

PHOTOGRAPHERS, PHOTOGRAPHS

THIS NUMBER'S DOSSIER IS DEDICATED TO PHOTOGRAPHY. TO BE PRECISE, WE ARE OFFERING A SET OF TWENTY-ONE RECENT PHOTOGRAPHS BY CATALAN PHOTOGRAPHERS. IT WOULD BE PRESUMPTUOUS TO SAY THAT THIS COLLECTION OF IMAGES REPRESENTS A BROAD SAMPLE OF PHOTOGRAPHY TODAY. FIRSTLY, AND FORTUNATELY, BECAUSE AT THE PRESENT TIME, TWENTY-ONE PHOTOGRAPHS DO NOT CONSTITUTE A REPRESENTATIVE SELECTION. SECONDLY, BECAUSE THIS DOSSIER HAS NO INTENTION OF PRODUCING A HIERARCHICAL RANKING: WE DO NOT SUSCRIBE TO THE SUPERFICIAL TENDENCY TO SUM UP THE AMBIVALENT AND UNDULATORY COMPLEXITY OF CREATIVE WORK IN SACRED LISTS. THE CHOICE OF PHOTOGRAPHERS AND THE WORK REPRODUCED HERE WOULD BE AS QUESTIONABLE AS ANY OTHER LIST IF IT WERE PRESENTED AS A "HIT-PARADE" OF PRESENT-DAY CATALAN PHOTOGRAPHY. HOWEVER, IT IS NOT BEING PRESENTED IN THIS WAY, SO MUCH AS TO PROVIDE SOME USEFUL INFORMATION AND SHOW THE GENERAL TRENDS WHICH PHOTOGRAPHY IS FOLLOWING IN CATALONIA, AT THE SAME TIME GIVING PRIORITY TO THE NEWEST PHOTOGRAPHERS AND, IN EVERY CASE, TO THE MOST RECENT WORK. AN ARTICLE BY JOSEP RIGOL, PROMOTER OF THE *PRIMAVERA FOTOGRAFICA*, IS INTENDED TO HELP PLACE AND UNDERSTAND THE PHOTOGRAPHS, WHICH HE CHOSE WITH THE PHOTOGRAPHERS' OWN CRITERIA IN MIND. THE COMBINED PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXT ARE PRESENTED AS DOCUMENTARY CONTRIBUTION, A COLLECTION OF USEFUL DATA, TO REVEAL THE VITALITY, THE PLURALITY AND THE CONTEMPORANEITY OF OUR PHOTOGRAPHY TODAY.

PHOTOGRAPHERS, PHOTOGRAPHS

JOSEP RIGOL PHOTOGRAPHER

Photography, as a means of communication and as an aesthetic creative process, is living exciting moments. While plastic arts are suffering from a critical weakening, the new photography is freely searching techniques and concepts for languages hitherto unknown to camera users". With these words, Daniel Giralt-Miracle, art critic and witness of the moment, described the expansive progress of creative photography in 1978.

Certainly, in the last few years, Catalan photography has lived a dizzy evolution. With the end of the dictatorship, photojournalism was set free and, at the same time, a group of photographers broke with the restrictive philosophy of the competition world and embarked on a great number of new initiatives; new magazines, photographic galleries, galleries which were open to modern visions of reality, international exchanges, etc. In 1980, the *Jornades Catalanes de Fotografia* defended the cultural dimension of the art of light. Later, the Faculty of Fine Arts accepted it as a subject, and the *Primaveres Fotogràfiques* produced an avalanche of new photographic work for the general public. Finally, the savings banks and the *Fundació Joan Miró* have shown great interest in the state of photography and have opened galleries that specialize in the medium.

