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PERMEABLE MEMBRANES: THE ARCHIVE IN VISUAL ATLAS CONSTRUCTIONS


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VISUAL ESSAY

PERMEABLE MEMBRANES

THE ARCHIVE IN VISUAL ATLAS CONSTRUCTIONS

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Abstract

This study examines two large photo-based installations in which the role of memory construction in photography is explored, with emphasis on the concept of image accumulation in the digital era. These installations aim to restore photography as object while exploring the immersive and experiential qualities of physical environments filled with images, in opposition to the digital experience through screens. The visual essay delves into the evolving relationship between photography, the archive and its transformative nature, as it transitions from a digital transient realm, and returns to a physical manifestation (Art Installation, Atlas). The focus on building thematic “Atlases” that serve as spaces for interpretation, draws inspiration from Georges Didi-Huberman’s take on Aby Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas*. The works created aim to contextualize the symbolic universe of images, and the construction of visual atlases as historical archives creating permeable and tangible membranes that provide evidence of our contemporary visual experience.

Keywords: Photography, Memory, Archive, Material Culture, Visual Atlas

INTRODUCTION

In the following two bodies of work, I aim to reflect upon our material coexistence with photography in today's world from a phenomenological perspective, while exploring the notion of permeable archives in the context of a photographic-centered digital society. In the last two decades, the transition from physical photographs to digital images meant losing tangible objects and the related frameworks and experiences from the past that the physicality of the image implies. This complex system of circulation lacks the physical interaction individuals had with physical photographs. By conceiving large-scale photo installations, I intend to contrast the ongoing dematerialization of photography due to digital technology, favoring an experiential or phenomenological approach. Didi-Huberman, interpreting images based on what they "have been" in relation to what we "are being" invites us to consider the temporal dimension, and the connection between the past and present created by photographic objects in a physical or digital state.¹

Transferences (2000-2012) and *Transferences v2.0* (2019)² constitute a photographic project that serves as an atlas of personal objects maintained since childhood, brought into exile, and subsequently photographed and displayed both, the physical objects and their photographic counterparts. Each object was meticulously photographed, creating a raw visual link to a specific memory. According to Elizabeth Edwards, photographs as objects "create the focus for memory and evocation."³ These collections of objects compose a self-portrait, a living archive, a testimony of a specific time and collective identity that play with both, memory, the construction of archives and a sense of belonging. The installation delves into the construction of memory, the passage of time, decay and selective retention. The photographic documentation ensured the preservation of the object's memory, even if the physical object were to disappear. The objects, both in their physical form and as photographic representations, exemplify the transient nature of human memory, serving as conduits to the past. Visitors to the show were encouraged to select an object to keep for themselves and, over the course of the exhibition, the objects would gradually vanish, leaving behind a photographic archive. The digital archive materializes as the photographs are printed and displayed, thus transforming the photographs into new transitional objects that bridge and acknowledge the presence of the original subjects.

