

## **We wander in circles through the night and are consumed by fire**

*In wildness is the preservation of the world.*

Henry David Thoreau

The production of these images coincides with the time in which we are devoured by multiple ecological catastrophes on a planetary scale. Therefore, it is no mere coincidence that this project by Carina Martins obtains its title from the Latin palindrome, *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*.

In the set of works dedicated to the paradoxical attempt to surpass the limits of photography as a technology that represents the real, and following the *Urupë* and *Physis* exhibitions, the photographer seems to, somehow, return to the inaugural historical moment of the production of technical images (calotype) conceived by William Henry Fox Talbot (1836), for whom photography (or photogenic drawing) resulted from nature's direct impression on emulsified plates. This *pencil of nature* would then be the operation by which reality would render to the act of representing itself, through an automatic genesis of images - *acheiropoietic* images (made without a human hand).

The photograph generated by human beings with the help of machines created from the canonical device of the *camera obscura* and from the Renaissance perspective, is of little use to us in a context of a relational turnaround with nature. If we want to approach *natura naturans*, in other words, nature itself, and not just the referent produced by the ocular-cognitive apparatus of humanist and anthropocentric philosophy, we can see that human vision needs an intense spiritual transformation. A metamorphosis that allows us to transcend the barbarism imposed by humans on non-human life forms, definitively verifying that on the other side of domination lies the ecological tragedy.

The moment in which we *wander in circles through the night and are consumed by fire*, the ocular regime produced by the disciplinary and industrial society has become obsolete, not only because the human eye has already established itself as an archaeological relic when compared to current artificial perception technologies but, essentially, because the observable world is only what we can see when we frame our individual field of view. Nevertheless, seeing is never just, and only, an effect of an act of "pure" vision. It is not just about opening your eyes and observing an object or an event. What we manage to see is always the result of the cultural patterns present in each society and the framework given by the language that accompanies the images we contemplate.

As we travel along the imagery trail in which this series takes us, we metamorphose into inhabitants of a visual territory, doubly structured by immanence and transcendence. Immanence is present in the language that was instilled in us from an early age: - *this is a tree, that is a rock*. Transcendence, however, always includes what is beyond that which is immediately granted by sensations. In this sense, as Merleau-Ponty will say in the notes for his last book on the visible and the invisible, it is true that the world is what we see, but it is also what makes us learn to see. Thus, we are already very far from the world's prevailing humanist view, defended since the 17th century by the philosophers who shaped modern life in Europe, such as René Descartes who, in his *Discourse on the Method* (1637), promoted the idea of electing ourselves as lords and owners of nature.

The set of values, beliefs, habits and norms that constitute the reference framework of a given society is, after all, a mental image of the social reality that guides the actions and expectations applied by instrumental rationality. In that worldview, Earth is seen primarily, if not exclusively, as a set of natural resources capable of being exploited to the limit of expropriation and the extinction of species.

Regarding the antipodes of the anthropocentric paradigm, the pragmatics of deep ecology (founded by Arne Naess in 1973), seeks another way and a more attentive opening to the non-human life that surrounds us. An ecological conscience - and an experience anchored in biocentric equality - considers the imposition of the will to power over nature as an illusory, erroneous and dangerous idea.

These photographs are not born from the light of modern instrumental reason to address the human gaze in a cartesian and solar space. Their origin must, indeed, be sought in the penumbra and in the gradients of darkness. They refer to an art of writing in the dark, a *nyctography* or a plea for the minimum of luminescence. Here, all matter emits light (biophosphorescence). Night vision captures the light source subtly disseminated by the cells, making it possible to glimpse the radiation emitted by all living matter.

Junichiro Tanizaki not only gave praise to the shadow, but also to its magic. Beauty, says Tanizaki<sup>1</sup>, loses its existence if we suppress the effects of the shadow, forgetting what is invisible to us and considering what is not seen as non-existent. But if we saw the colour of the night through the flicker of a candle's flame, we would see that it is composed of corpuscles, where each portion glows with all the colours of the rainbow.

Directing a critical rejection to secular anthropocentrism, the photographer is closer to a lineage of eco-philosophical authors, whose thinking and aesthetics mark a convergence point between the arts, literature and nature. As in the writing of Maria Gabriela Llansol, these images seek the glow, the energy of vibrant matter and all of nature's spontaneous and unpredictable vitality. In this modulation of voice and *poiesis*, the ontological valorisation of the non-human reverberates. As Llansol also says, "I see myself breathing, giving my hands and strength to the plants and the soil, and in the end, I can't distinguish myself from the day that goes by"<sup>2</sup>. This is also the subtle energy that emerges from these images, like someone who takes the opposite path of light to contemplate a sovereign existence in the trees.

Faced with the nocturnal presence of the majestic *Penedo do Guincho* (Guincho Rock), summoned by an atmosphere of strength and silence, we are placed before the sublime dimension of the mineral kingdom - a serene image of the eternal and the unalterable. And as much as we would want to listen and talk to the immensity of the ocean, so close by, none of us would have the secret knowledge of the tides that only that rock would have interiorized. Therefore, we must acknowledge that "only the mountain has lived long enough to listen objectively to the howl of a wolf" (Aldo Leopold).

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<sup>1</sup>Tanizaki, Junichiro (2016). *In Praise of Shadows*. Lisbon: Relógio D'Água.

<sup>2</sup> Llansol, Maria Gabriela (2002). *O Senhor de Herbais*. Lisbon: Relógio D'Água.