

“LE BADAUD & LE FLÂNEUR”

Snatched Moments of Ordinary Transcendence

The works of Miroslav Tichý & Alair Gomes

Both working in exactly the same period – throughout the 1970s and 1980s – both living under authoritarian regimes in completely different corners of the world – Tichý in communist bloc Czechoslovakia & Gomes during the right-wing military dictatorship in Brazil.

Although their circumstances were very different, they employed some similar strategies and methodologies, and both were driven by an obsessive love of ‘The Other’.

THE AGONY OF EROS

BYUNG-CHUL HAN

FOREWORD BY ALAIN BADIOU

Love requires the courage to accept full negation for the sake of discovering The Other.

In a world of fetishized individualism and technologically mediated social interaction it is The Other that is eradicated, not The Self.

TRANSLATED BY ERIK BUTLER

In the *Agony of Eros*, Byung-Chul Han considers the threat to love in today's society. For Han, love requires the courage to accept full negation for the sake of discovering The Other. In a world of fetishized individualism and technologically mediated social interaction it is The Other that is eradicated, not the self.

Today, love is being positivized into a formula for enjoyment - above all, love is supposed to generate pleasant feelings and no longer represents plot, narration or drama, only inconsequential emotion and arousal.

In today's narcissistic society we have come to look for love and desire within "the inferno of the same".

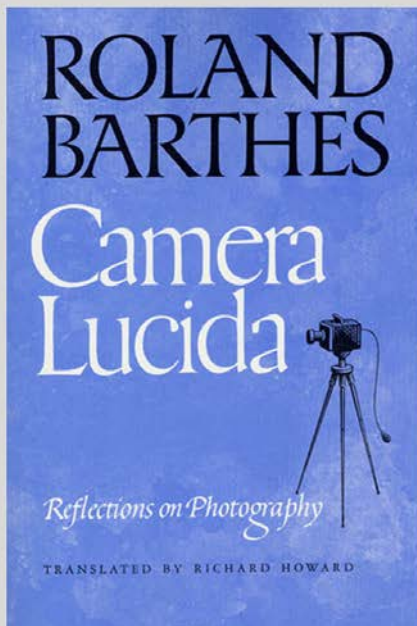
It is free from the negativity of injury, assault or crashing - to fall in love would already be too negative.

However, Han suggests that it is precisely such negativity that constitutes love.

“Modern love lacks all
transcendence and transgression”

Narcissistic achievement society, where everything is possible and everything occurs as an initiative or a project, has no access to love as something that wounds or insights passion.

Han suggests that modern love lacks all transcendence and transgression.



FRANZ KAFKA

“We photograph things
in order to drive them
out of our minds.

My stories are a way of
shutting my eyes.”



In the course of his argument, Han quotes Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, himself, in turn, quoting Franz Kafka – “We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes.”

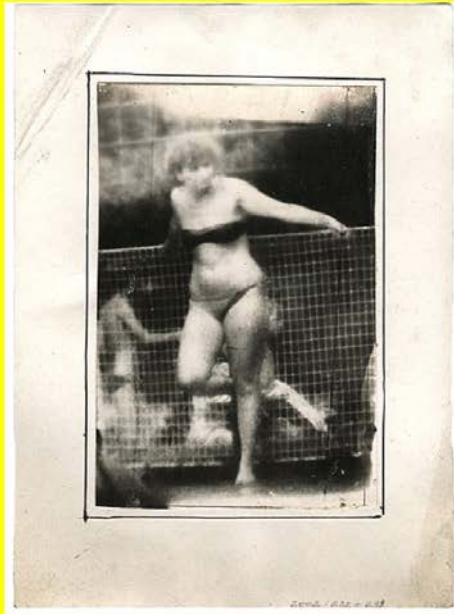
Today, faced with the sheer volume of hyper visible images we can no longer shut our eyes.

The rapid succession of images leaves no time to do so either.

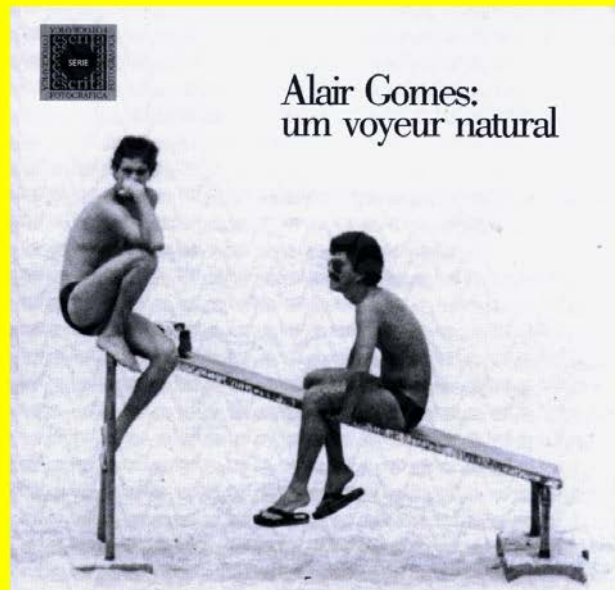
Shutting your eyes is *negativity* which does not pair well with the positivity and hyperactivity of contemporary acceleration society. Compulsive hypervigilance makes it hard to close your eyes. This also accounts for the contemporary subject's

nervous exhaustion.

Lingering in contemplation is a form of closure. Indeed, closing your eyes visibly signifies as much. Perception can arrive at a conclusion only by way of peaceful contemplation.



Miroslav Tichý (1926-2011)



Alair Gomes (1921-1992)

In this lecture, I suggest that both these two artists obsessively photographed the things they loved yet couldn't acquire - in order to drive them from their minds.

By accumulating so many images of The Other to peacefully contemplate, they were both able to CLOSE THEIR EYES.

Miroslav Tichý



From late 60s until sudden revelation & celebration in 90s, everyday MT walked the streets in his hometown Kyjov, in Czech Republic, covertly making thousands of photographs.

1926-2011







Locals viewed him - very strange eccentric - in this guise he surreptitiously photographed the world



Handmade cameras - old tins, toilet rolls, plastic drain pipes, cigarette boxes



Lenses: ground plexiglass, polished with toothpaste and ashes. Shutters: wooden spools, elastic



Imperfections - light leaks – blurs - overexposure,
underexposure, scratches, dust



Defies precision & technical control normally associated.
Disregarding convention - snapshots taken quickly - odd
angles



