

# TOWARDS AN EXPERIMENTAL CREATION OF THE PRINTED IMAGE FOR AN ACTIVE RECEPTION

Raquel Serrano Tafalla

This article proposes a reflection on how contemporary experimental practices in the printed image can encourage the viewer towards active reception. My practice-based research project has been instigated by questions raised through my fine art practice, concerning how reality is perceived within a photographic printed image and how chance in creation helps the possible development of the photographic reference.

The discovery of photography in 1839 triggered a mode of reproducing images that challenged traditional forms of visual representation. Its characteristic of mimesis of reality, unlike painting, drawing or engraving, forced artists to change their patterns of behaviour. With the arrival of Impressionism, artists recognised the influence of photography on their work, and the “photographic gaze” emerged, which provided a new way of contemplating and representing. As Coronado writes in his text on photography and Impressionism, “The photographic gaze extends beyond and beyond the limits of vision allowed to the painter’s eye” (Coronado, 1998, p. 310).

During the first half of the twentieth century, in the context of the avant-garde, the connection between photography and the plastic arts arose, leading to the conception of new photography in which the symbiosis of the verbal and the visual became evident. The period was marked by a type of innovation that produced a change in expressive resources by breaking with the mimetic condition, ceasing to be the mirror of the world to create another independent narrative, becoming the new reality.

## HYPERMEDIATION AND IMAGE

Images have become predominant vehicles in the circulation of knowledge and, therefore, in the configuration of power relations in modern societies (Castells, 2010). We live in a society marked by excess, blinded by the clarity of the screens that give us access to a completely guarded reality. In the context of the expanded

visual, we must recognise that images are poor in content. However, contemporary art has explored new ways to create a counterimage: a thoughtful image. It is a denser, slower light, not instantly ‘digestible’ (Martín Prada, 2012) that requires more time for visual assimilation and requires considerable analysis by the viewer. But for the true aesthetic character of the image to be experientially accessible, it is necessary to perceive the image as the image it is, that is, to interpret it correctly, taking into account that when we position ourselves in front of a contemporary work of art we are not only dealing with values, external shapes, colours or materials, but also with a process of conceptual recognition that goes beyond the observable.

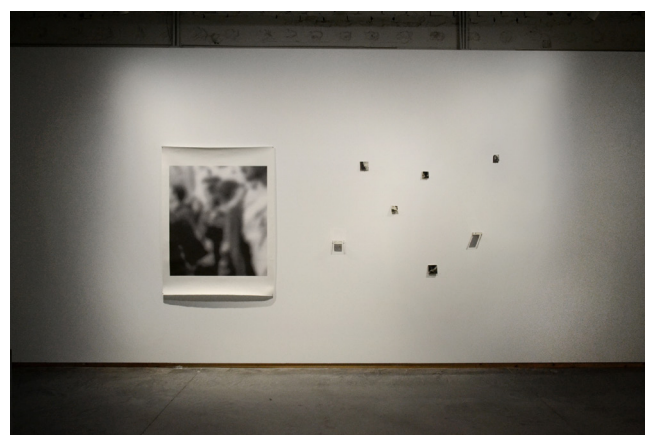


Figure 1



Figure 2

### Figure Titles and Information

Figure 1: Serrano, R. Cartography of an image, 2018. Digital printing and screenprinting on Hahnemühle paper. 150 x 110 cm. Screenprinting on modelling clay (seven pieces). Variable measurements, 8 x 8 cm approx.

Figure 2: Serrano, R. Sampler I (Offcuts), 2019. Screen printing on modelling clay.

The act of reception is part of the experience that the subject experiences in front of the object. We perceive the facts, the things, the actions, and the world. In this sense, aesthetic reception will be sensitive to the knowledge we have about the perceived image.

## NEW PARADIGMS OF RECEPTION IN CONTEMPORARY ART

The first experience in front of the image is presented to us only in a sensory and pleasant way. We react by trying to look for familiar elements: shapes, figures or colours that refer us to similar memories (Castillo, 2012). Umberto Eco affirms that the images give us aesthetic stimuli, and these incite the viewer to capture the global meaning.

