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A trip to Ecuador, on the trail of an invisible pipeline that is an unseen yet vital presence in a vast area of the Amazon rainforest. Photography here acts as a means of investigation, a necessary passepartout to open doors and hearts, to enter into symbiosis with communities that are unaccustomed to interactions. It chronicles the work of men and the energy of a nature that still seems to resist contamination.

During her quest to find the invisible pipeline, Giada Ripa draws upon her past and present visual experiences as a tireless traveler. Her latest memory is an itinerary through Asia, where she traveled between 2005 and 2009 along what was once known as the Silk Route and later became the Oil Route. On this journey, her aim was to “give a face” to the people that inhabit the various countries she visited, thus creating a sort of anthropological study of physiognomies. More remote experiences that she does not mention, but that are deeply entrenched in her photographic soul, include personal explorations such as “Falling Icons” (published in 2009) or “Lost in Space” (2003). In these series patiently constructed over the years, Giada Ripa puts herself or a female figure in a *mise-en-scène*, using a language that deftly blends performance and photography without ever crossing over into theatrical representation. It is a construction experience of a vision that originates as a design, with sought-after locations and that extends over time; a creation process that has allowed it to measure up to other situations, other subjects, in any case retaining an important echo of its metaphorical review experiments of an invention.

In Ecuador, Giada Ripa’s aim was to explore three issues: the environment, portraiture and labor. She ends up however dealing with the complex dialectic relationships between man and forest, work and nature, documentation and testimony. In doing so, she resorts to a sober and subtly dream-like narrative, a rarefied visual approach that enables her to depict places and people, freezing them in a timeless dimension that liberates them from the imperatives of journalistic documentation. Her images convey a sort of peacefulness and equilibrium that all but cancel out the fatigue, the heat, the humidity, and the mosquitos that the words evoke. In front of her lens, trees and men seem to be posing and her journey finally leads to the discovery of the pipeline, a thin line that passes through the air, suspended and non-intrusive. The light filters through the leaves, suggesting sounds, smells, heat, invisible presences, in a magical state of suspension where, it seems, only the unwritten laws of the forest exist.

As in her previous series, many images are imbued with a sense of anticipation, a sense that something is about to happen. While her “self-portraits” are set against specific backdrops and architectural spaces and work around the concept of instability and disorientation, the portraits of community members gravitating towards the pipeline instead suggest rootedness and stability. Women, men, children emerge as elusive animistic presences from the undergrowth, amongst the leaves, from the water, still and proud in front of the lens. The same pride is conveyed by the pipeline workers, standing tall and aware of their role and responsibilities. Nature, however, is predominant, omnipresent, untamable, lending a rhythm to the sequence of images. Giada Ripa portrays it through her powerful and poetic images. Nature becomes the heart of the narrative and brings the barely discernible pipeline to a state of necessary invisibility that was the initial concept.

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