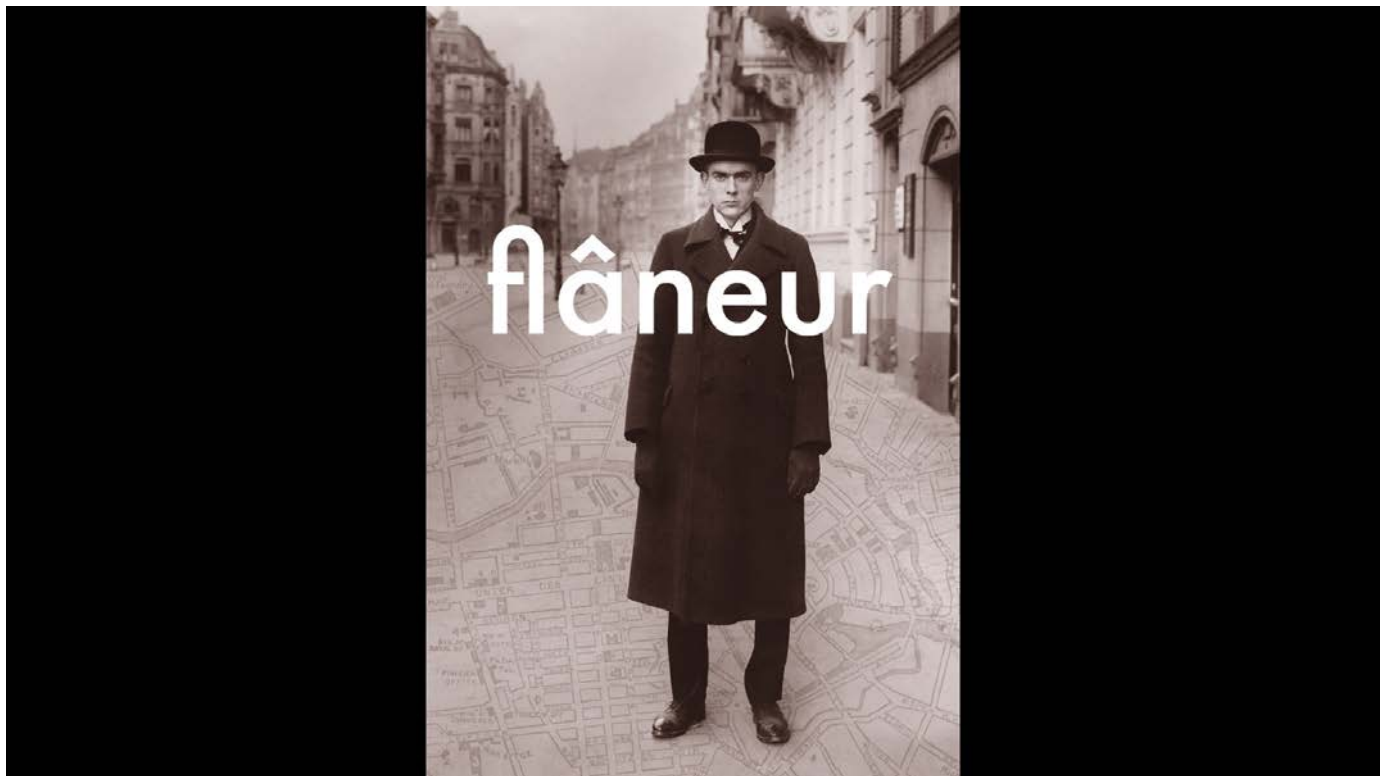
Blurred, disfigured, lack detail - imaginative interpretation.
Chance encounters - fleeting impressions



Intuitively scans the social world, responds to sensations -
momentary distractions

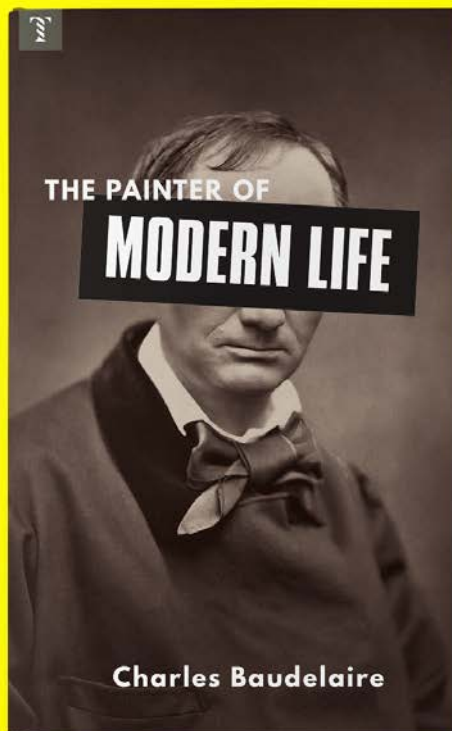


Solitary urban stroller - Sean O'Hagen: Tichy as *flâneur*.



1863 essay *The Painter of Modern Life*, Charles Baudelaire envisioned wandering, transient poet of the city that he called the *flâneur*.

Described the *flâneur* as “passionate spectator”



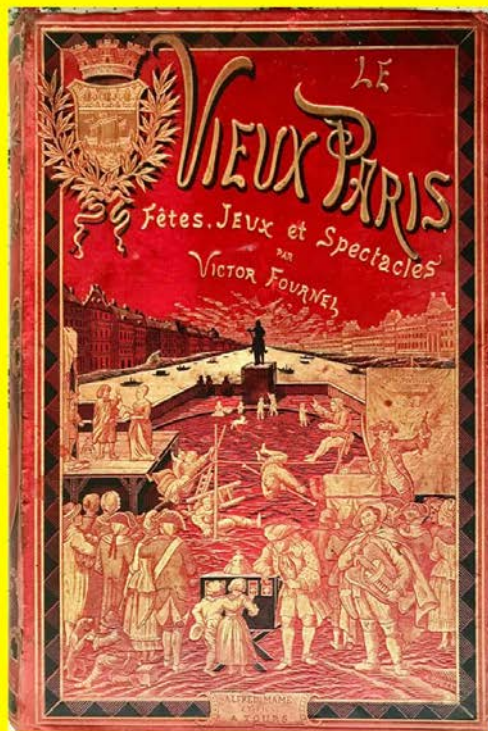
THE 'FLÂNEUR'

Baudelaire described the *Flâneur* as a "passionate spectator" – a dandyish stroller, wandering aimlessly through the metropolis, observing the diversions and temptations on offer, while simultaneously remaining detached from them.

Industrial Revolution - Modernism – Paris. Most valid aesthetic response: become a dandyish stroller, wandering aimlessly, observing diversions and temptations while remaining detached



Rather than 'dandy in control of his individuality' T closer to Victor Fournel's *badaud*.



LE 'BADAUD'

“Under the influence of the spectacle that presents itself to him, the *badaud* becomes an impersonal creature; he is no longer a man, he is the public, he is the crowd...”

1867, *What One Sees in the Streets of Paris*, Victor Fournel:
"The flâneur must not be confused with the badaud; a nuance should be observed here... The simple flâneur is always in full possession of his individuality. By contrast, the individuality of the badaud disappears, absorbed by the outside world, which ravishes him, which moves him to drunkenness and ecstasy".



