

Marcelo Brodsky:



Exiles, Remains, Resistances

Curator
Márcio Seligmann-Silva

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An artist and activist, Marcelo Brodsky is an agent in the fight for life. His work exposes violations and violence, and the resistance against them in particular. Highlighting the agency of individuals and collectives, and not of oppressive power, amplifying the images and voices of those occupying the streets, marching, crying out, and resisting is the gesture that makes Brodsky an ally of peoples and their rights - whether in Rome, Kingston, Beijing, Montevideo, Dhaka, São Paulo, or Bratislava.

As a Jewish artist born in Buenos Aires, in his works Brodsky re-elaborated the traumas of the dictatorship and of antisemitism in Argentina. Nevertheless, besides confronting his local context, the cause of indelible marks on his work and life story, Brodsky establishes alliances with times and spaces that he did not necessarily experience, but where he makes himself present, fist raised in the air.

This virtue, a mix of strength and solidarity, has been found in Brodsky's work for nearly three decades, as a consistent ethical, aesthetic, and political project done against the backdrop of defending human rights. Although art cannot be commanded to play a role, it is always an area of powers and consequences. In Brodsky's case, these works of art provoke and produce new worlds: more plural, decolonial, and democratic.

This is also one of the roles we are taking at Museu Judaico de São Paulo. Besides showing what Jewish artists are making in Brazil and in other countries, we believe that people and institutions should join together to build a truly democratic society, where everyone has the best living conditions, free of the horror of authoritarian power, which has marked not only the Jewish experience, but the history of many peoples and identities.

We hope that *Marcelo Brodsky: Exiles, Remains, Resistances*, an alliance between the artist, the curator Márcio Seligmann-Silva and the Museum, can be a sign of this intention, and we invite all who come to visit to share it with us.

Felipe Arruda

Executive Director

Museu Judaico de São Paulo



Marcelo Brodsky: Exiles, Remains, Resistances

In relation to the vast universe that now makes up the oeuvre of Marcelo Brodsky, the exhibit *Marcelo Brodsky: Exiles, Remains, Resistances* focuses on important moments in his work, emphasizing the artist's relationship with Jewish memory and its metamorphoses, as well as current policies of memory (and of forgetting), in an age of Neofascisms and segregationist and even genocidal policies.

Marcelo's work, born of the trauma of political exile from the Argentine dictatorship of 1976-1983 and of the loss of his brother Fernando, kidnapped, tortured, and murdered by this same regime, is seen as a unique touchstone in the resistance against fascisms and in the fight for justice. He also bears the marks of his condition as the son of descendants of Jewish exiles, who came to Argentina in search of a land far from the mortal antisemitism in Imperial Russia at the time.

The faster pace in production of his work is therefore understandable,

as are the demands for exhibits like these in countries in Latin America, Europe, the U.S.A., Africa, and Asia. There is a clear relationship between these works and the spirit of our time. In these works, stories of violence and destruction intersect and draw a panel of the Modern Age as a place of annihilation, as well as a stage for struggles, dreams, and utopias.

Marcelo carries out a critical collection of images from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which he brings back, curates, and resignifies through his interventions with colors and captions. He is aware that the political moment of the images oftentimes requires words for them to work. Contexts and characters are thus made concrete. His work should be contemplated based on its artistic, creative, and original facets and as a political means of producing images of resistance.

By appropriating historical images, he reveals them once again to awaken us to the need for a political response to the stories of repeated horrors. If photography produces a "shock" in relation to the here and now to preserve it in time, Brodsky duplicates this shock to reactivate these images and cause them to be reborn in our present day. He makes a record of a suffocated and usually

erased history, creating images that impel us to act.

At the exhibit, we see his work from the acclaimed *Buena Memoria* series to his recent *Traces of Violence* (dedicated to the early twentieth century German genocide in present-day Namibia). Throughout the exhibit, we go from a critical a(na)rchiving of the memory of Argentina's dictatorship from 1976-1983, through the exiles caused by this moment of terror, linking, as if in a "backward" repagination, to Marcelo's Russian-Jewish origins, with his works containing images of immigrants from his family album.

From this movement toward the past, we return to the theme of today's exiles (as in the series *Migrants in the Mediterranean* and *Open the Bridges*), which distinguish our hyper-liberal age, debased by the production of human *obsolescence*, with people condemned to wander from border to border, roaming a world that seemingly wants to expel them.

