

ROSEGALLERY is pleased to present *Retratos Pintados*, a collection of hand-painted vernacular photographs from Northeastern Brazil, on view 12 March through 30 April, 2011.

Accumulated over a period of fifteen years by historian, Titus Riedl, these distinct and striking portraits represent a stunning inventory of localized Brazilian photo-painting techniques from the early 1940's through the 1990's. Unique within the history of photographic portraiture, retratos pintados are defined by the bold, flat fields of color that merge the reality of the original photograph with an idealized vision of the individuals and families depicted in them. Brazilian photo-painters enhanced each portrait to match the wishes of their clientele by smoothing out their skin, augmenting their hair, giving them finer clothes than they were able to afford, and by adding jewelry where none existed. In some cases deceased family members were painted as if alive, and absent loved ones were added into group portraits to create lasting mementos of complete family units. The literal truth of the black and white photograph was surrendered to a poetic and lyrical final portrait.



The numerous photo-paintings that make up this collection hail from rural communities and urban peripheries in Northeastern Brazil. Most of the subjects are of mixed indigenous and Afro-Brazilian heritage and were primarily from the lower and middle socio-economic classes of the region. Accordingly, the commercial transactions surrounding the commissioning and production of these painted portraits were entirely informal. Clients placed orders through street traders called *bonequeiros* who traveled through the Brazilian backlands gathering photos from families to take to *puxadores* who enlarged the photographs. They were then given to a group of photo-painters, each of whom carried out their own specialty; from the preparation of extraordinarily vivid color washes, to the rendering of hair, the application of clothing and the interpretation of the subjects' faces. Eventually the finished pieces were hand-delivered to the homes of each client where they became an important part of the domestic setting.

Like other forms of traditional portrait photography, the craft of making retratos pintados is quickly becoming extinct. While Riedl has been able to locate capable photo-painters who can work within the old tradition, the necessary materials have become too difficult to obtain or too expensive to work with. Most portraits are now made using computers by artists who rely on digital retouching methods. The results may be technically sophisticated but they are also predictable and indicative of how removed we are from a time when having one's portrait made was a ceremony of great import.

Sixty-one traditional photo-paintings have been beautifully illustrated in the book *Retratos Pintados*, edited by Martin Parr and Titus Riedl, published by Nazraeli Press in 2010.

An opening reception for *Retratos Pintados*, hand-painted photographs from Northeastern Brazil will be held Saturday, 12 March from 6-8pm.

For more information and visuals please contact Shaun McCracken at shaun@rosegallery.net ROSEGALLERY is located at Bergamot Station Arts Center, 2525 Michigan Avenue, G5, Santa Monica, CA 90404. T. 310.264.8440. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10am – 6pm and by appointment.