Signs are bound by a necessity that is rooted in the perceptual habits of the addressee (...) unable to isolate referents, the addressee must then rely on his capacity to apprehend the complex signification which the entire expression imposes on him. (Eco, 1989, pp. 36-37)

Considering that the first sensory encounter leaves the task of understanding the image incomplete, Francisca Castillo analyses reception as a phenomenon that is revalued with a second glance, emphasising the interest of aesthetic reception in the 'after' of the first experience. Many times, it is the image medium itself that provides the relevant information to start that new look, which will allow you to carry out a more in-depth and elaborate analysis where the first emotions and aesthetic impressions will be connected with the information provided, thus developing more complex aspects.

The reception of the images must be conceived as a communicative process. The contemporary artist performs an intentional discursive practice, and it must be understood from the point of view of reception as a discourse and an expression that says, refers to and talks about something and does it for someone (Romeu, 2012). It is understood that the correct understanding of an image must function as a dialogue in which knowledge is not directed linearly, but rather the viewer corrects, reviews, asks, confirms his expectations created in that first sensory experience and returns to get new answers. The philosophical analysis of H. G. Gadamer conceives the question-and-answer mechanism as fundamental for aesthetic reception. You cannot receive anything to whose understanding you are not open; the subject must be prepared. "To understand a question means to ask it. To understand meaning is to understand it as the answer to a question" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 368).

However, nowadays the artist not only requires that the subject be open to receiving information but also requires active participation in the work. The images in contemporary works of art encourage us not to be passive spectators, even in the act of aesthetic contemplation.

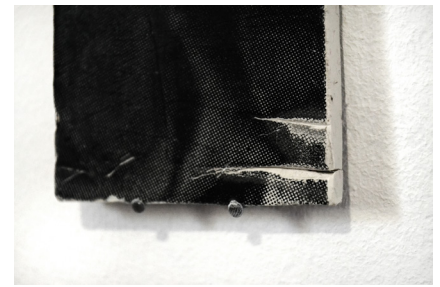


Figure 3



Figure 4

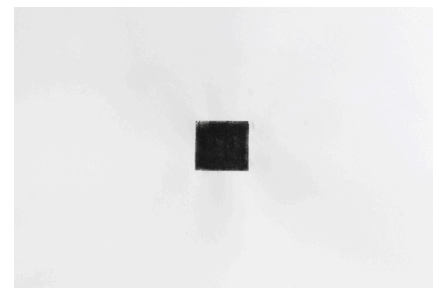


Figure 5

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Figure 3: Serrano, R. Sampler I (Offcuts), 2019. Screen printing on modelling clay.

Figure 4: Serrano, R. Without eyelids, 2018. Wall installation. 100 positive transfers on Canson 250 gr paper of 2,10 x 1,50 cm.

Figure 5: Serrano, R. Without eyelids, 2018. Wall installation. 100 positive transfers on Canson 250 gr paper of 2,10 x 1,50 cm.

## TOWARDS A CREATIVE PROCESS

This evolution of the image as an autonomous medium and the process of communication between this new reality, the artist and the viewer lead us to experiment with the visual message, exploring the different possibilities of the printed photographic image as a physical object, as a surface. Based on experimentation within contemporary graphics, my work focuses on reflection on the structure that makes up the image, reflecting on the importance of the viewer in the process of receiving the image.

I conceive images as autonomous objects beyond their mimetic condition of reality, which can give us more or different information about the world around us. What is represented in the photograph goes into the background, almost non-existent, giving way to an imaginary space with multiple interpretations to talk about concepts that go further. It is a discourse marked by an interest in the construction and reconstruction of the visual, where the multiple realities around which the visual object is built are explored.

My process explores the flexibility of contemporary printmaking through the interplay between different reproduction mechanisms: digital printing and traditional printmaking. The pieces represent a series of fragments of the world or images of it that are deformed and adapted to different materials, such as paper, modelling clay or fabric. I use different techniques in my creative process as a resource that reinforces the distortion suffered by what is photographed through the image printed as a three-dimensional physical piece. The point of interest of my research resides in the blurring, pretending an active perception to understand the message.

Thus, the multiple possibilities of abstraction of consciousness are observed referring to perception, memory or language, making visible the ability of failed acts and misreading to reveal the subconscious.

