

# Arts, Linguistics, Literature and Language Research Journal

## FAMILY IN 3X4: APPROPRIATION OF IMAGES IN THE CREATION PROCESS OF MYRA GONÇALVES

---

*Daniela Remião de Macedo*

Universidade de Lisboa, Faculdade de Belas Artes, Centro de Investigação e Estudos em Belas Artes (CIEBA). Largo da Academia Nacional de Belas Artes 4, 1249-058 Lisbon, Portugal

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3003-5891>

All content in this magazine is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License. Attribution-Non-Commercial-Non-Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).



**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to present an analysis of works by the Brazilian visual artist Myra Gonçalves that use 3x4 photographs from her family collection as materiality and result in images by chemical processes. The reflections arise from an interview with the artist and contributions from authors who dialogue with family photography, appropriation of images in contemporary art and the hybridity of processes in post-production. The artist's creation results from the transmutation of images into an appeal to the tactile, dealing with affective memories.

**Keywords:** Family photography; image appropriation; post production; hybridity.

## INTRODUCTION

Making art from the appropriation of images and objects has been a practice in contemporary art. Looking to reflect on family photography collections as a form of materiality for art, we focus on the work of Myra Gonçalves (Porto Alegre, 1965), looking for images created from the appropriation of 3x4 photos from the artist's personal collection. What we aim to find are the poetic potentialities of this materiality in art and how the artist resignifies these images in her creation process.

Myra began her activities in photography in the 90's. She holds a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts with a major in Photography (2003) and a Master's in Visual Arts (2007) from the Arts Institute of UFRGS. Photographer, researcher and teacher, she composed the faculty of UCS, UFRGS, FACAT and FEEVALE. She began her research in experimental photography in 2000 and has been part of the Lumen collective since 2016, where she shares experiments with historical and alternative photographic processes.

Understanding photography as a living organism, which is born, blooms for a

moment, then grows old, according to Roland Barthes (2012), the poetic potential of this materiality to express family memories and affections is considered. Questions about family photography, appropriation of images in contemporary art and the hybridism of post-production processes are addressed. The reflections arise from works by Myra Gonçalves from series made with the chemical development process in a minilab (Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 10), with historical processes in sunlight (Figures 5, 6, 9) and in the laboratory (Figures 7, 8), which use 3x4 photographs from her family collection as artistic material and result in analog images, in addition to an interview with the artist in 2020.

## FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHY

We are constantly subject to oblivion and that is why we need traces, traces and clues to help us fight it. Memory is an important tool for reconstructing the past, and in this constant tension between presence and absence, memory and forgetting, it becomes a necessity to keep traces that facilitate the act of remembering. Among documents, texts, letters and other objects, photography has stood out, since its inception, as the most popular way of creating storable traces. With the technological evolution, cheapening and simplification of the process, photography became popular and cameras began to accompany the lives of families (Lima, 2016).

Through photography, memory confronts the past with the present, since remembering is a review, or revisiting with the eyes of the present. "Each photo is a privileged moment, converted into a tiny object that people can keep and look at again" (Sontag, 2004: 28).

The function of the family album is not just to store images, its main characteristic is to promote the encounter of individuals with the images of their neighbors and with their

own images (Rouillé, 2009: 186). It is as if we invested photography with a commitment to the future or to the transgression of the finitude of our existence.

In 2009, with the loss of Myra Gonçalves' mother's older sister, the first among the women of a large family, many photographs began to be reviewed. The longing and the search for memories meant that the boxes, folders and albums kept in her mother's house were constantly being rummaged through.

The artist says that "photographic images guarantee the memory, the return to that experience" (Gonçalves, 2020), stressing the power of family photography in this sense. When reviewing these images, Myra's attention was drawn to the number of 3x4 photographs, thus starting a search for other images in the same format with other family members.