But what, really, is the present situation of photography in Catalonia? Today, photography is on the way to winning a respect which was unthinkable a few years

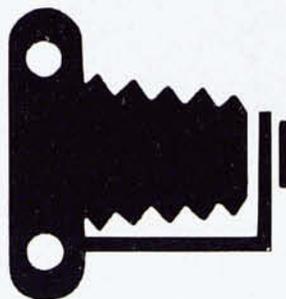
ago. The effort that photographers have made has been —no-one seems to doubt it— very profitable. Photography is talked about; it is a living subject that especially interests young people. What is not so well known is that this success has had to be paid for with a lot of unfinished projects, a lot of publishing failures and with so many frustrated vocations because of the lack of a cultural policy that only needed to take advantage of that unique moment. Our photographers have spent hours and hours working to recover the archives of Catalonia, producing theoretical studies of the creative motivations of the photographers themselves, and defending the expressive possibilities of photography.

A little tired now, the photographers are working as photographers. In the background, closed, remain the galleries Spectrum, Fotomania, Procés, Pentaprisma, Primer Plano, etc.; they were unable to pass the test of continuity of a medium that has to fight against the mistaken criteria which denies it artistic recognition because of its reproductive nature (when, in fact, there is more similarity between two lithographic prints than between two handprinted photographs). No-one now remembers the *Centre Internacional de Fotografia*, the most ambitious of the projects started in Barcelona. The *Institut d'Estudis Fotogràfics de Catalunya* just about manages to play the role of an intensive care unit for the scattered and damaged photographic treasures of the country, so rich, historically, in visual

memory. And now, to complete this repertory of disasters, the authorities in charge of the photographic department of the *Fundació Miró* have announced that they cannot carry on because of the present lack of funding and their restricted possibilities.

The hope that all these individual efforts should eventually have a positive result is being frustrated because photography does not yet receive the systematic attention it needs. The last vestiges of private responsibility that survive —a particular example is the Fòrum gallery in Tarragona— are aware of the important cultural function they serve and refuse to abandon their faith, but there is nothing to guarantee their continuity.

This situation is obviously responsible for the small number of new initiatives. The creative enthusiasm of the photographers of the sixties was caused largely by the anticipation of a battle that was already seen as won. Following the failure of the struggle to achieve a —commercial and public— photographic infrastructure, the new generation of photographers find it difficult to remember that not one of the great names of world photography worked with the idea of exhibiting in museums or galleries. Obviously, the times have changed and photography today, freed from its exclusively testimonial role, is living a particularly mellow period, with plenty of artistic possibilities; but the photographer needs to exhibit his work and this, if it is to be done with a minimum of decency, is not easy. In fact, the new ge-



nerations have not even got the chance to start a new struggle from zero: there are precedents that weigh too heavily. I would urge them to carry on the battle, carefully weighing up the risks and setting themselves realistic targets: the creation of natural groups, self-publication (one book is worth more than ten exhibitions), outside promotion, continued demands for an official infrastructure, etc. This crisis, with its stunting effect, can be overcome.

Artistically, from the mid-seventies on, Catalan photography has developed in the much the same way as photography in other European countries, not only with regard to the subject matter but also in the formal aspects of its treatment. Photographers are taking in and using the full range of the photographic language: on the one hand they are striving for the maximum definition and range of tonalities, and on the other they are demonstrating the inherent ability of the photographic technique to offer an image which is different to that received by the eye, decontextualizing objects and outlining reality.

What characterizes the work of the new generations is not so much the object photographed as the personal vision of it which is presented. This characteristic is common to almost all branches: portrait, urban and industrial landscape, everyday surroundings, still life, etc. "Our photographs only try to reflect our way of being and thinking. They are intended to be a reflection of us", say the young members of the group *Aula Quatre*. Photography, as if it were both a window and

a mirror, is a way of knowing and relating to the world and also an excellent medium through which to explore our own personality and to assert ourselves. It has an important autobiographical component. Any photographer who works continuously and seriously ends up photographing himself, apart from the person, animal or object that appears in his work.

Some people use the photographic medium as a therapy to exorcise their own ghosts. Others simply see it as a game. But above all, photography is the practice of creative enjoyment and freedom.

Devoid of any kind of subservience, what is known as creative photography makes freedom its foremost paradigm. It is a freedom with its limitations, but which allows photography to be critical of itself.

