

RENÉ BALCER: FORENSICS



**HUTCHINSON MODERN
& CONTEMPORARY**



Portrait of René Balcer. Photo: Jessica Burstein

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FORENSICS

BY: RENÉ BALCER

I grew up in Montréal, Canada.

Montréal is a place of refuge. My mother's family came in 1640, Huguenots escaping Catholic repression in France.

Ukrainians are the latest to find shelter there. Syrians before them, following Haitians and Lebanese on the run from chaos. My eighth-grade homeroom teacher was a refugee from the Algerian Civil War, a so-called *piéd-noir* shunned by France and Algeria alike. Far from the warm beaches of his youth, he turned his broken-hearted cynicism on the snowbanks piling up outside our classroom windows.

In the 1970s, refugees from Latin America found their way to Montréal. These refugees weren't running from poverty or crime, but from their own repressive governments. First came the Chileans in late '73, fleeing the Pinochet regime. They were followed by Ecuadorians and Argentinians, as one by one the countries of Latin America fell to the juntas, until all but four were ruled by dictatorships.

Many of these exiles were college-aged like I was. I was in university, and I'd run into them at the student union and in coffee houses. Many had left their homes just ahead of the police, after finding out that their friends or relatives had disappeared. Some didn't get off so easy—arrested and tortured—they'd been released with a warning to get out of the country.

Many in the Canadian government worried about admitting so many "foreign leftists." But we Québécois felt a natural kinship with these refugees from Latin America. Beyond our similar temperaments, there was our shared Catholic tradition and the Church's contradictory mission of ministering to the poor while sucking up to the rich and powerful. Both our societies suffered from the Church's alignment with repressive forces.

Wary as cats, the refugees kept mostly to themselves, careful to avoid conduct that might get them deported from their refuge. For the most part, beyond providing them with shelter, sustenance and sympathy, we locals left them alone. Because in those days, we were still dealing with our own brush with authoritarian rule.

In the 1950s and 60s, French-speaking Québécois awoke from the coma of English rule and began the process of decolonization. But Québec's "quiet revolution" moved too slowly for those of my generation—for us nothing less than full independence from Anglophone Canada would do. Like students around the world in those days, we took direct action, rocking the streets of Montréal with *manifs* (demonstrations) and strikes that defied state power, to the point that Mayor Drapeau issued an edict (that still stands today) forbidding all demonstrations in the city. The *Front de libération du Québec* (FLQ) was the armed manifestation of the independence movement, responsible for

a wave of bombings against Anglophone institutions in Montréal.

In October 1970, FLQ cells kidnapped a British consul and a Québec politician. In return for their release, the FLQ demanded the reading of a manifesto on national television, the release of political prisoners, safe passage to Cuba and \$500,000. Under the pretext of stopping a nascent armed insurrection, the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau responded by invoking the War Measures Act, putting Canada—in particular Québec and Montréal—under martial law and suspending *habeas corpus*.

Overnight, the Canadian Army rolled into Montréal and set up checkpoints and armed patrols. Given a free hand to arrest whoever they pleased, the police rounded up hundreds of suspected FLQ members and sympathizers, including singers, poets, union leaders, professors, journalists—and my cousin Lise.

Lise was a veteran of student strikes and a militant *indépendantiste*. She was close to the FLQ cell members who had taken the hostages but had split with them over the kidnappings. Still, there she was, under arrest and held incommunicado, shuffled between detention sites and subjected to fierce interrogations without benefit of an attorney. She was 21.

I was 16 and still finding my feet politically. I had marched in a few *manifs*, a couple of which had turned violent. Ever since my mother dragged

me in from the backyard on a sunny August afternoon in 1963 to watch the live broadcast of Dr. King's "I have a dream" speech, I've been for the underdog. At a school public speaking contest when I was twelve, I gave a breathless speech denouncing the Vietnam War. During school church services, instead of the hymnal, I read Mao's Little Red Book, just to annoy my teachers. I devoured everything I could about the Black Panthers and Malcolm X—I even read the Kerner Report on the 1967 riots in American cities. It didn't take much injustice to spark my outrage. But, at 16, it didn't take much of anything to spark my emotions. My troubled home life, my close friends, my girlfriends real and imagined, my sausage-factory school—all had equal priority with righting the world, and all kindled my passions.

Though I wasn't aware of it at the time, much as I had nudged the boundaries up till then, as a young middle-class white male in a liberal democracy, I had no real skin in the game. There was a bottom to what the state could do to rein me in. But in October 1970, that bottom fell out.

It wasn't just that my Montréal was now a city of curfews and arbitrary detentions buzzing with the same APCs and Huey gunships we'd see in reports from Vietnam on the evening news. There was something else deeply disturbing. It was how easily everyone fell in line.

Once the gloves were off, everyone wanted in on the game. Never mind that civil rights had

been suspended and that innocent people were languishing in jail, Pierre Trudeau and the War Measures Act had the overwhelming support of Canadians. Pierre Trudeau, the poster boy for progressive politics, who had liberalized the penal code and “taken the government out of the nation’s bedrooms,” who as a student had thrown snowballs at Stalin’s statue in Red Square, even *that* Pierre Trudeau had a taste for authoritarianism.

My cousin’s arrest blew through our family like an ill wind. Ashamed and fearful, my parents told my brother and me not to talk about it with anyone outside the family. Silence is what they cautioned.

Two days later, the headmaster of my school pulled me into an empty classroom during recess to question me about FLQ plans to attack the school—a private Anglophone boy’s school for the scions of the Anglo ruling class (except for me, of course). He thought I had a direct line to the FLQ via my cousin. I told him I didn’t know anything. I wasn’t lying. I hadn’t seen Lise since I was nine or ten. I didn’t know much about her, except that when she was eight she’d lost her father, a war hero who landed at Normandy on D Day and was wounded on the way to Berlin. The headmaster warned me that the school was keeping tabs on me through its network of “old boys” in high places; if I knew of any threats against the school, I’d better speak up or suffer the consequences. Without breaking stride, this educator had recast himself as an agent of state security.

The other shoe dropped the following Saturday night. I’d just left my girlfriend’s house in Westmount, the affluent neighborhood where the British Consul had been kidnapped. I was walking to a bus stop when I saw a checkpoint up ahead. Two soldiers and a

Montréal cop. I hesitated, thought of turning around. Too late—the cop called out to me in French, told me to take my hands out of my pockets and come forward. I obeyed.

The soldiers hung back on either side of me, holding their guns pointed at the ground. Two more soldiers were keeping warm in a covered jeep, another cop huddled in an idling patrol car.

The cop asked me what I was doing in the neighborhood so late. I told him. I kept my girlfriend’s address vague—I didn’t want to get her in trouble. My thin chivalry made the cop suspicious. He cracked some lame joke about my long hair and was I sure it was a girl I’d been visiting. He asked for my ID. All I had was a city bus pass with my name on it. He read my name out loud, then went to the patrol car. He gave my bus pass to the cop sitting there. That one picked up the car radio. The soldiers kept their eyes on me. I avoided looking at them.

The cop came back, giving the soldiers a little head nod. The soldiers braced. The cop asked me if I knew Lise Balcer. I said she was my cousin. By this time, the other cop had come over. They told me I had to go with them to the police station. I told them I had to get home. They grabbed me and marched me to the patrol car.

Twenty minutes later, I was sitting alone in a room in the basement of Station No. 10, a police station with a bad reputation. It was my first time being locked up in a police station. My first time feeling I was in big trouble.

Four guys came in—two in dark suits, one in a brown windbreaker and one in a blue Expos jacket. The suits sat down at a table against the wall, they each had a yellow pad. The other two pulled up chairs and sat down facing me. They told me they were sympathetic to the separatist cause, and they understood how a *ti*

cul like me could get impatient and frustrated and want to take direct action. All they wanted to do was prevent more violence. They were nice, they gave me a cigarette.

They asked me about Lise. I told them I didn’t really know her. The guy with the Expos jacket told me to stand up. I did. He shoved me hard. I tripped over my chair and fell down. He told me to get back up. I did. He pushed me down again. I told them I wanted to call my parents. They ignored me. To say I was scared is an understatement.

They asked me the same question a dozen different ways, but since I didn’t know anything, nothing I said satisfied them. They raised their voices. They pushed me around the room, bouncing me off the walls. Expos Jacket put a Montréal phone book on the table and started pounding it with a nightstick, threatening to do the same to my head.

