



Oriol Jolonch's invented realities:

text for Oriol Jolonch's

Invented realities exhibition catalog, at the
Vila Casas Foundation, Barcelona,
September - December 2015

The invented realities of Oriol Jolonch , Anna Belsa Soler

*La poesie est ce qu'il y a de plus réel,
ce qui n'est complètement vrai qu'il dans un autre monde.*

Charles Baudelaire

Oriol Jolonch's photographs pose the question — what is reality? Where does imagination begin and where does it end? Oriol Jolonch's work sits astride both concepts and examines them. If reality pertains to all that which occurs in a true or certain way, and is opposed to that which belongs to the realm of fantasy, imagination or illusion, we find ourselves facing an eternal philosophical problem. In fact, determining what is real and what is not has been one of the central questions in the history of philosophy. Depending on how it is done, we can assert that reality is made up of more than simple material. Intangible things such as feelings and emotions also exist, as does fantasy, which is a significant part of the life and work of artists, as in the case of Oriol Jolonch. Plato established a difference between the palpable and imperfect reality captured by the senses, and the world of ideas, immutable and eternal, captured by reason. The latter is what he defined as reality. For Aristotle however, reality was to be found in the sensorial world, in the things we can see, touch and feel. Without the senses there would be no action, and it is in action that things become real. Otherwise, we would move in an abstract world, made up only of possible things. In current thought, heavily influenced by French structuralism (one of the movements that has most influenced contemporary philosophy), the concept of reality is once again at the centre of discussion. Perhaps influenced by the ideas of Freud and the Surrealists, Jacques Lacan articulated his concept of reality as three fundamental planes: the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic, which are found indeterminately in the real world. The exclusively objective and external does not exist; it is

an impossibility, a pure intellectual abstraction. Later, Michel Foucault introduced the idea of the changing aspect of reality, and Deleuze awarded capital importance to the internal sense of things to define his idea of truth.

This is how the world of the senses returned to the spotlight of western cultural thought. In fact, until the period between the 12th and 17th centuries the confrontation between the real and the imaginary did not exist. In ancient mythology as well as throughout medieval times, unusual and magic phenomena, privileged by religion, were also considered part of reality, despite not being visible. The influence and principles of Descartes initiated a disruption between the real and the imaginary, and the world, increasingly ruled by reason, gradually lost its mystery and poetry. It was not until the 19th century when the world of the senses and the imagination returned to a central position. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll is a paradigmatic example of how, via dream "logic", the mechanisms of the real world can be explained and questioned: in short, it is ruled by an equally absurd logic. This line of thought continued through writers such as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Apollinaire, and Tzara until reaching André Breton, who wrote the Surrealist manifesto. The Surrealist movement started in the field of poetry, but soon spread to all artistic areas. Jettisoning reason and the moral conditioning of the time, the central role was relinquished to free thought in order to express all possible realities. From an iconographic point of view it was a prolific movement, full of intellectual distortions, attempts to translate thought into image, and to pursue dreams with transcendental meanings. The aim of art is to create alternative realities and the medium for doing so is the imagination. Photography was one of the disciplines that adapted best to the Surrealist movement: Man Ray's rayographs, Christian Schad's schadographs, and Moholy-Nagy's photograms are cases in point. Using the techniques of the day they manipulated images to create a representation of reality that disclosed its unconscious or subversive side. Here in Spain we have the example of Josep Renau (Valencia, 1907-Berlin, 1982), who produced collages of photographs with the intention of creating a new context. In this case Renau's aim was ideological since he put his creativity to the service of his political ideals. Nonetheless, it can be said that the Surrealist movement, unlike other artistic currents, was one that had arrived to stay. In the field of photography it started a genre that is very much alive today. Today digital techniques have smoothed the way for artists. We could mention a host of artists who produce Surrealist photography, but standing out amongst them are the Americans Jerry Uelsmann, Robert and Shana Parkeharrison, Gregory Crewdson, and Brooke Shaden; Julia Fullerton-Baten and Robert Jahns from Germany; Erik Johansson and Tomy Inberg from Sweden; Teun Hocks from the Netherlands; Norv Austria from the Philippines; Gilbert Garcin from France; and Chema Madoz from Madrid. While not all of them use digital techniques, as in the case of Madoz, their work can be included in the genre; which is where we can also undoubtedly site the work of Oriol Jolonch.

