

10Q

10 QUESTIONS WITH:

Susana *Blasco*

It seems like we have a theme running through our featured artists this month – graphic designers who have transitioned into the world of art. Susana Blasco is no exception. She uses the discipline and precision of being a graphic designer to create intricate and exquisite collages using found and collected old photographs. In the second of this new series of articles, we sent Susana 10 questions to consider and answer in her own time.

Susana Blasco by Maria Mira





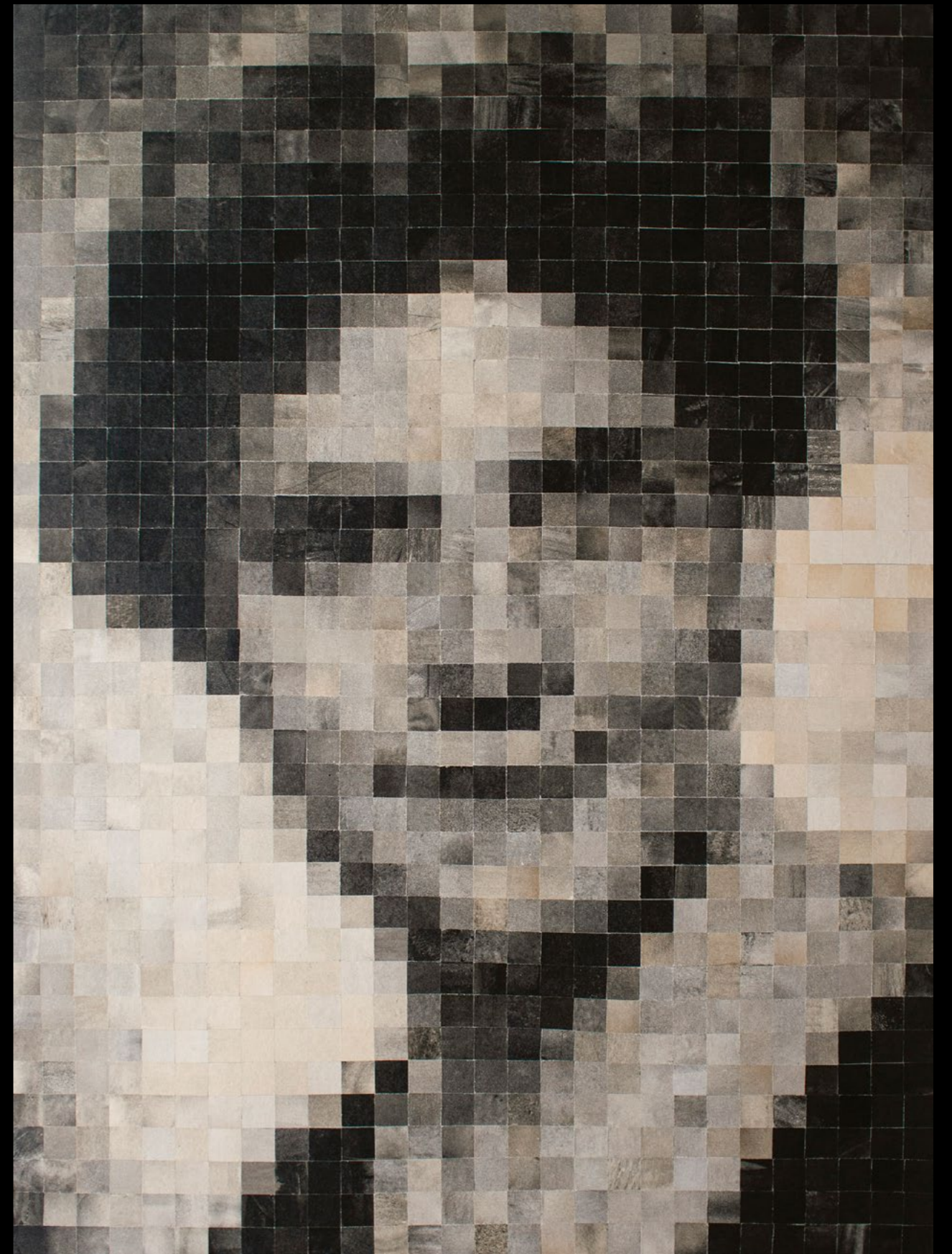
01. When and how did you first get into collage?

