

ANNA
MALAGRIDA
13.03—28.09.25
OPACITAS.
VEILING
TRANSPARENCY



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Tà

Anna Malagrida. (Trans)gazes of the sensible

Patricia Sorroche

‘Photography is, above all, a way of looking, it is not the same look. It is a way of seeing that has become conscious of itself, that has become reflexive.’

—Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 1977

What happens when we place ourselves in that intermediate space where the visible and the invisible intertwine? Anna Malagrida invites us to explore this question by delving into the dichotomy of opposites in her work, and by directing our gaze toward the space *in-between*, where our way of looking is amplified, expanded and transformed, blurring the boundaries between the perceptible and the imperceptible. Revisiting some of Malagrida’s works opens a path, a transmutation of our bodies and our drives as we move around her pieces. Like palimpsests, her works hold layers of memory for us to rewrite. Time, memory and narrative intertwine to confront us with a new perspective from which to observe the world.

Opacitas. Veiling Transparency takes as its starting point an apriorism where the poetic gesture reveals the political gesture. When Jacques Rancière speaks of the ‘distribution of the sensible’, what he offers us is the possibility of the gesture to modify and transform what is seen, felt or said within a society from a poetic space. Along the same lines, Martha Rosler maintains that poetry and art are spaces of resistance, as well as political and social reconfiguration. Based on this axiom, we can understand Malagrida’s photographs and works as a space where the poetic and the political intersect

Boulevard Sébastopol, 2008–09
Photographic print on Dibond, 145 × 216 cm

in a subtlety of visual nuances, allowing us to recodify ways of inhabiting space and time.

The journey begins with a hypallage, where the city is transformed into a text that is written and rewritten as we move forward. An accumulation of memories and desires, where each street, each wall, seems to tell a story waiting to be read. In the series *Vitrines* (Shop Windows, 2008-09), the city is highlighted as a place of tension, wherein Malagrida works on 'the epidermal space of the city'.¹ The financial crisis that devastated the economies of a global north during the early twenty-first century led to the bankruptcy of many businesses. The artist photographed and immortalised the shop windows of Parisian businesses forced to close as a consequence of the economic collapse. To conceal the view, the windows were painted or whitewashed, veiling the interior, creating absences. The photographs of these places, now hidden from view, place the postmodern subject in a liminal space, where the gaze is *para-actional*: we cannot see, but we can reinterpret the void. Here, the painted and erased surfaces invite us to draw upon the unconscious in order to activate these new visual paraphrases. Walking through those streets highlights the fragilities of being, the contemporary narratives marked by the strong tensions of a system alien to our daily lives.

An enormous pile of rubble in the middle of the gallery prevents the body from moving freely through the space. A ruin activated to challenge us directly, to make us reflect and think about our condition. It questions what remains as a memory of a past that projects us into the future; and it

1. Muriel Barthou, 'Entretien à Anna Malagrida', in *L'invisible photographique; pour une histoire de la photographie*. Paris: La lettre volée, 2019.

questions a present, as Andreas Huyssen recounted.² In this way, the ruin takes on a double dimension: both of a past with its scars and wounds, and of a future that is being built, which rises and walks, opening up as a space that enables a society continually emerging and re-emerging.

Continuing with the idea of opposites and dualities, our path takes us to the next space, more intimate, more enclosed, darker. As if we were entering a camera obscura or a lens shutter, the viewer is immersed in darkness; but this is a darkness that reveals a transparency, opening windows and walls to the outside, and placing us in the active condition of looking out.

Danza de mujer (Woman Dance, 2007) invites us to enter into an experience where the body is exposed in its fragile condition, 'reincorporating a sensitive look at that dialectical movement that, in part, the photographic device itself already deploys without imposing a reification of the world'.³ From a subtle artefact transporting us to a refuge in the Jordanian desert, a veil is swayed by the breeze entering through a small window. This simple poetic action condenses part of the characteristic axioms of Malagrida's works. The darkness of the refuge, with the light filtering from the desert outside, the black veil fluttering synchronously and asynchronously. These opposites operate with determination, reminding us that what prevents us from looking transparently limits our ways of interpreting and thinking about the world. The piece was made at a time of tension, when in France the veil was banned in all public places, and thus, Arab women were

2. Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.