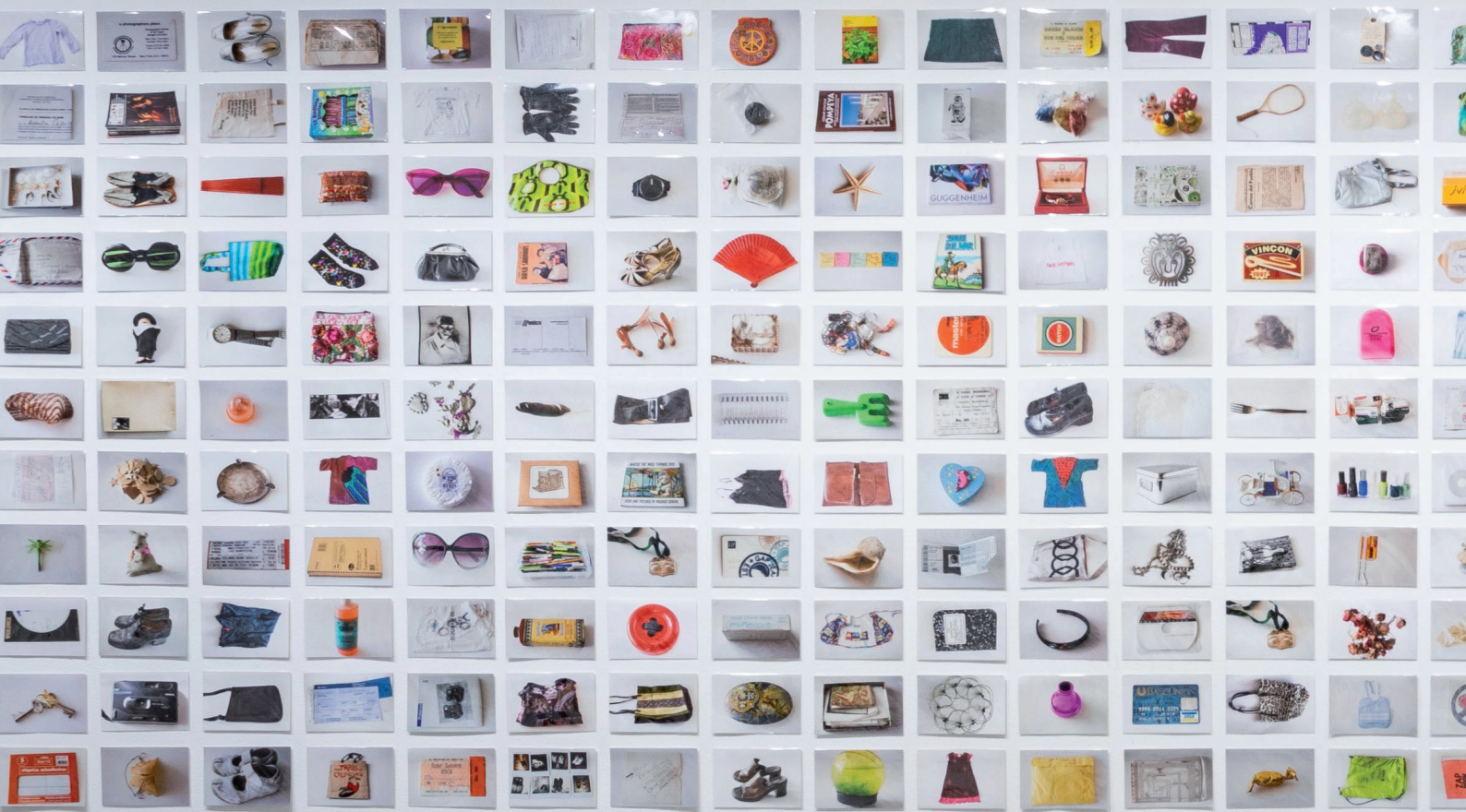
Building on Warburg's terminology of *Bilderfahrzeuge* (image-vehicles),⁴ *Bilderwanderung* (migration of images), and *Pathosformel* (pathos-formula), I produced *mutatis mutandis* (2017-18) (Latin for "things having been changed that have to be changed"),⁵ conceived considering the experience of physically entering a space saturated with images. It reunites a vast collection of photographs on long scrolls to mirror digital streams, and derives from my personal extensive digital archive, including artwork, art history materials for teaching, family photos, and downloaded images that relate to the Venezuelan revolt and social conflict from

2015-2018. Since 1999, freedom of the press in my homeland has progressively deteriorated under the Chavez-Maduro regime. Accessing information about street protests and the humanitarian crisis was suspended by the government, which required the population to turn to social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram for news. These downloaded photographic documents progressively merged with my personal archive and connected the memories of others by relating to our own experiences.

