

ON: SMILE!
YOU'RE ON CAMERA
MARIA PEIXOTO MARTINS
VISUAL ARTS
EXHIBITION
CURATION JOANA LEÃO
ZÉ DOS BOIS
BOOKSTORE
29.01.26/18.04.26

MONDAY TO SATURDAY 6PM - 10 PM / RUA DA BARROCA, 57 / ZEDOSBOIS.ORG



ON: Smile! You're on camera

Maria Peixoto Martins

Installation consisting of 270 photographs printed on 120 g offset paper and 1h30 sound (loop)

In the 18th century, British philosopher Jeremy Bentham devised a prison model designed to control prisoners' behavior. He proposed an architectural structure in which the cells, with no communication between them, were arranged in a circle around a central point, where a watchtower was located. The person in the tower could observe all the cells, but their occupants remained uncertain as to whether or not they were being watched, which led them to a state of self-control. This structure was called a panopticon.

In 1975, Michel Foucault revisited this concept to reflect on modes of discipline in modern societies. Constant surveillance emerges as the figure of the watchman, who exercises power over individuals, who, by internalizing disciplinary norms, remain in a permanent state of self-control. Foucault identified the presence of this mechanism in institutions such as schools, hospitals, and workplaces, where surveillance, standardization, and examination become structural mechanisms for the production of social order, allowing the information obtained to be used for the production of knowledge. For Foucault, knowledge and power were inextricably linked.

Fifty years later, these reflections have become unavoidably relevant. In the digital age, surveillance is constant and our data is collected, analyzed, and converted into economic value, feeding systems that seek to anticipate and influence individual actions.

Maria Peixoto Martins' work emerges precisely as a warning about this permanent surveillance to which we are subjected, most of the time without being aware that anyone, anywhere in the world, can have access to our image. However, this work does not only explore the oppressive dimension of this reality, but evokes a sense of ambiguity: moments of humor, tenderness, and humanity that, despite being captured without authorial intent, reveal a poetic dimension of everyday life.

Upon entering the installation, the audience is confronted with this paradoxical space: simultaneously welcoming and unsettling, intimate and public. The work exposes the involuntary gesture of being observed and yet creates a territory where these images take on new life, disconnected from their original context.

This encounter invites reflection: what does it mean today to talk about privacy or consent? How do we deal with the discomfort of knowing we are being observed and, at the same time, contributing to the very system we criticize—for example, by photographing and sharing this same installation on social media?

Some contradictions seem inevitable. Just as references to Foucault in exhibition texts, which I have also mentioned as clichés, return here not out of habit but out of necessity.

Joana Leão