

## Urbans Anti-Myths



Don't expect a discussion on Olympian gods. Myths, here, refer to the fundamental study **Mythologies** (1954-56) written by French thinker Roland Barthes. He saw myth as language. Contemporary myths would be discourses, which imprint objects, actions and images taken from everyday life a "natural" status, masking the fact that they are a product of socio-historical contexts. Soap-powders, toys, weddings, steak and chips, Greta Garbo's face, the brain of Einstein, striptease everything is articulated in Barthes's analysis as a system of mythical thought to be dismantled by the irrefutable fact that any discourse is a matter of context.

Mythification occurs whenever an object/fact/happening is emitted of its moral, cultural, socioeconomic and ideological aspects and is presented as "neutral".



The four artists participating in this photographic exhibition propose exercises of demystification. Each one, with different backgrounds and a lenses focused on specific objects of reflection and desire, build a system of thought and images that question and relocates "neutral" discourses about the nature of objects, about territory, about identity. With the series **Chelsea Hotel**, Portuguese artist Rira Barros - resident in New York since 1980 and a tenant of the Chelsea herself - responds to a stereotype vision of this New York institution offering us an affectionate and internal vision of this territory. Built in 1883 as an apartment building and transformed into a hotel in 1905, the Chelsea is considered the cult and underground mark of New York City. Since its inauguration this residence-hotel has had as tenants and habitues great myths of Western culture, such as Mark Twain, Bette Davis, Jackson Pollock, David Mamet, Arthur Miller, Vladimir Nabokov, Sarah Bernardt, Tenesse Williams, Thomas Wolfe, Janis joplin, Dennis Hopper. Andy Warhol has filmed **The Chelsea Girls** the band Velvet Underground rehearsed there. Arthur Clarke wrote the script for the film **2001, a Space Odyssey** there; Woody Allen is a frequent visitor.

An imprint mark of the city, the Chelsea Hotel is frequently surrounded by a legion of Japanese tourists, with their avid cameras, looking for cult celebrities to be clicked. It has been mythicized by the international press as well as by the way it

Has been registered in books and documentaries. Rita Barros, who lives at the silver door, apartment 2001 of the hotel - bapticized by the owner Stanley Bard as "Space Odyssey" - began the project of registering her neighbors in 1988. The idea was to create affectionate *tableaux* of each of the hotel's tenants within their own environment, translating their personalities and moods through their ways of lives.

Instead of presenting a mythified perception of the Chelsea Hotel as a place of lunatics and

alternatives, Barros offers us a register of everyday life. She articulates an exercise of freedom, where individual spaces and territories - rooms transformed into idiosyncratic homes and, most of the times, into working places - open up in a myriad of human possibilities.

Each neighbor of the artist is simply pictured in its own ambiance, from Russian poet Andrei Voznesensky, to trumpet player Don Cherry, beat poet Gregory Corso, French thinker Jean Baudrillard and painter Larry Rivers.

Another artist who articulates the mythified notion of identity is Cristina Guerra. Born in Lourenço Marques, Moçambique, and living in São Paulo since 1975, she builds a panel titled **Each Time I Look Less Like My ID Picture**.

What Guerra does is subversive. Looking after discarded pictures in automatic ID picture cabins, she captures abject faces, rejected by their lack of focus, weird expressions, juxtaposition of images, miscolorings. This accumulated pictures create a global notion of rejection of physical identity. ID pictures produced reproduced in series present faces repeated in clichés of identity, through fixed poses, lost eyes, immutable poses. Guerra's juxtaposed images of abject faces have an unexpected vigor. In recreates the banality, through a redemptive strangeness.

With a series that he calls **Taxidermy**, Brazilian artist Gal Oppido gathers street objects and recreates their own significance as he reinserts each of them in new, reconstructed contexts.

Using a sense of recycling to resuscitate a worn object or to liberate it from a previous and rigid signified, Oppido acts as an obsessive craftsman. A collector of dejects, he builds neo-baroque *tableaux*, capturing from the excess of recombining objects their own new soul.

A piece of a wood chair acquires a painted bidimensional frame constructed with paint and drawings; newspaper images and a helmet become reminiscent of the death of Ayrton Senna; a piece of wall made of cement, together with a wheel, a telephone jacket and a stone taken from Guaíba river are recombined generating a transcontextual message. Balls, buttocks, a collection of rounded surfaces are juxtaposed in a way to comment on the multiple aspects of geometry.

For the artist, there is no more grammar or ethics to the objects. Visual coherence or image integrity is anachronic notions.

What Oppido creates, on the other hand, are constructive exercises that flow through the context of everyday life in Brazil - more specifically, his chosen objects work as references to main facts involving the recent History of Brazil in the last 50 years. He creates allusive composition kits that comment and, at the same time, pervert the time frames of these narrative happenings.

With **Lost and Found in Detroit**, New York artist Cynthia Carris captures and frames a unique time and space. Her vision combines the precision of photojournalism with an affectionate and critical view. Subverting the expected vocation of a spatial territory in Detroit, Michigan, the **Heidelberg project** dared to congregate artists and inhabitants of a black

And poor neighborhood to take over and recreate abandoned houses. This was the summer of 1989.

The social inversion operated in Detroit particularly happened in the end of the sixties, as the beautiful Victorian houses, then inhabited by middle-class families pursuing the American Dream became charred, infested with rats, drugs, prostitution and poverty.

Leaded by artist Tyree Guyton, a group of artists carrying paint and lost objects began occupying the houses of Heidelberg Street. In the juxtaposition of street signs, dolls parts, old shoes, ribbons and buttons, these artists have realized a colorful political *collage*, juxtaposing notions of art, history and artifice.

It is as if the artists had offered drug dealers, prostitutes and inhabitants of the underground from Heidelberg's street their own mirrors, provoking their exile.

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