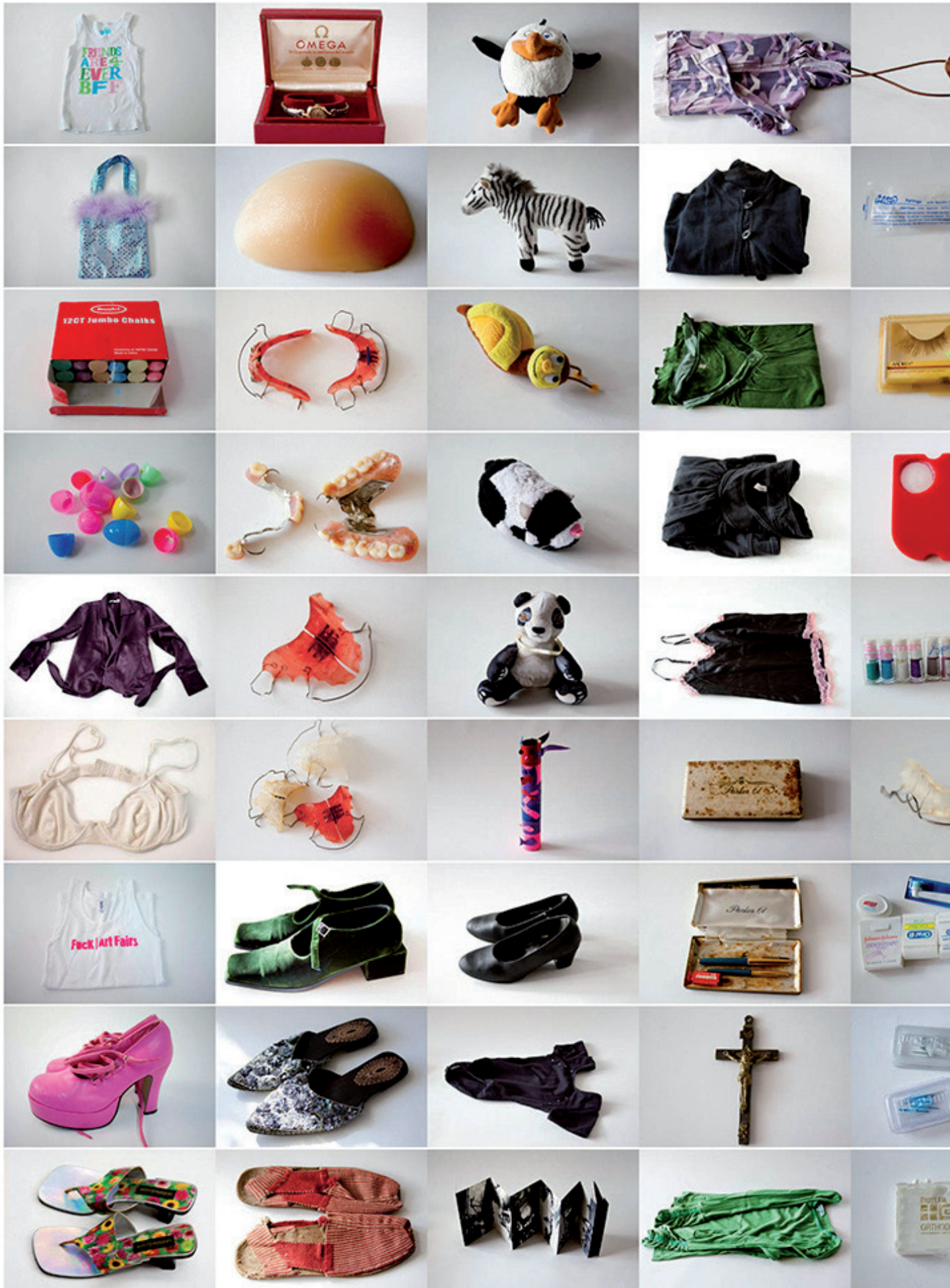
Following Joan Fontcuberta's concept of post-photography⁶ and the dematerialization of authorship, *mutatis mutandis* raises questions about our responses when confronted with a vast array of disparate images including those depicting extreme violence and the possible desensitization to human violence resulting from the constant influx of diverse and conflicting photographs and the potential for new interpretations of the newly permeated archive.