Le Badaud de Sarlat

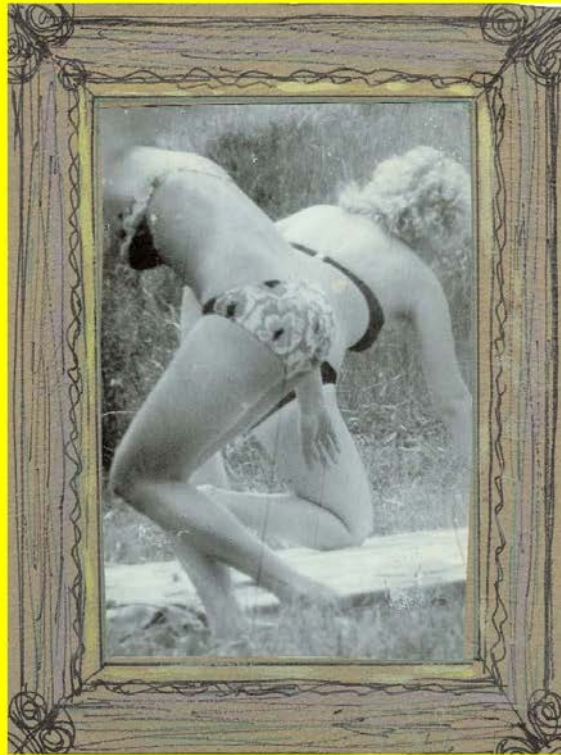
Gérard Auliac, 2002

Onlooker absorbed by outside world, intoxicated - losing himself under influence of the spectacle of society

Le Badaud de Sarlat - "The onlooker" - bronze statue by Gérard Auliac, 2002 - Dordogne, France



Sense of palpable absorption



New York Photo Review, 2010, R. Wayne Parsons:

“We see women photographed from the rear, from the front, from the side; we see their feet, legs, buttocks, backs, faces, as well as complete bodies...”



...we see them walking, standing, sitting, bending over, reclining.... Whatever eroticism is present is limited to that of the voyeur; these women are not inviting us into their world."

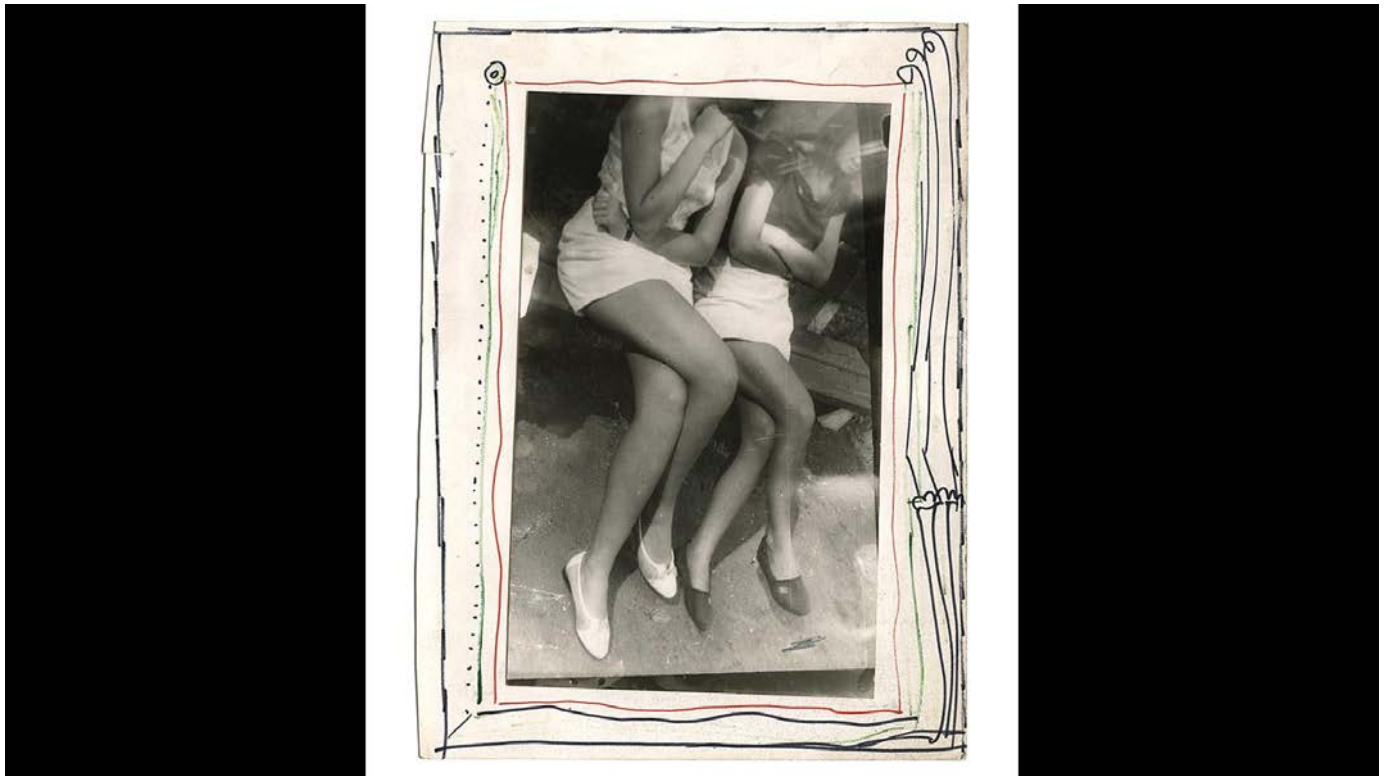


Feminist perspective: T beyond the pale as predatory male voyeur spying on unwitting subjects



Or subversive response to invasion 1968, curtailing artistic free expression & Prague Spring





Compelled to photograph - little interest in reasons

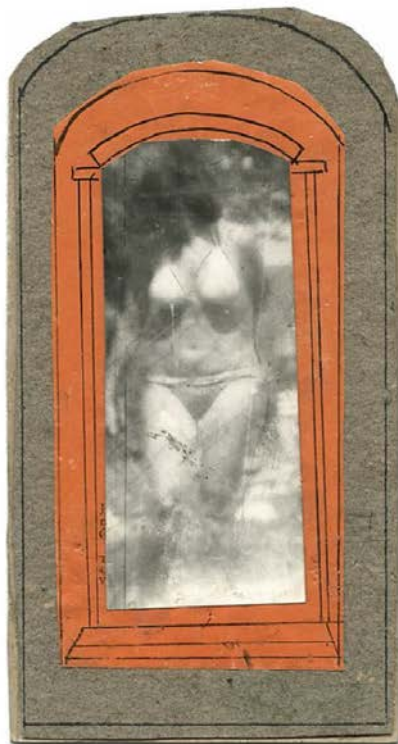


Nick Cave: "Tichý makes something almost religious out of women's unconscious selves. They seem to me to be devotional images, snatched moments of ordinary transcendence."