At some point he did put the phone book against my head. He must’ve whacked it with the nightstick, I’m not sure because the next thing I knew, I was in a windowless cell by myself. My head was pounding. There was water in a paper cup. I sat there under a dim light, my body aching, imagining the worst, for I don’t know how long.

Around noon the next day, they put me in a car, drove me to a bus stop and left me there. By the time I got home, my father had gotten a call from a nameless detective who told him I’d been picked up for curfew violation but because of my age there’d be no record of my detention. This was good news for my parents—my bright future would be unstained by an arrest record. Again, they told me to be silent. I never told them about my headaches or showed them the bruises on my body. Not that it would have occurred to them to ask.

This was Montréal, after all, not Chicago or Birmingham. I just toughed it out. In silence. The War Measures Act was lifted in January 1971. My cousin languished in jail yet bravely manifested her activism during court appearances, at one point embarrassing the provincial legislature into over-turning a ban on women serving on juries.

Pierre Trudeau remained Prime Minister of Canada until 1979, and then again from 1980 to 1984. His reputation as a liberal progressive defender of personal rights and democratic freedoms remained largely untarnished at home and on the world stage.

As politically naïve as I was at 16, I was stunned at how placidly Montréal society—and Canada as a whole—accepted the suspension of *habeas corpus*, the one law that insures our freedoms. How little fuss was made about it, during and after the October Crisis. I saw how thin the veneer of democracy and liberty really is, and how easily that veneer can be stripped when power feels threatened. The cynicism of my eighth-grade teacher suddenly made sense.

In the years that followed, I led a restless life. What home I had after my parents split up, I stayed away. An infrequent student, I hit the road every chance I got. I crisscrossed the country a dozen times, hitchhiking, hopping freight trains, sleeping by the roadside or on hard cots at the Sally Ann, in abandoned farmhouses and railyard shacks, working odd jobs. From my fellow vagabonds, I heard stories about police beat-downs, Indian school horror shows, one-way Mountie sleigh-rides. And every story, I believed, because of course it followed that whatever was done to this white middle-class kid under the pretext of the War Measures Act had been done a thousand times worse to my brothers and sisters of color without need of any pretext at all.

When I could afford to, I continued the photography I began at 14. I found my photos becoming more attuned to the disquiet of the quotidian, to the monsters laying just beneath the polite surface of Canadian society.

When I returned to Montréal in 1974 to resume my studies, I heard *castellano chileno* wafting through the smokey coffee houses of the student ghetto. Two years of high school Spanish was no help in penetrating the thick accent of the Chilean exiles. Still, I learned their stories, of missing friends and relatives and days of terror in a soccer stadium and desperate gambits for sanctuary. This was the full picture of what had merely been a sketch in October 1970. Their experiences gave context to my own.

An essay on the Left Wing and Media earned me admission to the Communication Arts program at Loyola College, at the time one of two such programs at North American universities. There, I began to experiment with film, television and photography as means of expressing my concern with social justice.

Latin America was never far from my reality, as more exiles and their stories arrived from Argentina. Their Dirty War had raised the stakes and taken on an unimaginable scale. Yet, for me, it had familiar refrains, from the Church's complicity to the middle class's conspiracy of silence.

One by one, countries from Guatemala to Argentina were overtaken by bloody-minded regimes. I felt a connection with their people's struggle for freedom and looked for ways to express my solidarity.

When the Sandinistas overthrew the Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle, I was taken by their embrace of

Liberation Theology and their inclusion of two activist priests in their new government. I helped organize a book tour for the Sandinista commander Omar Cabezas and his memoir *Fire from the Mountain*. Cabezas cut a romantic figure. But the honeymoon didn't last. Pope John Paul publicly reprimanded the Sandinista priests and disavowed Liberation Theology. As for Commander Cabezas, he split with his fellow revolutionaries when the Sandinistas under Daniel Ortega took a turn toward authoritarianism. Once corruptible hands grab the levers of power, they are loathe to let go.

My engagement with Latin America continued over the years through art and friendships and by virtue of my long-standing interest in Indigenous issues in the Americas.

When I came to Buenos Aires in December 2009, I heard echoes of Montréal. The familiar churches. The familiar colonial history. The familiar settler disdain for Indigenous people.

But mostly it was the silence. The silence my parents counseled. The silence of fear, shame, indifference. The silence of complicity.

Lining the quiet streets of Recoleta, elaborate *porteros electricos* guarded the entrances of posh apartment buildings. Expertly crafted, dutifully polished, they spoke to the privilege of their residents.

To me, these electric doormen spoke to something else. To the willful blindness of those within in whose name dirty wars are fought. In Buenos Aires or in Montréal.

Designed to intimidate, these cold steely mechanisms of disconnection mean to keep accountability at bay. But it's an illusion. The final accounting comes to every man and woman.

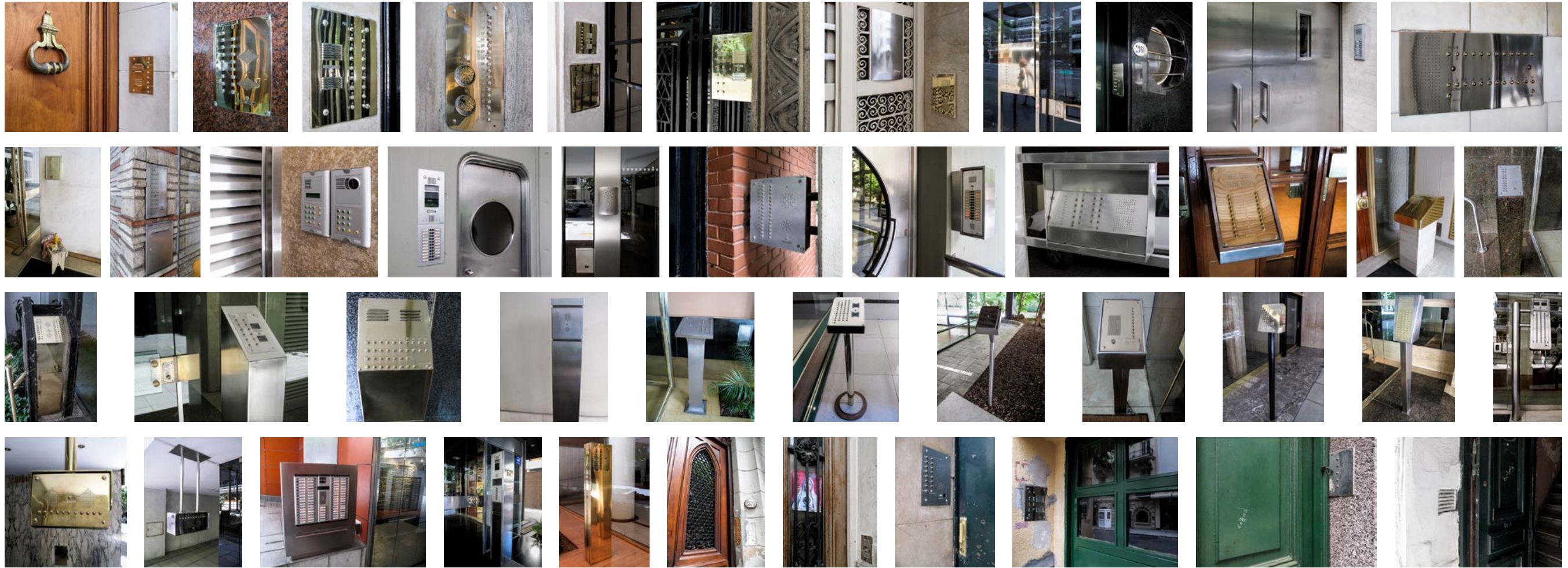
The poor have no such illusions. Their doors are wide open.

On that day in 2009, the *porteros electricos* posed a question—wherein lies the greater crime? In those who commit the horrors, or in those who stay behind their locked gates, who shut their eyes and close their hearts?

I had my own answer—what I saw before me was a crime scene.

So, in a nod to Ed Ruscha before me, camera in hand I went up one side of the street and down the other and did my forensic work.

