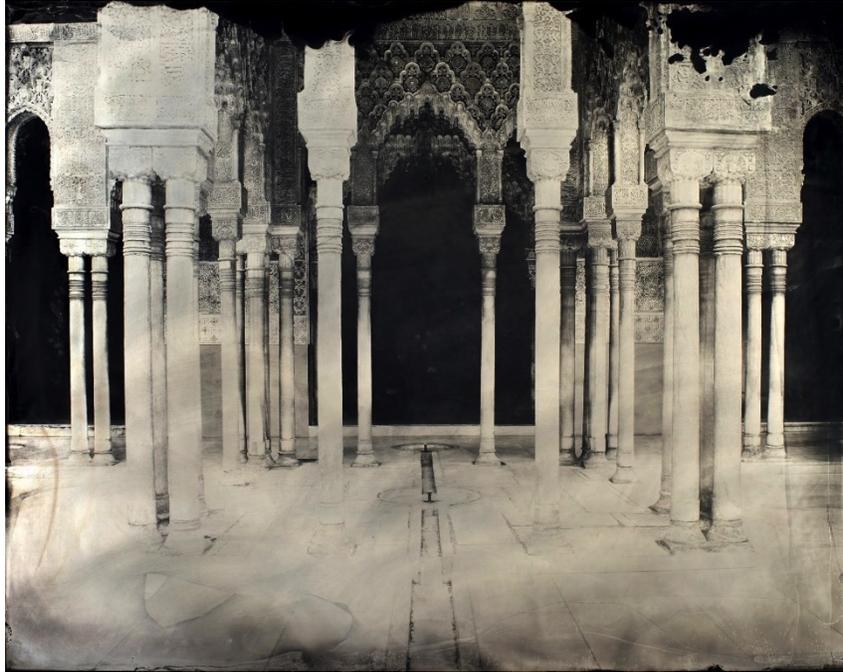


# GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE



*El Patio de los Leones*, 2016, tintype (wet collodion on aluminum plate), 40 x 50 cm

## **SERGIO VEGA** *Borges in the Alhambra*

From November 4<sup>th</sup> to December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017  
Opening on Saturday November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017, from 6 to 8 pm  
with the artist present

The Galerie Karsten Greve is pleased to present *Borges in the Alhambra*, a fascinating project by photographer Sergio Vega dedicated to Jorge Luis Borges, one of the most important and influential writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and a key cultural figure in the Spanish-speaking world.

At the Alhambra in Grenada, words by the Mexican poet Francisco de Icaza greet visitors: “Give him alms, woman, for there is nothing sadder in life than being blind in Granada.” It was with the spirit of this quotation in mind that the Argentinian artist developed this project consisting of a unique-plates photograph series and two videos.

In 1918, when he is still a child, Jorge Luis Borges (Argentinian novelist, poet and man of culture) visits the Alhambra in Grenada for the first time. Since that visit, both the architecture of this monument – deeply tied to Islamic poetry and philosophy – and the history of Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula become part of the writer’s fictional landscape. In 1976, during his second visit with his companion María Kodama, Borges, henceforth at the apex of his career and international renown, is

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blind. He suffers from retinitis pigmentosa that causes blindness, which he defines as ‘modest’: whereas one eye sees nothing, the other manages to perceive a world veiled in a yellow film, a golden reality.

He sees the Alhambra therefore through his companion’s eyes, through her descriptions, but mostly by getting to know it thanks to the numerous gurgling fountains and the chirping of the birds hidden in the garden's lemon trees. In Borges' vision, Alhambra becomes a dreamscape through which one can immerse oneself in the history of the Moorish dynasties, or in the cosmology that governs the architectural composition of this fantastic place. Borges wanted to share this unique way of looking and feeling; he wanted to give it as a gift to his wife in the form of a poem, *Alhambra*. In this poem his feelings of gratitude for being able to feel Grenada once again alternate with a sense of irreparable loss.

Sergio Vega's aesthetic journey offers a contemplative reconstruction of this second visit: by training his eye on the site's architectural spaces. To do so, Vega turns to a primary photography technique: tintage. A metal plate is soaked in a photosensitive solution that, upon contact with light, sets a permanent image. The result in these thirty aluminium-plate photographs is quasi-aqueous, creating phantasmagorical images from ghost-like traces. Alhambra's architectural details – organised according to strict mathematical principles – emerge from a rather twilight dimness like epiphanies. In Vega's photographs the Arabic alphabet that adorns the capitals of the columns transforms itself into black lace; not entirely dissimilar to the Andalusian women’s *mantillas*, still worn today.

In tandem with the photographic work, two videos will be shown during the exhibition. In *Un ciego en Granada* (28'02") Sergio Vega uses documentary film techniques to recreate the artistic journey of Borges' poem while he explores the palace's rooms and gardens aided by author quotes. In *Borges in The Alhambra (a hypothesis of blindness)* (11'46") Vega endeavours to reproduce the writer's sensory experience during his final visit to Grenada while seeing through ill eyes. This film will also be shown during Paris Photo, on 11 November 2017, at 15.00 at the Grand Palais MK2 cinema.

Sergio Vega has embarked on a quest, using eminently visual artistic means, to show those who can see what indeed a blind person sees. But it is thanks only to the spoken and written words that Borges has left behind (in interviews and writings) that Vega is now able to rebuild his hypothesis about seeing: seeing while comforted by the voice of a lover and by the noises that belong to these magical places. *Borges in the Alhambra* does not only require the visitor to look but also to listen, and eventually to close their eyes.

Sergio Vega was born in Buenos Aires in 1959. He has been a professor at the School of Art and Art History of the University of Florida since 1999. He has participated in numerous international artistic events, notably the 51st *Venice Biennale*; *documenta 13*; the 3rd *Moscow Biennale*. He lives and works in Gainesville and Miami, Florida, United States of America.