3. Marta Dahó, 'Espacio de la continuidad. Lugares de la intersección. Algunas notas en torno a los trabajos de Anna Malagrida,' in *(In)visibilidad* (ex. cat.). La Coruña: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Gas Natural Fenosa, 2016.

rendered invisible and blurred in a system that did not recognise the singularities of certain communities. Through the dance of the veil, Malagrida questions and puts into crisis the politics of the social in relation to certain specific groups, and how these narrow visions propose ways of seeing the world while excluding an important part of it.

From the symbolic and the poetic, Malagrida's work opens up to the post-human condition of being, understood as a relational and concentric existence with its environment and communities. To understand this relational condition, Édouard Glissant referred to the poetics of relation, where the idea of time is cyclical, and societies can only be conceived in a structure of continuous relationships.

Another work encountered by the viewer is *Le laveur de carreau* (The Window Cleaner, 2010), where Malagrida draws a 'parallel between the gesture of a sublimated painter and that of a worker carrying out an entrusted task'.⁴ Here, the idea permeating the artist's work is established: the gesture becomes the subject of the action, the idea of genius as addressed by Walter Benjamin is made evident. The cleaner is a metaphor for the painter, who becomes blurred in his condition as a worker, in his social condition of being. In this video work, we find ourselves looking from inside a shop, while a worker lathers the window and then proceeds to remove the remains of water and soap with a squeegee. From the passive condition of the onlooker, we attend to the action happening before our eyes. In this way, we witness the moment of creation and also of destruction. The soapy water our *cleaner*

4. Étienne Hat, «Entretien. Anna Malagrida», in Anna Malagrida, *Vitrines*. Paris: Éditions Filigranes, 2025; *Paris barricadé*. Paris: Éditions Filigranes, 2025; and *Los muros hablan*. Paris: Éditions Filigranes, 2025. (Author's translation.)

spreads over the glass surface is a metonymy of the act of painting; a fleeting work, which disappearing shortly after, returns to the transparency of glass. As in previous works, Malagrida again operates from opposites, from the concepts of opacity and transparency. Just for an instant, she places us in an intermediate place, just as Marcel Broodthaers did in some of his most renowned films (for instance, in *Abb. 1. Projection d'un film du Musée d'Art Moderne*, 1971), where the camera was placed at the midpoint between the inside and the outside, in his case the gallery, but aiming at the same idea, at the place where art is conceived as a process in constant movement, a flow transcending the static to become transmutable.

Both the *Vitrines* series and *Le laveur de carreau* can be read as *trompe l'oeil* references to large Informalist canvases. As both John Berger and Antoni Tàpies remarked, art should allow us to discover the unknown, to enter into places where the tangible, the visible, cannot go. Art is the place of transformation, a place where the unknown emerges in its multiple and polysemic condition.

Although there is no set itinerary for the viewer to follow, the last of the pieces in this exhibition is *Point de vue* (2006), where new agents appear in dialogue with those we have encountered before. This installation was made in Cap de Creus, in the north of Catalonia, in a protected natural area, close to the border with France. Thanks to the Law of Natural Heritage and Biodiversity, after a few decades the tourist complex built here by Club Med was forced to close. Malagrida installed her camera inside this architectural complex, which remained standing as a vestige and trace of economic systems that try to evade certain norms and sustainability policies. In so doing, Malagrida returns us to the intermediate and intersectional space, since we encounter the traces people

have left on the windows, full of dust and sand; scratched phrases proclaiming their condition as the poetics of social archaeology. The dust becomes a 'residue'⁵ containing the possibility of the new, of what is to come, and of the passage of time.