Kossov (2001: 28) warns about the power of photography as an "intriguing visual document" whose content is both revealing information and triggering emotions. The nature of photography is to show something and have its meaning surpassed what the eye sees. To be accepted by the individual who observes it, the photograph needs to be felt, noticed, looked at and thought about. This is how Myra came to look at the 3x4 photos of her family members originally made to be used in identity documents.

### 3X4 PHOTO

The professional card in Brazil was established in 1932 through a decree that ensured labor rights and recorded the worker's working life. The decree determined the presentation of three 3x4 photographs as mandatory, which, according to Art. 6º, must

*reproduce the image of the head taken from the front, with approximate dimensions of three centimeters by four, having, in one of*

*the angles, in clearly visible figures, the date on which they were taken, photographs taken more than one year before their presentation (Brazil, 1932).*

Probably, the mandatory 3x4 photography collaborated with the expansion of the photographer profession, which in addition to the usual photographs produced in the studio, also started to record in the new format required for the preparation of the work portfolio.

The 3x4 photos were also used in other identification documents. There is no legislation requiring serious expression, but relaxed facial muscles, or closer to our normal appearance, facilitates the visual identification process, the great purpose of photo documents.

Photography in Brazil has gone through several stages. In the 1960s, black and white photography, hand-coloured photographs; in the 70's color photography appears. In the 1980s, with more advanced technology, the first semi-automatic laboratories appeared. In the 1990s, computerized minilabs arrived in the country with rapid development within an hour. In the early 2000s, the technological revolution with digital equipment. But time and technology have not erased the 3x4 portrait. To this day, the format is used to identify documents and is present in family photo boxes.

The 3x4 photograph used in the document, according to Myra, "serves to identify us, but it is very inexpressive, it is not allowed many expressions on the face, it cannot wear earrings, makeup...", but "it is interesting to observe the changes through the clothes and hair" (Gonçalves, 2020). Thus, the artist began to gather the photographs she found of each relative, attracted by the marks of time and her taste for collections.

## FROM THE FAMILY COLLECTION TO THE GALLERY

The appropriation of non-artistic objects and images and their resignification in the context of art go back to the historical avant-gardes. The procedure is absorbed by the art system, becoming naturalized to the point that today it is impossible to dissociate it from contemporary practices (Marques, 2007). This way, family archives become a new form of materiality for art. We have in contemporary times a new artistic configuration, in which

*It is not a question of elaborating a form from raw material, but of working with cultural objects in circulation in the cultural market, that is, that already have a form given by others (Bourriaud, 2009: 8).*

We no longer move in the realm of creation, but in the realm of post-production, in which the works are inscribed in a network of signs and meanings.

According to Lima (2016: 51), from the 1970s onwards, family photographs ceased to be just a means of recording and keeping family memories, becoming material for art as well. From the shoebox to the artist's studio, from the album to the gallery, from the intimacy of the family to the institutionalized art circuit.

So, as Myra found more portraits of her relatives, she thought of a way to organize them, orienting herself by the common quantity among the images of the various family members. According to the artist, "3x4 images take on an interesting dimension when viewed in larger format" (Gonçalves, 2020). He then created his first artistic work with the appropriation of photographs of his family: individual plates, compositions with 8 3x4 photographs of each family member (Figures 1, 2, 3, 4), which were exhibited at UCS during the IV Semana da Fotografia de Caxias do South in 2011. From then on,

these images unfolded into others in the photographer's work.

In the images of the Cyanotypes series (Figures 5, 6), Myra uses the 19th century photographic printing process that produces images in shades of blue, by exposing a solution of iron salts to sunlight. In the works, which were part of the 225 *after John Herschel* at Espaço Arte II in 2017, the images of the artist's mother also undergo other procedures, turning with tannic acid and Antotype with vegetable pigments, modifying the characteristics of the coloring.

In the series *Minha Mãe* (Figure 7), presented in the exhibition *Caderno de Anotações* that took place in 2018 at Espaço Arte Dois at Universidade FEEVALE, portraits of his mother have their development processes on photographic paper partially interrupted at different intensities. Exploring the potential of the laboratory and chemical processes, the artist uses fixative sprayed on the photograph before taking it to the developer, resulting in white spots at the end of the process. What interests Myra are the deletions in the image.

