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Among projections and rejections: The works of Rosângela Rennó / Tadeu Chiarelli

Susan Sontag's metaphor of the photographer as "assassin of reality" can be extended to understand the act of photographing as an act of hunting, that age-old masculine activity, where the woman has, historically, been assigned the role of "cook". The woman is the one who transforms the cadaver of the hunted game into food, sustenance.

Rosângela Rennó refuses to photograph: she refuses a predatory approach to the real. She works instead with found negatives, and found images which have been discarded – for technical or ideological reasons– by their original authors. She selects from a peculiar point of view: as a woman artist born and raised in Brazil, a land of peculiarities.

Working purely within the darkroom, Rennó exploits the chance or accidental effects of her found material – high street portraits, old movie publicity stills, aged negatives, and prints from family albums. Her sensitivity to the surface and form of the photographs might define her as an artist in the modernist tradition, absorbed exclusively with the specifics of her medium. However, Rennó is motivated, beyond formal considerations, by a desire to identify herself with the images she processes. She selects scenes with female protagonists, or images of men which relate to the traditional female universe, for example, the bridegroom and best man in "Erro de Concordância" (A Congruous Error). Rennó recognizes herself, and identifies herself with the female figures in the photographs, who have been discarded, assigned to oblivion by their original authors. As if working in front of a strange mirror, she establishes another time, another place – another dimension – for these anonymous female characters, bringing them back to life as subjective projections of the artist's relation to her surrounding world.

In “Irmãs Siamesas” (Siamese Twins), a high-street portraitist had originally photographed two separate women, in the same frame, where Rennó found them bound, further, for posterity, by a swathe of retoucher’s pencil. Caught in the eternal prison of the frame, Rennó emphasizes their interdependence by reimagining them as sisters. The emotional aura uniting and causing them to stand out from the backgrounds is very similar to the aura of light that detaches the two girls in “Mulheres Iluminadas” (Illuminated Women), an image of the artist as child playing by her older sister’s side on Copacabana beach.

Rennó’s work’s are tales; small, lyrical poems. The physical trace of history – its passage from hand to hand – inherent in the original photograph, as well as the scene depicted, trigger Rennó’s imaginings of lost, lingering narratives and whispered dialogues.