In the last decade, photographers have insisted on broadening their knowledge of ordinary objects through an iconography which is contrary to the supposed "natural" one of conventional photography: that which until recently offered images which were anchored in a totally anachronistic pictorialism. According to Walter Benjamin's interpretation, it is a question of unmasking reality and showing that any representation is construction and it is vital to "construct" in a reflexive way so as to break the habits of vision; to make it possible to see and not only to recognize.

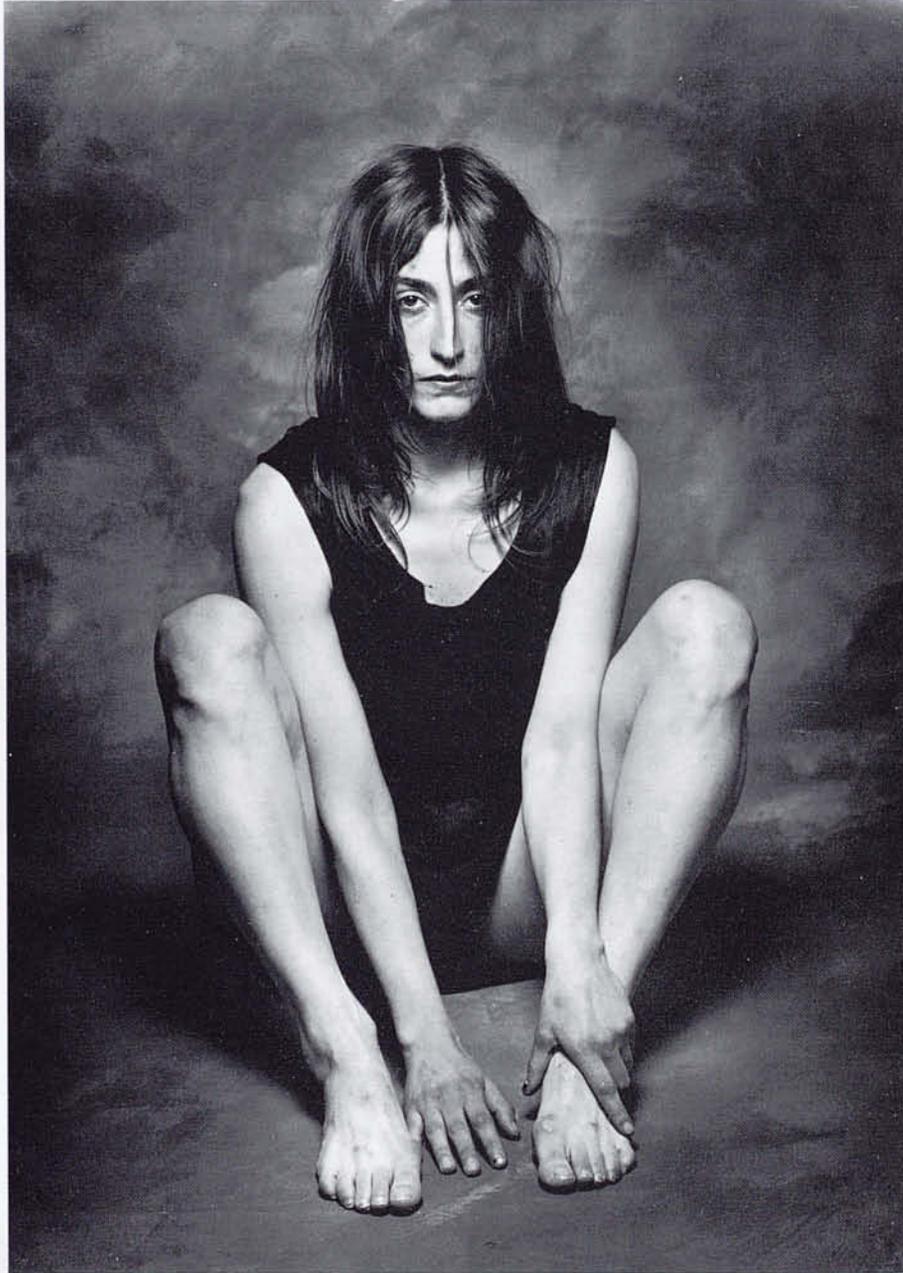
Even amongst those photographers who are most wary of visual shocks—from the most radically topographic landscapists to the most emphatically neutral portraitists, including the whole range of those who drink from Zen philosophy or those who

reduce reality to visualist signs—one comes across a more or less clear defence of countervision. This countervision is a form of photographic subversion which is not so much a critique of vision as of the visual intention and is therefore an attitude rather than a style or trend.

