

Illuminated diaries

When Patricia invited me to write about Josefina as a precursor of what is now called intervened photography, I saw a common bond between Josefina Oliver and Patricia.

Incommensurable Josefina's work and the same disproportion in Patricia, following her prints, classifying, archiving, organizing, in her search for any information, any track, any minimal hint that contributes to the knowledge of the life and oeuvre of Josefina Oliver, figure that Patricia proposed to expose like an archeologist in the face of her discovery.



This immense photographic and written material presents itself as a story of the private life of her time -1875 to 1956- and, as female protagonist, her work acquires another dimension.

In 1892, Josefina Oliver starts a diary which she continues until her death, composed by 20 volumes, a total of 8400 pages, where she inserts her photos and composes a space for minimum stories of neighbours, a register of her habits and customs.

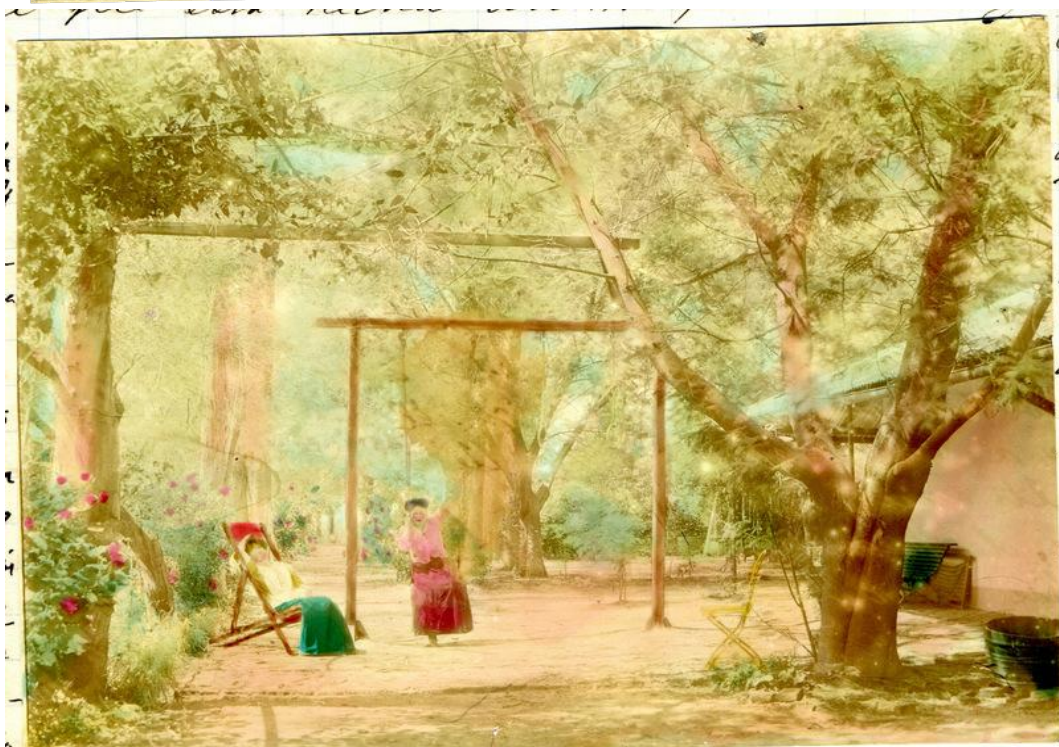
'Me saqué el 7 Octubre 1900'.

Autorretrato -Josefina Oliver- Diario 2, 1899-1902.

Did Josefina Oliver feel that call to write, breathless, a diary, to photograph and illuminate (colour) her shots, to cut out and assemble postcards, to send and receive as captive of a destiny without possibilities of being modify?

Or was it to her an anchoring in reality to push aside the pending shadow of the fear of madness?

In her photographic work, it can be observed the transformation that is accomplished through the passage from photography to painting; where, in some cases, the photographic skeleton or support dissolves in simple brush strokes and naive colours.



Catalina Oliver y Elvira Grau. Chacra Santa Ana, San Vicente, Bs. As., año 1901.
Foto e iluminado Josefina Oliver.

All of a sudden, her spontaneous and saturated work changes into cards and postcards elaborated with fineness and minuciosity. Put together with collage, photos and paintings that assemble and disassemble with originality. It interest me about Josefina the idea, which I share, that urge that leads the man or woman to alter or modify her reality and, in this case, the most real image of it.



Josefina Oliver y su ahijado Pedro Garcia Oliver, año 1905.
Postal. Foto, iluminado y collage Josefina Oliver.



Mercedes y Jenaro García Oliver, año 1906.
Postal. Foto, iluminado y collage Josefina Oliver.

We know through her images that she lived in a level that allowed her to travel, to stroll, to have meetings, friends, a full social life. Her costumes, poses, characters, in photographs put together as theater pieces, they seem to live a continued divertimento of a society, it would be said, without problems.



Josefina Oliver y amigos. Chacra Santa Ana, San Vicente, Bs. As.
Foto e iluminado Josefina Oliver

But we also know that, as an underground river, the water of the pain touch her nearby.
A series of family misfortunes darken her life, silence her pages, take her time.
I'm especially attracted by the mirror photos of Josefina Oliver's oeuvre.



Catalina Oliver en su habitación de Ecuador 1275, Bs. As., año 1899.
Foto Josefina Oliver.

The word “mirror” comes from the greek *speculum*. It means to watch, to observe more than to see; it implies a volitive and analytic action of the way of looking; to enquire into what it is not seen. Mirrors make us go into unintended riddles; they are not there, but reflect; they show, but we don’t know from where.



Josefina Oliver en su habitación de Ecuador 1275,
Bs. As.
Foto e iluminado Josefina Oliver.

We search for full knowledge, to look ourselves from the side, from behind, turning on us. I think there is in her act of question herself a desire to strengthen her person in the multiple, in what comes out of one to convert into two.

“The mirror that I am vacates me:
an endless falling down in myself
throws me to the horror of not being”¹

At the same time, the mirror turns into an element that fluctuates between the false and the true, the visible and the invisible, what is in the front and in the back. It is like wanting to know the whole person, as when the cubists showed in a drawing the hidden face of the object.

¹ Paz, O. (1960). “La caída II” (“The Fall 2”) in *Libertad bajo palabra (Freedom under oath)*, México: Fondo de Cultura Económica. (Traducción propia).

In the mirror, the real figure lengthens in its double, it continues, as if the real and the illusory formed one only piece.

They are quiet photos, everything very thought-out, very settled, beautifully considered.

Josefina Oliver delicately introduced herself in that tight space which the society of her time allowed her, and she knew how to own it with courage.

My acknowledgment.