

Images from Brazil, S. Africa impress

By **PATRICIA C. JOHNSON**
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As Houston FotoFest's Month of Photography winds to an end, the work of two radically different artists stands out in our city's galleries: William Kentridge's video at Vine Street Studios and *Traces on the Glass*, altered photographs by Brazilian master Geraldo de Barros, at Sicardi-Sanders Gallery.

De Barros, born in 1932, is recognized in Brazil as a modern painter and as the founder of the Grupo Rup-

Art review

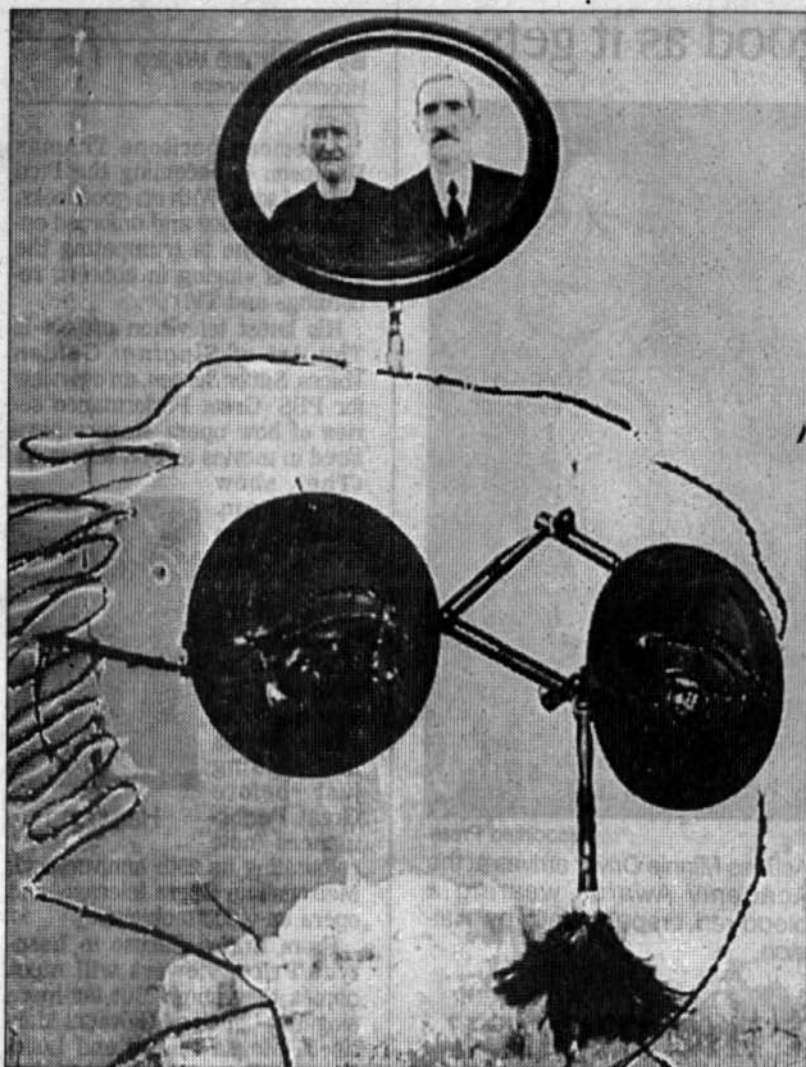
tura, an avant-garde movement in the 1950s. He is also a self-taught photographer, as innovative as he has been unknown, who uses the photographic negative as a printmaking technique.

He experiments with the serendipity of found images, reinvented in the darkroom.

When de Barros looks through his lens, a chink in the wall becomes a cat's eye, and a beat-up shoe on the ground is transformed into a young girl's nose. Then he uses pen and ink to sharpen the illusion.

In *Homage to Stravinsky*, he coaxed a mustache out of a feather duster hanging from a coat rack, the hats substituting for eyes. In another instance, he scrawled a hat and ear around a scarred wall to suggest Pablo Picasso's head, while the same wall, with different scratching, transformed its features into those of a skull.

This is the artist's first exhibit in this country. Evident in the display is his delight in probing the figure and in abstract arrangements, as well as his expert handling of his medium. The results are richly toned



The photos of Geraldo de Barros, including *Homage to Stravinsky* (1949), are on display at Sicardi-Sanders Gallery.

works that are rigorously composed and filled with astute humor.

The exhibit continues through Tuesday at 2623 Kipling; call 713-529-1313.

Kentridge is one of five South African artists spotlighted in an exhibit

at the newly reconditioned Vine Street Studios.

While his companion photographers push at the edges of mixed media, Kentridge appears oddly old-fashioned — and refreshingly direct — with his straightforward video.

Born in Johannesburg in 1955, he combines drawing with animation and filmmaking to produce the complex video *History of the Main Complaint, Felix in Exile*. This allusive, multilayered narrative touches on black-and-white relations and on the role of the artist in society, among other subjects.

The film, the artist's sixth, began as a sketch for an opera. He started it at the time Nelson Mandela's government convened the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate apartheid-era crimes.

"The questions of guilt, responsibility and collective memory that were in the air made their way into the film. . . . The drawings start out as strictly subordinate to the needs of the film," Kentridge says, but "in the end, the film becomes an extraordinarily complicated and cumbersome machine for arriving at a set of drawings."

Kentridge relays impressive emotional and environmental richness through carefully delineated figures in pencil or charcoal. As the protagonists move through rooms, a landscape and the artist's studio, the surroundings change from realistic to surrealistic and back; the willing viewer gets caught up in the mysterious, compelling voyage.

The exhibit will continue through Tuesday at 1113 Vine St.; call 713-529-9140.

A curators' tour at 10:30 a.m. Saturday will focus on the South Africans' exhibits and *Looking at the '90s: Four Views of Current Mexican Photography*, also on view at Vine Street Studios. A second tour, at 2 p.m. Saturday, will look at *Altered Worlds: Contemporary Staged Slovak Photography*, on view at the Winter Street Art Center, 2123 Winter St. The tours are free; call FotoFest at 713-529-9140 for information on exhibits and tours.