

## ARIANE LOPEZ-HUICI

### AC PROJECT ROOM

Photography usually seeks out beauty, whatever one conceives that to be, and also, in one way or another, tries to take possession of it. In the hands of Ariane

Lopez-Huici, however, the camera is freed from this sometime pursuit. Her subject retains his or her autonomy, and the work becomes a process of sympathetic collaboration rather than domination.

All six black and white images in this exhibition portrayed the same extremely overweight woman in a series of playfully theatrical poses, flaunting her own corpulent nudity with a humor and lack of self-consciousness that would be impressive in anyone, but that, in this instance, represents an enchanting act of defiance. There is no burdensome sociological, psychological, or esthetic construction placed on the extraordinary quantity of flesh this person possesses; it is neither a problem to be understood nor a grotesquerie to be faced. One senses that, for this woman, her flesh is a kind of accumulated wealth to be enjoyed.

Lopez-Huici's effort to be neither presumptuously intrusive nor unsympathetically aloof is clear from her careful framing. The model's body is both sufficiently distant to be fully contained within the frame (and thus at a tactile distance) and close enough to pretty much fill it. The poses take place against a conventional dark-cloth studio backdrop, but usually something of the surrounding floor, wall, or ceiling is revealed along an edge of the image, a Brechtian revelation of artifice that raises the question of whether this "performance" would have taken place outside the photographer's setup.

Personal identity is not the issue in these pictures; the self as corporeal being is. We never see the woman's entire face, which is always either lost in deep shadow or hidden by histrionic hand gestures. For all the exhibitionism of her poses, the model seems to ignore the eye of the spectator. There is neither confrontation nor coyness but, rather, self-containment. She displays and embraces her body as though it exists

for her pleasure alone, although she seems to accept the witness of the photographer and, by extension, her public.

While the lighting of these images is as theatrical as the model's poses, the compositions are balanced, symmetrical, and undramatic, a marked departure from "*Solo Absolu*," Lopez-Huici's last exhibition in 1993, in which the blurred, off-balance close-ups of a man masturbating communicated a frenzy comparable to the model's own. The difference between the two shows testifies to how this photographer keys her style to her subject.

Lopez-Huici raises the stakes in her investigation of the photographer/model relation by using herself as the subject in *TOAK*, 1995, a 16.5-minute black and white film (shown here in video format) made in collaboration with Chrystel Egal. Nude, amid deep shadows reminiscent of early Expressionist cinema, Lopez-Huici performs a sort of ritualized dance/exercise around a strange, dark metal object that only slowly becomes recognizable as a sculpture by her husband, Alain Kirili (the title of the film is an acronym for "To Alain Kirili"). Her performance becomes a kind of hide-and-seek being played with the camera, but it's the hard, stark immobility of the sculpture that she seems intent on seducing and, somehow, incorporating. The courage Lopez-Huici displays here is not in revealing her body to the camera but in revealing an impossible desire.

—BS

BARRY Schwabsky