In the series of solarizations (Figure 8), the images of the mother result from the artist's experimentation in the laboratory with this technique, where the tones of the images are partially inverted with exposure to actinic light during the revelation phase of the chemical process, in different intensities, until almost total disappearance. These works have not yet been exhibited, but Myra says she wants to continue and digitally enlarge them in large format, using the images made by Man Ray as a reference.

In figure 9, another work in which the artist uses the cyanotype process, the 3x4 photos and other family records unfold into images in shades of blue, and again compose a collection, being housed in a box.



Olmira 1955.jpg



Olmira 1960.jpg



Olmira 1963.jpg



Olmira 1967.jpg



Olmira 1970.jpg



Olmira 1973.jpg



Olmira 1984.jpg



Olmira 2006.jpg

Figure 1: Myra Gonçalves, Untitled, 2011. Chemical printing on silver paper, Plate with 8 photographs, 20 x 30 cm. Source: author.



Enio 1947.jpg



Enio 1952.jpg



Enio 1959.jpg



Enio 1965.jpg



Enio 1975.jpg



Enio 1981.jpg



Enio 1987.jpg



Enio 1995.jpg

Figure 2: Myra Gonçalves, Untitled, 2011. Chemical printing on silver paper, Plate with 8 photographs, 20 x 30 cm. Source: author.



Ondina 1957.jpg



Ondina 1959.jpg



Ondina 1963.jpg



Ondina 1968.jpg



Ondina 1980.jpg



Ondina 1986.jpg



Ondina 1992.jpg



Ondina 1995.jpg

Figure 3: Myra Gonçalves, Untitled, 2011. Chemical printing on silver paper, Plate with 8 photographs, 20 x 30 cm. Source: author.



Olinda 1958.jpg



Olinda 1964.jpg



Olinda 1967.jpg



Olinda 1969.jpg



Olinda 1970.jpg



Olinda 1991.jpg



Olinda 1993.jpg



Olinda 1998.jpg

Figure 4: Myra Gonçalves, Untitled, 2011. Chemical printing on silver paper, Plate with 8 photographs, 20 x 30 cm.

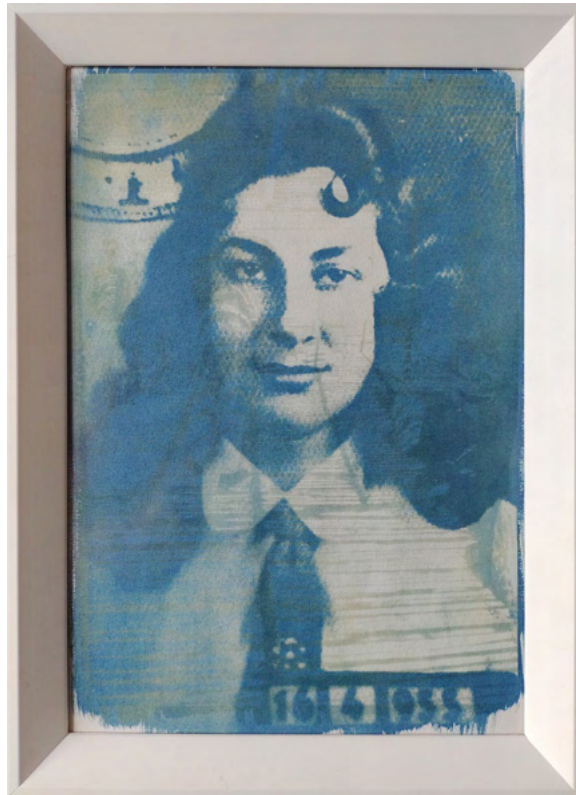


Figure 5: Myra Gonçalves, Untitled, 2017. Cyanotype over Antotype, 30 x 20 cm. Source: author.



