

Portraits from the 19th century: the business venture of two artists

LOCATION: Granada

DURATION: 1'45"

SUMMARY: Two young people dedicated to visual arts have decided to recover ancient techniques and open El Laboratorio (The Lab) in the Granadian Sacromonte. This is a cave where they make portraits by following the collodion process, the most popular photographic technique during the late 19th century. They also offer workshops and an artist-in-residence program aimed at other photographers.

VTR:

Thirty minutes to obtain a picture. That's the duration of a portrait session in El Laboratorio, or The Lab, a project started by Pablo and Hedvig in one of the Sacromonte's caves, in Granada. After teaching photography in Norway, these visual artists decided to begin this adventure that takes us to the 19th century.

PABLO CASTILLA
El Laboratorio Manager

"That contact with the lab, with the dark room, was what encouraged us to work this way."

HEDVIA SOFIE BIONG
El Laboratorio Manager

"Doing photography in a physical way. Analog photography, much slower, but always using our hands, with chemicals..."

They make portraits by following the collodion process. A plate is sensitized with silver nitrate and it is ready for the camera. The picture is taken using very long exposure times, up to thirty seconds.

PABLO CASTILLA
El Laboratorio Manager

"We discovered this technique, the collodion process, which was the most popular and extensive way of doing photography during the late 19th century. A very interesting technique."

The plate must stay moist during the whole process, either way it would lost its sensitivity and become useless. They can be glass plates, what is called ambrotype, or aluminium plates, what is known as tintype.

PABLO CASTILLA
El Laboratorio Manager

"The quality obtained with the collodion in a glass or aluminium plate is really amazing."

HEDVIA SOFIE BIONGS
El Laboratorio Manager

"People from all over come to visit the neighbourhood. And people who enter here and have their portrait done are usually very happy with the result."

Client

"On one hand the result, the truth is that the result is amazing, but on the other hand watching the process is also amazing."

The result is a portrait that takes us back in time, but that will persist in the future too, at least for two hundred years.

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