A dialog with the artist Moisés Patrício emphasizes the dialogic nature of Marcelo's work and his project of re-imagining art as a space to build a plural common life and a life of becoming. Art is only worthwhile when it is produced as a collective project. Public and exhibition spaces should interpenetrate. Bridges are open here too.

That is why, in front of the Museu Judaico, in the middle of Avenida 9 de Julho, a photograph of Marielle Franco, taken by Bernardo Guerreiro, was multiplied in different colors in the style of Andy Warhol's *Death and Disasters* series. By introducing, within the context of the exhibit, this emblematic photograph of this leader, cravenly murdered in 2018, a series of decolonial and gender struggles and fights for equality are once again articulated. Marielle's image makes us think about the words of the philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas: "The epiphany of the face is ethical." The face is the pure non-violence that calls us to responsibility.

Marcelo's work can be seen as a gesture of resistance to erasures. He seeks to eliminate forgetfulness and provide dignity to the "wretched of the earth," as Frantz Fanon says. The Jewish commandment to remember, the *zachor*, is followed in accordance with the ethical-political demands of our present. Let us be inspired by this work.

Márcio Seligmann-Silva

Curator



Buena Memoria

The work process

When I returned to Argentina after many years of living in Spain, I had just turned 40 and wanted to work with my identity. Photography, with its exact ability to freeze a point in time, was my tool to do this.

I began reviewing family photos and pictures from my school days, going back to when I was young. I found a class picture from my junior high school years, taken in 1967, and felt the need to know what had happened in each person's life.

I decided to hold a reunion with my classmates from the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires, so we could meet again after 25 years. I invited those I was able to locate to my home and asked to photograph each one of them.

I blew up the 1967 photo, the first where we were all together, to serve as the backdrop for these portraits, asking each of them to bring an element from their current life with them for their portrait.

I continued to take pictures of my classmates that did not make it to the

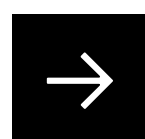
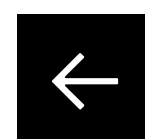
reunion, but because it was impossible to transport such a large photograph, I always carried small copies of this image with me to include in these portraits, which were taken in Buenos Aires, Madrid, Robledo de Chavela (Spain), and New York.

Later, a gathering was organized to remember our classmates from the Colegio who disappeared or were murdered by State Terrorism during the dark years of the dictatorship.

Twenty years later, the school's authorities agreed for the first time to officially remember, in the auditorium, those who were missing. It was a historical event. I decided to work with the large picture that served as the backdrop when photographing my classmates and to write a thought about each of their lives on the image.

The works in the *Buena Memoria* series are part of the collection at the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo.

Marcelo Brodsky



BUENA MEMORIA

As part of the event, an exhibit was held with photographs from that time, in an effort to convey images of what happened to today's students of the Colegio.

The photos were what remained of our 98 companions, a tool to make them into concrete people, near. We should know of what and whom we are speaking.

I decided to include the class picture from our first year of junior high, modified with my writings and current portraits of my colleagues. The photos were shown at the school over a few days.

The light from the sun, high in the sky, shining through the enormous cloister windows, hit the faces of the students who had stopped to look, reflected on the glass covering the photo with artist interventions.

The portrait of these reflections is a fundamental part of this work, since it already represents a moment of passing experience between generations.



BUENA MEMORIA

“My brother and I travel the brown waters by boat together. We stay in a prohibited place.”



BUENA MEMORIA

"The river Plate was the point of arrival and the final stop.

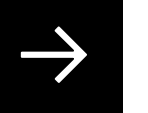
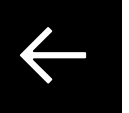
My uncle Salomón, my grandfather's brother, arrived by the river in the early twentieth century.

His image challenges the future, his stance expects everything"



BUENA MEMORIA

“They were thrown in the river.
It became their inexistent tomb.”



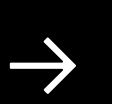
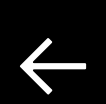
BUENA MEMORIA

“Fernando has his eyes closed next to the dining room table at our house in Caballito. A family party is going on around him. He is elegant, wearing a Prince of Wales-style jacket and tie.

There are flowers in the middle of the table and half-drunk glasses of wine.

The guests’ backs remind me a little of how people turned their backs to everything that was happening around them during the harshest years of the military dictatorship.

