

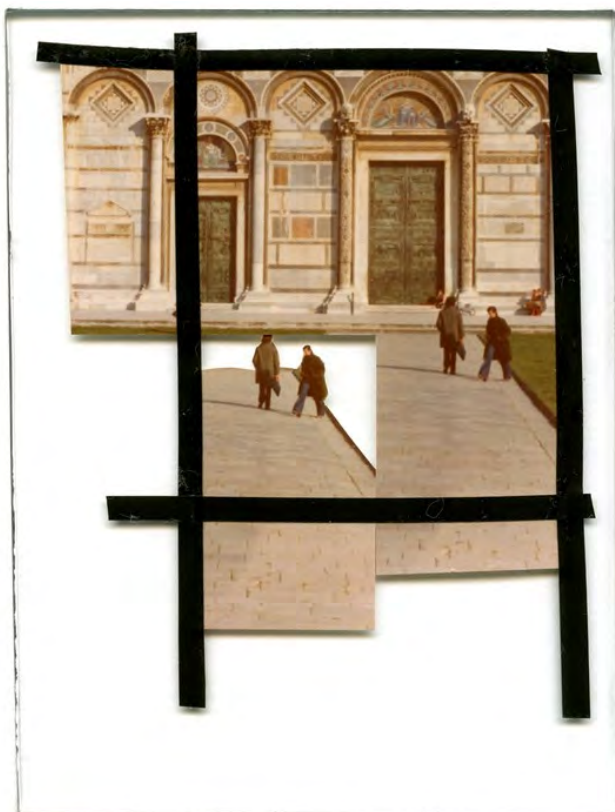
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## GERALDO DE BARROS: WHAT REMAINS

Pop Art, scratched negatives and intricately painted collages from the Brazilian legend

PHOTOGRAPHY FIRST LOOK (/FIRST-LOOK)

17 days ago Text Ruby Hutson-Gray ([userprofile/ruby-hutson-gray](#))



The late [Geraldo de Barros](http://thephotographersgallery.org.uk/geraldo-de-barros-2) (1923-1998) is a key figure in Brazilian art and although having worked across a number of mediums, he first built a reputation as young painter early on in his career. His work with a camera is noted for its creativity and his exploration of photography involved experimenting with multiple exposures, camera rotations, over-painting and the scratching of negatives to achieve his aesthetic. Following ill health towards the end of his life, he returned to photography, encouraged by his daughter after she found boxes of his old negatives.

Set to show at [The Photographers' Gallery](http://thephotographersgallery.org.uk/) in London this January, his retrospective exhibition is made up of two collections, *Fotoformas*, from the beginning of his career, and *Sobras* ('Remains') which he created in the last two years of his life, where he completed over 250 intricate collages. Drawing on a number of connections between his early and later work, *What Remains* reveals more about the artist himself, his artistic practice and the processes of production, which can be considered alongside his other work as a painter, designer and engraver.

We spoke to Isobel Whitelegg, co-curator and an expert on modern and contemporary art in Brazil, about her enthusiasm for de Barros' photographic material and the new exhibition.

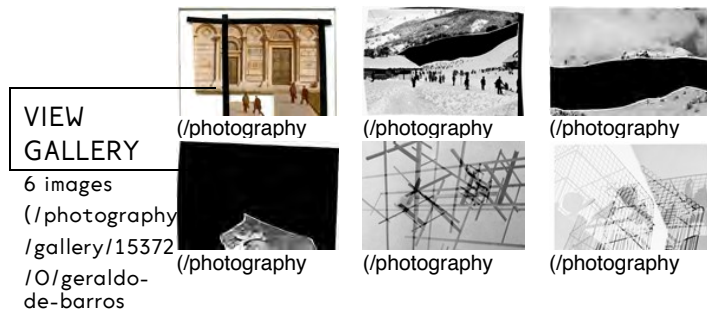
**Dazed Digital: Can you tell us how you first came across de Barros as an artist and photographer?**

**Isobel Whitelegg:** More than ten years ago, I was in Sao Paulo doing some research on a completely different artist when I came across a catalogue of de Barros' 1950-1 *Fotoforma* exhibition – by chance - in an archive. I knew some of his later abstract paintings, but had not seen his photographs at that point. The memory of this discovery stayed with me. I found out more about his photographic work gradually and began to talk to [The Photographers' Gallery](http://thephotographersgallery.org.uk/) about it about four years ago, around the time of their exhibition with Sara Ramos. Sara is an artist based in Brazil, and shared my interest in his work from the perspective of contemporary practice.

