

Claudia Andujar, *Incomplete work, 1961–68 (São Paulo and Washington)*

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There are no static myths.
C.A.

Claudia Andujar was born in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, with the name Claudine Haas, on June 12, 1931 (although some records give the date as the 6th of the same month), the daughter of Siegfried Haas, a Hungarian Jew, and Germaine Guye Haas, a Swiss Protestant.¹ The family soon moved to Oradea, in Transylvania, then recently incorporated to Romania after years of Hungarian domination under the name of Nagyvárad.² It was in that city that the couple had met a few years before, when Germaine had arrived there to work as a governess in the house of Siegfried's family. In Oradea, Claudine had a happy early childhood, with memories of Gypsies and their bears, sweet pies and music. Those years were interrupted by the conflicts between her parents and their separation. Her childhood idyll declined even further with the growing threat of the Nazi pogroms, which in 1944 resulted in the deportation and murder of her father and his entire family, in the Nazi concentration camps. In the company of her mother and stepfather, Claudine revisited and came to live in the house of her father's family, in one of the most haunting moments of a tumultuous biography intrinsically linked with the history of the 20th century. When she entered the house, the table was set, untouched. Her relatives had not had time to prepare for their departure.

With the imminent arrival of the Russian troops in Oradea, Claudine started a long process of relocation. First, the girl accompanied her mother to Vienna, where the latter fell sick and Claudine reported daily to the Gestapo. They ended this several-month-long trip in the natal Neuchâtel. However the Hungarian Claudine did not adapt to the Swiss lifestyle and after two years set off for New York in search of new opportunities, following her paternal family's trail of emigration. The American dream began in the house of relatives in the Bronx and eventually led to the tightening of her interest for art, beginning a career as a painter, and also to her marriage with a young Spanish man, Julio Andujar, whose surname she kept. (Because the marriage took place in the United States, the original Spanish accent mark on the name disappeared.) Meanwhile, Germaine went to live her American dream in other latitudes, having arrived in São Paulo on a yet undetermined date. In 1955 Claudia Andujar boarded a ship bound for that same South American city, to meet up with her mother. In Brazil, Andujar continued with her vocation for art, specifically through photography, which she worked with throughout a career of nearly fifty years. She has lived in São Paulo ever since.

This exhibition, entitled Claudia Andujar, *Obra Incompleta, 1961–68 (São Paulo e Washington)*, features artworks made throughout the 1960s. They are recent prints, made especially for the show, based on research made by the curator in the artist's archive. These images are being shown here for the first time, most of them have never having been previously printed, photographic enlarged, or reproduced in books or magazines. They were made under different conditions and with different aims, ranging from journalistic assignments, commercial commissions, and works made on the artist's own initiative, but they were all made when she was already working as a professional photographer. As the exhibition's curator, my hypothesis concerning the group of images is that it reveals the artist's interest in social documentary photography, and that these works in some way came to define a spirit, a language and a method for the research the artist carried out years later among the Yanomami Indians of Brazil, the work for which she is most recognized. A further aim is to point out how these works, though they are not autobiographical per se, nonetheless bear direct relation with the artist's biography, dealing with themes and having been made in countries that were important in her background as an artist and as a person. The research on the artist's archive has been carried out in parallel with another research project, underway since 2010, dealing with the photos taken during the 1970s among the Yanomami and with the role the artist came to play as an activist in the struggle for the rights of the Brazilian indigenous peoples. The biographical dimension appears in the artist's oeuvre less as an inventory of moments of a "life narrative" and more as a comprehension of history, culture and external events as a mirror of the individual, lending meaning to a life's path.

