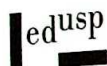




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## PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION IN THE *FRACTURED TIMES* EXHIBITION

Helouise Costa

There was a certainty of the importance of photographic media. The entry of photography into the museum came in the wake of the explosion of traditional supports. The classic photographers stood on one side and, on the other, the dematerialization.

Walter Zanini<sup>1</sup>

When asked about the situation of photography in museums during his period as director of MAC USP, Walter Zanini was assertive in stating that it contributed to the disruption of traditional categories of art. Such an assessment is shared by authors of the so-called postmodern critique, such as Douglas Crimp and Rosalind Krauss<sup>2</sup>. For Crimp, the entry of photography into the art museum highlighted the crisis of modern art and its alleged autonomy. Krauss, in turn, makes explicit the contradictions of the process of incorporating photography into the art museum based on the categories of art history. If we consider that photography was incorporated into MAC USP in the 1970s, a time when its collection was expanded and updated, we will see that, in fact, it played an important role in questioning the premises of modernism and in facing the new challenges posed by contemporary art.

This essay aims to reflect on the presence of photography in *Fractured Times*. The result of a collective curatorial work, the exhibition proposes to revisit sensitive moments in the history of the 20th and 21st centuries through the MAC USP collection. Photography itself is not the object of this reflection, but placing it in the broader context of 1970s cultural critique, which made it a key element in the questioning of the politics of representation. As anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards notes, this phenomenon led to the destabilization of the authority of photography as a producer of truth, enabled the emergence of micro-histories of visibility, encouraged cross-cultural encounters and raised evidence of the close relationship of photography with materiality and sensoriality<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Interview provided by Walter Zanini to the author in April 2006.

<sup>2</sup> See: Douglas Crimp, *Sobre as ruínas do museu*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2015; Rosalind Krauss. "O espaço discursivo da fotografia". In: Rosalind Krauss. *O fotográfico*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, "Tracing Photography". In: Ruby Banks (ed.) *Made to be Seen: A History of Visual Anthropology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011, p.160..



Despite starting from the specific point of view of anthropology, Edwards' reflections can be perfectly transposed to the field of art of the 1970s. That was when a significant portion of artists refused the aestheticization of photography with a modernist bias, investing in the resumption of documentation in other terms. Incorporated into the broader universe of contemporary artistic practices, especially those of a conceptual nature, photography contributed to the questioning of art, the artist and their social role, gave visibility to new themes and contributed to the construction of counter-hegemonic narratives.

*Fractured Times* highlights the critical potential of the photographic image, taking into account not only its history in the museum's collection, but mainly the possibilities it offers to question the politics of representation of different social groups today. Between the individual, the institutional and the collective, photography transits through different themes and temporalities, as we intend to show below through the analysis of some sets of works present in the exhibition.

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The incorporation of photography into the MAC USP collection began with the exhibition *9 fotógrafos de São Paulo*, held between May and June 1971. On the occasion, the museum was donated works by Boris Kossoy, George Love and Aldo Simoncini and acquired works by Maureen Bisilliat, Claudia Andujar and Cristiano Mascaro. This initial core of works already pointed to the diversity of themes, approaches and supports that would characterize the presence of photography in the Museum<sup>4</sup>.

Boris Kossoy's *After of Dance*, for example, is part of the *Journey through the Fantastic* series, which gave rise to the book of the same name published by the author in 1971<sup>5</sup>. Boris Kossoy's first contact with the universe of dreamlike and fantastic images took place in the 1960s, when he attended the drawing course taught by Fernando Odriozola. Around 1969, he began to produce photographic images in line with the principles of magical realism, to which he added references to cinema, theatre and advertising.

In Kossoy's images published in *Journey through the Fantastic* we see situations in which elements that destabilize the logic of everyday life are inserted. They are staged photos and most include human figures that embody different characters: the bride, the conductor, the harlequin, the dancing couple and the minotaur. The female nude and inanimate mannequins can be seen strategically placed on stage.

Some of the places chosen by Kossoy for his stagings fit into the concept of non-place, coined by the French anthropologist Marc Augé, which refers to places of passage, characteristic of the contemporary city, with which we do not establish affective bonds. Marked by transience and utilitarianism, these places contribute to highlight the degree of meaninglessness of our daily actions. The bride at the train station, the young woman on the overpass, the couple dancing at the Congonhas airport and the harlequin on a random road are some of the characters that bring out uprootedness and loneliness feelings.

*Journey through the Fantastic* stands out for its experimentalism and complex narrative. The book is composed of a succession of visual micro-stories that fuse realism and fiction, having been able to express the unspeakable of those times lived under the military dictatorship with the subtext not being understood by the agents of repression.

