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CLAUDIA ANDUJAR

A Sônia

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Any act of portraiture entails complicity, implicit or explicit. Portraiture is by its nature collaborative. Portrayed and portrayer must both participate. Both will reveal something of themselves, both will conceal something of themselves, to each other, yes, but even more so to us, the viewers-to-be. But the agency that is necessarily at play in acts of portraiture, while shared, is not necessarily equal; nor, although consensual, is the degree of disclosure. What is necessary-- or at least what is certain -- is that in the end one side will claim authorship, while what the other will claim is a mix of subject-hood and object-hood, the proportions of which are to-be-determined. Such is the pre-determined nature of the transaction in question: that it is indeterminate.

This sort of joint and even oscillatory agency is an essential component of Claudia Andujar's remarkable 1971 photo-essay *A Sônia*, currently on view at the Galería Elba Benítez. The project, as Andujar has described, was prompted by Sônia herself, an aspiring model from Bahia who presented herself at Andujar's studio seeking work, i.e. for her own professional purposes. After completing that initial photo session with Sônia, Andujar painstakingly reworked the photographs she had taken for Sônia for her own purposes, subjecting them to an elaborate sequence of experimental production techniques, such as re-photographing them with heavily saturating color filters, reversing positive and negative images, and cropping the images severely.

The result was some 90 photographs (a selection of which are on view at the Galería Elba Benítez) in which Sônia, the aspiring model from Bahia, becomes *A Sônia*, the photo-essay that is as lush and vivid as it is intimate and serene. The individual images are almost modular in many of their formal aspects, such as uniformity of scale, unchanging foreground-background

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relationship, and stylistic unity (that Andujar has presented *A Sônia* as a slide-show is understandable, given its near-cinematic quality as a whole.) But at the same time, each photograph conveys a level of palpable physicality almost at odds with the relentless abstraction of the photographic production. The other-worldly coloration, the erasure of identifying markers, the disorienting effect of the experimental techniques, taken together somehow do not distance us from a sense of Sonia's physique but rather, to the contrary, bring us closer to it: to her lithe and limber body, her lustrous hair, the quality of her flesh, the fine fullness of her facial features.

But not her eyes: Sônia's gaze, in Andujar's gaze, is inward. Both portrayed and portrayer seem to be enveloped in some sort of shared yet separate dream-state, one directed inward, the other outward, one seeing, the other being seen. In other words, while *A Sônia* partakes of the complicity of portraiture, what is portrayed, ultimately, is nothing less than a kind of dream. But whose dream? Andujar has stated that once she had completed her photo-essay, Sônia herself no longer existed, but, at the same time, Andujar's own "dream" had come true. To what degree might those two resultant dream-states of being have been contingent on each other? Did Sônia's have to end in order for Andujar's to come true? Did Sônia herself have to cease to exist so that *A Sônia* might be born? Did Sônia, the aspiring model from Bahia, have to be out of the picture in order to be in Andujar's dream-picture, the one we, the viewers-to-be, see today?

This transactional indeterminacy courses through *A Sônia* and lends it at least part of its singular and lasting power: dreams, too, are indeterminate. But what is certain, however, what is fully determined, is that Sônia, in Andujar's *A Sônia*, will endure, herself and yet not herself, as she was and yet was not, and as she forever will be.

George Stolz

Claudia Andujar (Neuchâtel, Switzerland, 1931; lives and works in São Paulo) is a photographer, human rights advocate and environmental activist. Andujar's career is generally associated with her work documenting and defending the indigenous Yanomami people of the Brazilian Amazon region, although her practice has also encompassed many artistic projects such as *A Sônia*. While Andujar's photography is generally motivated by social documentary impulses, it often freely employs nondocumentary and experimental photographic techniques in order to capture the spiritual, emotional and psychological aspects of individuals and cultures that otherwise evade the camera's objective lens.

Andujar has had solo shows at the Arles Rencontres de la Photographie (2025); Banco de la República (Bogota, 2024); MAM Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (2023); MUAC Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (Mexico City, 2023); Fundación MAPFRE (Barcelona, 2021); ICA Institute of Contemporary Art (Miami, 2021); Fondation Cartier (Paris, 2020); Instituto Moreira Salles (Rio de Janeiro, 2019, 2018); Museum für Moderne Kunst (Frankfurt, 2017); Museu de Arte Latinoamericana de Buenos Aires (MALBA) (2016); Instituto Inhotim (Brumandinho, 2015); Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia (Salvador, 2007) and the Pinacoteca de São Paulo (2005). She was selected to participate at Guangzhou Image Triennial (2017); Maison Européenne de la Photographie (Paris, 2013) and the 12th Istanbul Biennial (2011). In 2018 Andujar was awarded the Goethe-Medaille (Weimarestete).

A Sônia will be Claudia Andujar's second solo exhibition at the Galería Elba Benítez and forms part of the OFF Festival of PHotoESPAÑA 2025.

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