**DD: What do you find most exciting about de Barros' work?**

**Isobel Whitelegg:** Despite being recognised as a 'historical' artist, via his connections to Modernist movements in the 1950s, there is something in both his photographic work and

his way of working that resonates with contemporary practices and ways of thinking. You can look at certain photographs and have the sense that they could have been made very recently, that you can understand them with contemporary eyes rather than looking at them as if they were historical artefacts. His final series - called *Sobras* (Remains) - which was the starting point for this exhibition, is comparatively recent in fact. It was made 1996-1998 - in the last two years of his life.



**DD: In what way did his work go above and beyond that of his contemporaries, into the realms of Modernism?**

**Isobel Whitelegg:** In the realm of photography alone, de Barros was extremely important not only for his own work, but for his persistent efforts to argue for the place of photography within fine art practice, within Brazil's new modern art museums and at the new São Paulo biennale. In the 1940s a network of amateur 'photo clubs' in Brazil was the most important context for the development of new photography, and de Barros' provocative and persistently experimental attitude provided a catalyst for discussion and change, within a collective movement. He was invited to set up a laboratory and photography classes at the MASP (Museum of Art São Paulo) in 1949, and to organise an exhibition of his work there a year later. He had been a painter and a member of a studio collective before taking up photography, and this exhibition helped to bridge the photographic and artistic communities in São Paulo in a way that had not happened before. There is also a collective and always sociable aspect of his work that is important. Not only because he was part of a number of significant art groups and movements, but perhaps most significantly in his approach to other disciplines. He set up a furniture design and production company (Unilabor) for example that was organised as a co-operative and this was an ethical, and indeed political, decision.

**DD: In what ways do you think de Barros has left a lasting legacy amongst other Brazilian/ international artists?**

**Isobel Whitelegg:** Aside from his decisive influence on the development and visibility of photography in Brazil, I think that an important aspect of his legacy will continue to be his attitude. He really was relentlessly experimental. He did not stop subverting expectations and making changes to his practice, and was not afraid of being contradictory in his tastes and influences. It was as if he had a faith in the fact that his work would maintain an underlying consistency, despite any changes in technique. This fearless attitude led to the development of some extraordinary processes. And, many of his ways of producing photographic images required the skill of taking calculated risks: from multiple exposure, within the *Fotoformas* series, to cutting into family photos in the case of the *Sobras* - where the danger (or taboo) is of destroying memories or 'precious moments' if the experiment is not successful. He also saw photography as a way of approaching reality that much in common with both printing and drawing - no more true or real as a means of representation or remembering than they are. For that reason I find that his work chimes with the expanded approaches to all of these media as found in more recent art practices. All of these qualities are very evident from the exhibition. It is for these reasons that he continues to be recognised by younger artists in Brazil. I hope that those who do not know his work here will similarly be intrigued by it and also that the exhibition will provoke more research and writing - and that it will generate more opportunities to see his work in future exhibitions too. I hope that these images will stay with those that see them.

**DD: Can you describe in three words, what people can expect from the exhibition?**

**Isobel Whitelegg:** Beauty, tenderness and risk. (The fourth word would be humour).

*Geraldo de Barros: What Remains is at The Photographers' Gallery from 18th January - 7th April 2013*

[http://www.dazeddigital.com/photography/article/15393/1/geraldo-de-barros-what-remains?utm\\_source=Link&utm\\_medium=Link&utm\\_campaign=RSSFeed&utm\\_term=geraldo-de-barros-what-remains](http://www.dazeddigital.com/photography/article/15393/1/geraldo-de-barros-what-remains?utm_source=Link&utm_medium=Link&utm_campaign=RSSFeed&utm_term=geraldo-de-barros-what-remains)