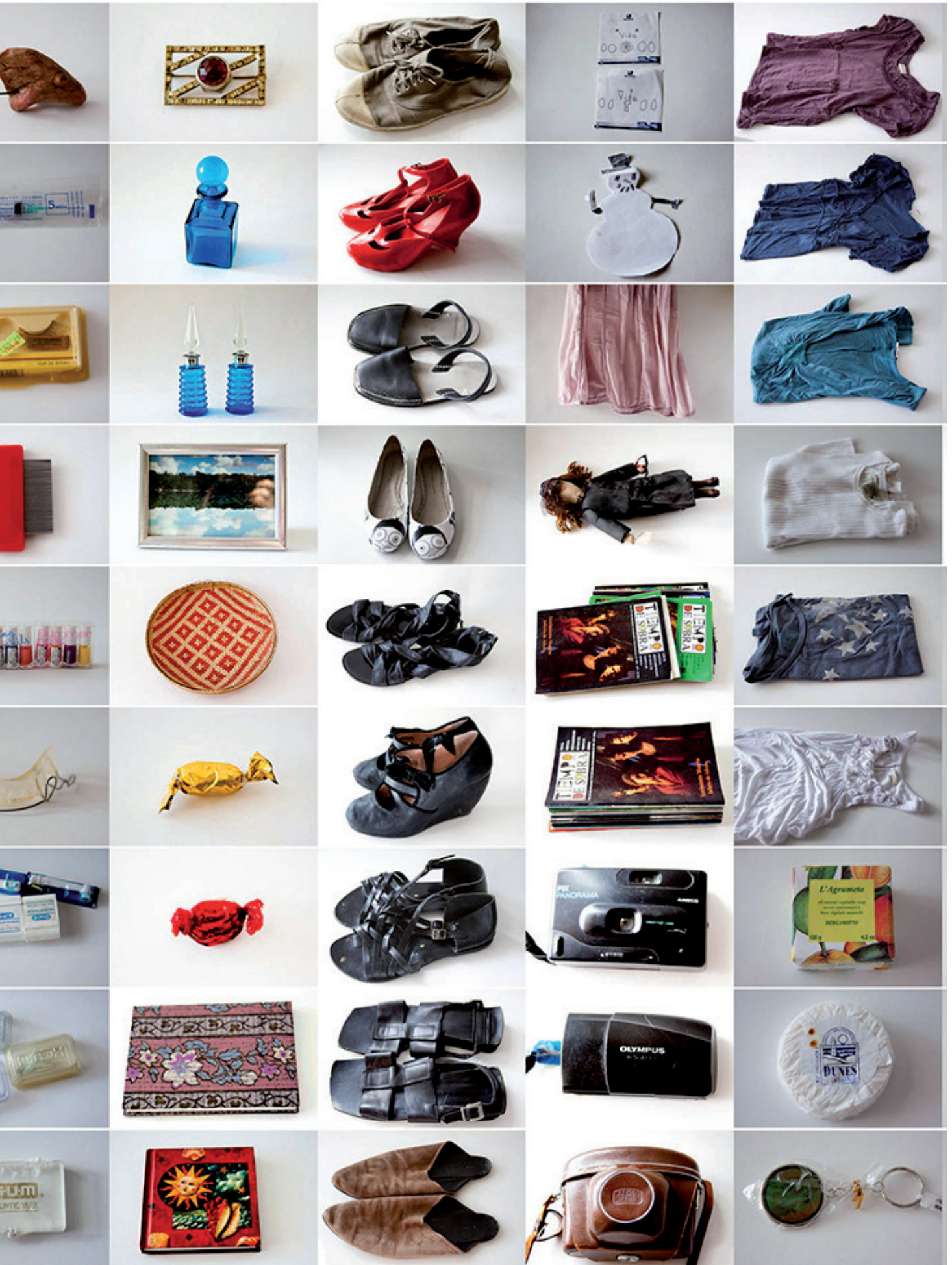
Aligning with Caraffa, photographs, photo-objects, and photo archives eventually become objects of research in their own right.⁷ Both atlases' photo installations explore the concept of an open archive as case-studies, challenging not only the role of memory fixed within the archive, but also question whose memories do these new added images or disappearing objects belong to? Do they become part of one's own memory? The disappearing objects from the exhibition that were my personal property in the *Transferences* installation now have a new ownership, highlighting the ephemerality and subjective nature of not only memory, but belongings, especially in the context of exile. It reflects on what we can carry with us and what we lose along the way, and the remaining photographic atlas serves as a testament to the memory bridge inherent of photography. In *mutatis mutandis*, the 'borrowed' photographs, taken from the internet and the public realm, now become part of a personal asset, ergo, my archive. It is in this sense that I speculate that archives (both, material and digital) function as permeable membranes in which important issues such as copyright, owner and authorship, as well as memory are questioned here after the uncontrollable appropriation of images that we are now able to possess and blend into our private archives.