Figure 6: Myra Gonçalves, Untitled, 2017. Undercut cyanotype with sodium carbonate, toned with tannic acid, 30 x 20 cm. Source: author.



Figure 7: Myra Gonçalves, My Mother, 2017-2018. Solarization and partial developments on silver paper, 5 photographs, 17 x 12 cm each. Source: author.





Figure 8: Myra Gonçalves, *Untitled*, 2018. Solarization on silver paper, 4 photographs, 24 x 18 cm each. Source: author.



Figure 9: Myra Gonçalves, *Postcard box*, 2019. Cyanotype on Hahnemühle paper, 30 postcards, 10.5 x 14.8 cm each. Source: author.



Figure 10: Myra Gonçalves, My Mother, my Father, Me, my Sister and my Brother, my Aunts and my Uncles, my Grandfather, my Cousin and my Cousin, 2020. Chemical printing on silver paper, Photographic panel with 120 portraits, 100 x 90 cm. Source: author.

In 2020, the confinement made Myra turn more intensely to her family and resume her search for 3x4 photographs. Her panels (Figures 1, 2, 3, 4), first works with the appropriation of family photographs, were reorganized, composing a single work with new images located over the years. *My mother, my dad, I, my sister and my brother, my aunts and My uncles, my grandfather, my cousin and my cousin* (Figure 10), a long title that seeks to highlight the presence and importance of each one in the family composition, is part of the collective exhibition *instants in time*, which took place at Galeria Espaço Cultural Duque, in Porto Alegre, curated by Ana Zavadil. In it, the artist gathers her family and her 120 3x4 portraits found in recent years.

It is a meeting of memories and affections. The 3x4 photographs over eight decades, placed side by side, contaminate each other and complement each other, a natural part of family life, and slice time into fragments that frame the transformation of their characters, the entire family and the family itself. photography. The photos show color changes, folds, staples, stamps, perforations, scratches, rust, fungi, erasures, parts of old documents of which they were part. The marks of time, the time of the images and the time of its characters. The names of each and the years in which the photos were originally taken reinforce the identity of their family members and the passage of time. The work forms a single decomposed time. The family album, 3x4 format, b&w photography, hand-coloured photography, color photography, analogue photography and digital photography coexist in the same image. The collection of identities in family portraits gathered in a single work, chronologically multifaceted, re-edits time and makes the photographer not only an external observer of the image she produces, but an integral part of the work. The most

recent 3x4 photo in the collection is a self-portrait of the artist, which contextualizes the present time. Her identity hidden behind a mask in the year 2020.

## HYBRIDITY IN POST PRODUCTION

Contemporaneity represents a questioning of modern paradigms, guided by originality, novelty, uniqueness, purity of means and specificity of each artistic modality. According to Icléia Cattani (2010), languages and abandoned forms of modernity began to emerge progressively, accompanied by mixtures of elements that open to hybridism, characterized by the fusion of the disparate elements that structure them. In contemporary art, according to Sandra Rey (2005), the different definitions of the term hybridization indicate art forms that mix different techniques and traditions, such as appropriations. Hybridization is also one of the main features of numerical art.

Therefore, the process of creating Myra's works presented here involved different times, authorships and hybrids. In addition to the appropriation of photographs, the artist unfolds the images in hybrid processes between analog and digital. Analog photography is present in most of the original images used as material for the artist's works, except for a few and more recent ones already made with digital technology, and in the unfolding of these images using chemical photographic processes, resulting again in analog images.

When the photographs from Myra's family collection, produced in an analogue way by anonymous photographers, are rephotographed by the artist with digital equipment, we have the first hybridization relationship. Images are no longer physical, a mark or impression left by a material object on a support, and are digitized, acquiring

numerical character. After being numbered, the optical image becomes hybrid and undergoes a second hybridization when added to effects through computer programs.

