

EDGAR MARTINS

What Photography has in Common with an Empty Vase

From 14th of March to 8th of May
Private View on the 14th of May, 2020

This is Edgar Martins' second exhibition at the gallery. The first, comprised the series *Soliloquies and Soliloquies on Death, Life and Other Interludes* – a project which we presented at ARCO 18 along with José Manuel Ballester's work. This work stemmed from a research carried out by the artist at the Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences in Portugal over a three year period and included newly produced work as well as archive imagery from the Institute's collection. Martins' project scrutinised the tensions and contradictions inherent in the representation and imagination of death and the decisive but deeply paradoxical role that photography has played in its intelligibility and perception.

His new exhibition, titled: *What Photography has in Common with an Empty Vase* is a multifaceted body of work developed from a collaboration with Grain Projects and HM Prison Birmingham (the largest, category B prison in the Midlands, United Kingdom), its inmates, their families, as well as a myriad of other local organisations and individuals.

Using the social context of incarceration as a starting point, Martins explores the philosophical concept of absence, and addresses a broader consideration of the status of the photograph when questions of visibility, ethics, aesthetics and documentation intersect.

By productively articulating image and text, new and historical photography, evidence and fiction, Martins' work proposes to scrutinise how one deals with the absence of a loved one, brought on by enforced separation. From an ontological perspective it seeks answers to the following questions: how one represent a subject that eludes visualization, that is absent or hidden from view? How can documentary photography, in an era of fake news, best acknowledge the imaginative and fictional dimension of our relation to photographs?

By giving a voice to inmates and their families and addressing prison as a set of social relations rather than a mere physical space, Martins' work proposes to rethink and counter the sort of imagery normally associated with incarceration.

The project thus wilfully circumvents images whose sole purpose, Martins argues, is to confirm the already held opinions within dominant ideology about crime & punishment: violence, drugs, criminality, race – an approach that only serves to reinforce the act of photographing and photography itself as apotropaic devices.

Edgar Martins was born in Évora (Portugal), although he grew up in Macao (China) and in 1966 he moved to the United Kingdom, where he studied for a BA Photography at the London College of Printing & Distributive Trades, as well as for an MA in Photography at the London Royal College of Art. He has received many awards such as the New York Photography Award in 2008, the BES Photo Prize in 2009, the Sony World Photography Award in 2009 and in 2018, he also won the First Prize at the 2010 International Photography Awards, in the Fine Art Abstract category.

In addition to his artistic career, he has also published one novel entitled "Mãe deixa-me fazer o pino". His work is represented in many public and private collections and he was selected to represent Macao at the 54th edition of the Venice Biennale. He lives and works in the United Kingdom.