The title of my first project, Cartography of an image, refers directly to the epistemology and visual semiotics of images and stems from an interest in the construction and deconstruction of images, where the multiple realities around which the visual object is built are explored. The photograph is blurred through a process of distortion and the volumes are built by large patches of chiaroscuro that intuit objects and people, forming a scene that is not completely clarified. To get a glimpse of the scene, seven clear fragments of the original image are connected by numbers, thus linking the two parts of the installation. The rest of the image is hidden, as it is a process of intuition. It is an installation materialised through a process in which screenprinting has intervened in conjunction with digital imaging. The two techniques coexist, each providing results specific to its nature.

The work Sampler I shows a fragmentation of a photographic image screen printed on modelling clay. It is a collection of shapes, marks and frames that make up an abstraction based on images

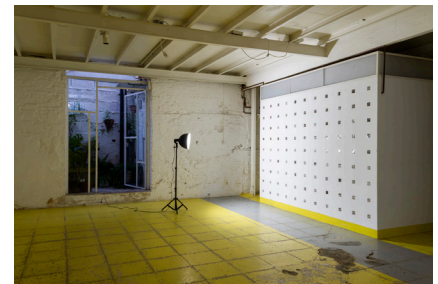


Figure 6



Figure 7

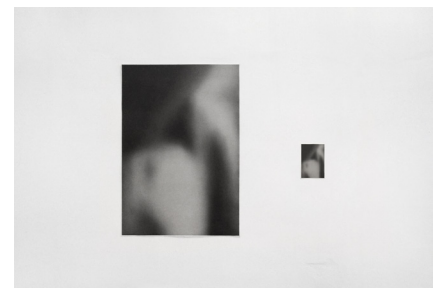


Figure 8

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 Figure 6: Serrano, R. Without eyelids, 2018. Wall installation. Positives laser printing (100 units) 4,5 x 4,5 cm each.  
 Figure 7: Serrano, R. i (i.jpg), 2020. Graphite on Canson 250 gr paper 23 x 18 cm.  
 Figure 8: Serrano, R. Format I and Format II, 2020. Graphite on Canson 250 gr paper (2 pieces) 100 x 69 cm and 20 x 13,8 cm.

and elements that coexist in the real world. One of the main elements that make up the work is chance: a factor that gives way to uncertainty. The material used is clay, which will

deform the image over time, creating an ephemeral work. Referring to chance, we can say that the term was born from the concept of ignorance, from the lack of information. However, it could be formally defined as a random phenomenon. This phenomenon does not allow it to contain a known algorithm. Chance shows two different behaviours: a corrosive chance, disciplined by the essence of change, and another, the creator disciplined by spontaneity. The artist, therefore, becomes an altering of probabilities by selecting processes in which the automatism, errors or objects found, in different degrees, serve to create.

Creative research, whether it be for new images or new ideas, involves traversing a web of infinite possibilities. When we refer to chance in the creative process we are accepting its deliberate inability to predict. From each of the points of that web radiate many paths that in turn will lead to others, each choice equally decisive for each process. This dilemma belongs to the essence of creativity (Ehrenzweig, 1967). Francisco Ávila Fuenmayor's writings on Wagensberg and entropy are key in this section. They describe how the artist is an alterer of probabilities by selecting processes in which automatism, errors and found objects serve to create.

The installation Without eyelids presents a review of the various readings and transformations an image undergoes through repetition and chance. The trend for the renewal of the gaze towards usual images and the need for detachment from what is photographed explains why the realisation of this work is based on archive images. I reuse and decontextualise images that already inhabit the world of the visible to generate new ways of seeing, presenting a review of the different readings and transformations that an image undergoes through printing.

It is an installation that talks about both the genesis and the consummation of the message in photography. It shows the viewer how the saturation of information ends up cancelling part of it. The point of interest of the work resides in the saturation, pretending from the beginning that the distortion of the image is produced by repetition. During the process, a fragment of an image was selected, and this was transferred 100 times in the same place. The installation consists of two parts: in the first, the superimposed transfers of the image to the paper and in the second, the respective plates that were used to carry them out. This is how the process is made visible in the work. The fundamental thing here is that it is the same matter but now organised differently, the result of the repetitive process of transfer.

The i.jpg project is made up of a series of drawings that represent digital images printed on paper: representations of representations.



Figure 9



Figure 10

Figure Titles and Information

Figure 9: Serrano, R. Reproduction footprint, 2020. Series of 10. Frottage. Graphite powder on Basik 150 gr paper. 140 x 95,2 cm each.  
 Figure 10: Serrano, R. Reproduction footprint, 2020. Series of 10. Frottage. Graphite powder on Basik 150 gr paper. 140 x 95,2 cm each.