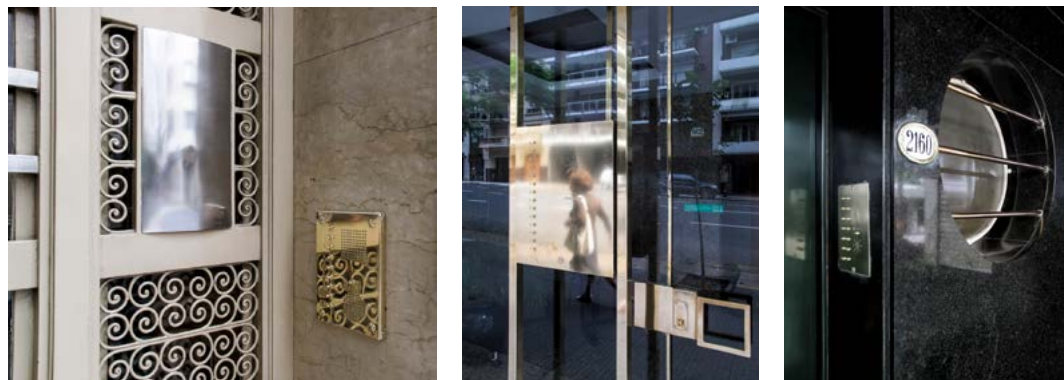
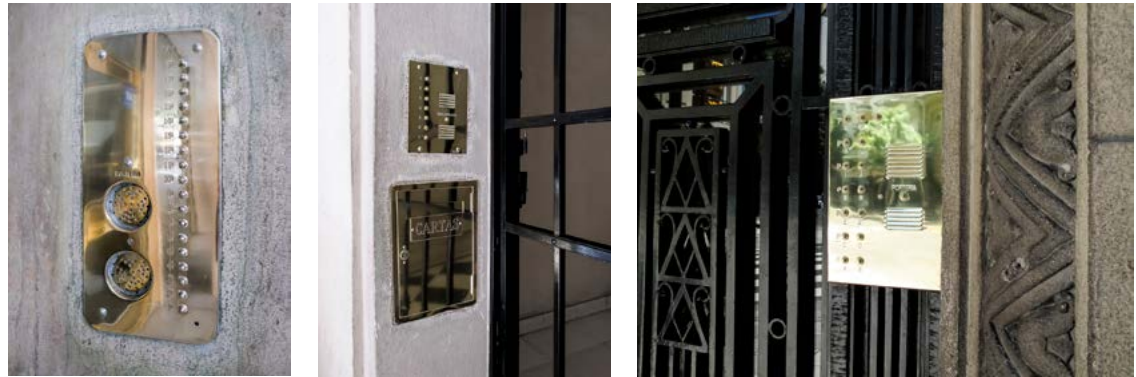
DESAPARECIDOS
A SERIES COMPRISED OF 44 PHOTOGRAPHS

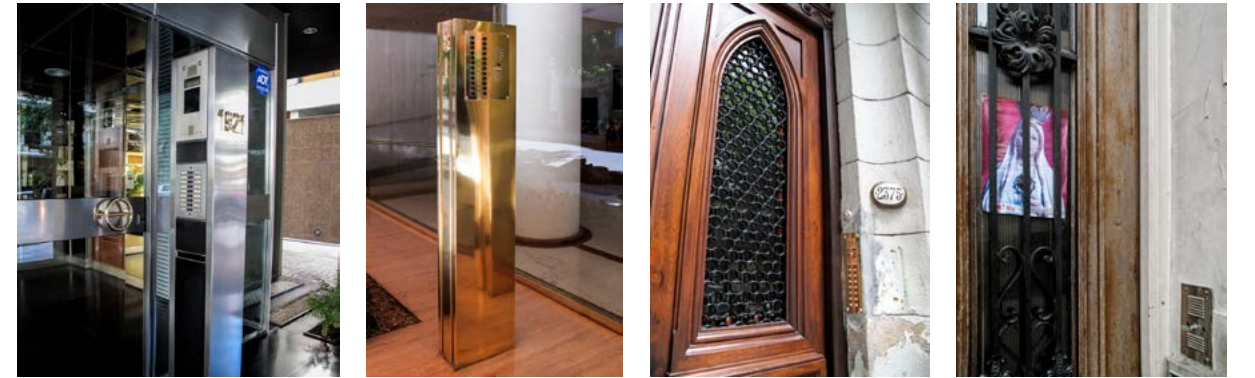


Desaparecidos, Barrio Recoleta, Buenos Aires, 2009, 44 photographs

Printed on Anodized Aluminum and White Aluminum

14 x 7 3/8 in – 14 x 12 11/16 in, Total 60 x 156 in





BUENOS AIRES



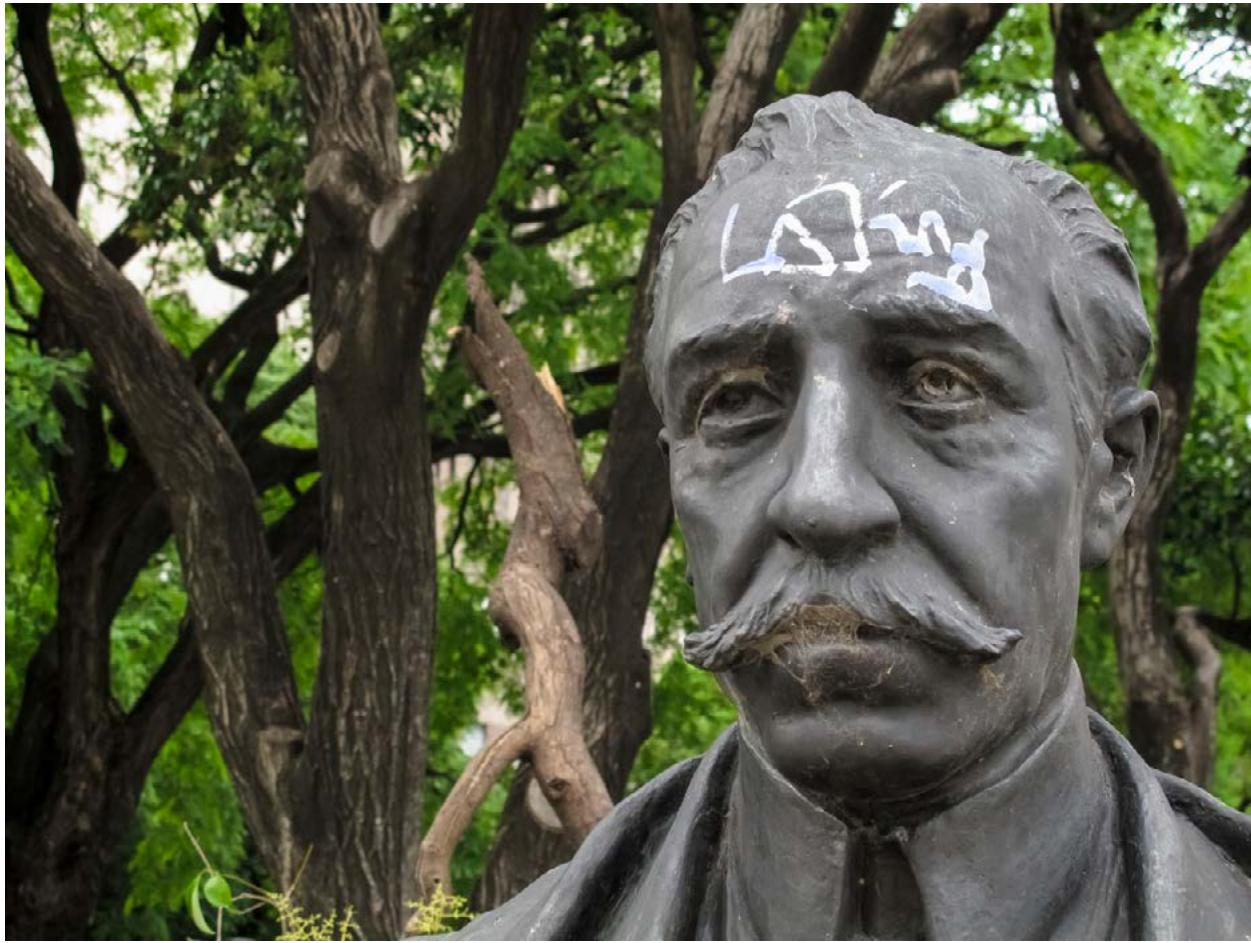
Barrio San Nicolas No. 1, Buenos Aires, 2009