Very significantly, a large number of today's photographers have devoted themselves to documenting industrial areas or ruined buildings. For one thing, the sensual visual wealth which can be found in urban degradation and industrial morphology presents a challenge to the technical ability of the photographer. Also, these photographers illustrate a reality which until now has been ignored by documentary photography: with these images, they propose a new concept of landscape photography which coincides with a social movement bent on ecologic testimony. This approach fits into the present more or less appreciable tendency to get away from the traditional aesthetic rules and even to break them.

A final characteristic of the present moment is the remarkable acceptance among young photographers of the guidelines put forward by the central European photographers between the wars. Realizing that they have not yet been improved on as regards artistic quality and authenticity, our photographers find in them the solid framework which they so badly need. This rebirth of the "New Vision" adopts two new elements in Catalonia: a visual existentialism with a certain measure of irony and a plasticity of tones and shades which has been neglected until now. ●

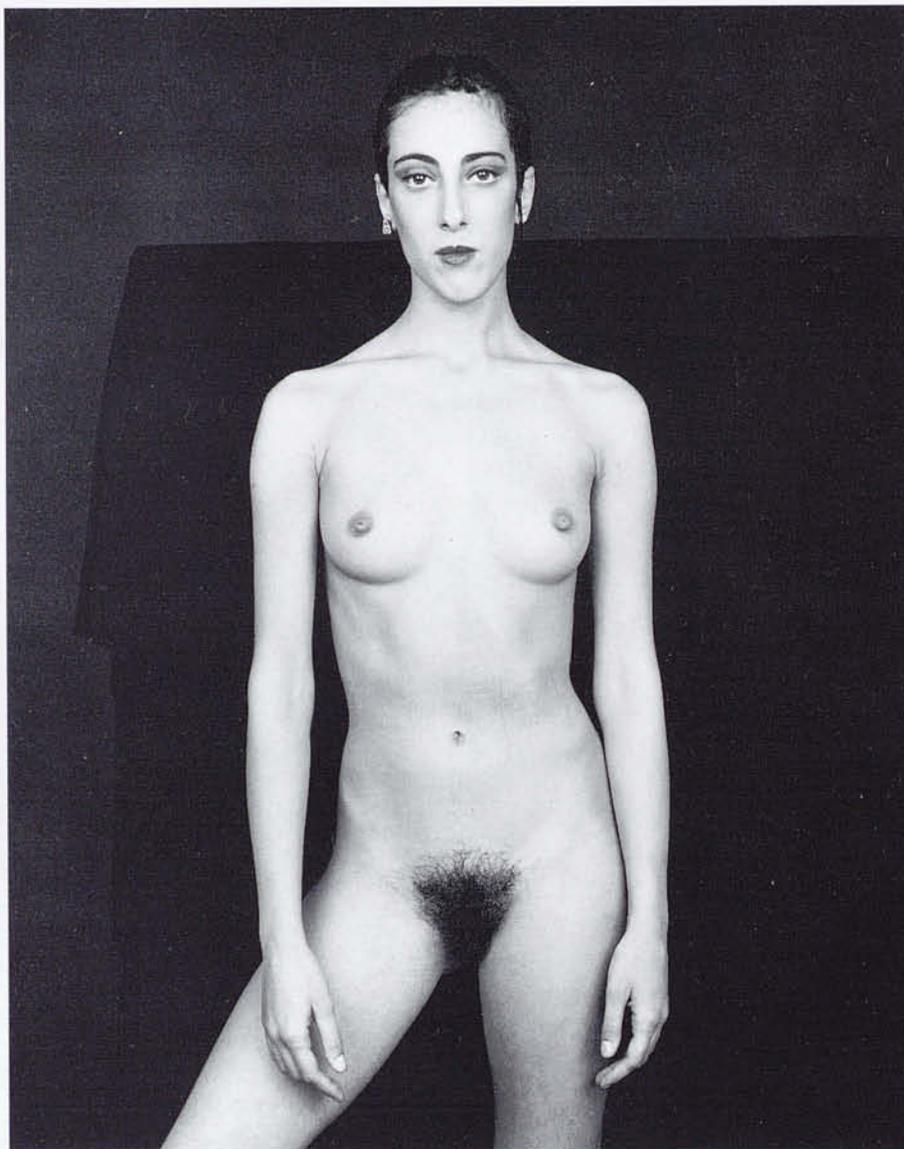
RAFAEL VARGAS «ONA» 1986



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HUMBERTO RIVAS «MAGDA» 1986



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LLUIS BOVER



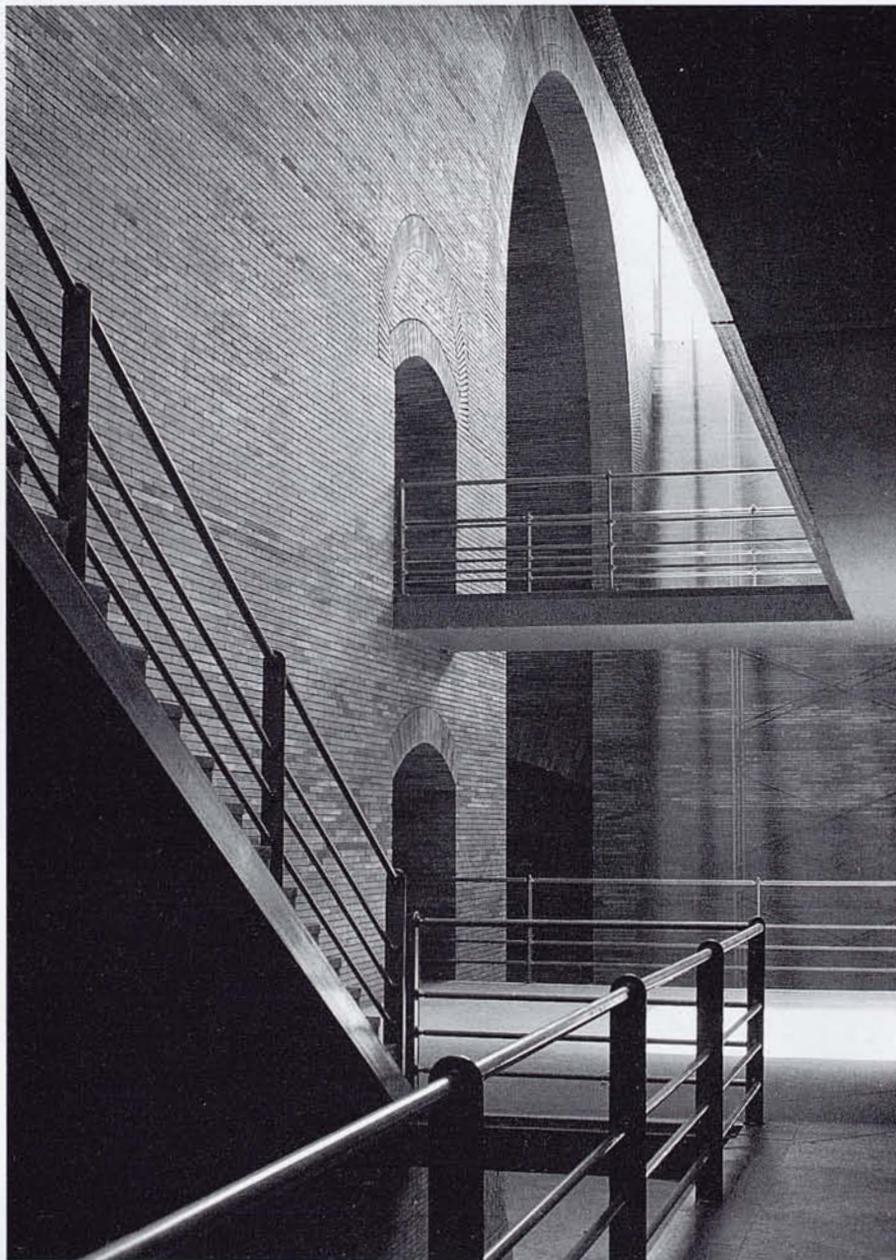


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TONI CATANY «MUGUET» CALOTIP 1986