Oriol Jolonch's photographs have the power to constantly astonish. His imagination drives him to depict possible worlds that go far beyond reality. His work is fruit of intense

intellectual exploration and becomes in itself an aesthetic attitude and approach. His pieces show us scenes from an alternative day-to-day. Freighted with metaphor they make us reflect on the world around us. It is as if the relating of a mere routine fact is elevated to the category of a symbol. If we perform an iconographic analysis of Oriol Jolonch's photographs, we can find a large number of symbolic elements referencing Surrealist art as well as magic or fantasy literature. It is worth singling out a few in particular, as much for their prominence as for their recurrence. These elements are the idea of dreaming; the presence of insects, dolls and animals; references to characters from fantasy literature; the concept of metamorphosis and transformation; the forest; the use of a sinister atmosphere; and the construction of metaphors. We can see the idea of dreaming in the photograph *In Your Room*, where the head of a female nude, reclining at the end of a room, turns into smoke. The walls of the room, formed by pages from the Voynich manuscript, undulate, creating a sense of unreality. Another theme, providing opportunities for fantasy in so much that it can refer to the existence of other possible worlds and other forms of life that both fascinate and repel, is that of insects. There are insects in *La vida secreta de las hormigas* (The Secret Life of Ants), *La verdadera historia de Romeo y Julieta* (The True Story of Romeo and Juliet), and *La ofrenda y otros mundos* (The Offering and Other Worlds). The exploration of this meta-reality created from human life and behaviour leads to the use of a series of elements that express or accentuate hidden, or at least mysterious, aspects and behaviour. Dolls and animals, with their unsettling connotations, are further motifs Oriol Jolonch uses in various photographs. Dolls, as inanimate representations of human beings and of beings at the mercy of others' wills, appear in *Neptuno o la quimera de lo imposible* (Neptune or the Illusion of the Impossible), *Asalto a la Casa Blanca* (Assault on the White House), and *Children Men*. While animals, as beings able to switch roles with, or even supplant, humans, provide the narrative thread in *Monkey Island*, *Radio*, and *Jirafas y monos* (Giraffes and Monkeys), amongst others. In Jolonch's photographs there are also references to characters from the classics of fantasy literature. In *Old Draculae*, Count Dracula's dentures in a glass are an impossible, but humanising twist; Dracula also ages. Dracula leads us to the concept of metamorphosis, clearly depicted in the photograph *Metamorfosis* (Metamorphosis) showing clams changing into butterflies. Another traditional ingredient of fantasy is the forest, as a symbolic space thick with secrets and sorcery. In *Lost*, a man in an old-fashioned diving suit walks, holding onto a rope, through a jungle. There is often an atmosphere of the sinister in Jolonch's photographs, sending a shiver down our spines, which results from the cognitive dissonance between what is familiar to us and what is alien, fascinating but also repugnant. It references a hidden and perverse side of reality in which obscure and malign intentions are intuited. It exists in works such as *La última exhaiación* (The Last Breath), *Deseo secreto* (Secret Desire) and *De lo efímero* (Of the Ephemeral), amongst others. Consequently, it can be said that the photographs of Oriol Jolonch can be viewed as complex metaphors allowing one or several readings.

Oriol Jolonch is a photographer with a magician's top hat, like his alter ego in the series *Mr. Jones*, who watches over a changing landscape, with his back to the viewer. His

magic wand is his imagination, and with it he watches and listens to reality, unveiling its potential and hidden content. He photographs the world and things in it (most of the elements appearing in his pictures have been photographed by him) and creates a collage that is a complex and critical metaphor for our world. In *Tomorrow*, a queue of children (his nieces and nephews with friends) wait at a blocked-up door of a house (in his parents' village), while in *Éxodo* (Exodus), people take trees with them on their flight to the Promised Land. At times, these photographic collages seem almost like a memento or reliquary from a long distant past. Viewing them, we experience a kind of undefined sadness. This sense of listlessness and nostalgia is further heightened by his use of an indeterminate tone, which is neither black and white nor sepia, arrived at after a long process of layering colours to achieve what he calls "vintage tone". At the same time Oriol Jolonch's photographs also awaken in us irony and a critical sense. In his creative process he gathers together the scattered similarities of things and their meanings to demonstrate that behind reality there may be a mutable meaning, a lost opportunity, a disregarded intention. His imagination is subversive since it explores the terrain of the possible to question established principles and to present alternatives. In this sense his creativity is liberating and, during these times of profound disenchantment, we could even say comforting. Oriol Jolonch's alternative realities broaden the horizons of our world; they are a fable teaching us that true power is to be found in the imagination.

FUNDACIÓ VILA CASAS, Barcelona

Monday 14 | September - Sunday 20 | December, 2015

<https://www.fundaciovilacasas.com/en/exhibition/realitats-inventades2>