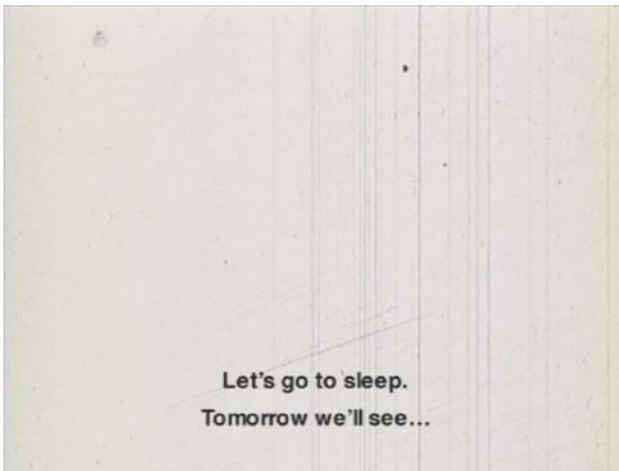

THE BOX

March 1–31, 2014

Rosângela Rennó

Vera Cruz (2000)



Courtesy Galeria Vermelho, São Paulo

I find the whites and the amnesias more interesting than memory itself.—Rosângela Rennó

Rosângela Rennó (b. 1962, Belo Horizonte) identifies herself as a photographer, although she very rarely takes photographs of her own, instead preferring to work with found images (and, more recently, lost ones). Often working in a serial mode, her conceptual approach to various collections of appropriated images—which have included wedding portraits, negatives from a prison archive, photos published in newspapers of people holding photographs of dead or missing loved ones, and stolen photographs from the National Library of Rio—offers a way to reconsider their meaning and highlights their inherent potency. Whether her final work takes the form of a gallery installation or a published book, Rennó highlights our relationship to these images and the subtle ways in which they shape our collective history.

Ironically, the subject of the video *Vera Cruz* is not an image but a letter, written in the spring of 1500 AD by Portuguese knight Pêro Vaz de Caminha while en route to establish a permanent outpost in recently discovered India. Had the Portuguese fleet, sent at the command of King Manuel I, had the benefit of foresight (or technology), they would have known that by drifting west from their southern route along the African coast (as they in fact did), they would eventually hit an enormous new continent, Brazil. But in 1500, when the ships came upon a tropical land remarkable for its lush forest that rose up from pristine, sandy beaches and clear blue water, they believed they had stumbled upon an Edenic island, which they claimed for

Portugal, naming it Ilha de Vera Cruz (Island of the True Cross). The letter, which was written as an official report to King Manuel I of the fleet's discovery, describes the land's impressive natural beauty and abundance as well detailing the crew's interactions with the inhabitants of the land, the Tupinambá. As a historic document, it stands as one of the earliest recorded moments of European contact with the new world. It also marks the discovery of Brazil.

Rennó's interest in the letter has more to do with what information it doesn't relate rather than what it does. The account is completely one-sided, failing to portray the point of view of the indigenous Tupis, with whom the Portuguese were unable to communicate. De Caminha, along with most of the crew, died in India, unable to relay in person the details of their 10-day encounter. The trick of *Vera Cruz* comes in Rennó's pairing of words and image, or nonimage, as the case may be. As if to underscore the myopic nature of the account and the impossibility of this document standing in for an authentic documentation, Rennó uses blank leader film, scratched and worn as if through age, as the background, allowing imagination and conjecture to fill in the details, much in the same way the Portuguese explorers did in their interactions with the Tupi people. The subtitles, written by Rennó and based on the details of the letter, imagine the kind of dialogue that might have occurred, but the only true witnesses that remain are the sounds of the wind and sea.

Vera Cruz is presented in conjunction with *Cruzamentos: Contemporary Art in Brazil*, which is one component of the center's *Via Brasil* initiative. During the run of the exhibition, The Box presents video works by some of the artists in the exhibition. Works from Rennó's *A última foto* (*The Last Photo*, 2006) are currently on view in the galleries.

The recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and the Mário Pedrosa Award from the Brazilian Association of Art Critics, Rennó has had her work exhibited at such institutions as the Museums of Contemporary Art in São Paulo and Rio, Centre Pompidou in Paris, and Museum der Moderne in Salzburg. She has also participated in the biennials of Istanbul, Moscow, and São Paulo. Her work is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo, Reina Sofia in Madrid, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Los Angeles.

Jennifer Lange
Curator, Film/Video Studio Program

Rosângela Rennó

Vera Cruz (2000)

44 mins., Single-channel video

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