The piece is also an allusion, a synecdoche where perspective plays a leading role. Composed of three large photographs, the piece reveals a landscape behind the dust, a perspective revealing our form of representation, whose signs are linked to society's power and knowledge structures. A theory influenced by Erwin Panofsky,⁶ who studied Renaissance perspective as a structure for representing time, place and society at a certain moment in history: something which structures the worldview. In this way, perspective becomes a space for representing socio-political systems, while in the Renaissance it adopted a homogeneous, infinite and ordered character, in contrast to the medieval or Romanesque vision where space was hierarchical. The classical and orthodox perspective proposed by this work invites us to think about how the forms of representation are ways of making the world visible and reproducing it. This idea points to the manner in which the telling of history is based on a structure, on a certain perspective that determines what is to be highlighted and ignores other events or facts running counter to historical hegemonies. It is also interesting to notice how the different layers are discovered to the viewer: first the dust, then the inscriptions and finally the landscape. And how, returning to the notion of distance and horizon, by way of passing through the glass we are led to reimagine the possibilities of the outside.

5. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Estética relacional*. Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo, 2006.

6. Erwin Panofsky, *La perspectiva como forma simbólica*. Barcelona: Tusquets, 1999 (1927).

In conclusion, operating from opposites, from the de-categorisation of traditional forms of representation and the overlapping of different languages, makes Malagrida's work move between textures, between places of the visible and the invisible, to immerse us in a dialogue of opposites. This dialogical premise with which we enter her works does not seek to block our view or interpretation, but rather opens up the multiplicity of discourse, of the image. Her work leads us to multiply our views, our ways of seeing the world, to make it more porous, while enabling other ways of understanding it, of transmuting it and traversing it. Her work forces us to confront our social and political condition of being, but from a poetic, liminal space, where contradiction is a symbol of the dualities of the human condition in the postmodern world. A place where we can meet and understand each other in possible societies of the common, from a collective and community-based place.

Shared Words. An Interview with Anna Malagrida

Imma Prieto

^{IP} In some of your early works, we already find the dichotomy between interior and exterior, an interior marked in many cases by the presence of the human being in a moment of introspection, as in *La bañera* (The Bath, 1999) or even alienation, as in *Telespectadores* (TV Viewers, 1999–2000). In fact, it seems like a preparatory path toward *Interiores* (Interiors, 2000–02). Tell us about this double meaning of interior, understood from the personal and the spatial.

^{AM} They were my first works, made between 1999 and 2002, and were influenced by the work of Humberto Rivas and by the notion of suspended time in photography: moments that seemed to challenge the very condition of the photographic instant. The images are very constructed; they are staged in interiors. I experimented with forms of lighting, drawing from the pictorial tradition of chiaroscuro and painters like Edward Hopper in particular. I used television monitors and computer screens as the only sources of lighting, and the low intensity of the light forced the models to pose for seconds, as they did in the first photographic portraits, in the nineteenth century, when the poses were long and the subjects had to relax their expressions. I was interested in the intensity of these portraits and the ambiguity produced by the precision of the faces, as well as their enigmatic and unfathomable depth. On the other hand, the way of lighting

was contemporary and alluded to the new ways of inhabiting an increasingly global city, in solitary interiors accompanied by screens, the new windows onto the world. These first portraits are situated in this context, staged in interiors and suspended in time, with the subjects absorbed by what is happening on the screens: an outside world that is inaccessible to the viewers of the image.

^{IP} I have always been interested in the project *Barrio Chino, la ville aveugle* (2003). Here, we find ourselves in a space that runs through the collective imagination of the city of Barcelona, that is, we break with a certain lack of spatial concretion present in other previous works. In this case, an interior is presented in relation to the home, anonymous but localised, an interior to think about an exterior, opening a contradiction that becomes a metaphor for a reflection on public space. Your camera, your eye, leads us through this inner memory inviting us to reflect on a collective space in demolition that has transformed the public space of the city. Appealing to this disappearance, to this silence of collective memory, how did you come to this project and how did you find the axes from which to build it?

^{AM} This project proposed a new perspective: that of observing the city from the street, a collective and common space. I carried it out in 2003 with my partner, Mathieu Pernot, during the transformation of the Raval neighbourhood. We were interested in approaching it from a documentary perspective, in which photography could deploy all its descriptive power and show the interiors of the apartments being demolished: a kind of archaeology in advance, a last excavation before the disappearance of a place.