LLUIS CASALS «MUSEU D'ART ROMÀ DE MÉRIDA»



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ARIEL MARÍN



ANTONI BLANCO «SELVA D'OZA» 1985



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CARLOS LLANES



EDUARD OLIVELLA «ROGER DORMINT»



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MANOLO LAQUILLO «BRAUNSCHWEIG» 1986



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MANEL AGRAMUNT 1986

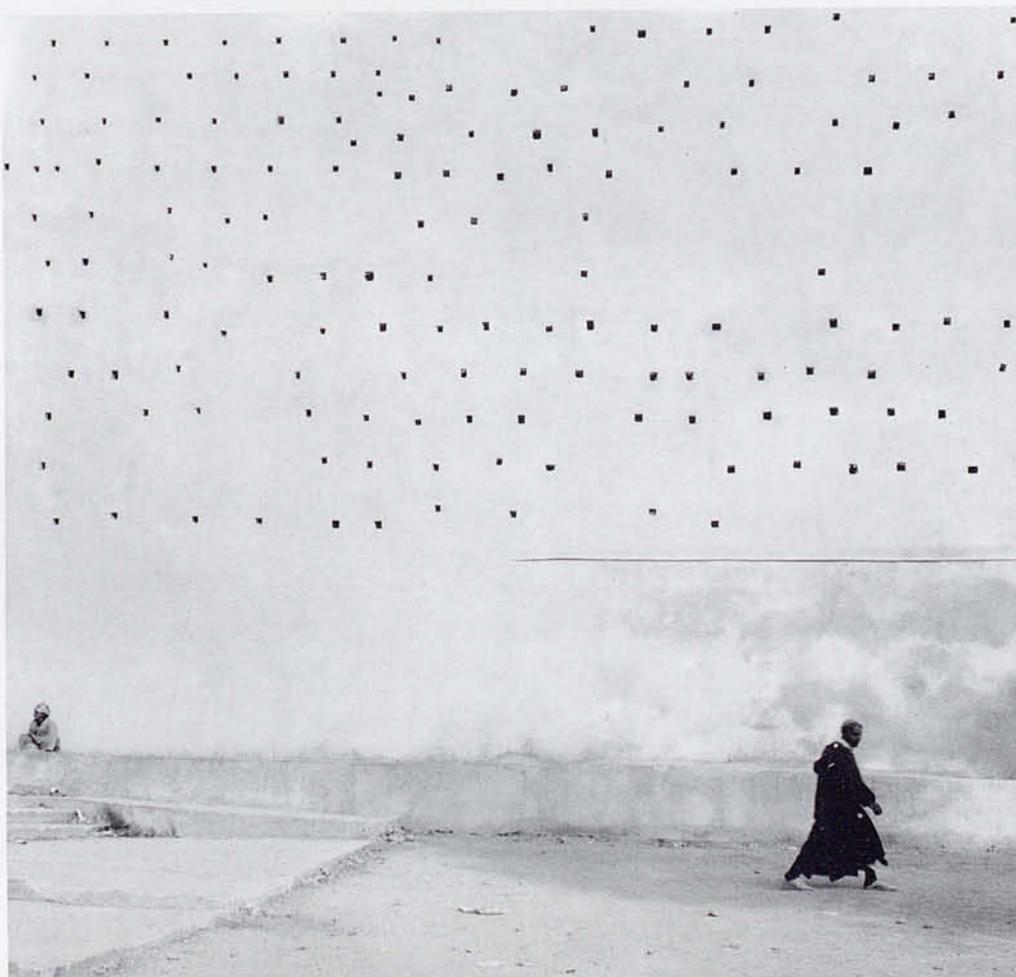


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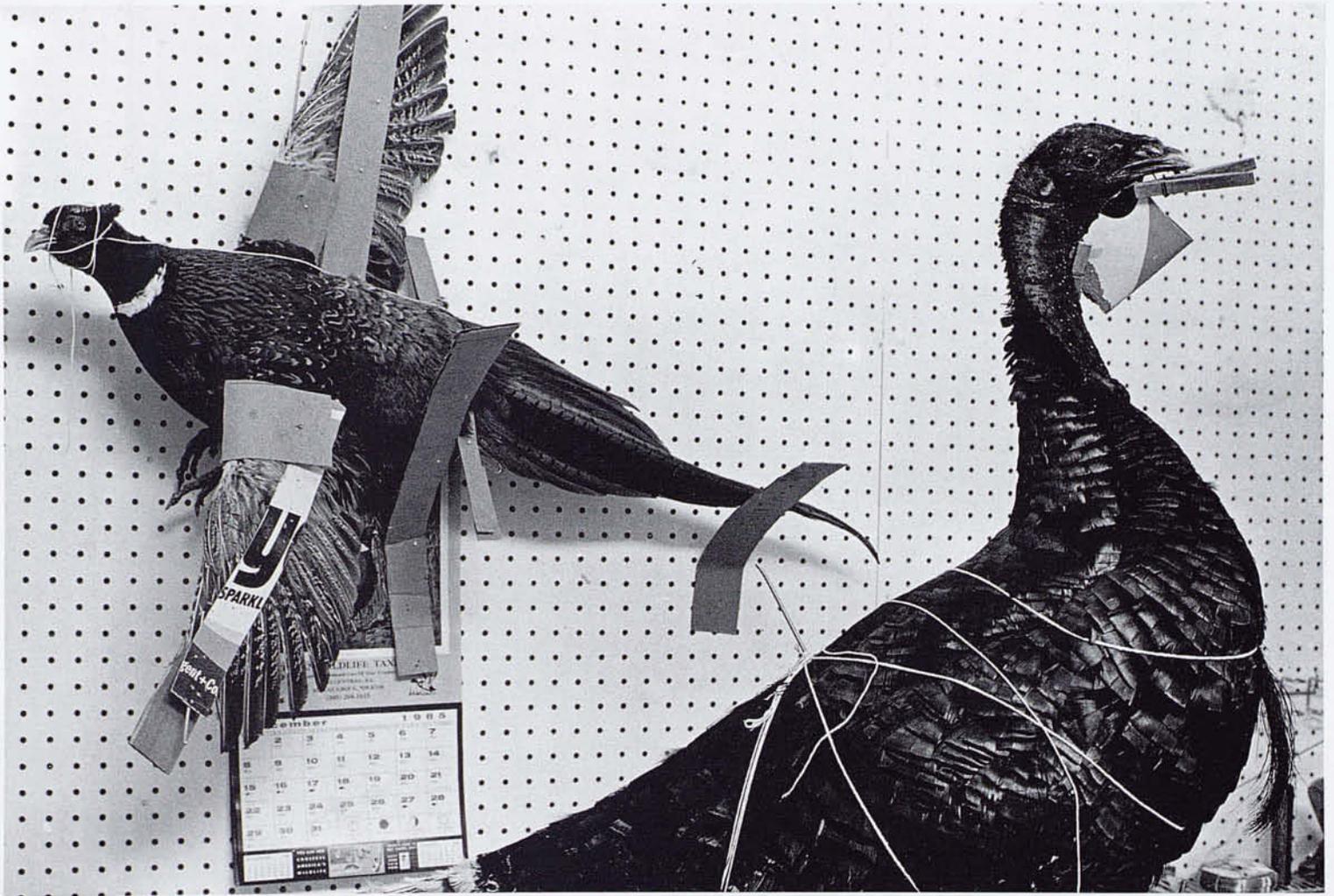




