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**Photography in Brazil**

While nineteenth-century photography in Brazil mainly documented the development of cities and their relation with nature, the photo clubs appearing from the 1930s onwards consolidated a system of photographic production and display, which was the basis for modernist photography in the country. Major modernist photographers such as Thomas Farkas (1924-2011), José Oiticica Filho (1906-1964) and Geraldo de Barros were influenced by constructivist ideals and Gestalt theory. Later, photojournalism in the 1940s and 1950s would not only absorb these geometric art influences, but also add anthropological and humanist concerns. The military coup in 1964 increased repression of information and culture, and as such the 1970s are marked by an increasing number of artists such as Miguel Rio Branco (1946-), Mario Cravo Neto (1947- 2009), Claudia Andujar turning to art photography as a way of escaping this institutionalized repression. Documentary photography with social themes was sometimes disguised as ironic or formal experimentation, for instance, in the works of Antonio Dias (1944-) and Antonio Manuel (1947-). After the end of dictatorship we find a more prominent use of photography as art as the Brazilian art market develops and becomes more informed. Contemporary artists that use photography are Rosângela Rennó (1962-), Vik Muniz (1961-), Rochelle Costi (1961-) and Paula Trope (1962-), among others.

Three main issues define the early stages of photography history in Brazil. Photography was invented locally by Frenchmen Hercules Florence (1804-1879) in Campinas, state of São Paulo in 1832. Florence was a self-taught draughtsman who took part of the Langsdorff Expedition (1825-1829) and went on to live in Campinas. Experimentation led him to discover in 1832 a silver based process he called Photographie, for which there was virtually no use. In 1840, the Daguerreotype process was introduced in Brazil, in a public presentation in Rio de Janeiro by the French abbot Louis Compte. D. Pedro II (1825 – 1891), Brazil’s emperor, was present during this presentation and went on to produce, promote and collect photography. In that sense the problem of photography’s invention transcends that of technical discovery, evidencing that it is the relationship between technical development, artistic knowledge, social function and value (defined by the Emperor’s acceptance) that define its early history.

The emperor’s interest led to photography’s popularity, something that is evident both in the number of photographers active in the nineteenth century in the country (mainly specializing in portraits), but also the presence of works by European photographers in the main Brazilian 19 century based photography collections, the Emperor’s and that of collector and historian Gilberto Ferrez. The importance of works of photographers such as Marc Ferrez (1843-1923), Militão Augusto de Azevedo (1837-1905), **Augusto Malta** (1864-1957), Albert Henschel (1827 - 1882),Victor Frond (1821-1881), George Leuzinger (1813-1892), August Stahl (1828-1877) and Felipe A. Fidanza (?-1904), nevertheless, exceeds the documentation of the development of main Brazilian cities and its relation with nature. They show signs of aesthetic concerns relating to painting’s such as that from Giovanni Castagneto (1851-1900) and Nicola Facchinetti (1824 -1900).

However, art in Brazil was still heavily influenced by French academy standards that did not recognize photography as an artistic media. At the same time, photography as a technique was restricted to professionals and this secrecy may account for the fact that **Pictorialism** is only introduced in Brazil in the twentieth century, through European photographers working in the press (such as Jean Manzon (1915-1990)), and through a growing amateur milieu led by photo clubs, notably the Foto Cine Clube Bandeirantes (1939). Artificialist experimentation is almost nonexistent although Valério Vieira’s (1862 -1941) composite and panoramic photographies are a noteworthy exception.

