
Bravo de Felipe Romero Beltrán (Bogotá, Colombia 1992) is the winning entry in the second edition of the KBr Photo Award, an initiative through which Fundación MAPFRE supports artistic creation and promotes the career of an artist by producing their project and an accompanying book and exhibition.

Romero Beltrán's photographic practice is located at the limits of documentary photography and employs elements typical of this language, establishing a dialogue between them and other components closer to the artistic, pictorial and even performative. As a result, Romero Beltrán's images have a hybrid character and transcend the strictly photographic to encompass the visual in a broader sense.

In all his works to date Romero Beltrán has been interested in territories that have been or are scenes of tension, conflict and visual reflection. The Río Bravo (Río Grande in the US) is characterised by its dual status, both a river and at the same time the border between Mexico and the United States. Here, geography has a profound political charge that has been accumulating conflicts and tensions since the 19th century until reaching an unsustainable situation in recent years. In *Bravo* Romero Beltrán locates us in a specific terrain, an area close to the Mexican city of Monterrey. Life here revolves around waiting, something that can last for months, years or even forever. The river and those who arrive here to cross it determine everything, shaping the identity of its people and their lifestyles. This movement of people not only affects Mexican citizens and is rather a phenomenon that extends to all of Central and South America. The photographic essay *Bravo* focuses on this reality, presenting a series of images of buildings, people and landscapes that inhabit it and reveal its hybrid and liminal character.

In addition to the images, this presentation includes working process material from the project and the audiovisual work *The Crossing*, created prior to the photographs. Here Romero Beltrán expands his visual reflection on the river to show us five situations which divert or displace its border status, incorporating other uses and situations associated with its dual geographical and political nature.

Victoria del Val
Curator

About *El Cruce*

We might come to think that the only action taken regarding the border is to cross it. The image of the one who crosses it, who, upon crossing it, fails to understand where this thing is that they are crossing, and crosses it without knowing what the border is, during the night. The border is a geography that belongs to language; once it is transgressed, it vanishes—or rather, once one reaches the place that defines one side and the other, one realizes that the border never existed, that it is precisely because it insists on not existing that it continues a little further beyond, just in front of the eyes.

Perhaps for this reason (because the border does not exist), crossing the border is the least of the exercises, the rarest of the forms in which it appears, because the border is not only ambiguous but also takes on concrete and varied forms—it even takes the shape of the deformation of shapes. At times, it resembles a disappeared person (the disappeared person is the border), like someone left behind a hollow in a place, like a constant absence. This is the case of the border when it slips through the gullies of the desert, those dusty trails among shrubs. The border evades through them. The border (the non-existent one) is what deforms them, what makes them swerve or lean, what makes them take one direction and then another without explanation—or more precisely, what explains them in a way that renders the explanation senseless. The border is what crosses them over one another, even over themselves; what compels them to appear and reach the other side or return to the point of origin; what causes them to vanish unexpectedly in the middle of a horizon.

The border is what diverts bodies, turns them into syncopated beats of one another, what compresses and extends them, what traps them in pairs, what forces them to stumble, what lifts one hand and not the other, and then the other hand; what makes them circle the pavement on which all these actions take place in the dance, what drives them to enter the circle of these movements. It is the guest who will never arrive, the cause of the celebration, the forgotten cause of going there and contracting, lifting, syncopating, dragging, rising, and lowering the bodies in that way.

The border rises or falls with the level of the water that, before the dam was built, was the divinity that gave it order: flood seasons during the rains, and dry seasons without rain. Now it is an emancipated border. It is a god itself. It can disappear when the sluice gates are closed, it can lose all its volume, it

can leave the smooth stones bare under the midday sun, it can reveal what once was a river, and expose sandbanks and pebble carpets, some form of filth—some form that, having sunk, left the world behind and now reappears—; it condemns the gaze to see the remains of a feast that will not be cleaned up, the waste of a drunkenness no one intends to tidy. When this happens, the border is not the absent one that defines the senseless curves of the gullies; when this happens, the border is a desert river, it is where a river once was. If someone once dreamed of floating to the other side, faced with the shape of the vanished water, faced with the realization that the river no longer exists, they hesitate to abandon the carefully constructed idea. It is one of those absurdities of renunciation, when what was imagined, dreamed, enumerated, calculated, vanishes. It is one of those forms of the absurdity of giving up and remaining on one shore, in front of the easiest of transitions, waiting—before turning back—for a reflection on the absent water.

In the periods when the border fills the river with water, its desert bed is covered and becomes what it once was, as if nothing strange had happened. But seeing the surface become murky, lingering on the reflections—these are posthumous operations; the river before our eyes is no longer that of the Romantics; one secretly senses that the water there is something else. The water that covers the border does not heed the swimmer who crosses it from one side to the other, who lets himself drift with the current, who occasionally notices where they are and looks to the other shore, searching for what makes it different. The water that covers the border ignores those who waded in up to their waists and apply it to their bodies to wash away all sins, from the first to the last. The water that covers the border ignores those who now cross it and see how the swimmer and the baptists are left halfway.

The border is the hollow outlined by a red-painted room where a small skylight opens to the street. It is the green corridor, in shadow, that leaves this room, that passes another room on the left, that reveals the tiny kitchen, the implausible vestibule, that leads to a cement patio with brick walls after being blinded by the light; on the floor there is a glass of milk; the exit from the patio (from the implausible vestibule, the tiny kitchen, the other room, and the red-painted room), the exit from the border in sum, which takes so many shapes, is always open, but no one there ever quite manages to cross it.

Albert Corbí