I made my first collage about 12 years ago with photographs found in London markets. Until then, in my work as a graphic designer and illustrator, I had used a certain type of conceptual illustration or visual poetry, playing with the mixture of objects, which in some way was also related to collage or assemblage. My collages with old photographs were not a direct evolution of my way of illustrating, but rather they arose as a result of a series of different circumstances, such as my obsession with the material. I have always had a certain collecting spirit (a bit of Diogenes syndrome) and I have saved boxes and boxes of small objects that I've found by chance.

When I lived in London, I found a different type of material that sparked my obsession, that I began to accumulate obsessively – vintage photographs. I bought them at markets, as an act of rescue. Discovering abandoned photographs has always awakened many mixed emotions in me. It moves me that something so personal and precious ended up forgotten in a box in the hands of strangers. That need to accumulate these images was very primary and compulsive and apparently had no artistic intention behind it because at that time I was not doing anything with them, I was just accumulating them in boxes.

One day I chanced upon an exhibition by John Stezaker at Whitechapel Gallery, his work surprised and deeply affected me and I thought '*why didn't I do something with those photographs I had accumulated?*'. On a professional level, I had also been wanting to create something directly with my hands for some time and get away from the computer. Added to all the above, just at that moment I was invited to participate in a group exhibition as a designer, and it was the little push I needed. So the piece I sent, instead of my usual illustrations, was my first geometric collage with photographs that I had found in Portobello market.

Left: *Asalto* by Karramarro®
Below: *Filias y hermanas 09*





Above : Fugaz 08

02. How would you describe your approach to collage and your specific style?

Regarding technique, I think there are several points that define and identify my work. One is the passion for searching and selecting the perfect photos. I am above all a tireless searcher and collector of images. I have thousands of photographs that I have rescued from flea markets or that people have given me. During the last 10 years, my tastes in photographs have changed, although I have always felt a special attraction for black & white photographs and, in particular, portraits of women. I almost always work with the original photograph, not reproductions. I am fascinated by old paper and its imperfections. When you work with the original photograph, there is no room for error and concentration is maximum. I really like that tension in the face of error.

Another constant aspect in my work is geometry with precise and meticulous cuts. My tools are a metal ruler and a sharp cutter. These geometric patterns help me fragment the image and recompose it again. In this deconstructing and constructing is where I find myself comfortable, playing with distortion and legibility.

03. What would be your artistic statement, in terms of what you're seeking to achieve in your work?

I think that working with this type of technique and in this way helps me reflect on memory, time and women. I like to connect through the process with the anonymous lives I imagine. A very powerful imagined narrative emerges when I work with these photographs. Sometimes, I dream about those people, the connection is very personal. On the other hand, my way of intervening in photographs, of fragmenting them, helps me convey the idea of forgetting, of erasure, of how memory operates, of the memories we invent or how we adulterate our own past as time passes. We tell our stories to others and to ourselves.

I also like to play with nostalgia and the common memories we share with our generation and those before us. The way the photos were taken before makes you identify with them or your relationships with your family, because they have many common aspects (colour, poses, hairstyles, clothes...). Perhaps this connection is lost with the new generations, with the disappearance of family albums, with the overproduction of selfies,...

04. What do you want the viewer to get from your work?

I do not seek to transmit anything with my collages. What I do is not intended for people to see one thing or another. What I intend is to reflect and experiment around topics and materials that interest and obsess me, but more as a personal exercise than as a way to tell something to others. So, I admit that I think very little about the viewer when I create a collage. I work for myself. I enjoy doing it and my only goal is to do what I need to do at that moment, whether people like it or not. And although I cannot deny that I like that people feel a connection with their own family memories, with their own nostalgia, and that through the intervention of those anonymous faces (but that seem familiar to us) the person who observes one of my pieces reflects, I don't like to make it evident or obvious. I like being a little strange, sometimes even uncomfortable. And many times, the challenge of being able to make a specific collage or try a new pattern or material is more important to me than the final or aesthetic result, and therefore what people will see.

