

The Photosensitive Image

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Questioning indigenous representations inevitably leads to the photosensitive image, that is, to records of visual reality such as photography and cinema. Introduced during the second half of the 19th century, these technologies accompanied the history of industrial modernity throughout its scientific expeditions, perilous journeys, and colonial endeavors. In Colombia, cameras used by anthropologists, scientists, missionaries, and travelers — among other types of explorers — will define the indelible outlines of our imagination of the other, of difference, and of what is distant, that is to say, of distance.

The selection of images — most of which are photographs — does not provide a complete overview of all the photographers who captured the lives of the indigenous peoples in the national territory. On the contrary, they present a fragment of this iconography, organized around thematic categories which form an extensive and interconnected network of images. Portraits of individuals or groups, tools used for violence and for leisure (bows and hammocks, for instance), the discovery and aestheticization of remains, and the categorization of indigenous peoples into different types contributes to shaping the historical representation of indigenous bodies and cultures in Colombia.

Numerous images here reflect the cannibalistic nature of the camera, as they illustrate the violence of the photographic gaze when it is used to create gaps, norms, and divides. The people captured by the camera often have no name, origin, nor territory, and their existence is reduced to this photographed moment; to a silent memory belonging to the imagination of others, and which is transformed into an object. The



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photographs on display thus do not have to be viewed exhaustively, and several photos may be difficult for the public to observe due to their height or format. Nevertheless, they are there, they exist, and they still silently influence the imagination of the person observing them.

However, this genealogy of the photosensitive representation of indigenous peoples goes beyond the mere spectacle of suffering. Through older representations – such as Liborio Zerda's and Henry Price's watercolor paintings, or Julio Racines' album of prints – as well as more contemporary ones – such as the pieces created by Jorge Silva, Brian Moser, José Alejandro Restrepo, and Pablo Mora – the aim is to recall the survival of these visual constructs in the current era and the forward-looking nature of the photographic image. Beyond memory and homage, this network of images encourages the formation of a new, inclusive, and informative system, which is conscious of the distances and proximities shared with others.



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