It is attention to the details of the encounter between a digital image and the materiality of the paper support when they are printed. For this reason, although they are drawings, delicate and precise, they do not evoke a tradition of classic images, but rather a technological universe of poor images that flood our digital exomemories. These pieces do not represent reality, but rather they remember it. They remember photographs and representations. They project the visual unconscious of our contemporaneity, of an imaginary crossed by digital technologies of production and reproduction. This work takes the pulse of our relationship with technology, with the constantly changing visual universe in which we are. We cannot recognise figures or gestures.

The proposed project for the Genalguacil Pueblo Museum Art Encounters, titled Reproduction footprint, is made up of a series of ten drawings made with graphite powder using the traditional technique of printmaking called rubbing or frottage. Through a series of pieces that confuse digital and analogue processes, this work seeks to "caress the image". I have tried not to invent anything and to receive everything. The concept extends beyond the analogue content, which goes into the background giving way to an imaginary space with multiple interpretations. The streets and architectures that make up the town of Genalguacil are the main pro- protagonist of the project since their reliefs have been used as plates. The surfaces of the elements that make up its architecture have been rubbed, forming images that speak of memory, process and chance.

Through the study of the different processes of reproduction and construction of the visual, this project proposes a dialogue between image and space. Based on the interest in concealing or visibilising, the exposed image replaces reality, generating a fictitious scenario where the physical space appears through the imposed obstacle, simultaneously concealing and revealing, restoring seeing, blinding to see again. It is a process of rendering through rubbing and scanning the space to transfer the three-dimensional surface of the architecture to paper.

In the cultural and social scene that we attend, the image and its presence in communication have revolutionised the way of receiving and relating to reality. However, the massive presence of images has increasingly blinded individuals through visual information overload. The media and its language constructed from images, fundamentally, make up a social reality that is more concerned with aesthetics than with the message, in which the constant spectacle limits critical thinking.

## CONCLUSIONS

Faced with the visual passivity to which new technologies have led us, contemporary artistic practices invite us to look carefully, to rethink the image. The images that make up the contemporary art ecosystem challenge the rhetoric of visual culture, resulting in

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an evolution of the aesthetic reception of the image towards an active reception in which the viewer must engage in an efficient communication process to enter the different layers of the image and thus reach knowledge.

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## AUTHOR

**Raquel Serrano Tafalla**

UK/Spain

University of the Arts London, Camberwell College / University of Seville, Faculty of Fine Arts, Seville.

r.serranotafalla0120221@arts.ac.uk

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Raquel Serrano Tafalla (Huelva, 1995). I graduated in fine arts with a Master in Art: Idea and Production, obtaining the Extraordinary End of Studies Award from the University of Seville. Currently, I am a doctoral student in the Art and Heritage Program and researcher of the HUM822 group: Graphics and Digital Creation at the University of Seville, carrying out an artistic research stay at the University of the Arts of London for three months in 2022. I participated in the International Meeting of the Emerging Graphics OPEN PORTFOLIO FIG BILBAO 2019 and was selected in the "A Secas, Andalusian artists of now" conference organised by the Andalusian Center of Contemporary Art in 2019 and the Genalguacil Art Encounters in 2020. I have recently made numerous individual and collective exhibition projects in Andalusia, the Basque Country and Madrid. I have participated in international contemporary art fairs such as ARCOMadrid, at the stand of Genalguacil Pueblo Museo in 2021 and Diputación de Huelva in 2022 and the Estampa and Artesantander fairs in 2021. My works are in the collection of the Andalusian Center of Contemporary Art in Seville and at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Genalguacil in Málaga.

