

The Photocaptionist is an on and off line aperiodic platform that encourages the practice of concubinage between photography and literature, images and words, through editorial projects, exhibitions, talks and awards. It believes in the idea of ‘slow criticism’ and intends to offer a space where authors of the past, contemporary and emerging writers, critics and photographers ‘meet’ to savour photo-textualities.

# A love affair between photographs and words

In this image-text composition – a feature where a photograph is paired with an excerpt from literature or non fiction, so that it becomes a new work in itself, and where the combination is accompanied by a text that expands on the association – made for Unseen, The Photocaptionist presents a preview of the work of Chilean artist Ignacio Acosta.

After working for five years on the notion of political landscape, focusing on the relations between Britain and Latin America, Acosta is currently leaving his comfort zone. His forthcoming series, *Intuitive Projects*, explores his links with the forgotten past of his mysterious ancestor, artist Álvaro Guevara (1894–1951) and plays with the uncanny feeling of encountering patterns of one’s own psyche,

unequivocally, in a distant relative. Chilean-born, painter, poet, playboy and boxer, Álvaro Guevara moved to England and won a scholarship to study at the Slade School of Fine Art between 1912 and 1916. Having established himself as an artist, he was associated with the Bloomsbury circle. Eventually, despite his ambiguous sexual orientation, he married the painter Meraud Guinness, an inquisitive adventuress that was the elder daughter of multimillionaire banker Benjamin Guinness, part of the Guinness brewery clan. Guevara lived between Valparaiso, London, Paris and Aix-en-Provence. Most of his paintings were exhibited with some acclaim in the 1920s and 1930s. However, the majority of his body of work was reduced to ashes when a bomb fell on 9 December 1940 on

the warehouses of James Bourlet & Sons, where Álvaro had arranged for it to be stored during the war. Three of Guevara’s surviving paintings are held in the Tate Gallery collection.

Despite their tumultuously bohemian conjugal – yet mostly separated – life, when Álvaro became terminally ill with cancer, Meraud cared for him in her property ‘La Tour de Cesar’, near Aix-en-Provence, until he died in October 1951. In his last year of life he composed a collection of prose poems in French. Guinness published it posthumously, in 1954, as a small edition of 400 copies, titled *Dictionnaire Intuitif*. The Chilean poet Pablo Neruda wanted to translate the text into Spanish but died before this could happen.



*D'une fragilité célestrale,*  
from the series *Intuitive Projects*.  
Tate Stores, 10 Mandela Way, London,  
2015 © Ignacio Acosta

Mystics, with their thorough studies, made us to believe that the heart is the palace the soul is used to inhabit, but these studies, of a celestial fragility, leave men of science in disbelief, claiming with a knife in their hands to uncover the truth.

*Heart*, from *Dictionnaire Intuitif* by Álvaro Guevara,  
published in Diana Holman-Hunt,  
*Latin Among Lions*: Álvaro Guevara,  
London: Michael Joseph, 1974  
English translation by Federica Chiocchetti

Haunted by this 'celestial fragility' and navigating through his childhood memories, from his conversations with Granny Alicia, Acosta cannot fully elaborate how Álvaro's mesmerising charisma intruded into his artistic practice. An unconscious voiceover. Perhaps a vague description of Guevara's paintings hanging in a London gallery room: a room with exquisite light streaming, "the kind of light that changes what you can see". The oppression of a repressed country and its brutal dictatorship and the vicarious relief

of a lost world in a family album, spelling out the English words Sun&Shadow.

A work of art is by definition celestially fragile. Lurking behind its market value and conservation risks lays the palace of the artist's creative soul, in all its abstractness, regardless of the work itself. It is the ultimate cliché, let's face it. Guevara never fully recovered from the destruction of his work. Acosta at the moment cannot see Guevara's surviving paintings as they are stored in crates within the Tate Collection archive.

Acosta shares with Guevara not only the artistic yearning but also a more intimate struggle: his quest for sexual liberation.

The alluring idea of illustrious ancestors is typically a Borgesian theme. By dissecting his excitement towards his eccentric, talented and tormented forebear, Acosta's imagery questions ideas of troubling and recurrent psychological patterns among generations.

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