We used a large-format camera to capture even the tiniest details of the interiors of the apartments and, with them, a whole story linked to the different types of people who had inhabited this place and were being displaced. The images constituted a cross section, an X-ray that showed the structure of the building, its internal organisation and the distribution of its floors and rooms. All of this evoked the spectacle of history disappearing before the eyes of passers-by and highlighted the brutality of the gesture involved in urban demolition.

We then decided to reconstruct a fictional city through a photo montage and the association of images of the dividing walls: *La ville aveugle*, which means ‘the blind city’, establishing a new cartography that indicated the fragile boundary between the private and the public in the urban space.

IP In 2006 you made *Point de vue*, which is included in this exhibition. In a way you continue to work with the ambiguity of the inside and outside, or rather, of what is shown and what is not. Something that will also become important in your work: What is shown? What is seen? How can we talk about absence? I think that location is again very important and accentuates the conceptual framework from which you work. Considered at a geographical level, as a border place, and taking its location into account, a site on the verge of, once again, disappearing. Tell us about these processes and these crossings.

AM The *Point de vue* series has a double meaning in French: both ‘point of view’ and its absence, an idea and its opposite. It was created in an old holiday resort shortly before its demolition, close to the border with France, in Cap de Creus, where the Pyrenees mountain range ends. Opened

in the 1960s, it was one of the first constructions to receive foreign investment during the Franco regime and, in 2007, it was demolished as it was located within a protected natural reserve.

As in *Barrio Chino, la ville aveugle*, this project is a last record of a place before its demolition, but in this case I invert my point of view and photograph from the inside. The reasons that motivated the demolition of both sites are very different. In the case of *Barrio Chino*, the families and people who lived in the demolished buildings were displaced. Their interiors were exposed to the view of passers-by who, from the public space of the city, witnessed the violence of the act of destruction. The demolition of a holiday resort, on the other hand, does not involve the displacement of its inhabitants, but is a political decision for the preservation of a natural park.

This led me to stand inside the dining rooms and photograph the points of view that were to disappear through the window frames. The impressive views were evidence of the interest that led the investors to build this holiday resort: its location in an exceptional natural setting. Some windows were smeared with whitewash or covered in dust. Photographing through a window means not having to choose a point of view or determine a frame; it is an idea that could be considered Duchampian. The window, as *objet trouvé*, introduced a new conceptual dimension, and glass, as a liminal space, became a surface of inscription.

The windows had lost their transparency, covered by white paint or accumulated dust. Like palimpsests, all these layers superimposed meanings and raised questions that were both political and aesthetic: the whitewash brushstrokes, which impeded vision and announced the demolition of the place, or the traces left by passers-by in the dust on the windows, were clues evoking the history of the place. At the