Dibond print
27 x 36 in



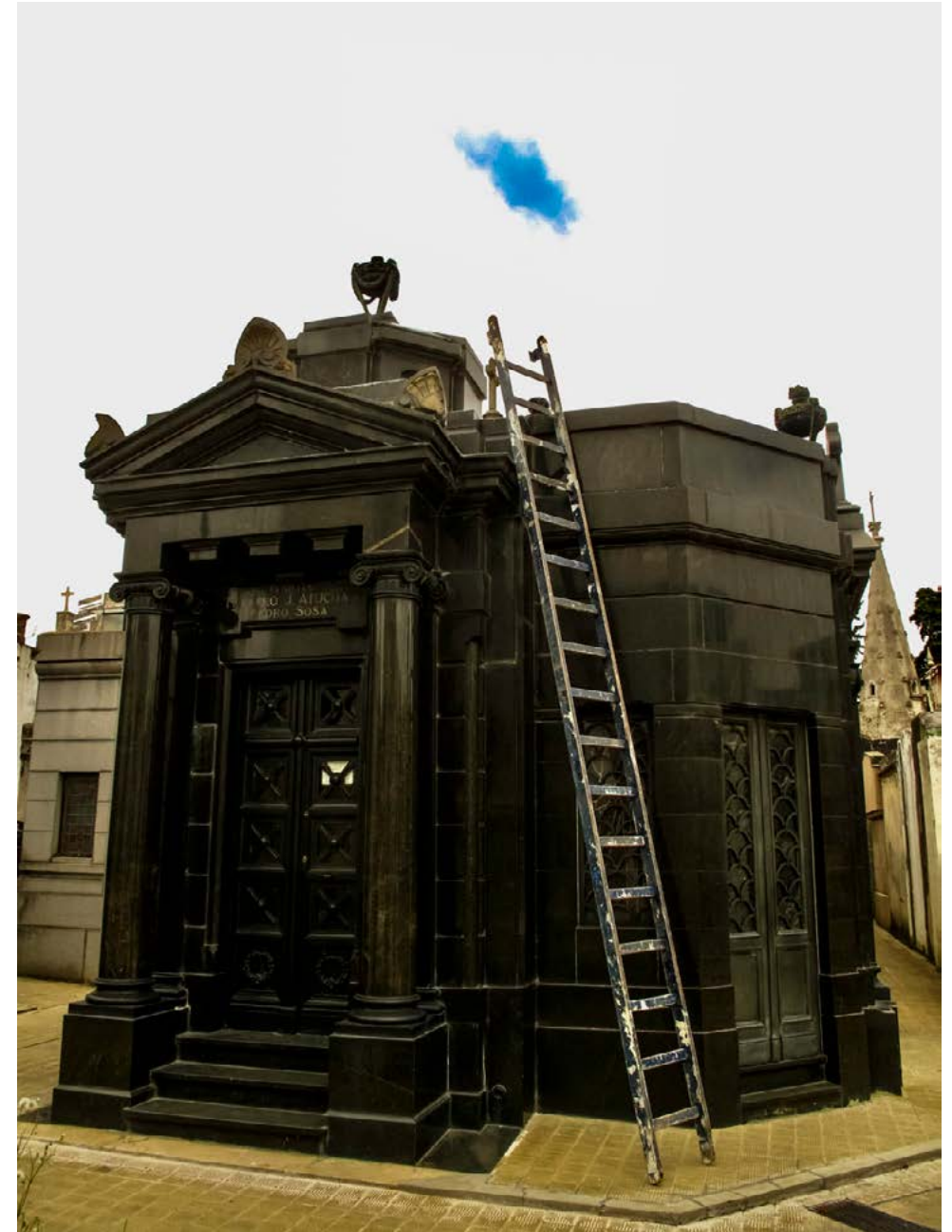
Barrio Recoleta No. 1, Buenos Aires, 2009

Dibond print
28 x 30 in



Barrio Recoleta No. 2, Buenos Aires, 2009

Dibond print
22 x 30 in



La Recoleta Cemetery No. 1, Buenos Aires, 2009

Dibond print
44 x 33 in



La Recoleta Cemetery No. 2, Buenos Aires, 2009

Dibond print

42 x 31 1/2 in



Barrio Retiro No. 1, Buenos Aires, 2009

Dibond print

24 x 18 in

PUERTO BEMBERG



Puerto Bemberg No. 2, Argentina, 2009

Dibond print
20 x 18 in



Puerto Bemberg No. 3, Argentina, 2009

Dibond print
18 x 22 3/4 in



Puerto Bemberg No. 4, Argentina, 2009

Dibond print

26 7/8 x 32 in



Puerto Bemberg No. 1, Argentina, 2009

Dibond print

21 1/2 x 18 in

RENÉ BALCER: THE GATEKEEPERS OF LA RECOLETA

BY MARCOS ZIMMERMANN

When Juan de Garay founded Buenos Aires in 1580, the aristocratic neighborhood of Recoleta was nothing more than a hill full of meadows overlooking the Río de la Plata, whose shores reached present-day Avenida del Libertador. In his original plan, Garay distributed land to the sixty-five people who had come with him. One of those lots belonged to Rodrigo Ortíz de Zárate, and there he founded Los Ombúes farm. Over time, the farm was passed down to several owners, until the 18th century, when one of them donated a plot of land to the Franciscan Recollect monks of San Pedro de Alcántara so that they might have a place to build their convent and the Iglesia del Pilar (Pilar Church). Those monks gave the neighborhood its name.

When, in 1871, Buenos Aires was plagued by a yellow fever epidemic, the city's upper class, who at that time lived in the neighborhoods of San Telmo and Montserrat, moved to the Recoleta area which, sitting at a higher elevation, had fewer disease-transmitting mosquitoes. Meanwhile, the massive homes of San Telmo and Montserrat, abandoned by the upper class, started to transform into *conventillos*, or tenements, large homes occupied by various families from the *criollo* population, descendants of slaves, and, above all, immigrants who had recently arrived from Europe with very limited economic resources. These groups were forced to share their life within the small spaces into which those mansions were subdivided by the

State as a way to house the growing influx of immigrants that Argentina was experiencing at the time. The resulting overcrowding was the cause of many deaths during the yellow fever epidemic, but it also gave rise to and supported a unique *porteña* or port city culture, forged in that kind of community living. Those living quarters, among other things, led to the birth of the tango, a simultaneously sad and moving musical genre, now recognized the world over as one of the most outstanding symbols of Argentina, whose many lyrics were written by authors born in those *conventillos*.

In contrast to this form of community life experienced by the Argentine lower class of the era, the upper class that had moved to Recoleta were, at the same time, building up the new neighborhood with huge mansions of a so-called *Belle Époque* style that, as a result of their luxurious nature and ostentatiousness, distanced themselves from the rest of the community. Designed with a combined lavish, academist, and eclectic style, their French features were arbitrarily mixed with Italian forms, solely to cater to the aesthetic whims that the exceedingly rich oligarchs imposed on the European architects they brought to Argentina specifically for that purpose. This is how the most exclusive neighborhood of Buenos Aires came to be, inhabited by an elite class that came into their wealth thanks to the enormous tracts of land that had been ripped from native populations in the most ruthless, brutal way,

through extermination campaigns such as the misnamed "Campaign of the Desert," started in 1879 by Julio Argentino Roca in Patagonia. It was then that the great Argentine ranches were born, infinite expanses of extremely fertile land, seized from native inhabitants after brutally massacring or enslaving them under the pretense of "civilizing" the homeland. These ranches led to a great accumulation of wealth among landowners.

Indeed, this is the historical, social, and political fabric that envelops the neighborhood of Recoleta, where René Balcer's photographic essay is anchored and where it develops its deep, suggestive dimension. Coming from quite a different background but armed with a premonition that seems guided by a compass, Balcer pointed his camera at Recoleta, the *porteño* neighborhood where he stayed for a short time during a visit to Buenos Aires. But it was plenty of time for him to come up with a completely engrossing photographic essay. In particular, it is a project that, at first glance, seems to feature a certain simplicity, but which, when studied from a more profound point of view, takes on a much deeper dimension.

When asking Balcer what drove him to produce this series of photographs about the Recoleta's electric gatekeepers, he only says: "They are intricate, shiny, made with rich materials, artistic in their own way. And given Argentine's modern history, elitist and classist. That is why I compare them with the doorways of poorer buildings, with very simple buzzers or broken buzzers or

ultimately no buzzer at all and the door just left open for all to enter. It just occurred to me that these doorways spoke volumes, they are everyday things, things we see without noticing, very functional yet full of meaning." And then he repeats a phrase that has guided him since he heard it uttered by one of his mentors: "I just want to make you see."

