

# The Calligraphy of Light on the Body

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Rafael Navarro is a self-taught photographer. He reached a point in his development when he came to the realization that photojournalism was not for him, that he grew pale with timidity when confronted with the harshness of reality. So, he decided to invent a reality of his own: he forged a link between exterior phenomena and the pulsating force within that at times shook him to the core. He subjected this invented reality to the rigor of aesthetic beauty, to the calligraphy of light which for him is a pencil that raises mountain ranges, that sculpts hills, plains and valleys in objects of all kinds. In the landscape here presented, the human body, on the living skin of a woman in repose, totally at ease in her beauty.

The female body and skin are a constant point of reference; it is the object of desire of a man, of the eye and of the lens. For thirty years, Rafael Navarro has revisited it without repeating himself: he has cast himself into the invisible bloodstream, the very membranes of life, into that skin wafted by the air, by the act of contemplation, in its uncompromising nakedness, that skin which is replete with textures and which exercises an inevitable attraction. His unique achievement in selecting one of the eternal themes of photography and of painting is his point of view, which is defined by the elegance, the symphony of light and shade which nuances the surrender, by its absolute transparency and its composition. Rafael Navarro is outstanding not only for his refined technique, mediated by intuition and craft (the zone system is in his soul and in his retina, which are indeed indistinguishable) but also for the precision with which he captures beauty and above all, his originality in transmuting a body into a landscape, a river, a heartbeat of muscles with soul, into a tremor of mystery and sensuality.

He has transcribed these forms of the body into a melody of sensations, a study and a consummation, a combined theory of sequences, instants, emotions and everlasting images which are transformed into flats and curves, into promises of paradise, into sunrises and sunsets which struggle to overcome the irresistible power of the horizon. Cheeks looming suddenly like volcanoes or a body in a state of unconsciousness, from which a forest emerges on the Mount of Venus, take on a different dimension: the smoothness of the seasons, the temptation of the flesh, metaphor of the viewer, veneration and ascent to pleasure.

Landscape is another source of his inspiration. It manifests itself in different ways. Perhaps one of the most apt is that primitive moving picture which is so appealing to the photographer. Like a film maker, a painter such as Brueghel the Elder or a composer of brief but intense pieces, Rafael Navarro constructs stories and incorporates subtle details, with slight shifts of focus, of attitudes of objects (man/woman and exuberant nature) and with all the power of light. One of many such examples is *El árbol de la libertad* [the freedom tree]: the tree and life, the tree and the nude, the tree and the woman who approaches, observes, comes and then goes away. Here is the return of the artist in essence, the poet of self-restraint, the patience of the sequential dreamer: maximum evocation with minimal means, the conceptual artist who suggests worlds that are within him and out there in the fields, from a birds-eye view, from the view of the hawk that is approaching.

Rafael Navarro is an artist at once classical and modern. He has learned to reconcile his two, or perhaps three, aesthetic directions: the observer of nudes and landscapes and the contemporary creator who researches forms and is unafraid of abstraction, geometry or the extreme subtlety of a gesture. He does not fear them, no: he elevates them.