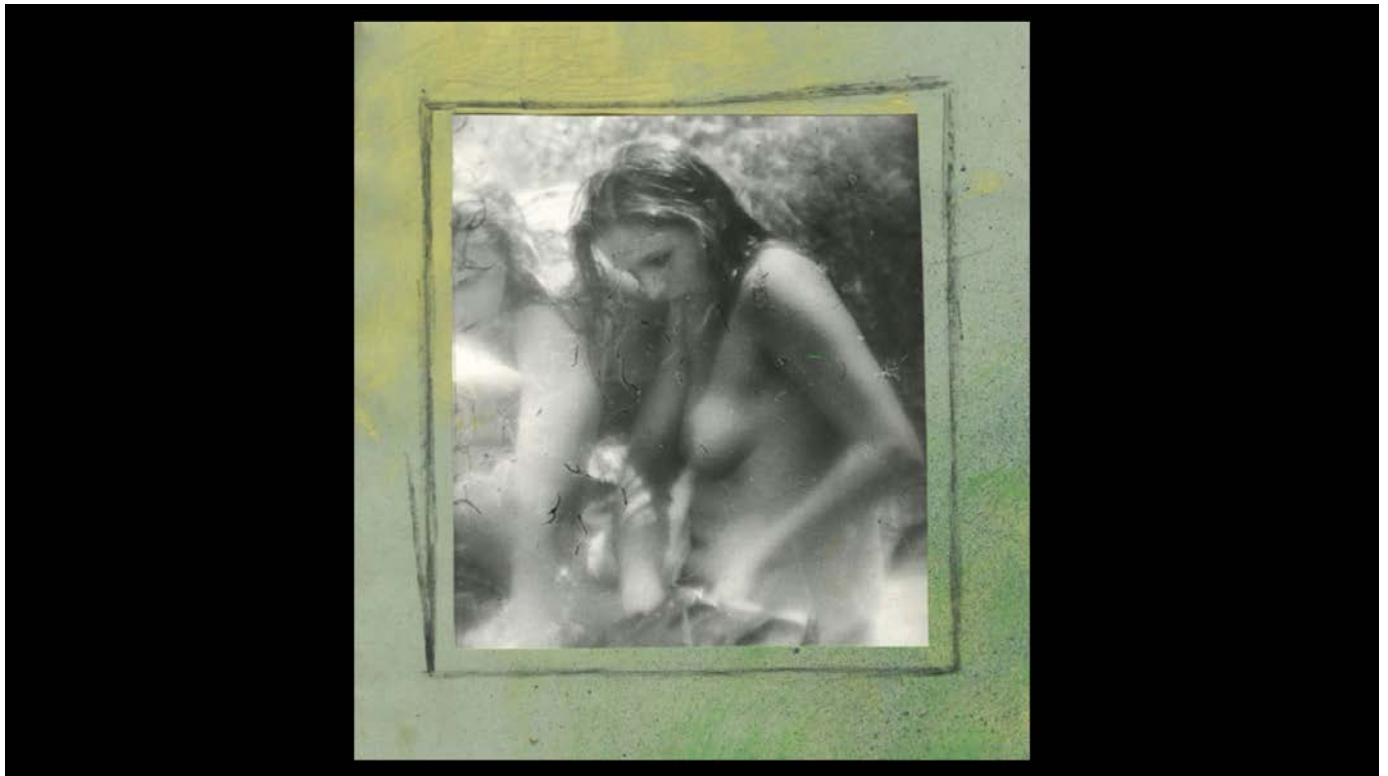


Moments of ordinary transcendence - wondrous





Evidence of neglect is part of power - enhances ominous atmosphere



Idiosyncratic cropping - mounts with decorative drawing.
Post-production - abandon



Neglected, walked on, slept on, deterioration - evocative



Reject conveniences of modern world - recycled detritus -
philosophical and political negation of progress -
independence from social conventions



Alchemist - the "poetics of bromide"



"Painting with light" – blackness mysterious - animated by gestural illumination



Modulated by light – apparitions - spectral figures appear
luminous - electric



Primary motif - female body



Dynamics of form, gesture, movement. Visual confusion –
instability - passage of time



Barthes Camera Lucida – punctum - the indescribable detail that attracts and moves us



Discursive space between what is shown and understood



Tichy - "The lens decides what's interesting...."



I see everything through the lens.



“Taking photographs is all about seeing - the camera is your eye - and it all happens so quickly that you don’t have to see anything yourself.”



“I've never done anything except let the time pass ... “

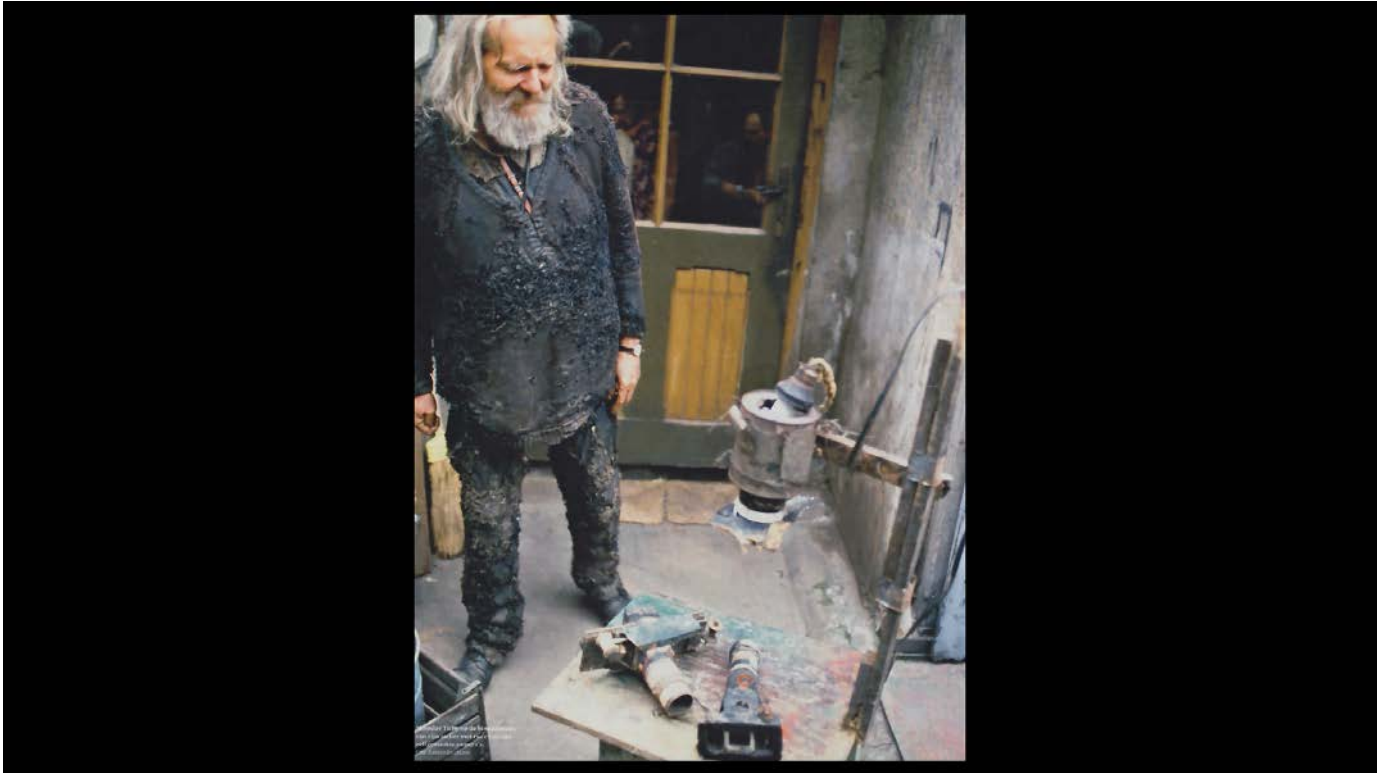


“I observe the world. But what is the world? In any case, it's only an illusion.”

