

A/O (The Céspedes Case)

It's irrational to have been born in a certain place at a certain time and to be of a certain sex. It's irrational that one can alter many circumstances and that one cannot alter many others. But if you're born as one thing, you can dare to be ten thousand other things (Diane Arbus)

When we study History one of our basic premises is not to judge the deeds of the past from the perspective of the present. This principle, which attempts not to distort events in order to give them their correct meaning, is what Helena Cabello and Ana Carceller have not needed, or wanted, to keep to. The investigation and rediscovery of the history of certain individuals and of the events and circumstances surrounding them enable us to interpret and transpose to the present time facts that have lost none of their relevance, facts that have not been resolved and that go on generating the same anxieties today.

The project Cabello/Carceller present in the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, *A/O (The Céspedes Case)*, refers to one such individual: Elena/o de Céspedes, a 16th-century (wo)man from Granada with a life marked from the first by her social status as a slave and her mulatto looks, who the Inquisition tried for the crime of sodomy after marrying a woman and dressing as a man.

Reading the transcripts of the trial allows us to delve into experiences and thoughts that bespeak an entire life dedicated to the search for one's own identity, to adapting to the moment one was obliged to live through and to prevailing over the constraints of the time. These experiences are the ones Cabello/Carceller bring together in order to accommodate them to their discourse and to pose questions about identity. A discourse that is based on the relativity of social roles imposed from within, and by, contemporary iconography. The signifiers they use when presenting these anxieties are drawn from cinema, which generates new icons of masculinity and femininity whose systematic repetition leads to their standardization. Starting out from characters of a very different kind, it is possible to find common features in their works like the importance of place and the state of constant searching.

The organization of space and the constitution of places are practices, both individual and communal, that derive from the very need to think about identity and about the relationship between the people who inhabit them. The handling and the choice of these spaces are never accidental in the works of Cabello/Carceller.

The venue for the video now being presented is the Carthusian Monastery of Santa María de las Cuevas, the current headquarters of the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo. The photographer who is the main character in the movie *Blow up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966) is the model being questioned. As an alter ego of Elena/o de Céspedes, the character makes a tour of this ancient space in search of a reality that is deemed to be apparent, as occurs when, after not recognizing himself, he attempts to capture his own reflection in the water with the camera.

In all this wandering about there is a process of transition of a character who cannot quite decide and who, while he attempts to, strolls among trees in flower that will soon bear fruit in the garden of a former monastery that was to become a ceramics factory and which is now a museum. In this way he turns into a time-traveller who reencounters his past between these 16th-century walls. There is a looking back, back to lived and remembered experiences, from the doubts and uncertainties of the present, with which he forms and defines his identity.

The questions posed by this new work by Cabello/Carceller serve as a point of departure for moving from the particular to the general and for making sure that current artistic practices are not confined to within the centre—be it a museum or a city—but are, like a living being, capable of making headway in new contexts.