

SEE THIS

Juan Pablo Echeverri's Searching Self-Portraits



Juan Pablo Echeverri's "Identidad Payasa: D Charles Morrison" (2017). Courtesy of the Estate of Juan Pablo Echeverri and James Fuentes

By Adriane Quinlan

When the artist Juan Pablo Echeverri died at the age of 43 last year, he left behind more than 8,000 self-portraits taken in passport photo booths around the world. What had started as a diary of hair styles and piercings grew into a conceptual art project as Echeverri evolved as an artist. This summer, a grid assembled from about 400 of those photos will hang at James Fuentes Gallery in Manhattan; another has been on view at Between Bridges, the nonprofit in Berlin run by Echeverri's former employer, the photographer Wolfgang Tillmans, who helped curate both shows.

Echeverri's sudden death from malaria came just as his career was zooming up, with a show in León, Mexico, and work in the collection of the former president of his native Colombia. But it would be a mistake to see the portraits as a somber memento mori. "I don't want to overburden the work," says Tillmans, who prefers to see it as Echeverri was: sly, cerebral and self-deprecating. The title of the passport series, "Miss Fotojapón," yokes together a joke about Colombia's past failure to win the Miss Universe pageant with the name of a photo processing chain. The exhibit in New York also includes "Identidad Payasa" (2017), a series of double portraits where the artist shared the lens with street clowns in Mexico City. First, Echeverri would take their photos in full costume, then ask the clowns to recreate the look on him, a way of embodying their position. Tillmans says the photos show how much Echeverri empathized with the clowns — they were both artists, putting on a visual performance and wearing masks. "Are they to be taken seriously? Obviously, they're being laughed at. It's deep, but he played it light," he says. "Identidad Perdida" is on view from June 7 to July 29, jamesfuentes.com.