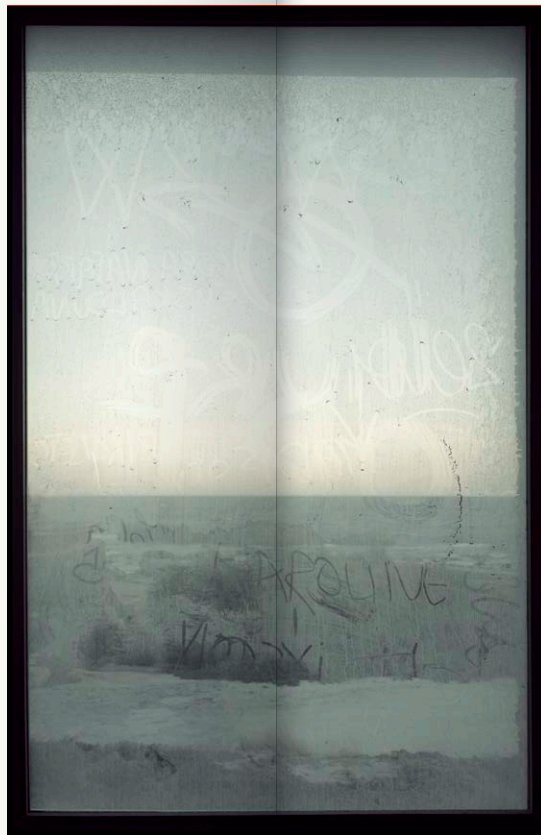
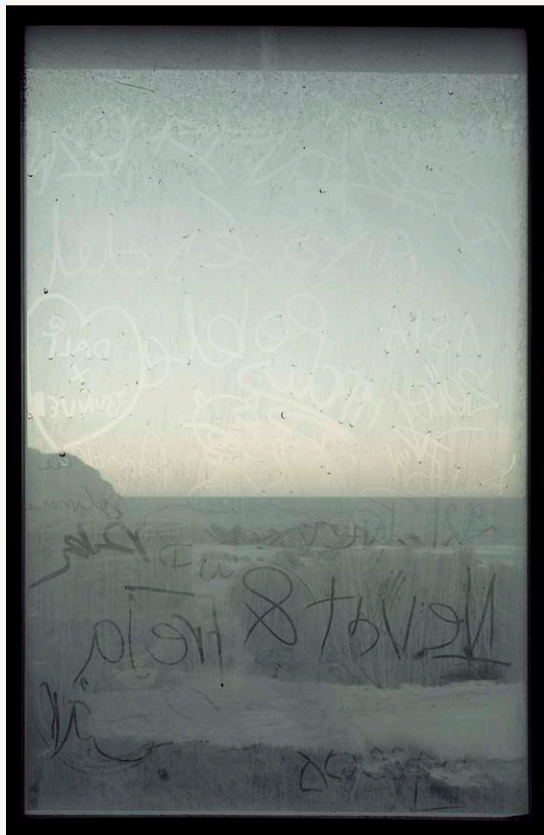
same time, other problems inherent to the image and representation also appeared: photography's capacity to perfectly replicate the pictorial, generating ambiguity and confusion between the media, or the poetry of the blue landscape perceived through the window, evoking the early Renaissance landscapes and the construction of perspective.

I was interested in this accumulation of meanings in a space – the glass – whose function was, paradoxically, invisibility and transparency.

^{1P} This exhibition focuses in a special way on the *Vitrines* (Shop Windows, 2008–09) project. In my opinion, it brings together many of the processes and reflections that you have worked on in previous series, with much more strength, balance and, if I may say so, subtlety. In addition, I'm especially interested, not only in this ambiguity of the interior or exterior or the gaze of the onlooker, but also in the socio-political vindication following the 2008 crisis and, above all, the presence-absence dichotomy of bodies. How the bodies that are the first recipients of the consequences of the economic crisis disappear; how, once again, the city becomes blind and people are made invisible. I think of Laura Terré's book *La fotografía habla de revoluciones* (Photography Speaks of Revolutions); I am interested in how on this occasion, the body disappears from the image, perhaps because the body will come later, when it occupies the public space in the numerous demonstrations around the world. But I would like you to tell us about this presence-absence and how, once again, the disappearing body, or the censored shop window, is presented in an allegorical way as an image of reality.



Rue Bleue, 2008–09
Photographic print on Dibond, 145 × 186 cm



Point de vue, 2006
Photographic print on Dibond, 110 × 170 cm (each)





Rue Laffitte II, 2008–09
Photographic print on Dibond, 145 × 219 cm



Rue Laffitte I, 2008–09
Photographic print on Dibond, 145 × 219 cm



Rue Lecourbe I, 2008–09
Photographic print on Dibond, 145 × 187 cm

AM After the *Point de vue* series, I became increasingly interested in the visibility of liminal spaces, such as shop windows located in the urban space, and in their poetic and political potential. The indexical question of photography seemed essential to me because of the link that relates it to what has happened.

In 2008, the stock market crashed after the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers and, with it, the global economic crisis began. In Paris, the city where I live, shops began to close and the streets were filled with shop windows smeared with whitewash. Those images were surfaces that recorded the symptoms and indexes of the crisis, but they also had a plastic quality reminiscent of abstract painting, which, mixed with the reflection of the city, materialised the crisis.

