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Singing to Life

by Pedro Meyer

A few days ago Nadia and I went to visit her grandfather who is 94 years old and lives with his new girlfriend, Blanca, in a retirement home for the elderly, near Mexico City. As we were leaving the home where they live with about another hundred elderly people, I came across the lovely lady in the picture sitting on a small chair across from the entrance door.

Upon seeing her I felt I was looking at something very special which I had to photograph, I took the picture without understanding my motives. I still had no clear idea, why this person who I did not even know, caught my attention so much. But after studying the image, and looking at it for a while, I discovered what my fascination was all about.

I concluded that indeed the way she looked was a song to life. On the one hand, women be they elderly or young, often like to dress in black while this woman was dressed as a rainbow that seemed to come from the palette of a painter. Where women usually flee from being photographed at the slightest wrinkle or blemish on their skin, this woman smiled to me with a great inner peace and joy, making me feel that it was quite all right for me to take a picture of her. She looked happy and the wrinkles on her face were just the outcome of a face that had seen quite a lot of life.

All her makeup while imperfect in execution, was yet another testimony that what was important was how she felt as a person rather than the tidiness of how the makeup was applied, all of this judging by how she looked at me through those blue-green eyes with such a fixed gaze.

I felt that the photograph was the perfect contradiction of everything that is desirable in society today in the manner women are depicted. From the perfect skin to the immaculate makeup, leaving on the wayside how women feel or even their own welfare. With the familiar claim that through digital means all traces of a full life can be promptly eliminated.

The problem is that at a certain stage in life, caring for all these aesthetic details, can be the difference between getting a job or not, as an actress, model or an executive, or even the votes as a politician. Or the approval of a boyfriend over the internet. The public image seems to be all that matters.

However, there is a time in life where everything changes, when we allow our wrinkles to be seen without any apparent problem or consequence. I think it is not a problem of age, but the conviction that we might have at whatever age it is, that appearances are just that, appearances.

I am sure that the irony will not escape you, that in these times where so much is discussed about the truthfulness of the photographic image, most people do not even want to see the truth, they prefer to live in a world of appearances.

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