The practice of a modernist photography certainly develops through photo club activities. In the 1950s, their popularity seems to consolidate a system involving practicing, showing and disseminating photography, even internationally. The increased exposure of the Brazilian art system to European modernism however, is not felt in the photo clubs until the late 1950s. Major modernist photographers like Thomas Farkas (1924-2011), José Oiticica Filho (1906-1964) and Geraldo de Barros (1923-1998), although being members of the photo clubs, are all influenced directly by constructivist art and Gestalt theory, known because of its appearance in the **São Paulo Art Biennials**, beginning in 1951. Farkas practiced geometrical composition in straight photography, and his series of the construction of Brazil’s capital, Brasília, are remarkable because of their extreme quality and use of composition. José Oiticica Filho, Hélio Oiticica’s (1937 - 1980) father, experimented with and without the photographic camera, producing a variety of works ranging from geometric abstraction to art informel. Geraldo de Barros was one of the main artists from the Ruptura group; his photography is directly connected to São Paulo’s Concrete art movements. In his *Fotoformas (Photoform)* series, the artist typically interferes or reconstructs photographs geometrically; creating a sense of complexity in form that ultimately comments form as much as brazilian culture.

Geometric abstraction had huge impact in 1960s and 1970s in amateur photography circles, as well as in photojournalism and advertisement. Photojournalism would not only absorb geometric art influences, dealing with increasingly complex compositional problems, but also focus on anthropological and humanist interests – exploring themes like the Brazilian indigenous populations, sacred rites of African-Brazilian religions, the Amazon jungle and other remote regions and regional customs. Works by pioneers such as José Medeiros (1921-1990), Flávio Damm (1928-), and Pierre Verger (1902-1996) are exemplary of this movement. Verger’s work for instance presented the African-Brazilian culture, and religious rites from Candomblé, some of them forbidden and unknown to most of Brazilian white and bourgeois population.

With the advent of the military coup in 1964 there was an increased repression of information and cultural and artistic production and events. Therefore, the 1970s are marked by an increasing number of artists turning to art photography as a way of escaping institutional constraints and expressing themselves. While photographers like Miguel Rio Branco (1946-), Mario Cravo Neto (1947- 2009), Claudia Andujar (1931-), Alair Gomes (1921-1992) and Hugo Denizart (1946-) mainly achieve visibility in the 1980s, they are a part of a very politicized generation of artists that were also questioning art tradition and experimenting conceptually with the photographic and filmic representation, which also includes artists like Helio Oiticica (1937-1980), Ana Bella Geiger (1933-), Antonio Dias (1944-), Artur Barrio (1945-) and Antonio Manuel (1947-). Their works often use the photographic, but what sets the Brazilian production apart derives from Neoconcretism’s use of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology. The notion that artistic form can increasingly incorporate social reality led to viewer participation and engagement. That can be seen in Antonio Manuel *Flan* series and its use of newspaper matrices to produce and disseminate fake news or in Anna Bella Geiger *Brasil Nativo/Brasil Alienígena* series (*Native Brazil, Alien Brazil*, circa 1975) and how it comments on traditional “tropical” “exotic” postcard images, which use the Indigenous Brazilian as props. The *Bólide caixa 18 (Homenagem a Cara de cavalo)* (*Bólide box 18, Hommage to horseface*, 1965) from Helio Oiticica should be mentioned as a critical work in Brazilian art history. It also exemplifies how photography would be used in Brazilian contemporary art. As part of a phenomenologically charged work, the photograph taken from a newspaper of a small drug dealer killed by the police in an unjustified manhunt, the bolide connects form and ethics, while using photography to inscribe into the work not a document, but rather a symbolic statement.

From the 1980s onwards, the notion of photography as art in Brazil comes to the fore with an art system more informed by international discourses on contemporary art. In the 1990s, artist such as Sebastião Salgado (1944-), Rosângela Rennó (1962-), Vik Muniz (1961-), Rochelle Costi (1961-) and Paula Trope (1962-), among others, become prominent in their make use of the artistic and photographic tradition. Salgado follows the modernist canon of photography, clearly relying on the tradition of humanist photography, mainly W. Eugene Smith’s way of engaging in realistic representation of social issues without forgetting concerns with form. In Rennó, Muniz and Costi’s work these formal concerns rather turn into revitalized conceptualist strategies that are strongly connected to international theory, pointing to both the historical separation between art and photography and the lack of local critical photographic theory in contemporary Brazil.

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