

# **A list of words for Helena Goñi**

## **Interchangeable or not**

*Marti Manen*

### **Uncertainty.**

Being in no man's land, always being in progress, always pursuing a lack of knowledge. Allowing things to be inexact, allowing them to escape and for what is left behind to be possibility, an outlet, a field of action. Allowing images to also be much more than what can be seen, to also be everything that has gone before and possible paths into the future. Thinking in terms beyond staticity, thinking of options for which we don't have the answer. Moving towards these situations, recognising contexts to explore their limits. Being a limit.

### **Situations.**

Helena Goñi works with situations where a narrative becomes yet another possibility. There is a before and after a camera shot, there is a series of exchanged looks, there is trust, there is a community and there is free-falling. There are moments which become manifestos, there are gestures and performativity, alongside a desire to wait, to pause, to control. If it were possible.

**Trace.**

Sometimes, it is important to revisit certain traces. Traces which remain in our memories. Or which we try to keep there and repeat over and over to prevent them from leaving. Moments charged with emotion, moments for pausing, past moments. Moments which incite a possible tragedy. Moments with different light. Seeing some of Helena Goñi's tones and being led to Nan Goldin, to Catherine Opie, to Annika von Hauswolff, to Wolfgang Tillmans. Adopting a referential framework when in danger, when falling, in a gesture of strength full of fragility.

**Gaze I.**

A black-and-white image from Behind Blue Eyes // Tell Me How Close We Are to a Riot. Ale and Ana. Two faces, one looking at the camera and the other looking upwards. Skin-to-skin contact. Trust, once again. A jacket, covering a body and caring, a gesture intended to change everything and confidence in what is happening, too. At the same time, a look into space, a tense mouth. And the trust generated by adopting a degree of freedom which also understands what violence and tension are.

**Gaze II.**

On a train, Helena observes someone who doesn't conform. Someone with an alternative attitude. His desires are different, his interaction with the world -if it is with the world- begins each second. Having no pre-established criteria but, instead, drawing on an emotion-based system. Approaching that person. Slowly. Seeking out a framework of trust for two worlds to meet. Successfully connecting. Fascination. Letting his eyes close. Letting his eyes open. Not letting his eyes look at us; it doesn't matter if they look at us, they're not ours, nor should they be. Allowing for an ability far removed from the usual analysis, letting colours explode like scents, letting touch be extreme, letting a sound take us far, far away.

**Tiredness.**

At certain moments, tiredness allows many things to happen, it allows barriers to cease to exist and for absolute trust to suddenly appear. Moments for shooting. Moments in the camera, with the camera, moments which, alone, hold on for those couple of seconds when we are aware of what is happening. I can see this connection between tiredness and trust, between staying awake and carrying on, seeking the dawn and little else. I think, too, that through tiredness we can be free. Sometimes I focus more on barriers, on how to deactivate them with an active gesture, that on how to find a paradox to break the mould. Helena is there, waiting attentively for this moment to arrive, and then everything flows freely.

**Around.**

There is something very complex about Helena Goñi's gaze. There is mist and stickiness, there is the possibility of pain and beauty, there is an ordinariness that borders on poetry. Being part of place but understanding that things are transient and fleeting. Helena in *Surrounded*, an approach to a city as full of greys and contrasts as London, a city which glows red at night, with flats offering a past and a former identity, a city with night-time escape routes which lead you who knows where and how. A city where moments of calm still exist, with compositions close to nature created out of romantic desire, possibilities of casting doubt on everything.

**Control.**

Michel Foucault and Chris Kraus. Thinking about the body, thinking about limits, thinking about the need to recognise limits. The idea that it is through limits that content can be discovered. But also limits as an explosion, as flight, as an escape system.

The question is how to escape when you have a safe word. Chris Kraus in L.A. joining the world of BDSM out of boredom, as a potential route into a different life. Foucault in clubs, also in California. And aesthetics which transform a series of objects into instructions and walls, and into elements of the body itself.

### **Gaze III.**

Olatz, a tired gaze out of frame. She is buttoning up her Texan shirt, white socks and movement. Her gaze is fixed but we don't know where. There is tension and the potential for explosion. There is also a confidence and latent power which could lead to anything and everything.

### **Discovering.**

The possibility of Roland Barthes' second moment and its maintenance or its connection with death. And with love, that love which Barthes also leaves out of the story, as it proves to be difficult to write about in a state of euphoria. Discovering in a second moment which could become the first. Returning, going back. Revealing. All the vocabulary of photography is charged with second possibilities.

### **Green flash.**

There is a fascination with moments of change, a tradition surrounding movement through stages. Fire and night. Dawn.

### **Discovering oneself.**

Helena Goñi's photographic process involves a great deal of self-discovery, of wondering about herself, there is a constant dialogue of sorts. Thinking through action, remembering what you were thinking when shooting, shooting and then thinking afterwards. Making a situation last and allowing it to return, allowing for everything to

be present, for colours not to be lost, for intensity to remain, for that constructed gaze to belong to someone who is also self-constructing or self-dismantling. Constructing and dismantling as a constant process, as maintenance of a present which needs self-discovery to feel, to be, to exist.

### **Definition.**

A jump to Kathy Acker's writing. Perfectly-defined chaos. It is not easy to fall and then explain it, or for writing itself to be a fall, for writing itself to be a person.

### **Anxiety.**

The photographic gaze is absolute attention placed on a moment, but also distance from this moment. Being and not being part. Looking through the thoughts of a camera, the thoughts of a machine, a construction of perfectly-adopted language which implies a possible emotional separation precisely because it is language. Living intensely through an image can obstruct participation in what is seen.

### **Photography.**

At a given moment, photography ceased to be photography to instead become everything. Image and art as a context where linguistic construction may be called into question. Images with times, images for contexts, images which become an installation, looks which become objects. A lost bathroom which is reconstructed to be seen and remembered.

### **Consumption.**

Helena produces images which we consume. But there is a change, there was a change in different looks which led these images to transition from being nice to being charged with subjectivity. Subjective content in the photographic gaze which is shared from the point of receipt, a receipt which, in some way, already lies the first photographic gaze. Photographs for one's own self and for others.

**Bowie.**

David Bowie's eyes and a permanently-enlarged pupil. Reactions out of sync with light or dark. Helena Goñi in Calgary, 2017. A casual self-portrait, with a backpack on. Her left pupil more dilated than her right.

**Speed.**

The multiplication and selection of images. Helena Goñi makes us part of the absolute multiplication of images, a world which moves from Ballard to Baudrillard to implode into Karen Barad. But poetics, we mustn't forget about poetics. Or sensuality, that tactile ability which, paradoxically, we can find in an image. Those extra seconds, that caress, that moment on our retinas.