Chronologically the first group of images in this exhibition, the photos from 1961 are the only ones that do not pertain to a closed group, and involve images made on two separate occasions. The two shots of downtown São Paulo were taken from a vast documentation made on commission for IBM, although the precise aim of that project has not yet been determined. They bear witness to the urban boom that Brazil was experiencing then, with large masses of people flowing into the large cities, with great promises of transformation, though with continuing social exclusion. For the show we chose to include an image of the Viaduto do Chá, a bridge that is also a sort of post card image of São Paulo's economic might, alongside the image of a black woman reading a newspaper. The third image dating from that same year was made in October at the opening of the 6th Bienal de São Paulo³ and shows the crowd gathered on the ramps of the Palace of Industries (1954) attentively listening to the inaugural address of President João Goulart (1919–1976) – who was deposed by the same coup d'état that the demonstration portrayed in the next room in the show helped to set off, on March 31, 1964. Jango, as he was known, had been sworn into office just a few days before his speech at the Bienal and his social reforms were still on the drawing board. The composition of this image somehow foreshadows his destiny, with its signs in profound tension: Niemeyer's curves, the enthralled crowd, the leader outside the frame.

The photos from 1964 portray an important moment in the reactionary escalation that led up to the military coup of that year, which immersed Brazil into a long, violent and traumatic military dictatorship that lasted until 1985, whose marks are still long from being erased. The images were made at the March of the Family with God for Freedom in São Paulo, on March 19, a date chosen by the Church for being the Day of Saint Joseph, the patron of the family. This name was given generically to a series of demonstrations organized by conservative sectors of society, which in the iconography of that time can be seen as a sort of response to the rallies held in that same period by President Goulart, the most famous of which had taken place six days before in Rio de Janeiro. Here it is perhaps interesting to briefly sketch out the historical roots of the Brazilian right. Conservatism in this country had its origins rooted in the Imperial period, marked by a strong feeling of privilege and possession represented by the Conservative Party, which regarded the abolition of slavery (1888) and the Proclamation of the Republic (1889) as threats, identifying in their wake the emergence of the “dangerous classes,” which in the case of Brazil came to be mixed with a violent sense of racial discrimination. In the mid-20th century, this feeling was kept more or less alive by the National Democratic Union (UDN), which was staunchly antagonistic against the successive populist leaderships. These forces were catalyzed by a growing anti-communist sentiment in the urban centers, from the 1950s onward, in the context of the mass media and the Cold War, and were orchestrated by the church, which appealed to the sense of family and private property, culminating in the coup.

What makes these images more current, however is the fact that they emphasize the direct popular participation in the events, belying the notion that the coup originated exclusively in the armed forces and the ruling classes. At the moment there is a great effort aimed at revising this history – while I write these lines, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff is deploying the first Truth Commission, nearly thirty years after the end of the dictatorship, charged with the task of identifying (though powerless to punish) the individuals responsible for the crimes of torture, death and disappearance, as well as clarifying the role of other entities, namely the US government, in the repressive apparatus of the state.⁴ The images selected from this group prioritize two registers that have practically become the photographer's hallmark. The first is a sort of portrait taken in situations of collective interaction, in which the individual is singularized only momentarily by the camera, without being unlinked from the actions that brought him/her to that situation. The second is a sort of more epic photo, with grandiloquent compositions that point to an idea of a collective trance and a social body. The artist's recollection of the register of these images is both direct and profound: “Trying to understand the country's social movements, I covered the March of the Family with God for Freedom, at Sé Square, with my camera, on my own. Once again, I was seeking to understand the happenings of the country in which I was living, I wanted to grow.”⁵ We can add a citation, a bit distant from the specific context though with great resonance in the context of Andujar's biography, taken from a diary entry by Rahel Varnhagen: “What are you doing? Nothing. I am letting life rain on me.”⁶ In this case, with the camera in her hand.

It is not by chance that the theme of integration appears as the central theme of the third group of images in the exhibition. Taken in and around the encampment that became known as Resurrection City, at the Mall, Washington DC, these images sympathize with the civil rights movement and the encampment itself, but above all evidence the artist's original intention to make a journalistic photo-essay at that place. As will be seen in the statement below, Andujar did not have access to what she wanted to photograph, though she showed her personal credentials; and even though the photos she did manage to shoot only suggest what those other images would have been, they are still among the strongest images that the artist photographed in that decade.

That they were never published by the publication that commissioned them Andujar attributes to a politico-ideological editorial decision, but here personal accounts and fact can be blended in the work of recovering the archive. For the curator, it seems that the images did not live up to the sensationalist treatment that the theme acquired in the press at that time, which riled feelings and brought about the regression of the racial agenda in the United States.

