

**Francisco Paco Carrascosa**

**'Black  
&  
White'  
with  
Friends**

**8**

**VERLAG FÜR MODERNE KUNST**

# **PC – and the joy of seeing**

**Urs Stahel**

The first and second pictures in volume 1 of the book series show two sparrows, presumably a pair, as they perch resolutely on the rim of a plate and peck away at the remains of a leftover salad. There's a lot of rucola and some red pepper there, neither of which seems to have met with approval. The rest is concealed by a folded napkin weighed down by a fork. Skip from photo one to photo two: between the two shots, the sparrows have moved a little, exhibiting, perhaps, the excited, bouncy behaviour we associate with them. Seven volumes of photos later, and the very last picture in the collection is of a painted tiger, with, on the right, a partial view of an 'oriental' beauty adorned with jewellery and rings. The closing image on the back cover is a full-length depiction of this 'foreign' beauty, framed by a second tiger. The photos of paintings of exotica form part of a sequence about a carnival, which concludes the densely packed and wide-ranging series of books.

In between, throughout a total of over 3,500 pages, or, to be exact, 528 pages per volume, we are presented with an extraordinary world of ordinary life. The paradox is intended: the photographs, which were taken in Switzerland, Spain, England and Italy, are all bled to the left or right edge of the page, and slide like an almost endless film through themes of the banality, the simplicity of everyday life, the unspectacular nature of life; pictures shot by an idler, a roaming stray whose eyes rove here and there, to the right and to the rear, before he slowly moves on. When he shoots, he does so in a burst, following an incident, panning as if holding a cine camera; he scans the front of a building, his lens bores into the depths of the space in front of him, zooming in and out. There are no motorways here, no trains, planes, airports or industry, no money-laundering facilities, no church

(or, if there is, it's easily overlooked) and, as a result, no sense of speed, no coolness, no production, no assertions, no bluff, none of the things that constitute a unique selling point in our contemporary lives. On the contrary, life seems to stall here, to slow down, the cityscape and its architecture interlocking, becoming condensed, with an arm, a bird's wing, half a car, a sniffing hound, a melting ice cream, a naked back, condensed into horizontal bore holes – a second paradox, a type of core drilling going down into life and taking place only inches away from our awareness, our usual sphere of interest, inches away from life's hustle and bustle and sophisticated functionality.

PC uses a Panasonic Lumix DMC-TZ71 – a compact camera, a 'point and shoot' camera, as it was commonly referred to in the analogue era, but with all the usual technical options available today. The key issue here is that the camera is small and slight: it's just a camera, not a machine, because PC works amongst people, right in the middle of a crowd. Though he does not conceal himself, he still clearly does not want a 'photo situation' to arise, a distraction in which the world turns to the camera, where widows compete to out-weep each other for the camera, where all events no matter how complex are directed towards the camera, this one-eyed central perspective, like a chorus line or the catwalk at a fashion show. He scans his worlds unnoticed as a rule, click by click, guided by his feelings, moods, desires. Two other points are key: the camera has a 30× optical zoom, which means that PC can home in on the world, overcome distances, compress the near and the far so that they belong together, merge into one and ultimately form a PC image pattern to be captured – click! – by the camera. In contrast to the wide-angle shot, which throws everything open and creates distance, the long lens connects, compresses and splices together that which it sees. A movement in the foreground and one right at the back become a sabre-rattling duel on the same plane, architectural structures are wedged together in a tangle of shapes where people and animals, pets, sparrows, squirrels and cuddly toys suddenly go hand in hand or lean on each other for

support. The world is cast in an equalising mould by the focal length of the camera lens, or 'democratised', if we are to use a political image. In this way, a visual substrate of the ebb and flow of life is created, a strange, extraordinary equivalence of the ordinary existence of all creatures and objects emerges before the camera – and within the frame of the picture.

The flowing and slowing and the movements back and forth also acquire a filmic quality thanks to a significant decision by PC: he never takes just one shot of a scene – he always shoots in bursts of three, four, six or even ten pictures; and he does not stand or sit still – he moves like a shadow character in the middle of an anticipated scenario. People carry on what they're doing, birds dig for worms, dogs turn around, avalanches are diverted – intrinsic movements which are then supplemented, doubled or multiplied by the changes in perspective and angle of view. New constellations and other angles generate very distinctive imagery. PC does more than photograph everyday life: he films it. By creating sequences of 3-5-7-9 pictures, he makes his own unique kind of frozen short video. Not one click of the shutter, but seven. From these seven points a line is formed – not a straight one, but a zigzag, on which the photographer himself moves with, or in the opposite direction to, the action, twisting and turning as the mood takes him. I wonder what the effect would be if PC were to display his images as projections, running at a single speed or in various tempos, in a large room, one projection here, another there, until a giant living picture rose up in the space. Often there's something in his way, blocking the view, spoiling the perfect shot. But this other thing, this intrusion, immediately becomes part of the short animated story, a pillar, a wall to place in the picture that unfolds before our eyes; and it corresponds to the reality of our experience when wending our way through a bustling crowd of people, in a market place for example. We see scenes of ordinary life, leisure time, recreation, shopping, strolling: scenes of human and animal life mixed in a predominantly urban confusion.

