

**Vik Muniz**  
**Scraps**

As I was peeking through a catalogue raisonné I made a few years ago, I had to concede that my entire body of work seems to go in all directions, making it hard to find a central thread, theme or meaning. My excuse for that is that I was never really interested in making things; I was more focused on how and why things get made both in our head and in the physical plane. Although these thirty plus years of wild and unhinged experimentation left a rather labyrinthic path to my way of seeing and thinking about the world around me, they have also provided me a very complex map of breadcrumbs to guide my curiosity to a few important recurring areas of visual thinking.

My place of work has always been in the dark and narrow gap separating perception from mind. From very early pieces, such as *The Best of Life*, *Equivalents*, and *Individuals*, my main concern was to understand the duration and definition of pictures once they enter our minds. In remaking pictures common to most people's visual vocabularies through different materials, I am attempting to push the viewer into confronting an iconic memory of a novel image that is now presented to them in another form. A lot of my images from media, family albums, post cards and museum catalogs are attempts to recreate assumedly well-known imagery, with the same fragmentation, confusion, and ambiguity we conjure them in our imagination. We build these images in our minds from shards of experiences and memories, forming elaborate mosaics that simultaneously assemble a credible reference to satisfy our interpretations, while masking the severe limitations in relating to things that are not in front of our eyes.

While mosaic work has provided an incredible source of satisfaction in trying to build mental-like images, for the last few years I have been experimenting with the displacement of the pictorial plane by manipulating parts of its surface then rephotographing it consecutively. Like a *mise en abyme*, with cuts, shadows, and surface details from different times of captures, the result, now unique, is presented as a mere interruption in a never-ending process. With every layer encapsulated in the context of the time of its capture, I have been able to mimic the entropic decay of a visual memory, every time it is summoned by our imagination.

Working late at night in the studio, looking for pieces to make the pictures under enormous piles of left-overs and re-photographed images, I, for once, felt within the place I forever wanted to inhabit. A confusing gradient connecting the scraps of memories and experiences that made me who I think I am, and the mountains of actual residual fragments, things made, lived and seen, that seamlessly connect their physical presence to the mess inside my mind.

This is as close to a nirvana as I have ever been. As I looked through the piles, I let my mind wonder through the archeology of my own visual memories, finding similar, disconnected scraps of unusual relevance. A dying flower at a friend's house, the strange color of sky behind a bird shot by Outerbridge, a room with a Thonet Chair crowded with Malevich's masterpieces, a bathroom in a gas station where I once went in Newark, a bombed public building, a picture I once took in a garbage dump, the leafy fronds behind my studio in Rio, a banal picture of the sea I took from my boat, just because I knew I would never see it quite that way again...

In March of 1990, I had perhaps one of my greatest art epiphanies ever, when entering the Grey Art Gallery at Washington Square and seeing Gerhard Richter's *18. Oktober 1977*. Sharing the same abhorrence for ideology with the great painter, I was surprised to see him confront the politically charged theme of terrorism. But the masterful orchestration of the images' ambiguities gave them a sense of humanity rarely seen in the art of our days. The images seemed stuck in a pictorial purgatory between photography and painting, past and present, reality and imagination. The experience consolidated my dedication to the "picture in my mind". Out of the fifteen works in the exhibition, the one that indelibly stuck with me was the painting of Andreas Baader's record player, based on a crime scene document. It kept reappearing in my mind for no reason, for the last thirty years, until I recently understood what it was finally doing there. It was there all this time to remind me that every picture is a bridge between worlds, and to work as such, it cannot exist exclusively in the realm of physical things nor in the ether of the imagination; it must invite interpretation, but not closure, and speak to anyone without sacrificing the value of the artist's experience.