Photography is an ubiquitous presence in our lives today. However, it is essential to recognize that its omnipresence like our own as humans, is not assured to endure, even with material manifestations. Over time, our archives, memories, and even we ourselves may undergo evolution or decline, both intertwining like permeable membranes.

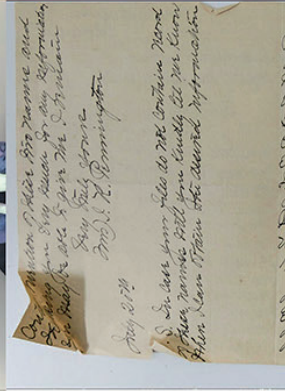
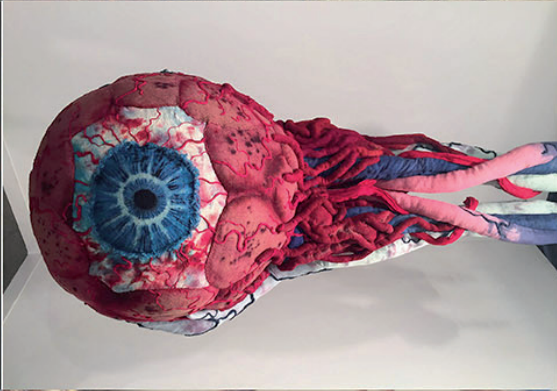