05. Who or what are your biggest influences and why?

Apart from Stezaker, I could cite dozens of people whose work fascinates and inspires me. In this super-information society, every day I discover people whose work I find interesting. It is difficult for me to cite specific people, but here are a handful of some people I adore: Joseph Beuys, Hannah Höch, Magritte, Buñuel, Louise Bourgeois, Daniel Gil, Cruz-Diez, Tàpies, Dadaism in general, Anish Kapoor, Isidro Ferrer, the Pixies, Meret Oppenheim, Cai Guo-Qiang, Enrique Vila-Matas, Bowie, Chuck Close, Daniel Clowes and the Ramones.

In fact, I firmly believe that influences are everything that surrounds me on a daily basis, that is why it is important to be close to the things – people, places, music – that bring out the best in you and make you connect with inspiration. It is important to know how to listen, to know how to look, to be attentive to changes, to constantly learn, not only about art but about everyday life.



“

I admit that I think very little about the viewer when I create a collage. I work for myself. I enjoy doing it and my only goal is to do what I need to do at that moment, whether people like it or not.



06. What ambitions do you have for your art - are there directions you'd like to move in?

I am not particularly ambitious and I am quite happy with how things are flowing both in my personal life and in my professional career. So, my plan is to continue working and producing, doing what I like and letting life surprise me. As a vital rule, with each project, I try to do something a little different and with those small steps, some good and some not, I move forward in an organic way.

07. What do you use as your materials and where do you source them from?

The main material I use are old black and white photographs from different periods that I rescue from flea markets or buy online. Sometimes people (even strangers) give me photos they have found or discarded from their own family albums. The type of photography that interests me varies over time, before I liked older ones, now I almost always work with photos from the 60s or 70s. And they are usually portraits of women. Lately I've been super obsessed with tiny passport or yearbook type photos and contact sheets. I should also say that I like to buy photographs in large batches, I don't tend to obsess over a specific photograph, but rather I look for them in bulk, in large quantities sometimes without really knowing what I am buying. Other times, depending on the projects (especially murals), we collect photos from the family albums of the people participating in the project. Lately, several institutional archives have contacted me seeking me to work with the photos they have in their care.



08. Can you choose one of your pieces and give us an insight into the story behind it?

LAPSUS (Pictured above) is one of my favourite projects. It is a series of seven collages designed to be exhibited on the street, specifically in an old market within the prestigious Getxophoto photography festival (Spain), which in this edition was around the theme '*pause*'. In this case, the festival contacted me and proposed that I intervene in photos from the Fototeka Kutxa Fundazioa archive. After visiting the archive and happily getting lost in its wonderful photos, I selected the images I was going to work with: images of women resting, enjoying themselves, at peace. Each image appears in the collage divided into two halves, alluding to the tension between serenity and mental noise, pause and disturbance. But also referring to the transit between both states, to the need to give ourselves a real time of rest that gives us balance.