FERRAN FREIXA «FES, MARROC» 1986



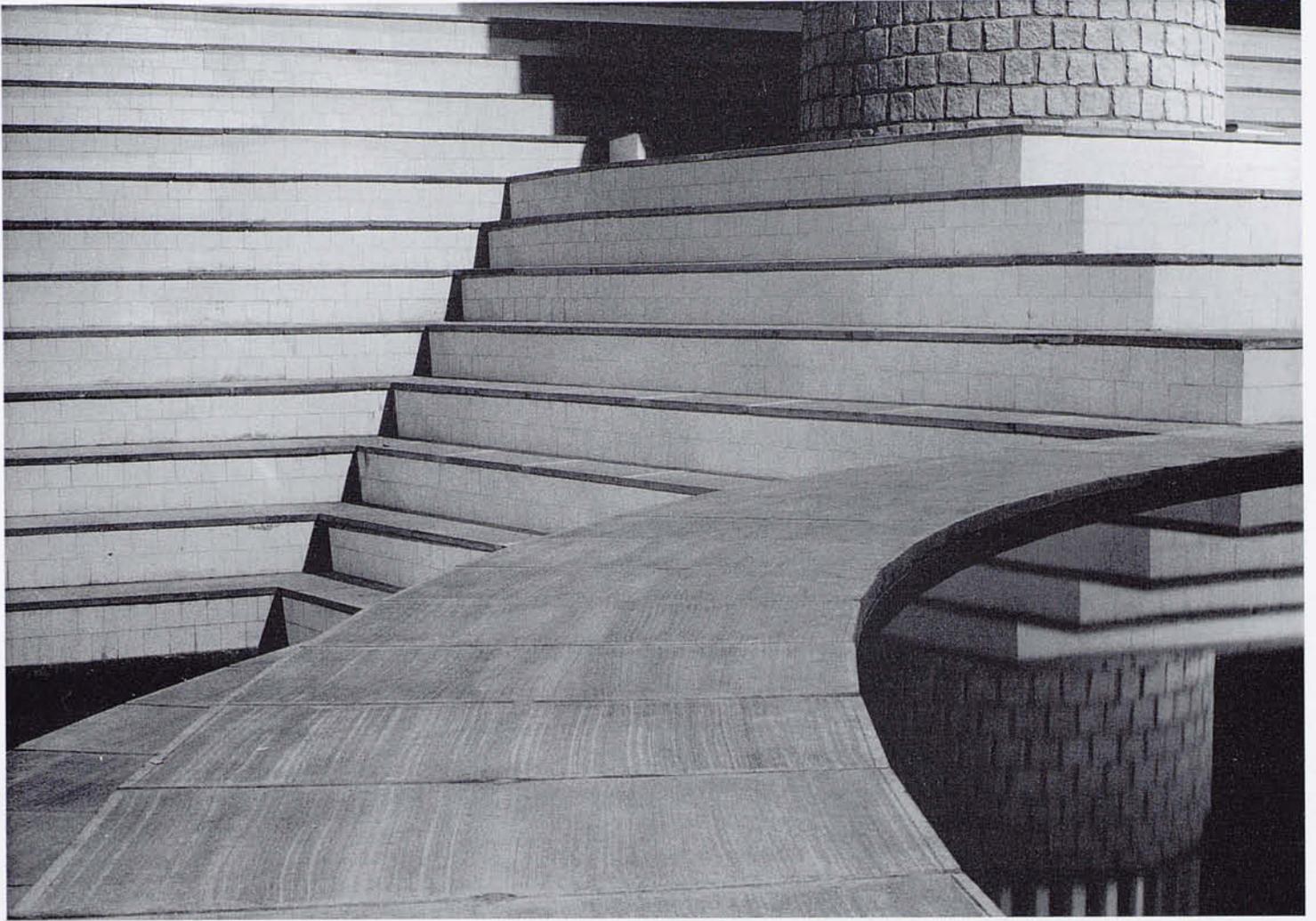
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M. DOLORS MONTSERRAT 1987



LORETO TUTUSAUS 1986



DANIEL CASANOVAS «PARIS» 1986



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MARTA POVO «PARÍS» 1985



MANEL ÜBEDA «MARROC» 1986



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MANUEL ESCLUSA



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