<sup>4</sup> About the *9 Fotógrafos de São Paulo* exhibition, see: Helouise Costa, *Fronteiras incertas: arte e fotografia no acervo do MAC USP*. São Paulo: MAC USP, 2017, pp. 47-48. This publication shows that the photographic image in the MAC USP collection, although also presented as a two-dimensional copy, often advances beyond these limits, materializing itself in objects, books, posters, postcards and installations. At other times, it is transmuted through reproduction and printing techniques such as photocopying, off-set or printing.

<sup>5</sup> A more in-depth analysis of this series can be found in: Helouise Costa, "Viagem pelo fantástico: o livro como obra aberta". In: Boris Kossoy (ed.), *Revisitando viagem pelo fantástico*. São Paulo: Ipsis, 2021, pp. 15-24.



The 10 photographs by Cristiano Mascaro, of the *Barrientos' funeral* series, were produced in 1969 by the then young photographer during a trip to Bolivia<sup>6</sup>. Mascaro was sent by *Veja* magazine to cover the death of the country's president, René Barrientos Ortuño (1919-1969), killed in a helicopter crash. A conservative military man, Barrientos came to power through an armed coup and remained president between 1964 and 1969. In 1967, however, he launched himself as a candidate for the presidency in direct elections and was easily elected due to his enormous popularity. His great acceptance among the country's less favored population was due to his dual origin—Spanish and Quechua—which allowed him to address the indigenous people and field workers in their own language, placing himself as one of them. According to speculation that circulated at the time, his disappearance was linked to the death of the guerrilla fighter Ernesto Che Guevara, captured and killed during his government.

Cristiano Mascaro chose to photograph *Barrientos' funeral* from the point of view of the popular reaction instead of recording the official protocol of the event as usual. He recorded the local population, mostly of indigenous origin, expressing their grief at the loss of the populist leader, regarded by them as a benefactor. As a set, the series proposes an almost cinematic narrative and uses resources such as internal captions to create greater visual impact. The bodies of each of the individuals, united by suffering, seem to transform into a single collective body. The photographic series *Barrientos' funeral* was presented in the *9 fotografos de São Paulo*, being the first exhibition in which Cristiano Mascaro participated. Like the work of Boris Kossoy, Mascaro's photographic copies were mounted on rigid supports, in poster format, a widely resource used at the time, which alludes to the materiality of the image and to its presence in the domestic space as a decorative element. Acquired by MAC USP in the same year it was exhibited, the series testifies to the incorporation of photojournalism into the collections of art museums in the 1970s and speaks of the various ways of seeking the truth of the facts.

Hildegard Rosenthal and Alice Brill are two modern photographers, considered pioneers of photojournalism in Brazil, who not by chance had their works incorporated into the MAC USP collection in the 1970s, an initiative by Walter Zanini<sup>7</sup>. The exhibition *Hildegard Rosenthal – Photographies*, was organized by him in 1974 and resulted in the recognition of the photographer by the artistic circuit. Photographs produced by Hildegard in Lasar Segall's studio were among the nine series exhibited. Two of them are exhibited in *Fractured Times*. In the first, the artist appears painting a portrait of Lucy Citti Ferreira who, as a muse, poses for him playing the accordion. In the second, the numerous canvases, carefully arranged in the studio, reveal the artist's obsession with Lucy's face, so often captured in his paintings. In exhibition these photos are a counterpoint to a self-portrait by Lucy Citti Ferreira in which she is also depicted playing her musical instrument. The painting, dated the previous year, unveils her affinity to music and reminds us that she was also an artist. As in a game of mirrors, we are involved in an imagery of seduction and power established between the two artists, bringing to light the complexity of their social and gender roles.

Alice Brill, on the other hand, has two of her series featured in *Fractured Times: Juquery Hospital, 1950*<sup>8</sup> and *Flagrants of São Paulo, 1954*. The first was produced in the psychiatric hospital that lends its name to the series, commissioned by the artist Maria Leontina, whom Brill had met while attending the Santa Helena Group. The second was commissioned by Pietro Maria Bardi, whose objective was to publish them

<sup>6</sup> This analysis was originally published in Helouise Costa, *Fronteiras incertas: arte e fotografia no acervo do MAC USP*. São Paulo: MAC USP, 2017, pp. 86-87.

<sup>7</sup> For a comparative analysis of the trajectories of the two photographers, see: Helouise Costa, "Sistema de arte e relações de gênero: retratos de artistas por Hildegard Rosenthal e Alice Brill". *Revista do IEB, Dossiê Mulheres, arquivos e memórias*, 2018, pp. 115-131.