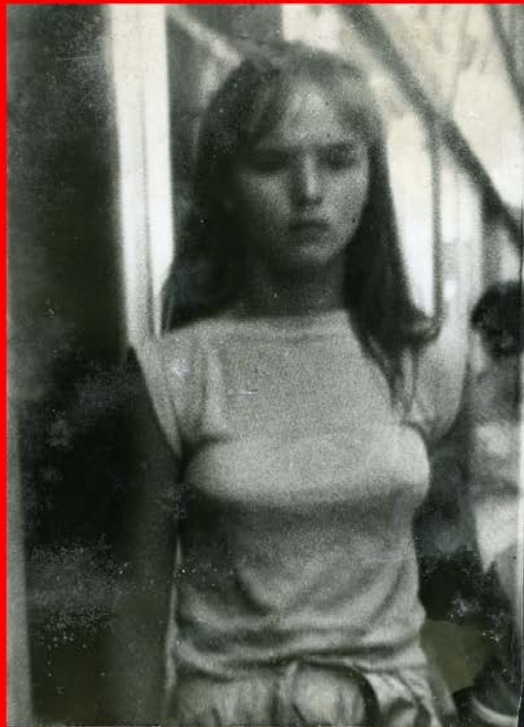




Until death in 2011 (at 84) unconcerned by art world - semi-reclusive figure in dirty apartment - cheap lager - rejects artistic claims



Truth complex - disturbing



Outsider artist status wrong - Academy of Fine Arts in
Prague - critical acclaim as figurative painter



Born 1926 - Academy of Arts in Prague - Communist coup
1948 - “dissident” elements purged - socialist realism -
cultural intellectual life - education under state control



Czech art students must paint heroic Socialist-style -
exalting workers & leaders - T rebels leaves Academy



Prague 1968 - Soviet invasion - evicted from studio -
paintings & drawings thrown in street



Forced back childhood home - “I looked for new media,
with the help of photography I saw everything in a new light.
It was a new world.”



Hidden world made manifest - clandestine aspect,
atmosphere evoked: floating world - nothing solid – all
elusive



Photography: art of stilling time - haunted by time's
inexorable passing - melancholy record - fleeting moments,
remnants, traces



Time imprinted - soiled grimy materiality: water damage, creases, blemishes, dust, dirt - evidence of outsider existence



Women beyond his reach sexually & socially



Banished by his otherness - surreptitious artistic pursuit –
tramp-like appearance



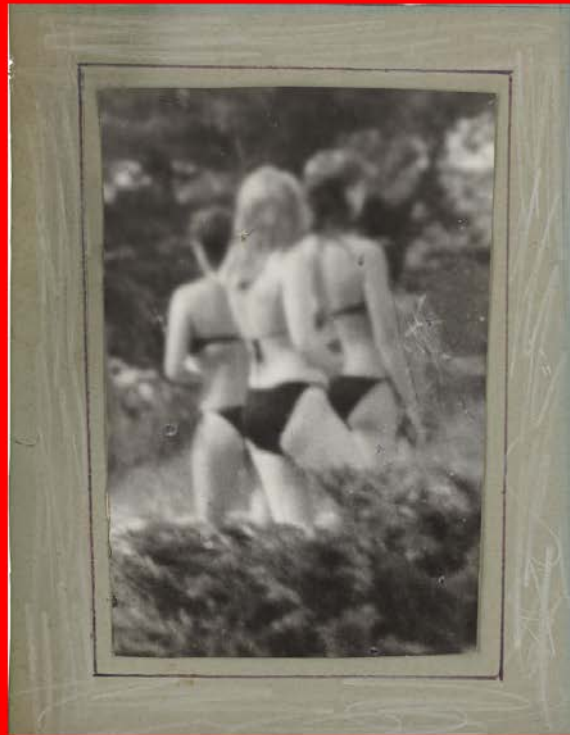
Longing, distance - unconsummated desire - compulsion to collect – degrade - never destroy images



In spite - gaze was transformative



Extreme otherness - children scared - neighbours tolerant -
young women repulsed



Nick Cave: "Tichý was actually physically excluded from his subject's world. He was not allowed, for instance, into the public swimming pool because he was seen as essentially a homeless person and therefore had to photograph the women through a cyclone wire fence."



Cave: "That sets up all sorts of strange tensions in his photographs – of exclusion, loneliness, obsession, alienation and exile and, of course, intrusion."



Cave: "But there is, in them, an acute understanding of the human condition as some sort of collective dream and a sense of the essential and pure moments that make up the common experience."

