But what is it that René Balcer wants to make us see? As soon as he told me the title of his essay, "Desaparecidos," and knowing that he was a foreigner, I felt compelled to warn him of the meaning and heaviness that this word implies for the Argentine population. A word that refers to the most shameful event in our contemporary history, perpetrated by the dictatorship that ravaged our country from 1976 to 1983. In that period, more than 30,000 Argentines, now *desaparecidos*, were tortured in concentration camps, killed, or thrown alive into the sea during "death flights," for political reasons. Faced with this warning, Balcer explains: "I was of course aware of the original meaning. But in this essay the word 'desaparecidos' has a different meaning." "The 'desaparecidos' in this case may be the well-heeled residents who disappear behind their ever fancier "porteros eléctricos," seeking refuge from social realities and responsibility, while the lower classes have no such protection." They are the descendants of those Argentines from the *Belle Époque* era who –according to Balcer– nowadays disappear from the gaze of the rest of the population, denying the reality that surrounds them,

hiding behind their electric gates, and isolating themselves from any contact with the nation's commoners. In this way, Balcer imposes a diametrical change to the meaning of the word *desaparecidos*. An act that, to most Argentines, would seem to conspire against the immense symbolism of this word in our country. But, as strange as it may sound, and though "the disappearers" would be a more suitable term in this case, his idea becomes ever more valid as we dive into the depths of his essay.

Recoleta is indeed home to many Argentines who are not only the direct successors of those who massacred the native peoples in the 19th century, but who were also at the forefront –through acts or omissions– of some of the most denigrating and anti-Republic behaviors seen in Argentina in recent decades. And although it seems obvious that a neighborhood cannot be judged *en bloc* or be assumed to have a singular ideology –this would be an unacceptable type of prejudice– we can wholeheartedly agree that a significant portion of the inhabitants of Recoleta, whom Balcer identifies as the subjects of his photographic essay, have contributed to –or at least tolerated– the different forms of oppression deployed against our nation at different times in its history.

But let's go a little further and try to understand when René Balcer first began to experience the impulses that drove him to produce this essay, in this neighborhood, with this title. The first clue is offered up by the photographer himself, who says that, ever since he was a child, he felt the need to fight injustice. In his first years studying photography, he was captivated by the images of the great social photographers, such as Robert Capa, Werner Bischof, Gordon Parks, Dorothea Lange, Leonard Freed, many of whom

were active participants in the "concerned photography" movement. It is evident that this commitment to others is one of the first features present in Balcer's essay. But, although this particular project is based around social concern, his style and way of expressing this concept differ from that of the teachers he so admires. And this is where an extremely intriguing aspect of Balcer's work reveals itself. Because, although Balcer's photographic essay includes a social concern similar to that displayed by the great photographers mentioned above, the style set forth in his buzzer photographs makes direct reference to the photographs of Bernd and Hilla Becher, for whom inanimate objects also "speak." The Bechers' photographs, as well as Balcer's, reflect an aesthetic deprived of all mannerism, imbued with marked technical rigor. This alleged simplicity gives the images a realism so great that, at times, it seems to stand in opposition to their deeper meaning. But although the style of both portfolios is among the most austere ever witnessed in the world of photography, they both clearly feature an artistic discourse that goes beyond form and which, curiously, ends up being foreshadowed and emphasized by such extreme realism.

This apparent contradiction between depth of content and simplicity of form reflected by Balcer's aesthetic style is anything but innocent. The artist achieves his synthesis by relying on two secrets that he keeps close to his heart, combining them in the most surprising way. The first can be found in the ideas that support the work of Marcel Duchamp: "the concept lies behind the apparent," "thought modifies what is seen," "truth is revealed in the obvious." Because, just as Duchamp displays a toilet in an exhibit and thus turns it into a work of art, René Balcer also shows us a series of cold-looking devices with shiny buttons, transformed into works of art,

thanks to the context in which they are shown. As in the case of Duchamp, the fact that these devices appear in artistic photographs, while also being displayed in an art book, is what turns them into art and gives them new meaning. But the game proposed by Balcer goes further, revealing a second, even deeper secret. Balcer photographs buzzers in the Buenos Aires neighborhood that serves as the home to a social class that "rejects the reality" surrounding them. And here is where Balcer's double game emerges. Because, to comment on that specific class, the photographer has chosen a photographic aesthetic of absolute realism. Thus, his portraiture takes on the form of the very fears of the nation's commoners expressed by that social class. In this way, his photographs are stamped with the exact dilemma of this Argentine elite that refuses to enter into contact with others. And, so, his work becomes doubly conceptual.

Not only is it evident that the artistic operation developed by Balcer in his photographs does not end there, but it also alludes to an immanent characteristic possessed by all buzzers. Something that goes beyond the particular history of Recoleta and is linked to the social development experienced by almost any large city. Because metropolises long ago ceased to be the humanist meeting place proposed by the European Renaissance model as a reaction to the palatial, walled-off monumentality of medieval cities. As the 15th century saw a transition from feudal economies to mercantilist ones, this gave rise to more inclusive cities. Peasants abandoned work in the feudal fields, choosing to move to the city as merchants, which in turn made these cities more populated and less elitist. But a mere four centuries later, the uncontrolled development of mercantile liberalism has once again transformed the city into a series of compartmentalized spaces. And, today, there

is an immense flow of ordinary people who have no place in certain ontological hierarchies present in the world's great cities.

This general contemporary situation is also on display in Balcer's essay. And it is precisely in this expansion of the underlying meaning behind his work that we can begin to understand the link between the photographs he took in Buenos Aires, the name he chose for his essay, and certain events more closely tied to him, ones that occurred in his country of origin. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada reported the disappearance and deaths of more than 4,000 Indigenous children from residential schools, which occurred over more than a century (from 1883 to 1996). They had been forcibly taken there after being torn from their families. This concern is made manifest by Balcer. And, in a sense, it exists as a backdrop for his work, one that refers to a story that has sadly been repeated throughout the Americas.

There is one final aspect to this complex artistic operation, with the various sides and readings that René Balcer achieves with a few simple buzzers, that I would be remiss not to mention. One last layer of the onion that is worth peeling back, related to the concept of "object of desire" or "*objet petit a*" described by Freud and Lacan, respectively. With these different names, both psychiatrists identified the same remnant of original satisfaction, lived and kept in man's memory. A remnant that we then eternally seek, with the aim of finding that primary and mythical pleasure, always so elusive. That object of desire –they affirm– is never present in the conscious mind, but rather comes out through disguised impulses whose original matrix we are unable to get a clear view of, and even less able to handle. Seen from this perspective, Balcer's buzzers are also the concrete remnant of social unconsciousness

of class differentiation, present in today's world. But, upon closer analysis, there is an even deeper message in Balcer's portraits of these buzzers, one previously expressed in Lacan's famous phrase: "*Only idiots believe in the reality of the world.*" In other words, is this back-and-forth between reality and backdrop, displayed in Balcer's work, not also a reflection on this unconscious structure of modes of ontological communication—non-communication, one that we can only perceive through substitutes, as referred to by Freud and Lacan? And if so, might the artistic operation suggested by René Balcer's photographs call on us to wonder about the effectiveness or fragility of ways of expressing profound statements through art? Or, even further, be a warning about the difficulties faced by any artist with a commitment to the world when presented with the challenge of using their art to express the deepest concepts of life and society?

In all of this, I would simply like to point out that René Balcer encompasses a sensibility that I find comparable to that of André Kertész, a specialist in the use of direct photography to capture that which did not exist or could not be seen. It seems to be this same ability to photograph the unphotographable, to talk about that which is not being said, that is made explicit in Balcer's photographs. Displayed with the pseudo-innocence of an industrial catalog, but transformed, thanks to an entire conceptual operation, into thought-provoking objects. Because there is much to be admired in this artist's ability to, with the simplest of photographs, reveal everything that lies behind them. To make us feel so clearly that which exists but has not been photographed. To include in a single image that which is shown and that which is missing, all at the same time. If there was any doubt, one need only look at the last photograph in this series which, in my

opinion, sums up the entire project. In it, the buzzer he is creating a portrait of has ceased to exist. The object is no longer there. We only see the trace on the wall of the place where it once was. Its shadow. A trace that, through negation, comes into existence. In the end, this is the greatest symbol of a "disappearance."