If at the core of our argument there is a contrast between the American and Brazilian model of racial integration (and exclusion), this can only be understood as a central question in the artist's oeuvre and life, which is universalized and particularized in a single movement – that is, the artist's engagement with the Other stemmed from her aim to know her own history better. In the images of 1964 the biographical question appeared as a desire for knowledge on Brazil, her new home country. But in the 1968 images it reemerges in an even more precise register, pointing to the themes of integration and exclusion, of her own double nationality and the limits of photography as an apparatus for revealing the Other.

In Andujar's words:

At that time, I was married with George Love,⁷ who was an Afro-American. Actually, he was a mix of White and Black, and he said that he also had Indian blood. He came to Brazil and felt very well here, very much at ease. I think that also for racial questions, he felt better than in the United States. In that year, we went together to the United States, where he was given another reporting assignment. When the Black uprising took place in Washington, the staff of the magazine Realidade thought it would be good to document it. He didn't want to go, perhaps for being Black, and I went. Arriving there, I saw what was happening but I didn't have anyone to introduce me into the situation. When I arrived, I saw a war scene, with a great deal of hate on both sides. The Blacks were revolting against the situation of civil rights they were in. The North American government, the Whites, had an entire military apparatus to control the situation. There were people from various cities at the encampment, and many people were following the happenings in front of the Capital. I, as someone recently accustomed to Brazil, with a certain tolerance for racial issues, when I tried to enter the encampment I was stopped by a Black police officer, who is was on security duty. I had entered and stayed there at ease, I was not prepared to confront a militia. They asked me to leave, they did not allow me to photograph. It was very strange to me, I had never faced a situation like that before. The only time that I had felt racial repression had been in the country of my birth, in Oradea, when the Nazis had brought my relatives to the concentration camp. In Brazil, never. I tried to explain that I was married to an Afro-American, but they would not have any of it, they said that words were cheap. They said that I could not stay there, if I wanted to keep my camera. At the same time, I had already taken some images before they stopped me. Once they came after me, I had to leave, there was no way to face them. Afterwards, I returned to New York, where George was waiting for me, and Realidade wound up not publishing anything, perhaps so that they would not appear anti-American. At that time, I had American citizenship. When I began to work with the Yanomami, I became a Brazilian citizen, in 1974. I felt that the government of the Brazilian military dictatorship would not tolerate me working with the Indians if I were American. But that was not just a racial question, but a political one.⁸

Her work with the Yanomami Indians came to define Claudia Andujar irreversibly, converging art, politics and life in a unique way in the 20th century. Much of this already existed as a spark in the images of this exhibition.

NOTES:

1. Data collected from the *Cronologia* published in Claudia Andujar. *A Vulnerabilidade do Ser*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, Pinacoteca do Estado, 2005. Complemented by statements by the artist to the author, beginning in November 2010 and ongoing.

2. Andujar learned to speak Hungarian and French as a young child and had classes in Romanian at school, though she has forgotten the latter language. Besides the paternal and maternal languages, she has also learned to fluently speak German, English and Portuguese.

3. The artist Lygia Clark (1920–1988), from the state of Minas Gerais, won the prize for sculpture at the 6th Bienal de São Paulo with her *Bichos* [Animals], in a progressive decision by the institution. For a brief history of the first twenty years of the Bienal, see Mario Pedrosa, “A Bienal de Cá pra Lá,” in Aracy Amaral. *Mundo, Homem, Arte em Crise*. São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1986.

4. An extraordinary effort of discovering sources was made by journalist Elio Gaspari in his tetralogy dedicated to the history of the military dictatorship in Brazil. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2002–04.

5. Statement by the artist to the author in correspondence. May, 2012.

6. Unpublished diary entry, dated March 11, 1810. Cited in Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: judia alemã na época do romantismo*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, 1994. Translated by Antônio Trânsito and Gernot Kludsch. “Preface.”

7. This was American photographer George Leary Love (1937–95), Andujar’s companion and colleague at the magazine *Realidade*.

8. *Idem* note 5 *supra*.