<sup>8</sup> According to the website of the Moreira Salles Institute (IMS), the institution that owns the patrimonial rights to Alice Brill's work, this series consists of 51 photographs in total. MAC USP owns 27 and some of which are duplicated. See: Alice Brill. *Arte e inconsciente. Três visões sobre o Juquery*. São Paulo: IMS, 2009.



in a commemorative book of the 4th Centenary of the city of São Paulo<sup>9</sup>. In the images taken at Juquery, Alice Brill offers a record of a route that goes from the entrance of the establishment, through the courtyard, to the art studio, where the photographer highlights some of the inpatients with their creations. In the images of the city of São Paulo, Brill travels through neighborhoods such as Sumaré and Bexiga, and some locations in the center, such as Praça da República and Viaduto do Chá, casting her gaze on the precarious conditions in which a significant portion of the Afro-descendants residing in the capital lived. Unlike other photographers working at the time, Alice Brill does not glorify modernization, but reveals the contradictions of a social process that victimizes the Black population disenfranchised from the benefits of progress.

An unusual approximation between art and photojournalism can be found in the series *Rio Negro Expedition*, by Raymond Frajmund, donated to the Museum by the author in 2007 on the occasion of the *Art and Anthropology* exhibition. Born in Poland in 1927, Raymond Frajmund lived his childhood and part of his adolescence in Belgium with his family<sup>10</sup>. Of Jewish origin, he was sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp at the age of 15, where he remained for two years doing forced labor until he managed to undertake a risky escape that guaranteed his survival. Still impacted by the war, he travelled to Brazil in 1953 and first decided to settle in the capital of São Paulo, where he began to work as a photographer for the newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo*.

Frajmund had been living in Brazil for five years when he was hired by the artist Flávio de Carvalho as a cameraman to make a film "in the modern surrealist style."<sup>11</sup> The film would be loosely based on news published in the press of the time about a white woman who had supposedly been kidnapped, as a child, by an indigenous group. In addition to Raymond Frajmund, Eva Harmst and Olga Walewska also joined the team as actresses in the film.

In order to make his project viable, Flávio de Carvalho asked for permission to join an expedition to Rio Negro, organized by the Indian Protection Service (SPI) and coordinated by the sertanista Tubal Vianna, whose objective was to contact isolated indigenous groups, including the Waimiri and the Xirianã<sup>12</sup>. The hardships posed by the jungle resulted in serious conflicts between Carvalho and the others. In a statement given to the newspaper *Última Hora*, Frajmund tells that about 15 days after the start of the expedition Flávio broke off relations with him, who forbade him to continue filming: "I couldn't do anything because the two cameras were his and I was at his service."<sup>13</sup> Besides the conflict, Frajmund kept photographing by his own.

The set of 40 photographs gathered in *Fractured Times* are by Raymond Frajmund. Taken according to the pattern adopted by the illustrated press of the time, the photos highlight a certain exoticism in the appearance and behavior of the indigenous peoples, understood as types and not as individuals. Even though it is still necessary to confirm the ethnicity of the group portrayed, the images constitute rare records of the troubled expedition.

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9 Some of the photographs in this series were published in *Habitat* magazine but the book planned by Bardi was never published. See: Danielle Stewart. *O álbum nunca publicado de Alice Brill para o IV Centenário de São Paulo. Comunicação apresentada no Seminário "Fotografia moderna? Fragmentos de uma história"*. São Paulo: Instituto Moreira Salles, 2019 (to be published).

10 About this series, see: *Raymond Frajmund: 1958*. Brasília: Zebrinha Livros, 2022.

11 "Fracassou a fita de Flávio de Carvalho na Amazônia: medo de filmar os índios". *Última Hora*, Nov. 19<sup>th</sup> 1958.

12 This expedition to the Amazon was announced by the press of the time as *Experiência n. 4* because the action in which he paraded his summer outfit through the streets of downtown São Paulo had been named *Experiência n. 3*. See: Amanda Bonan and Renato Rezende. *Flávio de Carvalho expedicionário*. São Paulo: Caixa Cultural, 2018; Kiki Mazzucchelli. *Flávio de Carvalho. O antropófago ideal*. São Paulo: Almeida e Dale, 2019.

13 *Última Hora*, Nov. 19<sup>th</sup> 1958.



