

Carlos Pazos «I am going to make myself a star»

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Carlos Pazos presents the self as both a social and artificial construct. The mass imagery of the film and rock music star is his terrain, and Pazos from the early 1970s onwards, tried to reinvent himself within the photographic language of the star. His early series *Voy a hacerme una estrella* [*I am going to make myself a star*] presents the artist in the role of a star and the typical tabloid presentation of film stars. Pazos used photography to construct an artificial fictive identity as a star and as a means of presenting a glamorous and ambiguous sexuality, a position which anticipated and paralleled that of younger American artists such as Cindy Sherman. These works built on Pazos' earlier *Modelos de escultura* [*Models for Sculpture*] (1974) and *Esculturas al aire libre* [*Sculptures in the Open Air*] (1975) in which Pazos posed himself and other models according to the composition of paradigmatic works of art, that is as living sculptures captured in photography. Here the immediate predecessors for Pazos were artists as diverse as Manzoni, Gilbert and George and Vito Acconci, not to mention figures beyond the artworld such as David Bowie and the growing climate of glam rock.

Pazos' primary concern in the 1970s was with the question of fame, and his modus operandi was performance, though he participated in every important event in the development of conceptual art in Barcelona at the same time working in New York. Despite his proximity to conceptual art, Pazos invested a content into his performances which was much closer to Pop art and incorporated the rhetoric of gossip magazines and the memorabilia of fame. This phase of his career culminated in the action entitled *The Floor of Fame* staged at the recently opened Centre Georges Pompidou in 1978. Here Pazos arrived in ceremonial fashion dressed in an elegant suit at the entrance of the museum in a black Mercedes limousine accompanied by body guards. A red carpet was rolled out to receive him. He stepped out of the car and was received by the director of the museum. In a wet slab of concrete he wrote his name in front of the museum. The director of the museum escorted him into the exhibition, which consisted of memorabilia of his fame such as a full length self-portrait plaster casts of his hands and face and a series of daguerreotype portraits depicting scenes from his 'private' life.

With the action *Bonjour melancholia* (1980) Pazos concluded the obsession with self-imagery and began an exploration of collage and the construction of environments which explored memory and nostalgia, in general a sense of loss of a past childhood defined by archetypal images of derived from children's stories and comics, especially Mickey Mouse and Peter Pan. Pazos in fact has one of the great collections of Mickey Mouse figures and his use of such characters, deriving from his own childhood, considered the dark side of childhood and the repressed character of adult life. In short, for Pazos' collage was as a means of self transformation and a protest against the establishment's desire to reduce art to a commodity. Pazos' collages of the 1980s were beyond the paradigm of taste and often reflected a disturbing psychology. In this respect Pazos incorporated strategies from earlier avant-garde movements such as surrealism, and here he adopted the example of Salvador Dalí, perhaps the most discredited Catalan artist in the sense of Catalan 'good' taste. Pazos understood that Dalí's struggle was one against a culture of mediocrity, a humorous and 'revulsive' rejection of a hypocritical society. For Pazos,

culture is a proposition situated within the realm of lived experience and not a matter of an endless and pointless confection of 'unique' objects aimed at serving the demands of the art market.

For Pazos' surrealism offered an example of 'individualised fragmentation', the possibility of avoiding psychic or instrumental totality. He has noted the tendency towards the imposition of 'rational languages' in all areas of human experience and resists this phenomenon at considerable personal risk. In opposition he proposes the possibility of a discourse motivated not by rational languages but 'by means of desire'. This resistance to the dominant power structures of the art world is Pazos' most powerful weapon. This sense of psychic disruption was a feature of his recent retrospective catalogue produced by the Rocci di Umbertide's Centro per l'arte contemporanea in Italy (April-May 1998). Entitled *Carlos Pazos: Fromage de Tête*, the cover of the catalogue presented an image of Pazos asleep in bed with a slice of paté overlapping his head and a plastic toy water pistol overlapping his body- as if to suggest the paté is a measure of the artist's psychic state and the pistol a mock reference to psychic self-destruction.

Here Pazos presents us with the famous 'death of the author', not so much in the sense of the birth of the text in the mind of the viewer as in the sense of involving us in his own psychic crises and transformations. Is this an invitation for us to rethink our own sense of psychic stability and enter into a process of transformation? Pazos' most recent collages (1998) seem on first glance to represent an innocent exploration of pop images, but on further examination they reveal a precarious balancing act in which the artist continually constructs and reconstructs his sense of psychic identity, presented literally in some of the collages in the form of a childhood photo of the young Pazos.

Pazos' influence resides in his penetrating exploration of the star-system as glamour, and what might be described as the aesthetics of *cutre*, a Spanish word approximating the English word 'tacky'. In this sense his works exist outside of the paradigm of 'taste', either good or bad. Pazos' work is ultimately a hybrid of attitudes informed by both Pop art and Conceptual art, a peculiarly personal position which privileges the behaviour of the artist at the expense of the art object. Here the personal and the political intersect, and this example has had a striking resonance in recent Spanish culture. In the 1970s and 1980s personal behaviour became tantamount to a political attitude in Spain and amounted to a rejection to the generation of the dictatorship. For the generation of the 1990s Pazos example is one in which there is much to be found in the poverty of the most banal object. For Pazos alternative modes of private behaviour presented in the very public forum of the performance, or the art exhibition, amount to the construction not only of an underground and alternative culture in the most general sense but of the one's own innermost personal identity.

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