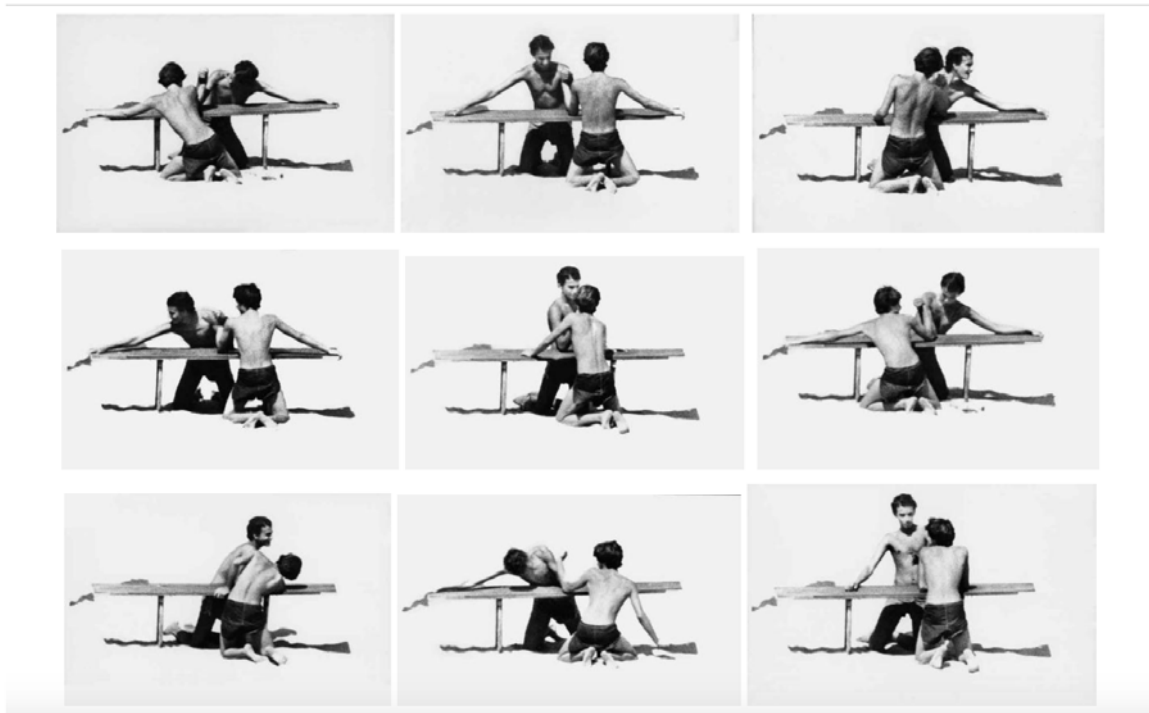




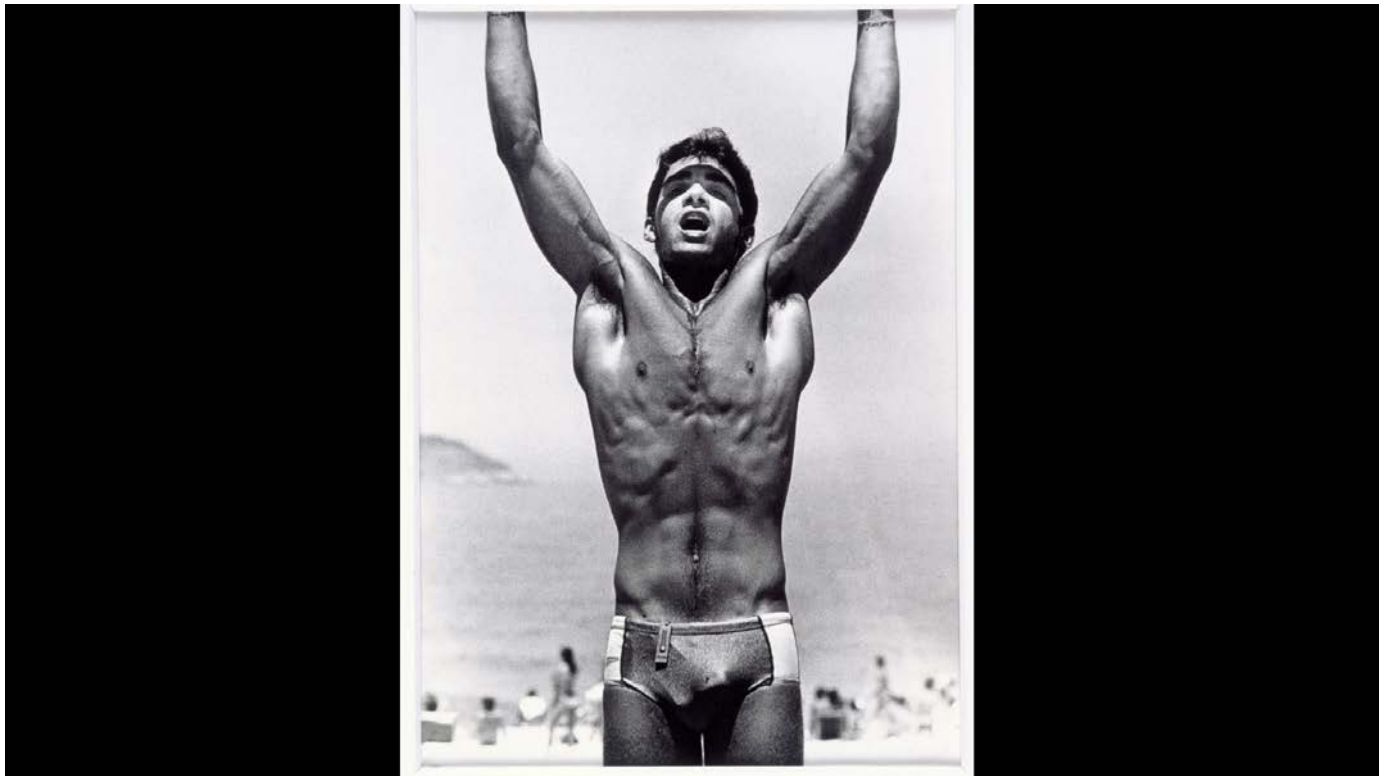


Alair de Oliveira Gomes (1821-1992)

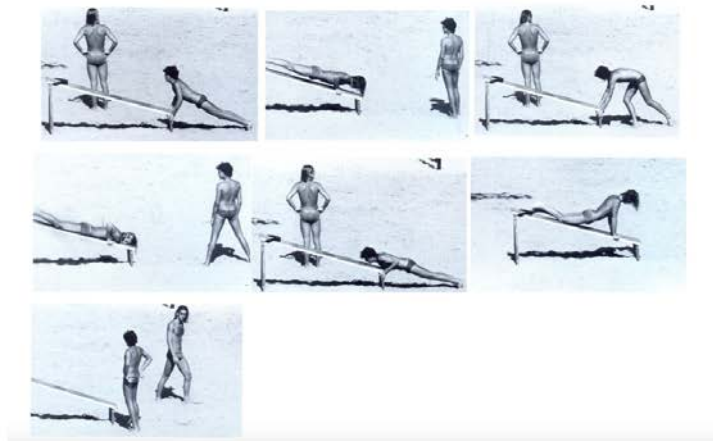
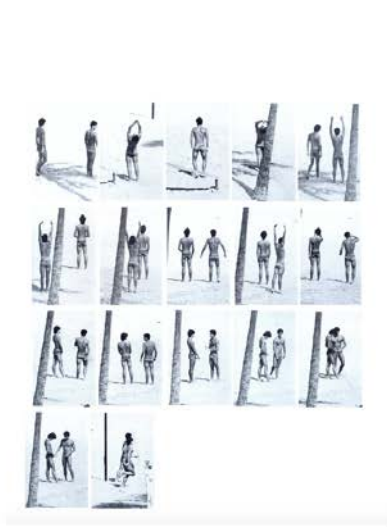
Philosopher, art critic, university professor – over 50 started



Immense tableau devoted beauty of male body.
Film-like sequential narratives captured surreptitiously - titled
with symphonic names

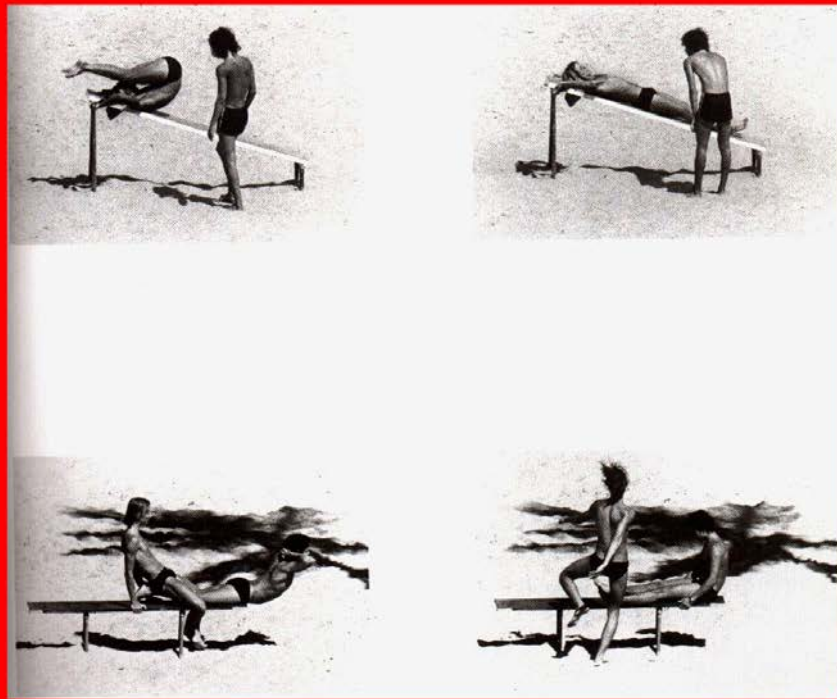


Ipanema beach Rio de Janeiro



Covert - beach or window - ordered to rhythm - 'visual music'