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IMAGE GALLERY



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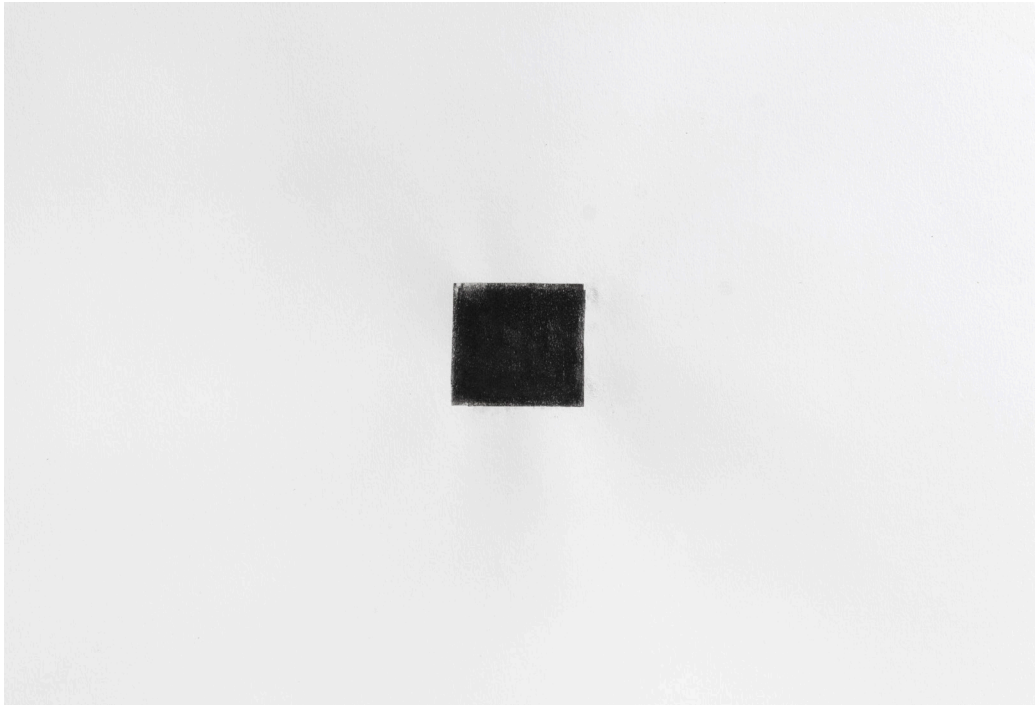




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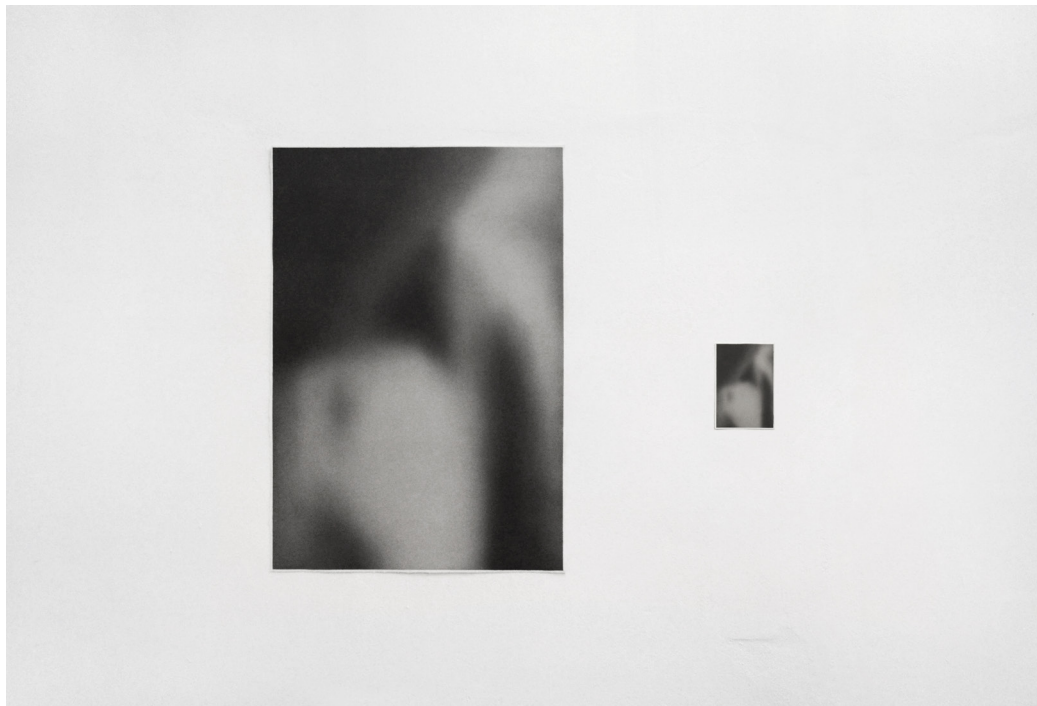
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