Art always arrives as a lifeline for man, helping provide explanations for people. Through his essay, René Balcer allows us to recall the origins and continued existence of an Argentine social class that is constantly transforming and reappearing in different costumes, only to distance itself from the rest of its people. It also speaks about his country. But, more than anything, it pushes us to wonder about the limits of art, and to explore the potential found in new conceptual forms of photographic expression. In a certain sense, it is an assertion that photography can still cast a light into mankind's darkest areas. All of this is present in René Balcer's photo essay. An exercise full of reflections, hidden in these photographs of buzzers, which are revealed here, thanks to the eye of the photographer, full of new and profound meaning.

Marcos Zimmermann
Buenos Aires, October 2022

Marcos Zimmermann is an Argentine photographer and writer. The author of twelve books of photography, his award-winning work is collected by museums the world over and has been the subject of numerous international exhibitions.

RENÉ BALCER: LOS PORTEROS ELÉCTRICOS DE LA RECOLETA

POR MARCOS ZIMMERMANN

Cuando en 1580 Juan de Garay fundó Buenos Aires, el aristocrático barrio de la Recoleta era solo una loma repleta de pastizales que balconeaba sobre el Río de la Plata, cuyas costas llegaban hasta la actual Avenida del Libertador. En su plan fundador, Garay repartió tierras a sesenta y cinco personas que lo acompañaban. Uno de aquellos lotes le correspondió a Rodrigo Ortíz de Zárate en el cual fundó la chacra Los Ombúes. Con el correr del tiempo la chacra pasó a mano de varios propietarios, hasta que en el siglo XVIII uno de ellos donó una parcela a los monjes franciscanos Recoletos de San Pedro de Alcántara para que construyeran allí su convento y la Iglesia del Pilar. De aquellos monjes proviene el nombre del barrio.

Cuando en 1871 una epidemia de fiebre amarilla asoló Buenos Aires, la clase alta porteña que habitaba en los barrios de San Telmo y Montserrat se desplazó a la zona de la Recoleta ya que, al ser un área más alta, había allí menos mosquitos transmisores de la enfermedad. Mientras tanto, las inmensas casonas de San Telmo y Montserrat abandonadas por la clase alta, empezaron a convertirse en "conventillos", caserones habitados por numerosas familias de criollos, descendientes de esclavos y, sobre todo, inmigrantes recién llegados de Europa de bajos recursos económicos. Estos grupos se vieron obligados a compartir la vida dentro de los pequeños espacios en que fueron subdivididas aquellas mansiones por el Estado, a fin de poder alojar el creciente

flujo inmigratorio que vivía la Argentina de entonces. Tal hacinamiento fue la causa de muchas muertes durante aquella epidemia. Pero también fue origen y sustanciación de una cultura porteña propia, forjada en aquella forma de vida en comunidad. Allí nació entre otras cosas el tango, esa expresión musical triste y emotiva a la vez. Un género hoy reconocido internacionalmente como uno de los símbolos más destacados de la Argentina, muchas de cuyas letras fueron escritas por autores nacidos en aquellos conventillos.

En contraposición a esta forma de vida comunitaria que vivía la clase baja argentina de entonces, la clase alta que se había desplazado a la Recoleta construyó en ese nuevo barrio, y en la misma época, enormes mansiones de pretendido estilo *Belle Époque* que, por su lujo y ampulosidad, imponían distancia con el resto de la comunidad. Diseñadas con un estilo fastuoso, academicista y ecléctico a la vez, los rasgos franceses se mezclaron en ellas con las formas italianas arbitrariamente, solo para complacer los caprichos estéticos que aquellos oligarcas riquísimos les imponían a arquitectos europeos traídos especialmente por ellos a la Argentina para tales fines. Así fue creándose el barrio de Buenos Aires más exclusivo, habitado por una elite enriquecida gracias a las enormes extensiones de campo arrancadas a los pueblos originarios de modo impiadoso y bestial, en campañas de exterminio como la mal llamada "Campaña del Desierto" iniciada en 1879 por Julio Argentino Roca en la Patagonia. Fue entonces cuando nacieron

las grandes estancias argentinas, espacios infinitos de tierra fertilísima, usurpada a los pobladores originarios luego de masacrarlos o esclavizarlos brutalmente con la excusa de "civilizar" la patria. Fue con estas estancias, que estos terratenientes se enriquecieron inmensamente.

Es en este entramado histórico, social y político que envuelve el barrio de la Recoleta donde se ancla el ensayo fotográfico de René Balcer y donde desarrolla su dimensión por demás sugestiva y profunda. Venido de otros aires pero munido de un presentimiento que parece guiado por una brújula, Balcer apuntó su cámara a la Recoleta, el barrio porteño en el cual se hospedó por breve tiempo durante una visita que realizó a Buenos Aires. Pero ese tiempo le bastó para proponer un ensayo fotográfico que nos deja absortos. Sobre todo por la sencillez que parece poseer una propuesta que, vista en profundidad, cobra una dimensión mucho más honda. Paso a explicarme.

Cuando uno le pregunta a Balcer qué es lo que lo empujó a hacer esta serie de fotografías sobre los porteros eléctricos de la Recoleta, él se limita a decir: "*They are intricate, shiny, made with rich materials, artistic in their own way. And given Argentina's modern history, elitist and classist. That is why I compare them with the doorways of poorer buildings, with very simple buzzers or broken buzzers or ultimately no buzzer at all and the door just left open for all to enter. It just occurred to me that these*

doorways spoke volumes, they are everyday things, things we see without noticing, very functional yet full of meaning." Y luego repite la frase que lo guía desde que la escuchó de boca de un profesor suyo: "*I just want to make you see*".

Pero, ¿qué es lo que René Balcer nos quiere hacer ver? Apenas él me refirió el título de su ensayo "Desaparecidos" y sabiéndolo extranjero, me vi en la obligación de advertirle el significado y la carga que esa palabra tiene para nosotros, los argentinos. Una palabra que remite al hecho más vergonzoso de nuestra historia contemporánea, perpetrado por la dictadura que asoló nuestro país entre 1976 y 1983. En ese período, más de 30.000 argentinos, hoy desaparecidos, fueron torturados en campos de concentración, asesinados o arrojados vivos al mar durante los "vuelos de la muerte", por motivos políticos. Es frente a esta advertencia, cuando Balcer explica: "*En este ensayo –dice– la palabra 'desaparecidos' tiene otra acepción. 'Estos desaparecidos' –aclara– son otros'. 'En este caso, son quienes se esconden detrás de los porteros eléctricos, evitando el contacto con los demás y defendiendo una concepción elitista de la vida que le da siempre la espalda a lo popular*". Son entonces los descendientes de aquellos argentinos de la *Belle Époque* quienes –según Balcer– hoy desaparecen de la mirada de los demás negando la realidad que los circunda, ocultándose detrás de los porteros eléctricos y aislándose de todo contacto con el pueblo. De este modo, Balcer

impone un cambio diametral en el significado de la palabra desaparecidos. Algo que para un argentino parecería conspirar contra el inmenso símbolo que representa esta palabra para nuestro pueblo. Pero, aunque suene extraño y en realidad sería “desaparecidos” una palabra más justa en este caso, su idea comienza a cobrar cada vez más validez a medida que nos sumergimos en las profundidades de su ensayo. Veamos porqué.

Es cierto que en Recoleta viven muchos de los argentinos que, no solamente son herederos directos de quienes masacraron a los pueblos originarios en el siglo XIX, sino que han sido protagonistas –por acción u omisión– de algunos de los comportamientos más denigrantes y anti republicanos que se hayan visto en la Argentina de los últimos decenios. Y aunque es obvio que un barrio no puede ser juzgado en bloque ni inferir que posee una ideología compacta –un prejuicio que sería inaceptable– coincidimos totalmente en que una buena parte de los habitantes de la Recoleta, los cuales Balcer identifica como sujetos de su ensayo fotográfico, ha contribuido –o cuanto menos tolerado– las diferentes formas de opresión desplegadas en diversas épocas sobre nuestro pueblo.

