

A última foto (the last photo)

A turn of the century invention, the camera has been adept at reinventing itself. Yet, never before has the photograph been at a more unpredictable stage of development, transformation and catharsis. The recent proliferation of digital cameras into phones and computers have profoundly altered the way we conceive of and identify the world around us. Ironically, these new enticing agents of image making are intrinsically detached producing innumerable snapshots displacing the popular objecthood of the print photograph.

Contemporary photography in Latin America is somewhat complicated, as the history of the medium has had at times a strong relationship to the literal and associative aspects of a dystopian reality (with the cruel absurdity of photographs being sometimes the only proof of mass disappearances under various authoritarian regimes) alongside unprecedented experimentalism in the 1990's with the (re)construction of Latin American technocultural imagery. Both are present in the work of internationally renowned Brazilian artist Rosângela Rennó. As an inheritor of this twinned legacy, Rennó has often posed questions about the collective amnesia and authorship of image making in Latin America as a primary means by which authority imposes its power on society.

For her newest work, Rennó invited forty-two photographers to participate in the creation of the exhibition *A última foto* (the last photo). Each photographer chose a camera from the artist's vast and diverse personal collection to produce images of the iconic Christ the Redeemer statue that towers above the city of Rio de Janeiro. The impetus for choosing this monument was due to the controversy of the sale of souvenirs associated with Christ the Redeemer and the struggle for copyright control of its image between the family of the French-Polish sculptor Paul Landowski and the Archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro. Questioning control and authorship, Rennó painted ink on the returned camera lenses and selected one image of the statue from each of the forty-two cameras. The resulting exhibition at Galeria Vermelho in São Paulo displayed the "last" images along with the sealed cameras. The camera and photograph diptychs made it clear that the perception of the same iconic statue differed from photographer to photographer because cameras seldom click at the same fraction of a second, and, even more tellingly, the photographers (or any other observer at this heavily populated tourist site) may see the colossal statue at different times and angles demanding a sort of cinematic mode of looking.

For the upcoming exhibition at Prefix, *A última foto* (the last photo) will be reconstituted through the selection of twenty diptychs marking the first time this project will be exhibited outside of Brazil's borders. Recontextualized from one locale to another, *A última foto* will demonstrate the rich connections between national and international alignments and displacements that unwittingly occur when the photograph is witnessed in one place and then another. It is a theme that has a wide relevance. Poignantly, *A última foto* suggests that even the few

iconic images (such as monuments like Christ the Redeemer) that once were virtually the only familiar touristic imagery shared across borders and continents probably have different meanings and resonances because they can be presented in such different ways. In a Canadian context, *A última foto* is capable of taking on new significance reflecting upon the slow privatization and commodification of revered Canadian icons such as national parks. Exhibiting *A última foto* in Canada, a changing nation in which spaces are simultaneously deterritorialized, re-negotiated and recognized provides an ideal forum for the multiple authorship of this work.

-Elizabeth Matheson, 2007