As in *Point de vue*, layers of meaning seemed to accumulate on the glass, which was traversed by history, crisis, brushstrokes by anonymous painters, graffiti left by passers-by and urban reflections. The images were taken from the street and reproduced on a large scale. I was interested in the tension generated by the coexistence of all those layers and the possibility of addressing issues that are both political and aesthetic; a reflection on the photographic medium itself without forgetting the bodies of those who inhabit the city and are faced with the impossibility of seeing beyond those hidden walls. The gaze bounces off the painted glass and is metaphorically the denial of access. As you say, there are no bodies represented in the photographs, but the traces and vestiges of those who look through them remain.

In the exhibition, the size of the image is essential: almost life-size. I am interested in the idea of involving the viewer not only with their gaze, but also through the experience of their body in a blinded and depthless space, a metaphor for an inaccessible and unstable city.

^{IP} This work also reflects on the role played by the citizen and the city. Thinking about the construction of an urban space designed for a citizen who walks but above all, who looks. The *flâneur*. While in the late nineteenth century we experienced the construction of cities simultaneously with an awareness of looking and being looked at; in the twenty-first century, are we facing a subject who has stopped looking at the world directly? What does looking at screens imply? Are your veiled shop windows a symbol of the absence of gaze?

^{AM} The tradition of photographers who have photographed the city, its walls, façades and shop windows, coincides with the emergence of large cities in the late-nineteenth century, particularly the city of Paris. In Paris, this tradition goes hand in hand with Baudelaire's figure of the *flâneur*, the passer-by who observes.

I was interested in the work of Eugène Atget, a French photographer who, with a large-format camera, took more than fifteen thousand photographs of the French capital at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. His images of shop windows became famous thanks to the Surrealists, who were fascinated by the ghostly character of the photographer's reflection in the glass, proof of the selective quality of the gaze. The eye decides what to look at; in photography, all the planes and reflections appear without hierarchy. These images, commissioned by the first shops located in the boulevards of Paris, tell us the story of what the great cities of the twentieth century would be like, conceived as shops whose displays attract customers as they walk by. As you say, in the twenty-first century, walkers and consumers in the global city do so through screens.

These questions already appeared in my first works with the *Interiores* series and were raised again with the *Vitrines* series. The closure of shops due to the crisis also coincided with the end of an era and with a transformation in the experience of wandering through the city, which ceased to be physical and became virtual, mediated by screens.

This is one of the reasons that led me to create a work that could be experienced in the exhibition space, which is a space of sociability and is visited physically, wandering through the space as if it were a walk through the city.

^{IP} In some of your recent works, your camera has left the urban space, despite the fact that many of the actions and decisions that provoke the situations that your works capture are located there, and has approached a natural space, presenting us with a landscape far from the urban, but which continues to be the recipient of the consequences. How do you get to a natural environment? At the same time, an interesting reflection opens up around the differences between public and urban space, both are shown from a game of opposites between what is seen and what is not. What interests you about all this?

^{AM} In some previous works, such as *Point de vue* and the video *Frontera* (Frontier, 2009), the natural space already appeared, but always as a space crossed by man. However, it is true that in the last fifteen years I have focused on the urban space, the environment in which I live. I am currently becoming more interested in the natural space. In part, it is an intimate need to get away from the city and reconnect with nature, but my interest remains focused on the mark left by those who pass through it and their impact in the Anthropocene era.

^{IP} On a few occasions you have spoken to me about your interest in how the subject is situated in the world. In fact, it is something that runs through all your work. I find this split between the subject who looks and the subject who thinks interesting, how they merge into one thanks to the play of opposites between the absent and the present. Thinking about the subject in front of the world, facing the world and yet in it. From what perspectives and under what objectives do you reflect on this subject?

^{AM} The origin of my projects is closely linked to the gaze, and they are often born from a detail, a mark, an indication that I have observed and that seems to go unnoticed by others, but that, nevertheless, interests me. And perhaps I am interested precisely because I like insignificant spaces to thicken, to be filled with interpretations, associations and stories, with tensions and ambivalences that make me reflect and enthrall me. I believe that looking is precisely that: it is not just seeing, but activating the subject that thinks.