It also seems like a clash of generations: the elders ignored the young people, represented by Fernando, who is looking the other way.”

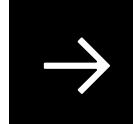
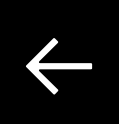


BUENA MEMORIA

"Nando, my brother Fernando, in La Boca: my mother's photography career began and ended with this photo of my brother.

A painter and sculptor, Sara decided to study photography and enrolled in classes at the Clube de Fotos Buenos Aires.

She won first place for this shot in a contest whose theme was 'La Boca'. Nando is sitting outdoors in an empty theater. He looks at mom seriously and with focus, in a characteristic gesture. He seems both assured and defenseless."



BUENA MEMORIA

"This picture of my brother was one of the first photographs I ever took, using an old camera my father gave me. His face is out of focus. His movement, now inexistent, makes him blurry to the lens. The photographs on the wall, however, better withstand the prolonged exposure. This is the best photograph that I have left from that time when we lived together."

Fernando Rubén Brodsky was kidnapped on August 14, 1979, and has been missing ever since.



BUENA MEMORIA

“Martín takes a picture with his Kodak Fiesta, which is just like mine. Chascomús (lake) behind.”

“Martin Bercovich was kidnapped and has been missing since May 13, 1976. He was the best friend I ever had.”



BUENA MEMORIA

“Claudio was lucky with the photos. Here, on the way to the excursion, we slept one night.”

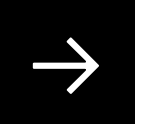
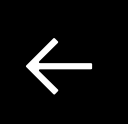


MIGRANTS 2: EXILES

"A portrait in exile is a portrait of a fragment of someone trying to rebuild themselves, to recompose themselves, to be again.

An incomplete face, with hidden and latent features. Blurred and dark eyes that look through the black wool to the new reality they are trying to understand.

Friends in exile replace family and constitute what is similar to a blood bond, but different."



MIGRANTS 2: EXILES

“It’s interesting that, when showing this image to friends who were also in exile, many of them remembered similar photographs from the same time. We are seen shot, riddled with bullets, persecuted... It seems as though the image had worked as a way to recognize the situation we had gone through and as a mechanism for overcoming fear.”



MIGRANTS 2: EXILES

"When I arrived in exile, I had a family that I no longer have.

My exile family is crossing the jetty at the Port of Barcelona and it seems as if it will fall. Its image was reduced to a few lines.

A hand rises, trying to grab a handle that does not exist. Or is it saying goodbye?

It is at an inclined level, the balance is off.

The boy, now a man, grew. But I never saw him again. Maybe he forgot that I was his father."



MIGRANTS 2: EXILES

“At the Port of Barcelona, numbered seats are facing the sea. The foam rising when it hits the jetty shows that there is movement. A return to *mare nostrum*, which is the birthplace and the future. A scenario of questions and multiple horizons. The ships wait to take us anywhere, except Argentina.”



MIGRANTS 2: EXILES

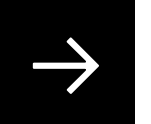
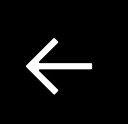
“Like the Jews expelled from Sepharad, who took the keys to their homes with them and kept them for 500 years, our keys came with us in suitcases and pockets.

Keys to homes that were invaded, destroyed, violated, sharing the same keyrings with new keys, which opened up new doors to us and allowed us to build a home again, perhaps permanent, perhaps temporary.”



1968: The Fire of Ideas

The series *1968: The Fire of ideas* (2014-2018) is made up of dozens of archive images with manual intervention, born of the student and workers movements that took place worldwide at the end of the 60s. In it, Brodsky virtuouistically developed his technique of making a record and intervening on appropriated photographic images as a means to create powerful critical memory devices. Here, the spaces in the image became a space of action. The series is very important in the *oeuvre* of the artist/photographer and deserves to be highlighted in the context of this show, since it clearly carries the insignias of dreams and desires.



