

L'ŒIL DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE

Ettore Molinaro Collection : Dialogues #23 : Agata Wiczorek & André Kertész

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Agata Wiczorek, Disguised portrait I (from Fetish of the Image Series), 2019, Poland / André Kertész, Untitled (Advertisement for Diana Slip), 1930 ca., France – Courtesy Ettore Molinaro Collezione

This is the twenty-third dialogue from the **Ettore Molinaro Collection**. A dialogue that I care a lot about and that's why I decided to write it in the first person. The passage to the self, always so dense, is a tribute to **Agata Wiczorek**, a photographer whom I collect, support and whom I have the honour of presenting on the occasion of her splendid project «Growing», recently exhibited at the cultural association Procurarte in Lisbon. A constant dialogue between me and Agata and I am happy to have witnessed the birth of an artist.

I first met the work and then the author. And behind the great portraits of that extraordinary genre of actor-performer-explorer that are the Maskers, I didn't imagine finding a young woman like Agata Wieczorek. Sometimes the imagination superimposes the body of the photograph and the body of whoever creates it. Not in this case, where the extreme subversion of the theme corresponds to an innocent look that reminds of Alice in Wonderland, blue gaze and blond hair. After all, isn't it Lewis Carroll's creature who meets the Cheshire Cat on her initiatory journey? And isn't it the Cheshire Cat who reminds the lost girl that the choice of one's way depends on where one wants to go? There are no entrances or exits, just possibilities. Valuable advice, which Agata has welcomed and it is precisely the audacity to wander and set her gaze on other realities, even other identities, that pushed me towards her work.

I was her first collector and I believe that the extraordinary images of the series *Fetish of the Image and Second Skin*, taken in the transition between the film school in Łódź, Poland, where Agata was born in 1992, and the entrance to Le Fresnoy in France, have found in my world a welcoming home, nocturnal even in the solar hours, phantasmagorical in the labyrinth of references, coincidences, memories. And this dialogue is the evidence. When I started wondering about which photograph to combine with the mysterious face portrayed by Agata, a male face in depth and a female one on the surface, I found many answers. Instinctively I could have chosen Pierre Molinier, another essential masker, or Yasumasa Morimura, or Joel Peter Witkin, because in a certain way this portrait is an exhumation, or even Roger Ballen and his cemetery ghosts. I could have chosen Charles Guyette for fetish consonance in a New York of the 50s, or an anonymous German at work ten years later. Instead I decided for André Kertész, not the known one from the *Distorsions*, but his unpublished and clandestine work created for Diana Slip's «particulière» lingerie maison.

Also in this case, behind the female name is a man, Léon Vidal, who in the 1930s had launched a challenge to the queen of «modern lingerie», Yva Richard, by opening a fashion house and a publishing house both of which promised access to the realm of fetishism. Corsets, patent leather boots that detract from naturalness to the touch, whips, gloves, stockings and suspenders, and all of this photographed by Brassai, Roger Schall, André Kertész, and narrated in the pages of the *Éditions du Couver-Feu*. The ideal time is the curfew, a tribute to the dark and its followers. Yet in his atelier Kertész had created a luminous set to enhance the very white flesh of the two protagonists and the exciting sparkle of the skin. There is no pain, as the fetish culture wants, because it is always all about play and theatre, still a thin shadow does arch behind the *Dominatrix*. And I believe that this shadow is the open way that the Cheshire Cat mentions, not foreseen by any map, not even a mental one. Surely it is the same route that Chrissie Seams, a man under the silicone of a female skin, has loved to travel for many years. And above all I believe that Agata, the new Alice in Wonderland, will find other ways to penetrate the darkness and will always be beside us in the free fall of our masks.

Ettore Molinario

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