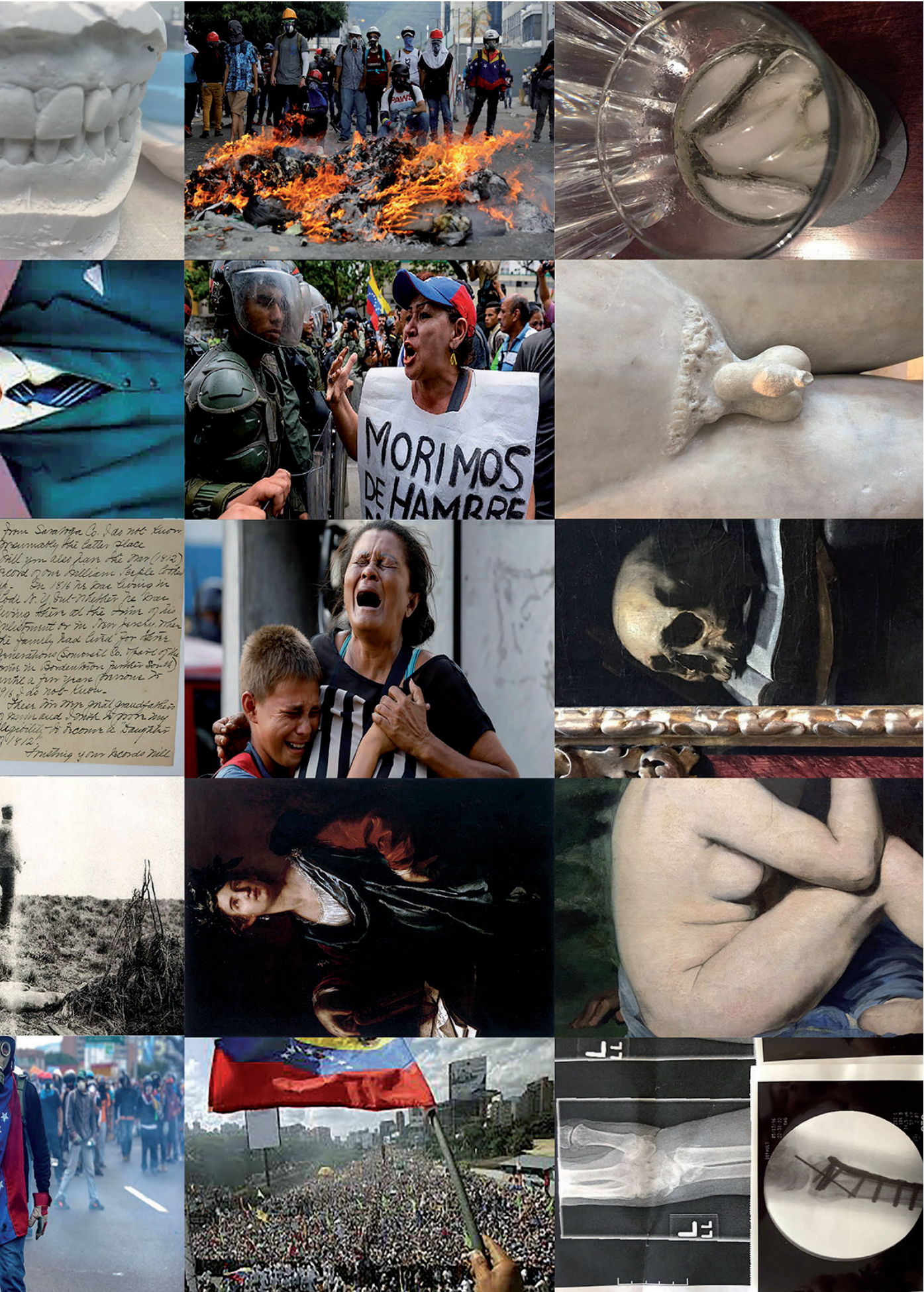












From San Juan Co. I do not know
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1814 for the time being in
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discovery to in Don Pedro when
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order in production further south
until a few years previous to
1814 do not know.
After the war great numbers of
people had come to from the
Venezuela to become the daughter
of 1812.
Trusting your hands will





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- 1 Chari Larsson, "The Materiality of Images," In *Didi-Huberman and the Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).
 - 2 The language difference between Spanish and English of the same project is due to the fact that the first iteration of it was exhibited in Caracas, Venezuela in 2012, and the second, in Hollywood, Florida, in 2019.
 - 3 Elizabeth Edwards, "Photographs as Objects of Memory," in *The Object Reader*, ed. Fiona Candlin (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 332.
 - 4 Warburg explored in his *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924-1929) the notion of images as vehicles, studied the migration and of images, emotion, while analyzing the cultural history, provenance and emotional impact images would acquire when placed together.
 - 5 From Oxford Reference: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/search?q=mutatis+mutandis&searchBtn=Search&isQuickSearch=true>.
 - 6 Joan Fontcuberta, *La furia de las imágenes. Notas sobre la postfotografía* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg S.L., 2016), 40-41.
 - 7 Costanza Caraffa, "Photographic Itineraries in Time and Space," in *The Handbook of Photography Studies*, ed. Gil Pasternak (London, New York: Routledge, 2020), 85.

IMAGE CAPTIONS

- Page 170-171 Amalia Caputo, *Transferences v 2.0.*, 2019. Installation view. Image courtesy of Oriol Tarridas Photography.
- Page 172-173 Amalia Caputo, *Transferencias o la Infidelidad de la memoria, Atlas I*, 2009-2012 (detail). Image courtesy of Oriol Tarridas Photography.
- Page 174-175 Amalia Caputo, *mutatis mutandis (Atlas III)*, 2017-2018. Installation view (detail). Image courtesy of Oriol Tarridas Photography.
- Page 176-177 Amalia Caputo. *mutatis mutandis (Atlas III)*, 2017-2018. Model composite. Image courtesy of the artist.
- Page 178 Amalia Caputo. *mutatis mutandis (Atlas III)*, 2017-2018 (detail). Image courtesy of the artist.
- Page 179 Amalia Caputo. *mutatis mutandis (Atlas III)*, 2017-2018 (detail). Image courtesy of the artist.