Pero vayamos más allá y tratemos de entender cuando nacieron en René Balcer las pulsiones que lo impulsaron a realizar este ensayo en este barrio y a ponerle este título. La primera pista la da el mismo fotógrafo, cuando refiere que desde niño sintió a la injusticia como algo que debía combatir. Que en sus primeros años del aprendizaje de fotografía, se deslumbró con las imágenes de grandes fotógrafos sociales, tales como *Robert Capa*, *Werner Bischof*, *Gordon Parks*, *Dorothea Lange* y *Henri Cartier-Bresson*, mucho de ellos enrolados en la “*concern photography*”. Está claro que ese compromiso con los demás

es uno de los primeros rasgos presentes en el ensayo de Balcer. Pero, aunque la preocupación social esté en la base de este trabajo, su estilo y manera de expresarlo es diferente al de sus admirados maestros. Y aquí comienza a revelarse un aspecto más que interesante del trabajo de Balcer. Porque, si bien el ensayo fotográfico de Balcer incluye una preocupación social semejante a la de los grandes fotógrafos nombrados más arriba, el estilo de sus fotografías de porteros eléctricos refiere directamente a las fotografías de Bernard y Hilla Becher para quienes –como para Balcer– los objetos inanimados también “hablan”. Tanto las fotografías del matrimonio Becher, como estas de Balcer, participan de una estética privada de todo manierismo e imbuida de una marcada rigurosidad técnica. Esta simplicidad que a primera vista parecen tener, les brinda un realismo tal que por momentos parece contraponerse al sentido profundo que poseen. Pero aunque el estilo de ambos trabajos sea de los más austeros que se hayan visto en fotografía, en ambos se vislumbra con claridad la presencia de un discurso artístico que va más allá de las formas y que, curiosamente, ese realismo extremo, preanuncia y enfatiza.

Pero esta aparente contradicción entre profundidad de contenido y simplicidad de forma que encierra la operación estética de Balcer, no es inocente. El artista consigue su síntesis apoyándose en dos secretos que él guarda y combina de manera sorprendente. El primero es posible hallarlo en las ideas que respaldan la obra de Marcel Duchamp: “el concepto se halla detrás de lo aparente”, “el pensamiento modifica lo visto”, “la verdad se revela en lo obvio”. Porque, tal como Duchamp exhibe un inodoro en una muestra y lo convierte así en objeto de arte, René Balcer también nos muestra una serie de aparatos de frío aspecto y teclado brillante, transformados

en objetos de arte, gracias al contexto en el que son mostrados. Como en el caso de Duchamp, la aparición de estos aparatos en fotografías de arte, que además son expuestas dentro de un libro de arte, los vuelve en sí mismos arte y les agrega un nuevo significado. Pero el juego que propone Balcer va más allá y revela un segundo secreto todavía más profundo. Balcer fotografía porteros eléctricos del barrio de Buenos Aires donde se refugia una clase social que “rechaza la realidad” que la circunda. Y aquí viene el doble juego de Balcer. Porque, para hablar de esa clase, el fotógrafo elige una estética fotográfica de absoluto realismo. Así, su retrato consigue la forma del mismísimo temor al pueblo expresado por esa clase social. De ese modo, deja impresa en sus fotografías el exacto dilema de esta elite argentina que reniega de su contacto con los demás. Y es así como su trabajo se vuelve doblemente conceptual. Asombroso!

Está claro que la operación artística que Balcer desarrolla con sus fotografías no termina allí. Y que también alude a un rasgo inmanente que poseen los porteros eléctricos. Algo que excede a la historia particular de la Recoleta y que está ligado al desarrollo social que han sufrido casi todas las grandes ciudades. Porque las metrópolis dejaron de ser hace tiempo el sitio humanista de reunión que propuso el modelo renacentista europeo como reacción a la monumentalidad amurallada y áulica de la ciudad medieval. La transformación de la economía feudal en economía mercantilista iniciada en el siglo XV, dio pie a una ciudad más inclusiva. El labriego abandonó los trabajos en los campos feudales para acudir a las ciudades convertido en comerciante y este cambio volvió a estas ciudades más pobladas y menos elitistas. Pero bastaron cuatro siglos más para que el desarrollo descontrolado del liberalismo mercantil haya transformado nuevamente a las

ciudades en espacios compartimentados. Y, hoy, hay un caudal inmenso de gente común y corriente que no tiene lugar en ciertas jerarquías ontológicas presentes en las grandes metrópolis.

Esta situación contemporánea general, también está expuesta en este ensayo de Balcer. Y es justamente en esta ampliación de sentido subyacente de su trabajo, donde se puede entender mejor un vínculo entre las fotografías realizadas por él en Buenos Aires, el nombre elegido para su ensayo, y ciertos hechos que lo atañen más directamente ocurridos en su país de origen: Canadá. Porque cabría preguntarse ¿qué impulsó a un renombrado guionista y escritor a realizar un ensayo fotográfico sobre los porteros eléctricos de un barrio de Buenos Aires? ¿Y qué lo hizo titularlo “desaparecidos”? Seguramente, parte de la respuesta esté en que, en 2015, la Comisión de la Verdad y la Reconciliación de Canadá denunció la desaparición y muerte de más de cuatro mil niños aborígenes ocurridas en escuelas residenciales durante más de un siglo (desde 1883 hasta 1996). Allí habían sido llevados a la fuerza luego de ser arrancados de sus familias. Esta preocupación es manifestada por Balcer. Y aparece de manera como telón de fondo de este trabajo que refiere una historia tristemente repetida en toda América.

Solo quisiera agregar que esta compleja operación de arte, de varias aristas y varias lecturas que despliega René Balcer a partir de unos simples porteros eléctricos, encierra un último aspecto que no quiero dejar de mencionar. Una última capa de la cebolla que vale la pena desentrañar y que tiene relación con el concepto de “objeto de deseo” o de “objeto “a” descriptos por Freud y Lacan respectivamente. Ambos psiquiatras identificaban con estos nombres diversos, a una misma huella de satisfacción original

vívda y guardada en la memoria del hombre. Una huella que luego buscamos eternamente para hallar aquél placer primario y mítico que resulta siempre inasible. Ese objeto de deseo –afirman– no se hace jamás presente en la conciencia sino a través de impulsos disfrazados, cuya matriz original estamos imposibilitados de vislumbrar claramente y, mucho menos, de manejar. Vistos desde esta perspectiva, los porteros eléctricos de Balcer son también huellas concretas de un inconsciente social de diferenciación de clases, presente en el mundo actual. Pero, haciendo un análisis más afilado, hay un mensaje aún más profundo en el retrato de estos porteros eléctricos de Balcer, que fue ya expresado la famosa frase de Lacan: *“Sólo los idiotas creen en la realidad del mundo”*. Esto es, ¿no será también este juego de realidad–trasfondo, expuesto en la obra de Balcer, una reflexión sobre esta estructura inconsciente de modos de comunicación–incomunicación ontológica que solo podemos percibir a través de sustitutos a la que se refieren Freud y Lacan? Y si así fuera, ¿no será la operación artística que proponen las fotografías de René Balcer un llamado a preguntarnos acerca de la eficacia o fragilidad de las formas de expresar enunciados profundos a través del arte? O, aún más, ¿un alerta sobre las dificultades de todo artista comprometido con el mundo para expresar con su arte los conceptos más hondos de la vida y de la sociedad?

Por todo esto solo me cabe señalar en René Balcer una sensibilidad que encuentro paragonable a la de André Kertész, especialista en plasmar en una fotografía directa aquello que no existía, o no podía ser visto. Parece ser esta misma capacidad para fotografiar lo infotografiable, para hablar de lo que no se dice, aquello que queda explícitado en estas fotografías de Balcer. Desplegadas con la pseudo inocencia que puede poseer un

catálogo industrial pero convertidas, gracias a toda su operación conceptual, en objetos movilizados del pensamiento. Porque es admirable la capacidad de este artista para, valiéndose de fotografías de gran simpleza, dejar al descubierto todo aquello que se halla detrás. Para hacernos sentir tan claramente lo que existe pero no ha sido fotografiado. Para incluir en una imagen lo que se muestra y lo que falta, al mismo tiempo. Si hubiera alguna duda de esta enorme capacidad de Balcer, no hay más que mirar la última fotografía de esta serie que, a mi juicio, resume todo el trabajo. En ella no existe el portero eléctrico que él retrata. El objeto ya no está. Solo vemos la huella en la pared del sitio donde alguna vez hubo uno. Su sombra. Un rastro que, a través de la negación, le da existencia. Al fin y al cabo, el símbolo más grande de una “desaparición”.