Over 170,000 negs



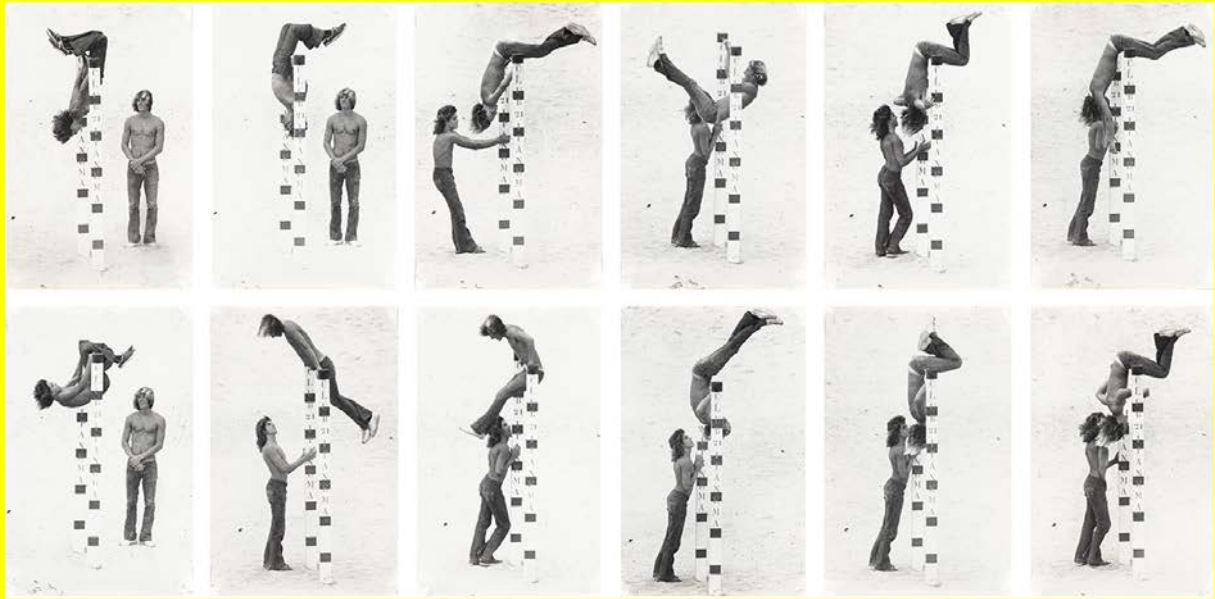
Fresco on visual scale - grandeur transcends ordinary life



Inspiration: classical culture - sculpture religious iconography
- triptychs & friezes - film & classical music



Masterwork: 1767 photographs “Symphony of Erotic Icons”
- five distinct movements - Allegro, Andantino, Andante,
Adagio and Finale



Aim: “transcend reality” create “proto-religious” state



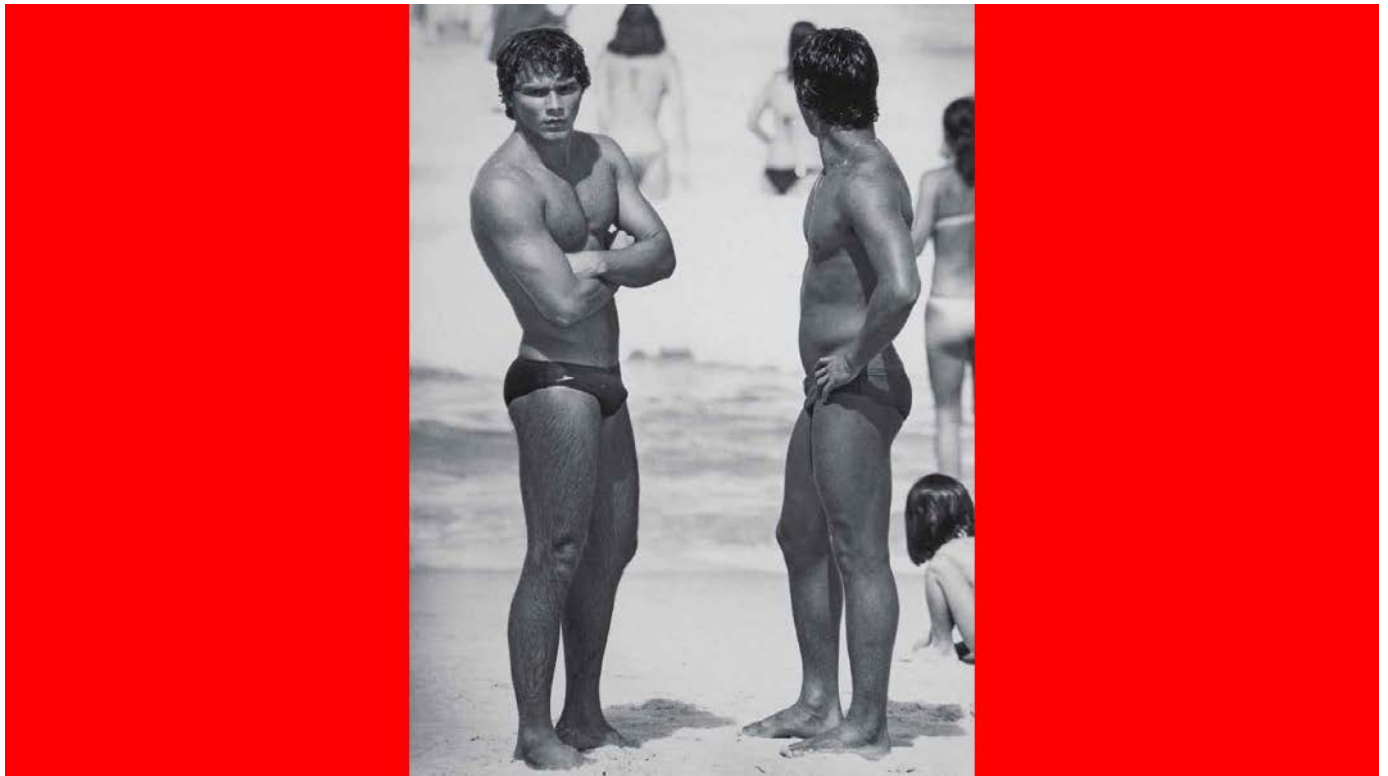
Insists viewed in very specific order - otherwise not at all







