

siembra 28

iñaki bonillas

*jazz covers from the
j.r. plaza archive*

from august 21, 2021

Iñaki Bonillas presents *Jazz Covers from the J.R. Plaza Archive* in Siembra, a series that explores the relationship between photographic language and design in the visual communication of jazz. The care in graphic design, the variety of abstract shapes, the rich color palette, and the authenticity and intimacy of the album covers from the late 1950s and 1960s fascinated Bonillas. Two decades ago, the artist inherited an enormous collection of photographs and personal material from his grandfather José Rodríguez Plaza. Among the documents in this archive is an extensive collection of self-portraits, where body language and image composition make him look like an attractive and charismatic icon or celebrity. Bonillas found resonances between the self-portraits and the photographs on the covers of these jazz albums. For the works he presents, the artist removes the text from the covers and replaced the photographs of the musicians with self-portraits by J.R. Plaza. By eliminating the text from the covers, Bonillas brings to the foreground the different visual elements of the composition and shows the influence of abstract art in their design.

One day, while Bonillas was listening to John Coltrane's album *Giant Steps*, one of his grandfather's self-portraits came to mind where he appears sitting on a small staircase with a histrionic expression of disappointment and pointing a gun at his head with humorous despair. He himself had cut out the picture and pasted it over a cardboard and drawn a graph that indicated the years '63, '64, '65, '66 and a red zigzagging line in a downward direction, perhaps indicating the decline of something in his life. Precisely during those years, both jazz and design were at an effervescent point generating innovative and revolutionary proposals. The album covers of young designers like Reid Miles became stylistic landmarks and visual signifiers of energy, freedom, and modernity. The contrast between the rise suggested by the album title, *Giant Steps*, and the decline indicated by the image, coupled with the formal resonances of the portrait, prompted the collage in Bonillas' mind in the form of an album cover and detonated this new series of 60 prints, each in a vinyl sleeve format that is presented in Siembra.

The J.R. Plaza archive opened a path in Bonillas' practice towards the appropriation and recycling of photographic material that he proposed to work with the images that already exist instead of creating new ones. Since then, his work has experimented with different approaches to archival

[kurimanzutto](#)

[gob. rafael rebollar 94](#)
[col. san miguel chapultepec](#)
[11850 mexico city](#)

[tue - thu, 11 am - 6 pm](#)
[fri - sat, 11 am - 4 pm](#)

[press](#)
[julia villaseñor](#)
julia@kurimanzutto.com
[+52 55 52 56 24 08](tel:+525552562408)

www.kurimanzutto.com
[@kurimanzutto](#)



material and investigated the materiality and semiotic depth of photography as a medium.

about the artist

Despite all appearances, Iñaki Bonillas is not a photographer. Rather, his work investigates the materiality and semiotic depth of said medium in a somewhat topographic manner: starting, and never ending, in a periphery that stands ambiguously as both the material margins of photography as well as its self-reflective dimension—that is, its apparent core. As he exerts infinite variations on generic aspects, alternately related to structure and meaning (primary colors; family photographs; erasures; captioning; fiction; archival habits; etc.), Bonillas delivers a paradox with each of his works where background becomes foreground, face pigment, anecdote main theme, stain signature, and vice-versa.

Unlike many contemporary artists of recent generations, Bonillas started his career before, and instead of, undertaking an official fine arts education. Widely and internationally exhibited before he reached age 20, his work started off with highly analytical studies of ordinary photographic procedures such as printing (in his foundational piece, *Trabajos fotográficos*, 1998) or pressing the shutter (*Diez cámaras documentadas acústicamente*, from the same year). Trained in the subtleties of image processing while he worked as an assistant in a photographer's studio, Bonillas saw his literalistic impulse transformed by the inheritance, in 2000, of his grandfather's photo archive; a corpus he referred to thereupon as the "J. R. Plaza Archive". Composed of nearly three thousand pictures grouped in thirty albums, along with eight hundred slides, two volumes of an encyclopedia on film, and a folder of composite documents, the J. R. Plaza Archive became the matrix of more than twenty works produced between the years 2003 and 2016.

kurimanzutto

gob. rafael rebollar 94
col. san miguel chapultepec
11850 mexico city

tue – thu, 11 am – 6 pm
fri – sat, 11 am – 4 pm

press
julia villaseñor
julia@kurimanzutto.com
+52 55 52 56 24 08

www.kurimanzutto.com
@ kurimanzutto