El arte acude siempre como tabla de salvación del hombre y ayuda a dar explicaciones a los pueblos. A través de su ensayo, René Balcer nos permite refrescar el origen y la vigencia de una clase social argentina que se transforma y reaparece siempre con diferentes ropajes, solo para establecer distancia con su pueblo. También nos habla de su país. Pero además, nos empuja a preguntarnos sobre los límites del arte y a explorar el potencial de las nuevas formas conceptuales de expresión fotográfica. De alguna manera, una reivindicación de las posibilidades que aún brinda la fotografía para alumbrar las zonas más oscuras del hombre. De todo esto nos habla René Balcer en su ensayo. Un ejercicio lleno de reflexiones ocultas, escondidas en estas fotografías de porteros eléctricos, que se revelan aquí, gracias al ojo del fotógrafo, pletóricos de una significación nueva y profunda.

Marcos Zimmermann
Buenos Aires, Octubre de 2022

RENÉ BALCER

Born 1954, Montréal, Québec, Canada

Lives in Los Angeles, Works Nationally and Internationally

EDUCATION

1978 Bachelor of Arts, Communication Arts, Loyola/Concordia University, Montréal, Québec – Film & Photography

EXHIBITIONS

2024 *Forensics* (solo exhibition), Hutchinson Modern & Contemporary, New York, NY
2024 *Backbone* (w/Xu Bing), Asia Society Texas Center, Houston, TX
2015 *Backbone* (w/Xu Bing), SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, GA
2014 *Backbone* (w/Xu Bing), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA
Backbone (w/Xu Bing), Asia Society Hong Kong Center, Admiralty, Hong Kong
Backbone (w/Xu Bing), Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei City, Taiwan
2012 *Backbone* (w/Xu Bing), Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT
2011 *Backbone* (w/Xu Bing), Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA
1977 Photo Group Show, Media Gallery, Concordia University, Montréal, Québec, Canada

SELECTED AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

2018 Golden Dragon Award, Best Documentary, Ferrara Film Festival, Ferrara, Italy
2014 Best of Festival, Documentary Short Film, Richmond International Film Festival, Richmond, VA
2010 Champion of Justice Award, Alliance for Justice, Washington, DC
2008 Honorary LLD, Concordia University, Montréal, Québec, Canada
2006 Career Award, Reims International Television Festival, Reims, France
2005 Best Television Episode, Edgar Awards, New York, NY
2004 Margaret Sanger Award, Planned Parenthood
2003 Alumnus of the Year, Concordia University, Montréal, Québec, Canada
2000 Best Television Episode, Edgar Awards, New York, NY
1999 Best Television Episode, Edgar Awards, New York, NY
1998 Award for Best Episodic Television, Writers Guild of America, Los Angeles, CA
1997 Emmy for Best Drama, Academy of Television Arts, New York, NY
Outstanding Producer of Episodic Television, Producers Guild of America, Los Angeles, CA
Peabody Award, Henry Grady College of Journalism, University of Georgia, Athens, GA

1993 Best Television Episode, Edgar Awards, New York, NY

FILMOGRAPHY

2024 *Painting the Chinese Dream*, documentary, writer/producer
2020–2024 *FBI: Most Wanted*, TV series, creator/writer/showrunner
2017 *Above the Drowning Sea*, documentary, co-writer/co-director
Law & Order True Crime, limited series, creator/writer/showrunner
2016 *Big Orange Predator*, video short, writer/executive producer
2015 *For Justice*, TV Pilot, writer/executive producer
2013 *Watching Tea Leaves in Shanxi*, video short, writer/director
Jo, TV series, creator/writer/showrunner
The No Name Painting Association, documentary, writer/producer
Blue Sky, video short, writer/director
2011 *Xu Bing Tobacco Project Virginia*, documentary, writer/producer
Law & Order LA, TV series, writer/showrunner
2009–2014 *Law & Order UK*, TV series, writer/creator
2007–2008 *Paris Criminal Inquiries*, TV series, writer/creator
2006 *Proof of Lies*, TV film, writer
2001–2011 *Law & Order Criminal Intent*, TV series, creator/writer/showrunner
2000 *Hopewell*, TV Pilot, writer/executive producer
1997 *Mission Protection Rapprochée*, TV series, creator/writer
1994 *The Crow*, feature film, writer
1992 *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, TV series, writer
1990–2010 *Law & Order*, TV series, writer/showrunner/director
1991 *Stranger in the Family*, television film, writer
1990 *Solar Crisis*, feature film, writer
1989 *Out on the Edge*, television film, writer
1979 *Twist of Fate*, film short, writer/director
1978 *Turcot Interchange*, film short, writer/director
1976 *Solid State*, film short, writer/director
1976 *Averbach Vs. Zak*, film short, writer/director

SELECTED BOOKS, ARTICLES, INTERVIEWS AND FILMS

2024 Smith, Brian, and The Wolfsonian Museum. "A Conversation between René Balcer and Pulitzer-Prize winning photographer Brian Smith at the Wolfsonian, Miami." FIU, 2024.
Tantimedh, Adi. "Seeing As: Former Law & Order Showrunner René Balcer Talks Photobook." *Bleeding Cool News*, January 21, 2024.
2023 Hobbs, Robert, Xu Bing, Ghiora Aharoni, Marcus Zimmermann, and Naomi Hirahara.

- Seeing As: René Balcer*. London: ACC Art Books, 2023.
- Nakamori, Yasufumi, and Nicola Zavaglia. *A Conversation between René Balcer and Tate Modern Senior Photography Curator Yasufumi Nakamori at the Century Association, New York*. Time & Rhythm Cinema, 2023.
- 2022 Maier-Katkin, Birgit. "Documentaries about Jewish Exiles in Shanghai." In *East Asian German Cinema*, edited by Joanne Miyang Cho. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2022.
- 2018 Hubert, Amelia. "Above the Drowning Sea." *Meer*, March 8, 2018.
- 2016 Zavaglia, Nicola. *Journey to Ithaca*. Time & Rhythm Cinema, 2016.
- 2014 Villez, Barbara. *Law And Order New York Police Judiciaire: La justice en prime time*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2014.
- 2013 Kallas, Christina. *Inside the Writers' Room: Conversations with American TV Writers*. London: Red Globe Press, 2014.
- 2012 Kaplan, Merrill, and Timothy R. Tangherlini, ed. *News from Other Worlds*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: North Pinehurst Press, 2012.
- Nichols-Pethick, Jonathan. *TV Cops: The Contemporary American Television Police Drama*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2012.
- 2011 Shapiro, Ben. *Primetime Propaganda*. New York: Broadside, 2011.
- 2010 Brennan, Emily. "Moral Convictions: An Interview with the producer of Law & Order." *America Magazine*, February 22, 2010.
- 2009 Balcer, René. "Interview with René Balcer." Interview by Glenn Greenwald. *Salon*, September 25, 2009.
- Conan, Neal. "Why We Love Crime Fiction." NPR, August 9, 2009.
- Horton, Scott. "The People v. The Torture Team: Six Questions for Law & Order's René Balcer." *Harper's Magazine*, October 5, 2009.
- 2008 "On the Use and Misuse of Power: René Balcer." *Concordia Journal*, November 6, 2008.
- 2007 Carter, Bill. *Desperate Networks*. New York: Crown Currency, 2007.
- 2003 Stevens, Brad. *Monte Hellman: His Life and Films*. Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2003.
- 2002 Winckler, Martin. "Les miroirs de la vie." *Le Passage*, 2002.
- 1998 Courier, Kevin, and Susan Green. *Law & Order: The Unofficial Companion*. Kent: Renaissance Books, 1998.

SELECTED ARTICLES AND ESSAYS BY RENÉ BALCER

- 2024 Balcer, R. "Backbone," "Xu Bing: Word Alchemy." Asia Society Texas Center, 2024.
- 2014 Balcer, R. "Backbone: Two Friends at Work," "It Begins with Metamorphosis: Xu Bing." Asia Society Hong Kong Center, 2014.
- Balcer, R. "Preface: On Collecting Hasui." In *Water and Shadow: Kawase Hasui and Japanese Landscape Prints*. Leiden and Richmond: Hotei Publishing and Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2014.
- 2013 Balcer, R. "Kawase Hasui: Collecting a Versatile Modern Master." In *Impressions*,

Journal of the Japan Society of America, no. 34 (2013): 109.

- 2010 Balcer, R. "Confucius, Listen." *Written By Magazine*, September/October 2010.
- Balcer, R. "Writers Without Borders." *Written By Magazine*, April/May 2010.
- 1980 Balcer, R. "The LA Magnet." *Cinema Canada Magazine*, December 1980.
- 1979 Balcer, R. "A Masterwork: Apocalypse Now." *Cinema Canada Magazine*, June 1979.

COVER IMAGE

René Balcer
From the series *Desaparecidos*

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