Gradually, it becomes clear that PC spends less time standing up than one might think. He stoops, sits on a bench, or squats down. As a result, his photos shift, they do not show things in their usual perspective; he frames the world from a lower position, sometimes much lower. He lowers his viewpoint, he looks up at the scenery with a dog's-eye or a cat's-eye or a small-bird's-eye view. He shows things we can never see with our upright stance and brisk step, though we might quite possibly tread on them and squash them. In two senses, he photographs from his belly: he photographs in places where all bodies collide with each other to form one huge mass, where life smells of life, not of perfume or of money; and he photographs semi-instinctively.

His view is so extraordinary because he shows the ordinary from a new perspective, as if he were cutting a slice of cake horizontally instead of vertically. In his amazing book *A Fine Balance*, Rohinton Mistry portrayed the reality of life in India from the perspective of the Untouchables. PC seems to show the everyday world of people through the eyes of their pets and the small creatures of the city, through the eyes of those who have little or no worth (such as sparrows) or the eyes of those who are most loved (pets, one's own dog for example), when they do not care about anything, when a poetic and strange existence plays out before our very eyes amongst all the people, when everyday life becomes an *Animal Farm*.

In his reflection of ordinary life in short sequences, a palpable feeling of joy in the image comes through, which bows neither to narcissistic self-portrayal such as we see in social media, nor to the iconoclastic attitude in contemporary art which confronts the image with scepticism, discusses it only in the context of print and online media, as power, as representation of the white rulers in the West, of imperialism, men over women, haves over have-nots, people over nature – and therefore approaches it with little (or only shameful) joy. PC, by contrast, completely surrenders to his joy in the picture: he looks and looks, shows and shows, clicks and clicks, rocks back and forth, sinks down, glides high. He immerses himself in this ordinary

world, goes native, as it were, free of all ideological judgments, 'shows what there is' and shows it simply – even if six or seven times. PC looks, if in doubt, from below, from the perspective of the neglected, those left behind, but with a primal joy in seeing, exploring, capturing the everyday, the unspectacular, the many unpredictable knots in the tangle of ordinary life. PC believes in the image without being religious, he seeks and loves the energy of images without exploiting them, he likes the strength, the power of images – but far more as a storm, a light drizzle, or as bright sunshine – than as the power of someone over someone or something else.

To put it in more basic terms: this is a photograph and it contains a certain subject matter. This photo is therefore about this subject, this event, and was taken by this or that photographer in a certain context, maybe anonymously, photo credit unknown. That's all, end of story. We call this a strictly descriptive (denotative) view of photography. In it, it is easy to overlook the aesthetic power of photography, the strength of the image, its visual suggestiveness, the deep blacks in the layer of silver, the massiveness of oversized formats, the brightness, the vibrancy of the colours of the pigment print. Photographs can do so much more than simply label or name things. They haunt you, acquire charisma, get under your skin; in other words, they penetrate us emotionally and so convey not one but two, three or four different messages to us at the same time – so-called connotative, associative messages that can be presented as metaphors or symbols and often have to be seen and interpreted allegorically. Or those which, like music, find their way directly and suddenly into our emotions. Sometimes we can be filled and saturated by the emotional power of a photograph more intensively than its descriptive content is capable of doing. And sometimes descriptive and emotive powers may find themselves competing against each other as if in a duel, in a contradiction that leaves the observer unsure or uncomfortable. But when indexes, references and labels intermingle with emotive power, with the strength of the image, the photograph can be unbeatable.

A special mixture of ‘deno’ and ‘conno’, the denotative and the connotative: that’s PC, with a good measure of joy in the picture stirred in. This puts him in opposition to some of the ways pictures are used today; for example on the Internet, where images are reduced to targets, to catchwords, ‘green’, ‘yellow’, ‘red’, ‘blue’, ‘great’, ‘lip’, ‘awful’, ‘cool’, to simple names that can be viewed in a minimal format in a hundredth of a second and rated with likes. His joy in the picture also chafes at the severity, the dryness, the burden of theory imposed by politically correct art. For him, the important thing is the joy of being and the joy of the picture, and that can no more be ‘pure’ than sexuality, for example – much as we may try to persuade ourselves otherwise. His images here show that there can be a world outside these frames, images that are simple, almost as unspectacular as a tree, a rock, a person, and almost as contradictory as life, as reality itself. A proper-improper rush buzzes through our senses, and the condensed, yet at the same time animated, poetry of ordinary life takes over our brains. These seven volumes by PC – by Paco Carrascosa – are redolent with a powerful smell of life.

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