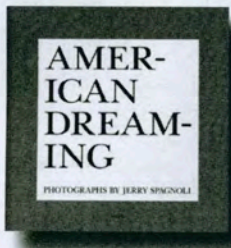


AMERICAN DREAMING

BY JERRY SPAGNOLI
STEIDL, 2012
96 PP./\$48.00 (HB)



Jerry Spagnoli's book *American Dreaming* visually and physically conveys one of the five senses difficult to achieve in a photo book: hearing. Photographic noise and static connect the background with overlaid images from page to page, and become a continuous theme in Spagnoli's narrative of America in the pre-Gulf War era. All images in the book are enlargements; some gain

volume and distortion from page to page by Spagnoli's enlarging of progressively smaller parts within each image.

The grain of the noise conveys sonority which is artfully matched by the content of the images. While some images, although abstract, are very easy to discern, other images are more complex. Tightly cropped portraits become images of entangled limbs and bodies, with boisterous, lusty, desirous sensations whispering, and sometimes shouting, through the noise on the page. The increase in skin and sensuality in the portraits leads the reader to the sexiest images later in the book; one image clearly depicts a couple in an untidy open-mouth kiss. Another image contains bare arms or legs of multiple people, but discerning which body part belongs to whom is nearly impossible.

Paper texture augments the feeling of sound: the tooth lends the paper a gritty feel, so much so that in turning the pages, the reader feels tempted to try wiping them clean. If static had a texture, it would match that of the pages of *American Dreaming*.

Spagnoli's website describes the book as metaphor for people only seeing "what we are prepared to see, and understand[ing] only as much as our habits and predispositions will allow."¹ With the gift of hindsight, Spagnoli uses static and abstraction that allows the viewer to contextualize each image within their own experience of America in the pre-Gulf War era.

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NOTE 1. See www.jerryspagnoli.com.

HISTORIA, MEMORIA Y SILENCIOS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LORENA GUILLÉN VASCHETTI
SCHILT PUBLISHING, 2012
84 PP./\$45.00 (HB)



Historia, memoria y silencios, Lorena Guillén Vaschetti's first monograph, is an exploration of memory and perception that foregrounds photography's allusive nature and subverts its claims to veracity. On the book's cover are embossed shapes that suggest empty picture frames. Below them is a prelude by the Argentine artist, born in 1974 and raised in Buenos Aires: "My mother and I are the only members left of a

large Italian family. She decided that throwing away all the family slides was a big favour to me."

Guillén Vaschetti managed to rescue just one case of the archive. It contained metal canisters of unprocessed film and hundreds of transparencies—some loose, some bundled—none of which she had seen since childhood. Created primarily by her grandfather, the cache became an invitation for Guillén Vaschetti to reconcile her memories and reflect on her family's past.

Historia, memoria y silencios has two sections. To make the images in the first part, Guillén Vaschetti re-photographed the loose slides. Referring to memory and its nebulous nature, the artist rendered sharp only a minute area of the image, leaving the rest soft. Hair, hands, hemlines—her decisions, like remembrance, seem indiscriminant. Similar to a family album, the photographs are chronologically arranged and grouped by location. Depictions of private moments reveal the subjects' personalities, including the artist's grandfather's, as both the photographer and occasional subject. They are the centerpieces of this section and the strongest work. In the 1970s, as the original archive was forming, Susan Sontag asserted that photographs can't explain the past; rather, they can only serve as "invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy." This thesis is the foundation of Guillén Vaschetti's investigation.

Unopened/Sin Abrir is the series of still lifes that comprise the second part of the book. The title refers to canisters of unprocessed film and bundled slides, which the artist preserved as found. Guillén Vaschetti used the medium to transform these objects into jewels invested with personal significance and mystery. Other photographs depict the torn paper that was wrapped around the transparencies and canisters.

With fortitude and finesse, the artist created the images in *Historia, memoria y silencios*, while also revealing a portrait of herself.

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