

The

P H O T O

# REVIEW

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... a knowledge of  
photography is just as  
important as that of  
the alphabet. The  
illiterate of the future  
will be ignorant of the  
use of the camera and  
pen alike.

László Moholy-Nagy  
1936



Mary Georgiana Caroline, Lady Filmer (English, 1838–1903)  
Untitled, loose page from the Filmer Album, mid-1860s, Collage of watercolor and albumen prints, Paul F. Walter  
From "Playing with Pictures: The Art of Victorian Photocollage" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

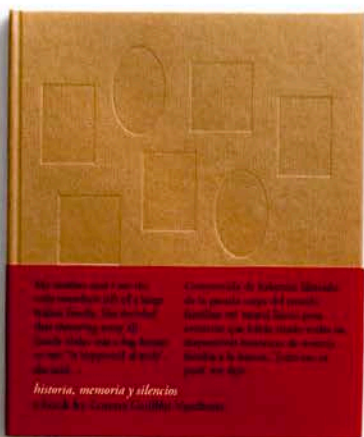


gambling contests, first communions. But Salzmann has gone well beyond these things in his commitment to the ethics of meeting others, and treating others as fellows — not with self-righteousness or liberal moralism, but with a powerful modesty and a penetrating large-heartedness to match that of his subjects.

Laurence Salzmann knows how to link peoples through images, and *Échele Ganas* is a work of his accumulated wisdom and compassion.

Jason Francisco

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**Historia, memoria y silencios.** Photographs by Lorena Guillén Vaschetti, (Amsterdam: Schilt Publishing, 2012), 84 pages, 43 color illustrations, hb., €35.

*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. The book has two sections of images and begins with an introduction by the Argentine artist who was born in 1974 and raised in Buenos Aires.

On the book's plain board cover are seven embossed ovals, rectangles and squares arranged salon style that suggest empty picture frames. Below them, a band of red paper folded around the book offers an intriguing prelude: "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."

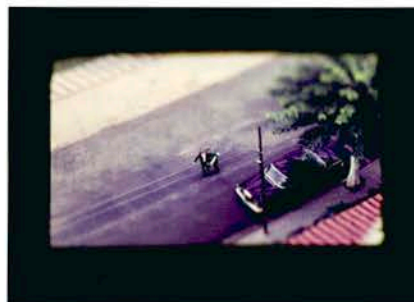
Guillén Vaschetti was not convinced. She urged her mother to retrieve the archive that her maternal grandfather had created between the 1950s and the 1970s. In the end, just one case was rescued. It contained metal canisters of unprocessed film and hundreds of transparencies — some loose, some bundled — none of which she had seen since childhood. To Guillén Vaschetti the cache became an invitation to reconcile her memories and reflect on her family's past, one that had been indelibly marked by betrayal, absence, and the ransom scheme that left her young uncle dead. He was abducted by acquaintances who were after his family's money.

Her grandfather was a winemaker, but clearly had a penchant for the camera. He took most of the pictures, although he also appears prominently throughout the book's first section, gesticulating in a silk robe, contemplative on the terrace or behind the morning paper. His privilege is inferred, as is his appreciation of beauty and light, a gift bestowed on Guillén Vaschetti.

The artist didn't simply appropriate her grandfather's images. Over three years she re-photographed all of the loose slides with a macro lens on an illuminated light table, intuitively rendering sharp a minute area of the image, leaving the rest unfocused. Hair, hands, hemlines — her decisions, like remembrance, seem indiscriminant. In most cases, the subjects' faces are soft. The pictures are printed on black paper, which creates the illusion of a deep window framing history.

In her introduction, the Buenos Aires-based artist wrote, "Everyone looked so different from how I remembered them...so happy! As if the past had not been as I imagined."

Reinforcing the notion of a family album, the photographs in *Historia, memoria y silencios* are arranged in chronological order, grouped by location: countryside, mountains, beach. Depictions of private moments in domestic or intimate contexts are the centerpieces of this section and the strongest work. The characters' personalities are suggested, as is the photographer's provocative self. We see women in seductive postures: bent over in a dress; in lingerie by the window; or reclined in bed smoking a cigarette — and in another image, a man in a suit, making the same bed.



These works recall Bill Jacobson's signature out of focus series from 1999–2003, *Untitled* and *New Year's Day*. Jacobson's painterly urban and rural landscape photographs refer to memory and its often-nebulous nature by reducing subject matter to blurry fields of color and form. "They question what is 'real' and what is 'abstract,'" Jacobson said. This is evidently the premise for Guillén Vaschetti's process of investigation, probing, and reworking the slides.

Occasionally one wonders if a wider selection of images from the hundreds of slides the artist worked with could have yielded greater insight and if a more dynamic sequence might have shown clues about, or parallels between, the subjects, broadening the interpretive potential of the overall narrative.

*Unopened/Sin Abrir* is the name of a series of still lifes that make up the second part of the book. The title

refers to canisters of unprocessed film and bundled slides, which the artist preserved as such. She chose to work with the material as she found it, perhaps out of respect for the reason it was left that way, or as an emotional safeguard from the unknown.

Set against a black background are sculptural stacks of slides bound with blue string or pink rubber bands. The images are at once arresting and seductive and they are the highlight of the book. Guillén Vaschetti deftly used the medium to transform these historical objects invested with personal significance and mystery into jewels. Other photographs depict the torn, punctured graph paper that was once wrapped around the transparencies and canisters. Noted on them are the names "M. del Plata," and "Dolomite." Architectural in nature, the subjects evoke Richard Serra's sinuous *Torqued Ellipses*, Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao, and, by extension, the crumpled paper that Gehry cited as inspiration for his sketches. Guillén Vaschetti's *Unopened/Sin Abrir* photographs clearly emanate from her design background. She is also a trained architect.

In the early 1970s, as the original archive was still forming, Susan Sontag asserted that photographs can't explain the past, rather, they can serve as "inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy." This thesis also guided Guillén Vaschetti's exploration. About photography's use in the family context, Sontag wrote that it is "mainly a social rite, a defense against anxiety, and a tool of power." Her argument may apply to how Guillén Vaschetti's grandfather employed the medium, and surely to how it is used today, but not to these pictures. Instead, it was with fortitude and finesse that the artist created the images in *Historia, memoria y silencios*. Through it, she reveals a portrait of herself.

Janelle Lynch

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