Ethnographic or zoological - countless specimens
emphasising animality



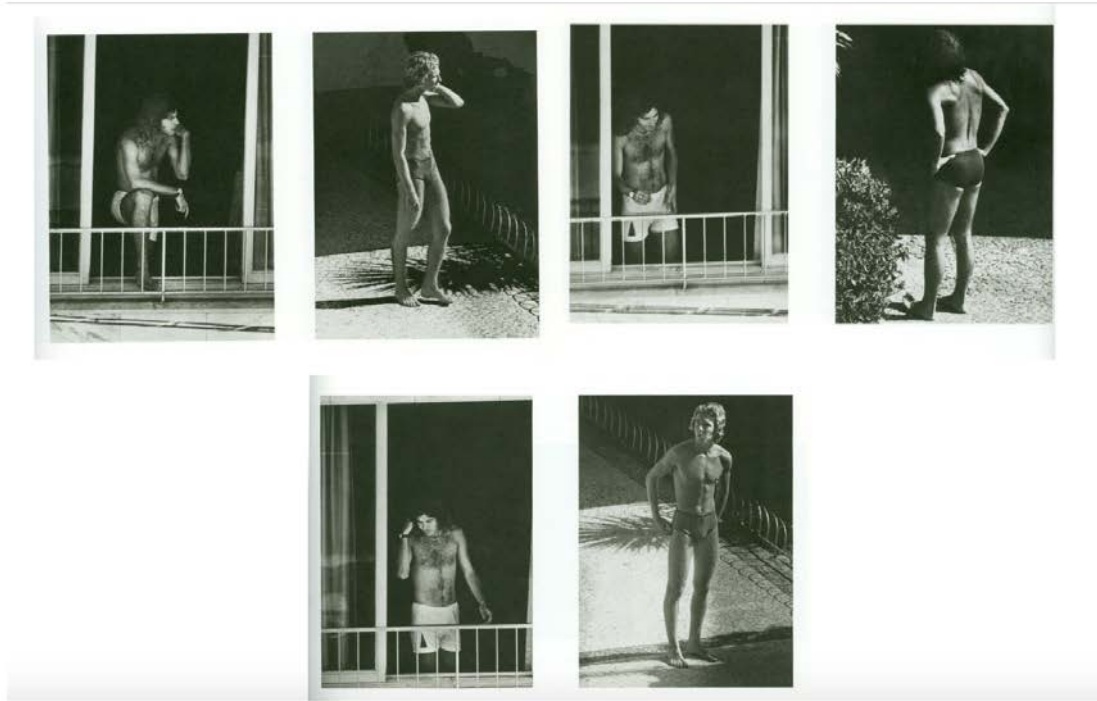
Like Tichy – exhibitionist/voyeur



Middle-class, catholic family, university civil engineering degree



Worked for Brazilian railways - religious crisis in his late-twenties - studies philosophy



Fellowship year at Yale, USA



Taught philosophy at Federal University of Rio &
contemporary art at the School of Visual Arts - academic
conferences - art criticism - philosophy



Gomes = Flâneur

Flâneur often juxtaposed with *Badaud* – Gomes fits the gentleman/dandy - cultured, self-aware observer



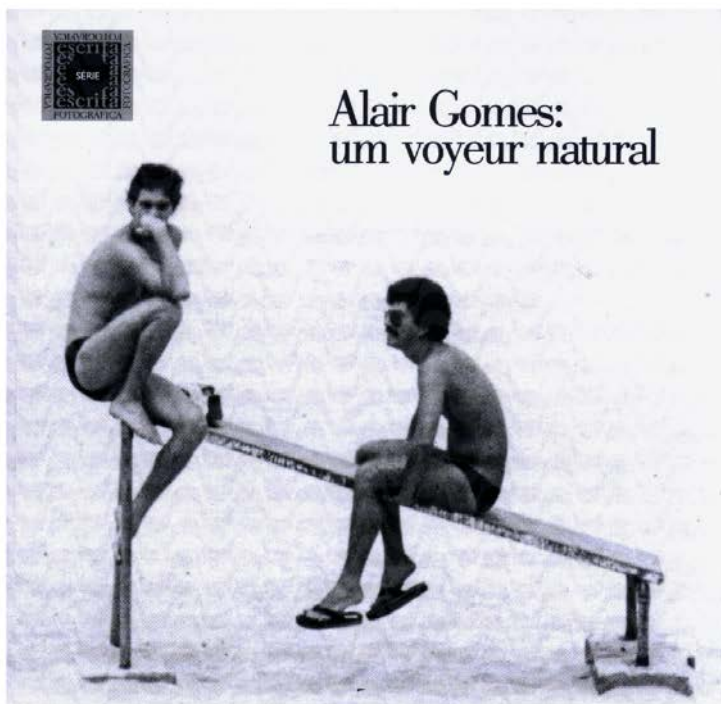


Murdered at 71 - supposedly man he brought home – case never tried - never solved - adds mystery



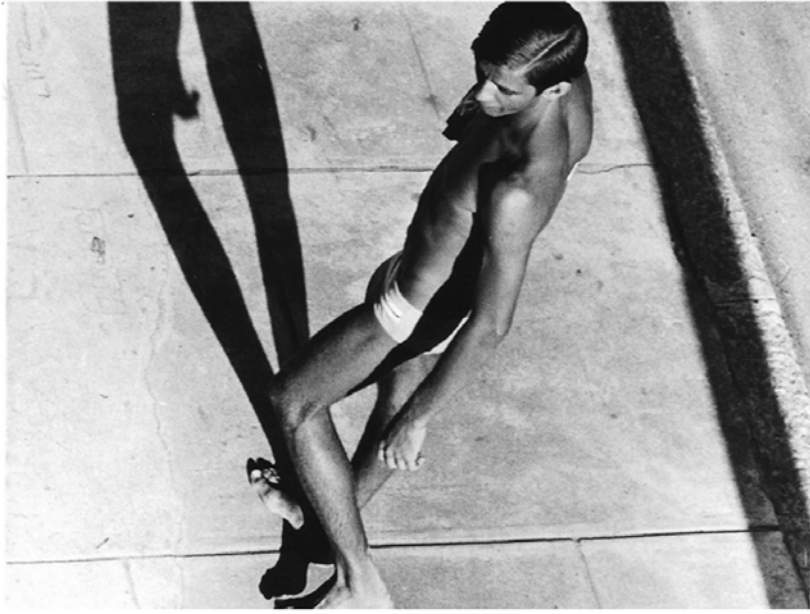


Alair Gomes:
um voyeur natural





Silently courageous, powerful - Brazil's military dictatorship (1964-1985) *machista* (male chauvinist, homophobic) - voyeurism from society that stifled him





Desire drove work - artist's gaze became complex and original





Recent years - radical work combining personal compulsion with refined artistic language - studied legitimized - MoMA recently acquired work