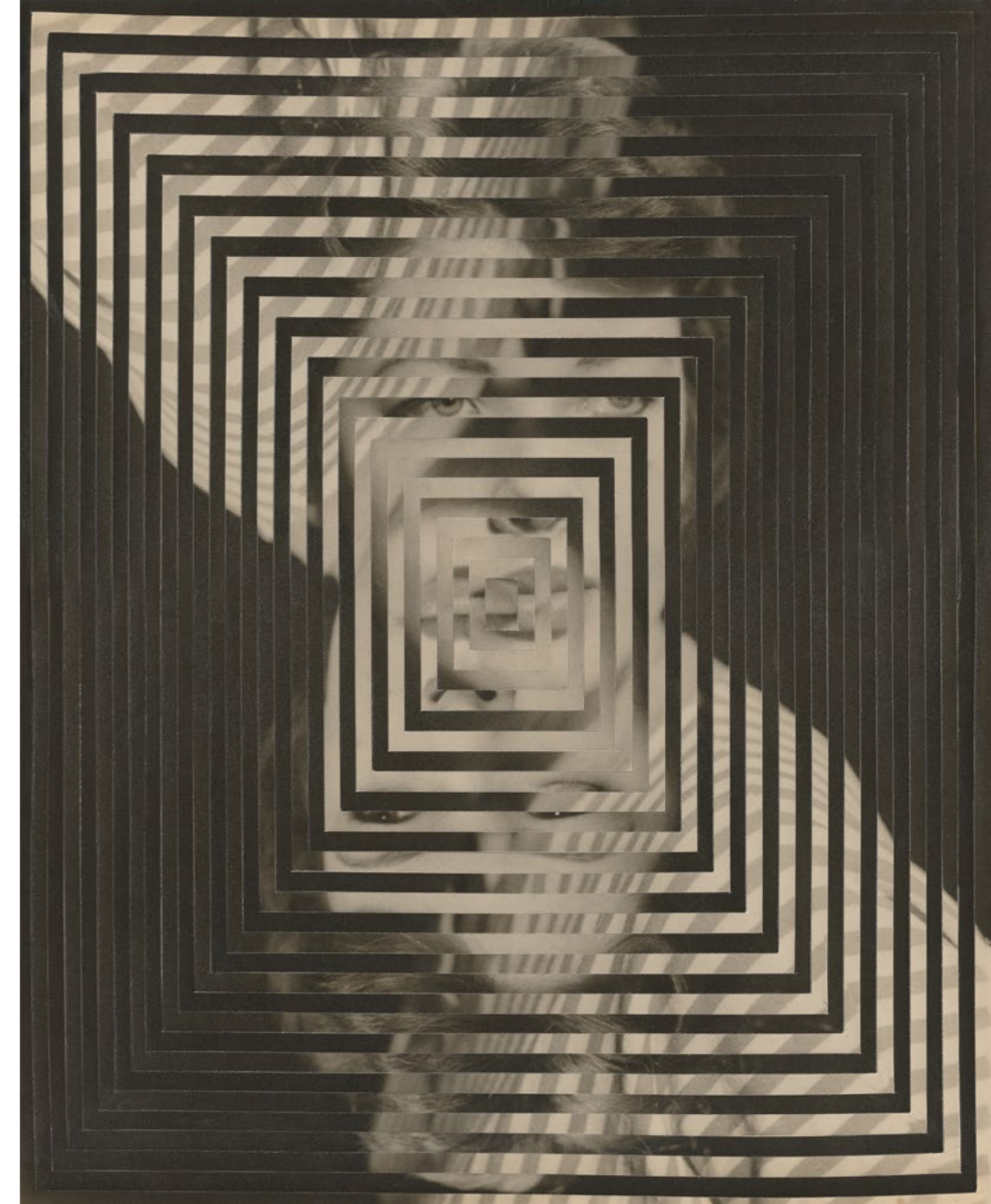
09. Please finish this sentence :
Collage is...

***what has changed my life
and the way I understand
myself.***





Left : Fugaz 10
Right : Fugaz 05



“

A very powerful imagined narrative emerges when I work with these photographs. Sometimes I dream about those people, the connection is very personal.



Left : kaos festival SLOVENIA mural
Right : Fugaz 02
Next page, Left : Lapsus 07
Right : Baguena — mural

10. What's the one question we should have asked, but didn't?

How is your work as a graphic designer connected to your artistic work with collage?

At first they were two disciplines (art/design) that I tried to keep radically separate. But, over time, I have realised that they are contagious and nourish each other. And precisely when they are mixed, the result is more interesting. In fact, almost every time I have a design project commission, the client wants me to use collage or somehow show my style in that project. And inevitably, every time I tackle a collage or an artistic project, my designer mind plays a fundamental role. I admit that, now, I love this lack of definition and I feel very comfortable adapting one label or another depending on the moment and the project.





Quickfire questions

Analogue or digital?

Always analogue. Although I always sketch digitally. I don't start cutting until I'm 100% sure of what I'm going to do.

Small or large format?

Small format most of the time, but a mural from time to time.

Music or silence?

Podcasts.

Hannah Höch or Robert Rauschenberg?

Always Hannah.

Glue stick or medium?

Liquid spray.

Studio or house?

My studio with large windows and views over the Bilbao river.

Cut or tear?

The thoroughness and perfection of cutting with a cutter.

Plan or intuition?

Intuition in image search. Extreme planning in how to cut and paste.

Standing or sitting?

Both.

Sell or keep?

Sell. I have very little attachment to the pieces I have already produced. I prefer other people to enjoy them.

You can see more of Susana's work on her website: susanablasco.com and on his Instagram page: [@descalza](https://www.instagram.com/descalza)