After digital treatment, the artist's images are printed on transparent sheets that will serve as negatives to transfer to the pictorial plane through artisanal printing (Figures 5, 6, 7, 8, 9), thus intensifying the relations between the craftsmanship of chemical photographic processes and the mechanics of digital photographic negatives. The photographs that make up the panels (figures 1, 2, 3, 4) and *My mother, my dad, I, my sister and my brother, my aunts and my Uncles, my Grandfather, my cousin and my cousin* (Figure 10) undergo a new hybridization as they are computationally edited by the artist, adding the names and years of registration.

This way, all of Myra's works presented here are the result of hybrids with the appropriation of photographs from the family collection, the fusion of analog and digital processes until reaching each of the final analog images. Time in photography is expanded and overlapped. The time stamps of the original photographs overlap with the artist's period of interaction with the images in post-production. The hybridity of processes transmutes the photographic image, giving it a new body and new life.

## CONCLUSION

It is concluded that in contemporary times we have a new artistic configuration, we no longer move in the realm of creation, but in the realm of post-production, in which the works are inscribed in a network of signs and meanings. Thus, family photographs become a new form of materiality for art, and their poetic potential generates tensions between past and present, permanence and erasure, document and art.

In the midst of so much evolution in photography, now dominated by digital technology, seeking in manual, historical and non-commercial processes means to produce images within the field of visual arts stems from a concern and need for experimentation in relation to the rigid photographic language, seeking a greater freedom in artistic production. Thus, Myra Gonçalves' creation process expands the limits of photographic practice, exploring the artist's interference in the transmutation of the original images, in an appeal to the tactile instead of the eminently optical of photography, typical of those who deal with affective memories. Myra's photography is shown as a metaphor for life and its impermanence. While the digitization of the family's originally analog photographs would bring to these images the possibility of the promise of eternity, Myra Gonçalves offers the images a new body and a new life. The images that emerged through the lenses of several anonymous photographers over the years with the objective of representing the identity, are reborn as art by the artist's hands in new analog materiality and with a new destiny ahead, until time, little by little, the make it grow old, consuming the grief of loss, through its slow disappearance.

## REFERENCES

- Barthes, Roland (2012) *A câmara clara: notas sobre a fotografia*. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira. ISBN: 978.85.209.3148-6
- Bourriaud, Nicolas (2009) *Pós-produção: como a arte reprograma o mundo contemporâneo*. São Paulo: Martins. ISBN: 978-85-61635-11-4
- Brasil (1932) *Decreto nº 21.580*, de 29 de Junho de 1932. [Consult. 2020-12-01] Disponível em URL: <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/decret/1930-1939/decreto-21580-29-junho-1932-526759-republicacao-81815-pe.html>
- Cattani, Iceia Borsa (2010) “Mestiçagens na arte contemporânea: conceito e desdobramentos.” *Mestiçagens na arte contemporânea Fotografia de família: entre objeto de recordação e material para arte contemporânea*. Porto Alegre: Editora da UFRGS: 21-34. ISBN: 978-85-702-5968-4
- Gonçalves, Myra (2020) *Depoimento à autora*.
- Kossoy, Boris (2001) *Fotografia & História*. São Paulo: Ateliê Editorial. ISBN: 978-85-7480-060-0
- Lima, Daniel Francisco de (2016) *Fotografia de família: entre objeto de recordação e material para arte contemporânea*. Frutal: Prospectiva. ISBN: 978-85-5864-061-9
- Marques, Susana Lourenço (2007) *Cópia e apropriação da obra de arte na modernidade*. Dissertação de Mestrado. Lisboa: Universidade Nova de Lisboa.
- Rey, Sandra (2005) *Cruzamentos impuros. Processos híbridos na arte contemporânea*. Festival de arte 2005. Faculdade de Artes, Filosofia e Ciências Sociais. Universidade Federal de Uberlândia.
- Rouillé, Andre (2009) *A fotografia: entre documento e arte contemporânea*. São Paulo: Senac. ISBN: 978-85-7359-876-6
- Sontag, Susan (2004) *Sobre Fotografia*. Trad. Rubens Figueiredo. Rio de Janeiro: Companhia das Letras. ISBN: 978-85-3590-496-3