I Pray With my Feet

The triptych *I Pray With my Feet* is dedicated to the memory of Marshall Meyer, a rabbi originally from New York who lived in Argentina for 30 years, leaving a huge mark on Reform Judaism in this country and in Latin America. In the first image, we see a meeting between Martin Luther King and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (who said after accompanying Mr. King on one of his protests in Selma in 1965: "When I march alongside Reverend King, I feel I am praying with my feet.") In a second image, Marcelo's triptych shows Heschel studying with Marshall Meyer in the Theological Seminary Library in Harlem, New York. The third image in the work shows Meyer on April 24, 1984, just a few months after the dictatorship fell, hosting an event for the Jewish Movement for Human Rights in Buenos Aires. The two black and white photographs in the series *The Camps* are from this same protest. If in *The Camps* Marcelo connects the memory of the Shoah to the memory of the Argentinian dictatorship, here in this triptych, as

a complement, there is a meeting of the waters of the remembrance of the fight for civil rights and the fight for redemocratization in Argentina.



Traces of Violence

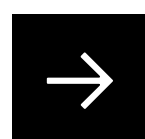
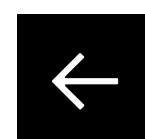
In the recent series *Traces of Violence*, from 2022, Brodsky shows the first genocide that started the twentieth century, that is, the genocide of the Ovaherero (also known as the Herero) and the Nama people in Namibia, which was then a colony of the German empire (from 1884 to World War I). In this genocide, Brodsky recognizes a fundamental chapter in the history of horror in the Modern Age. Let us remember that in her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt wrote: "African colonial possessions became the most fertile soil for the flowering of what later was to become the Nazi elite." By recovering forgotten archive images of colonialism, Brodsky points to what was (and still is) repressed and suppressed, and he allows a memory of terror to be created while also formulating demands for justice. German colonial photographs taken in Africa and produced by the occupiers are *decolonized* and turned into images of indignation and denouncement. The 30 works in this

series have eloquent titles and produce a robust record of the colonizers' actions. The texts he writes on the photographs, in German and English, are punctuated by a statement of the crimes committed there.

"It is necessary to recognize photography as an active agent of Western colonizing authority at work on the body of the Other, both in the past and in the present. It is only through this that we can begin to fully recognize the complexities and political impact of photographs in visualisations of racialized subjects."

"The ending affords us in the present the opportunity to do new forensic work on the historical sites and bodies of photography that concern its essentializing and racializing nature."

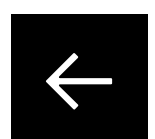
Extracts from *Decolonizing the Camera, Photography in Racial Time*, by Mark Sealy, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 2019



Do you Accept?

The work *Aceita?* marks the meeting of Moisés Patrício (1984) and Marcelo Brodsky. This is significant in artistic as well as historical terms. Both artists work with memory. They both seek to draw strength from the past to build a fairer present and future. The two of them also convey stories of horror to denounce them and promote justice. We should not forget that both the Jewish diaspora that occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the black-African diaspora occurring since the sixteenth century were produced by the same structuring violence of the Modern Age. Racism was created during this era to promote the domination of peoples as well as to generate an idea of a "pure race" of dominators. Afro-descendants and Jews were persecuted based on these Fascist projects. That is why here we are presenting an artistic action in the form of an installation, where Marcelo and Moisés join together in the gesture of photographing their own hands, producing a multiple narrative. The gravitational center of the images

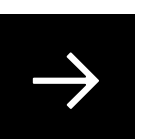
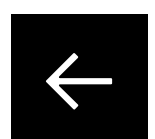
that emerge from these gestures is an image of Moisés's hand, which is holding a map where South America fits into the west coast of Africa. There is nothing more symbolic: building bridges over the Atlantic is the mark of Afro-Brazilian art, aimed at healing the trauma of forced diasporization.



Seed - Marielle Franco

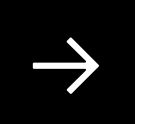
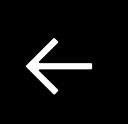
As an artist profoundly engaged with his present and having always been very active in Brazil, Marcelo Brodsky took part in the creation of a photobiography book entitled *Marielle Franco - Fotobiografia*, recently published by Instituto Marielle Franco along with the city council member Mônica Benício. This artwork is based on that publication. Using an emblematic photograph of Marielle, shot by Bernardo Guerreiro, Brodsky makes a range of tones with different color interventions. Bernardo's photograph shows a body-image, a fighting-body, harking to the unmatched strength of the politician Marielle, a black woman, a leader, a mother, a wife, and a native of the Maré favela in Rio de Janeiro. This serialization by Marcelo is part of his work giving new life to characters and scenes through intervention on photographs. In Latin America, photography of victims of State violence has a long and important history, which is reactivated here. In this serialization, within the same

gesture of remembering the vitality of this victim of the necropolitics of political leaders and Afro-descendants, Marielle's power is reaffirmed, beyond the trauma of her violent death. She goes from the fight to being the seed of new fights.