From the 1970s onwards, in the context of contemporary art, portraiture often makes otherness explicit, no longer from the point of view of the expressiveness of the portrayed figure or exoticism, but taking into account social relations, feminist claims or even gender and sexuality issues in a broad sense. Roberto Okumura, in his series *Situations*, produces a sequence, almost cinematographic, of portraits of a group of boys who seem to inhabit the streets. Inquisitively, they return their gaze when they perceive themselves as the object of the photographer's attention, denouncing the asymmetry of class relations. Leticia Parente manipulates the image of a model's face, in an operation that makes explicit the way in which women's appearance defines their social roles in patriarchal societies. The performative dimension of self-portraiture is evident in several works featured in the exhibition. Anna Bella Geiger, on her part, appropriates stereotyped images of the indigenous population, conveyed in postcards, to stage the impossibility of meeting this other loaded with exoticism and emptied of any subjectivity. In Gretta Sarfate's works, the self-portrait is the result of performative actions in which she fragments her own body, transforming these records into tools for investigating sexual roles in contemporary times

The performative actions is also at the core of some works of Hudinilson Jr., as in the case of *Narcisse / Exercise of Seeing Myself VII*<sup>14</sup>. The artist's trajectory began when he was admitted to the Armando Álvares Penteado College (FAAP), where he studied arts between 1975 and 1977. At the same time, he also began to attend the School of Communications and Arts of the University of São Paulo (ECA USP), where he obtained privileged access to a photocopying machine of the Xerox brand, which represented a new technology, but was used almost exclusively for commercial and bureaucratic purposes.

Daringly challenging the pragmatic use of the equipment, Hudinilson began to hold performance sessions, during which he interacted with the machine, completely naked, reproducing parts of his body on sheets of paper. Already at the time, art critics identified in his actions a parallel with the mythological figure of Narcissus. The work presented in *Fractured Times* is the result of this process and reveals details of the artists body recomposed as a large mosaic. The male human body was the main theme of Hudinilson Jr.'s work, which is also represented in *Reference Notebook XVIII*, in which he engages in a voyeuristic exploration of the bodies objectified by the pornographic industry.

The fragmentation of the body also appears as an artistic strategy in the series *Black Skin* by Maureen Bisilliat. Born in England and naturalized Brazilian, she initially dedicated herself to learning painting and drawing, which she abandoned in 1962 in favor of photography. Produced in 1968, *Black Skin* is considered to be her first major work in the field of photography<sup>15</sup>. The series consists of 23 photographs, 8 of which are owned by MAC USP, having been incorporated into the collection after the aforementioned 9 *São Paulo Photographers* exhibition. Maureen records the body of Conceição in them, a Black woman close to the photographer's family, giving vent to an affection of political vocation, as evaluated by Claudinei Roberto da Silva<sup>16</sup>. Using a sophisticated play of lights and shadows, the photographer materializes the fascination with her model's skin color, while making reference to the effort to give social visibility to this portion of the Brazilian population. 35 years later, Caio Reisewitz performs a similar operation when he seeks to materialize his affection in a portrait of Rufo, a Black man, for many years, was at the service of his family in daily tasks and who inhabits his childhood memories. In a large-sized photo, what would be a simple portrait becomes an monumental image that reminds us of the discreet and solid presence of someone who, otherwise, might not be seen.

<sup>14</sup> This analysis was originally published in: Helouise Costa. *Fronteiras incertas: arte e fotografia no acervo do MAC USP*. São Paulo: MAC USP, 2017. p.82.

<sup>15</sup> Maureen Bissilliat. "Pele preta". In: *A Forma da Luz*, vol. 3, São Paulo: IMS, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Claudinei Roberto da Silva. "Prospecção afroatlântica no acervo do MAC USP". In: *Curadoria, crítica e estudos decoloniais em artes visuais. Diásporas africanas nas Américas*. Available in: <https://estudosdecoloniais.mac.usp.br/painel-curatorial/clauidnei-roberto-da-silva/>. Access: 14 April 2024.



The challenge of visiting the *Fractured Times* exhibition while taking photography as a common thread allows us to connect various agendas of the 1970s with the identity claims of today's social movements. The friction between the images, largely enabled by the conceptual dimension of photography, offers us different points of view, questions what is understood as truth, and makes us aware that the politics of representation are the result of historically determined collective social constructions. Such questions lead, inevitably, to a reflection on the importance of public art collections and the role of the so-called "permanent exhibitions"<sup>17</sup>. In this sense, *Fractured Times* seeks to turn the MAC USP collection into a platform for critical reflection open to the construction of narratives that are not always predictable, but committed to a collective vision of belonging to a plural and inclusive society.

<sup>17</sup> The term "permanent exhibition" refers to the beginnings of museums, when collections were understood as perennial and immutable sets on permanent display. Despite the changes in this conception, the term continues to be used, but it has been replaced by "long-term exhibition."