection to the imagery of

Charlot, Buster Keaton, Jacques Tati, or Alfred Hitchcock but also with the surrealist *collages*, or Magritte's mysterious photographs. Garcin is like a *jigsaw* in which every piece fit together perfectly: he managed to give his character the autonomy, made him timeless, and the apparently absent-minded paternal figure reinforce the proposal means. We perceive the sense of humor when commenting on living with his couple, the tenderness, the shrewdness; when thinking about him as an artist, ego comes around at the same time as dissatisfaction of always being in front of a much more powerful and mysterious image: reality. When visiting a museum, he finds motifs in its reflection, in the corners, in the vanishing lines encouraging us to look through the first image; his comments on modern art are as shrewd as the most skeptical texts of Ernst Gombrich. Garcin takes us to his ground in which he shows himself precise and funny, quiet and locuacious. His images seem always ready to live, as if they were closer to a concentrated story than a snapshot. As if they would stop when they got caught, as if they didn't need us to survive.

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