The Exuberance of the Minimum Visible. Concerning the Work of Anna Malagrida

Marta Gili

Anna Malagrida's work deals, in an extremely delicate way, with the circular experience of time – time that comes, time that goes and time that never ceases to come and go. In the spaces between these different temporalities, which sometimes overlap and often displace each other, the artist explores how the perception of the visible and the evocation of the invisible shape our sensibility, both on an aesthetic and political level.

Halfway between intention and intuition, in most of Malagrida's works (consisting of photographs, video pieces and installations) an everyday gesture, a minimal action, a subtle transparency, a slight movement, a veiled form, a barely perceptible shadow or an emerging light shining on a person's face constitute the raw material with which the artist constructs her poetic micro-narratives.

Fundamentally, the attentive contemplation of the exuberance of the minimum visible is the place where Malagrida explores indeterminacy, in relation to the principle of uncertainty: between the unnoticed and the perceived, between order and disorder, between the limit and the edge.

The question of time, and the way Malagrida approaches it, is not trivial. If, on the one hand, photography stops time and retains it, then, on the other, the filmic image (cinema and video) expands and prolongs it. The artist's commitment to these two mediums allows her to fragment and recompose the

flow of time, both continuous and discontinuous, fixed and in movement. Its aesthetic effectiveness lies in Malagrida's ability to shift the distinction between the visible and the invisible. She thus challenges the perception of the ordinary so that it manifests in all its meaning, that is, as the unnoticed space of the commonplace, where different sensibilities of great political and social significance that shape our perception of the world and our experience of life are brought into play.

The city is the space of subjectification and the circulation of gestures, bodies and hierarchies of power where the ordinary, as the site of the commonplace, takes centre stage in many of the artist's productions. In the series *Les passants* (The Passers-by, 2020–21), for example, which shows pedestrians moving around, in solitude, through the streets of an empty city – the artist carried out this project during the COVID-19 lockdown – Malagrida evokes the theatrical set of suspended norms, or in other words, the politics of surveillance and neutralisation of public space. Another example can be found in the series *Los muros hablaron* (The Walls Spoke, 2011–13), in which the graffiti inscribed on the walls of the buildings that hold economic power, once erased but still perceptible, represent a form of urban palimpsest of resistance and authoritarianism.

In these stratifications of the visible and the hidden, windows are another element that the artist explores metaphorically and poetically, both as a means of connection with the outside world and as a restriction of access to that world. In Malagrida's work, windows often symbolise the duality between dissociation and connection. On the one hand, acting as a barrier that separates the inside from the outside; on the other, allowing interaction between the two spaces.

From the beginning of her career, with the series *Interiores* (Interiors, 2000–02), Malagrida was already suggesting

windows as a place of intrusion from the outside to the inside by photographing the windows of a building and, through them, the barely visible activities of the neighbours inside. In other projects, the artist is also interested in the dialectic between opacity and transparency, as in her series *Vitrines* (Shop Windows, 2008–09), which shows the windows of closed businesses with the glass coated with whitewash; or in *Point de vue* (2006), in which the windows are covered with paint and signs, becoming borders that separate and prevent us from looking outside. An ordinary element and symbol of the commonplace par excellence, for Malagrida, windows are also the place where imaginaries circulate and reveal those who are inside while also excluding those who are outside, as suggested in film pieces such as *Danza de mujer* (Woman Dance, 2007) and *Le laveur du carreau* (The Window Cleaner, 2010).

In short, suspended time, discreet instants, fleeting experiences, revoked distances, assigned concealments and circumspect transparencies are all elements that make up Anna Malagrida's body of work, in which what is seen evokes what is intuited or not shown. And this is precisely one of art's greatest tasks.



La laveur du carreau (The Window Cleaner, 2010)
Video, 3' 26"

Anna Malagrida.
Opacitas. Veiling Transparency
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