Open the Bridges

In the *Open the Bridges and Migrants - in the Mediterranean* series, we are confronted with the theme of refugees and forced movements that have marked our hyper liberal age, producing an *obsolescence* of humans, who are condemned to wander from border to border, roaming a world that seems to want to expel them. In his recent book *Brutalisme*, the theoretical academic Achille Mbembe discusses this “borderization” of the world, which creates camps of foreigners for abjected bodies. Bodies regarded as subaltern are prevented from circulating, they are persecuted, hunted, and imprisoned. Instead of realizing its potential to integrate Europe with Africa, the Mediterranean is converted into a cemetery. Marcelo demands: Yes to bridges, No to walls!



The Camps

In these two sister images, we see two memorials listing place names. In the first, in Berlin, at Wittenbergplatz, we read a list, put up in 1981, of the concentration and extermination camps created by the Nazis. In the second memorial, the list is of the torture and disappearance camps instituted by Argentina during the last dictatorship. Brodsky made this work, inspired by the German version, in 2001. In the Berlin memorial, there is a phrase that says "Orte des Schreckens, die wir niemals vergessen dürfen" ("Sites of terror that we must never forget"). Here memory is treated as law: "you shall not forget." Brodsky's work also starts with this same motto: "Lugares de memoria que no debemos olvidar jamás." In this work, Brodsky's vision again articulates two horrific moments in the history of the twentieth century: the Nazis and the Argentinian dictatorship of 1976-1983.



THE CAMPS

At the same protest in Buenos Aires on April 24, 1984, where we see *I Pray with My Feet*, with Marshall Meyer, here we see another list of locations of barbaric Nazi terror. Here, memory is triggered by these lists of places of terror.



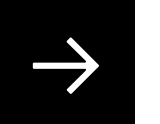
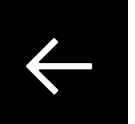
THE CAMPS

At the April 24, 1984 protest in Buenos Aires, at the same time that mothers and other family members demand the presence of their relatives who were disappeared by the dictatorship, Nazi atrocities are remembered along with the heroic uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. The geological layers of memory meet once again here. Marcelo's mother, one of the Plaza de Mayo mothers, carries a poster naming Argentina's largest torture and disappearance center, ESMA (Navy School of Mechanics). Her friend Beatriz Levin carries a poster: "Warsaw."



Black Lives Matter and Women's March

In this work, Marcelo makes an intervention on a photograph by Tasos Katopodis of protests in Washington D.C. on June 3, 2020, as part of the hundreds of protests set off by the brutal murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 15 of that year. This moment represented a cross-section in the history of the movements for cultural and political decolonization, and this photograph with Marcelo's intervention documents this new era in the fight for civil rights and human rights. In dialog with the image of Martin Luther King in *I Pray with my Feet*, this work recalls the tragic continuity of racist oppression as well as the fact that anti-racist struggles have yet to abate.



BLACK LIVES MATTER AND WOMEN'S MARCH

Also in Washington D.C., here we have the Women's March against Trump and for women's rights and respect for minorities. With over 500,000 participants and held on January 21, 2017, one day after Trump took office, this march is also representative of the new fights for rights that had seemed to be guaranteed in the twentieth century, but became contested within a new Neo-Fascist wave. If in *I Pray With My Feet* and in *The Camps* Brodsky references the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in articulation with his work on the memory of the terror of Argentina's dictatorship, here he allies himself with the feminist uprising. The watchword is uprising, it is the *action to stop the massacres*.



Remains - Escombros - AMIA

These two stylized stars of david were assembled using pieces of photographs. The images come from photos that Marcelo took when *Parque de la Memoria* had first opened in Buenos Aires. This park, which currently houses an important center of memory of Argentina's dictatorship, previously served as the site where the rubble from the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) building was deposited, after a 1994 terrorist attack that caused 85 deaths.



THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH

We can see books that were literally unburied after the end of the civil-military dictatorship. These books had been buried by Argentines who feared for their lives because of the dictatorial regime's deadly policy of censorship (1976-1983). By bringing books into the exhibit as a *corpus delicti*, the artist is also recalling that wherever books are persecuted and destroyed, people are also not safe.