



1968, The Fire of Ideas

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© Marcelo Brodsky, from the series 1968 The Fire of Ideas

Marcelo Brodsky is a photographer based in Buenos Aires, whose practice focuses on the physical and psychic effects of civil and human rights abuses during Argentina's Dirty War (1976-83) period in which the artist was forced into exile. Brodsky continues creating and exhibiting work centered around the ideas of collective memory and human rights around the world. His work also focuses on the relationship between word and image, in the intervention of images with text, the use of archival images and other resources to build up a narrative.

His work is part of major collections such as, the *Museum of Fine Arts Houston*, *Tate Collection*, London, *Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes*, Bs. As., *Museo de Arte*

Moderno, Bs. As., Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, Santiago de Chile, MALI Lima, Museu de Arte Moderna do RJ, Pinacoteca del Estado de SP, among many others.

First of all, can you tell us how you got into photography?

Throughout my whole life I have been interested in photography, to the point that at this current moment, I am showing – as part of my exhibition *Imagination to Power* at *Henrique Faria Fine Art* gallery in New York – a photograph that I took when I was fourteen years old, in 1968, taken from my personal photo album.

It relates to Claudio, with whom I shared a camping outing when we were teenagers. He later became one of the victims of the military dictatorship in Argentina. Looking at that old album with poems and photographs, I become aware of my early relationship with the visual world that later evolved into a special interest in photography.

When I was exiled from my country due to political reasons in 1978, I went to live in Barcelona, Spain. There was a growing photographic movement in the city that was part of the permanent transformation of the medium and its expansion towards multiple fields of art and culture. Some of the participants of that Catalonian photographic movement, such as Joan Fontcuberta, Humberto Rivas, Ferran Freixa, Tony Catany, Manel Esclusa, and others, were part of a pioneering visual education project, the Centro Internacional de Fotografía (International Center of Photography). The institution was located in the center of the Raval neighborhood, before MACBA was there, and it was directed by a mythical visual educator, Guspi. I studied there and I was able to have access to the first serious photography library I had seen in my life. I was twenty six years old at the time.

Could you talk about your creative process?

My creative process begins when I focus on an issue that I am interested in. Then I think of the way in which I can approach it with my own style: I start making proofs until I get to an idea in which I create a piece or a project. The development of personal language is important to reinforce my own style. I am interested in producing visual projects that add an original point of view, presenting new uses of photography and other media to build a narrative, and combining images with text in a way that enhances them both.

I am keen to deal with the complexities of a visual discourse and to combine, in an original mode, different resources that enrich the narrative, through a language that includes different mediums. I am also interested in generating an impact in an original and coherent way throughout exhibition spaces and in publications, and innovating visual language through an unconventional combination of elements such as, text, word, archival material, sound, and installation.

In terms of the subjects that I want to deal with, there is a wide spectrum, from the possibilities of pure visual dialogue (visual correspondences), to political topics, like the Resignification of the Ideas of 1968 (1968, The Fire of Ideas), migrations (Human Tides), The Transmission of Ideas (I pray with my feet), Art and Memory (Buena Memoria and Nexo), history (Foundational Myth), the relationship between nature, and memory and family (Tree time).

Your bodies of work tend to look into keeping history alive, and photography seems to be the leading point throughout your projects. Can you talk about the relationship between photography and history?

Photography has a huge narrative power and it allows us to understand history from a place filled with secrets. Taking the image as a starting point, it is possible to narrate or review history in a complex and original manner. Many hidden details are accessible in an intuitive way. The incorporation of visual elements to the historical

narrative generates an emergence of secrets that do not show up in narratives based exclusively on texts, non-visual documents, and academic interpretations. When we incorporate the image as part of an artwork that focuses on history, it opens up different ways of interpretation. The image is not univocal, it is open and it invites different readings.

The connection that we have with images and visual information is acquiring prominence in language and in interpersonal relationships. A piece that has its core in visual language is intrinsically contemporary: it allows the viewer to review history and other subjects, and it has great potential to produce identification, to formulate questions, and to generate emotional reactions.

The main objective of my work is to create an emotional dialogue with the viewers. I want to reach an intuitive place, not necessarily rational. Through approaching the sensitive fibers, I intend to invite the viewer to reflect and to understand.

Can you talk about the title, *1968: The Fire of Ideas*, of your most recent exhibition at ROLF Art? How did this come about?

1968 was an important year in my life and in the transition of the last century. The movements that took place around the world looking for new spaces of freedom, and the imaginings of a different reality by the youth of the world came together in an explosion of new ideas and of questioning authoritarianism and violence. These were years of rebellion that affected many generations, from Mexico to Paris, Tokyo, Prague and Cordoba.

The connections between these different movements and their ideas are a good approach to the zeitgeist, the spirit of the times that I want to bring back to discussion. We can see that it was a global youth movement: it asked itself and society about existence, about ways and reasons to live, and it was able to propose new debates. In a short time, we will celebrate fifty years of the movements of 1968. I think it is important to re-visit them, to put them in their context and to compare them, in one

way or another, with the ideas and the discussions that we have now, fifty years later. Is the effect of those ideas still present? Are we better now? Have we reached the social objectives that we were fighting for: more freedom, more equality, more rights? Or are we entering an era of obscurity, violence and social backwardness? Are the ideas of 1968 still powerful?

In terms of the title, I was preparing the setup for the exhibition of *1968* in *Henrique Faria Fine Art* in New York with the gallerist and the gallery team, and so we chose to put the images on a wall with a fireplace. I thought of keeping the fire lit during the duration of the show, but that was not possible. So I decided to produce a video of fire and to place it in the fireplace. From there, the title came naturally: 'The Fire of Ideas'.



A wave of protests swept West Germany in 1968, in reaction against the emergency laws that the Government wanted to pass. Students also fought for more democracy and against authoritarianism. Photo by Friedrich Raub.

© Marcelo Brodsky, from the series *1968 The Fire of Ideas*.

You have worked with photography, video, performance, and installations and you have also published books. What else will be coming from Marcelo Brodsky? What other mediums do you think you will explore?

The mediums are resources to communicate ideas – they do not have sense by themselves. They need to say something, propose a way of seeing, of acting, of thinking. Each new project means a new challenge and a new way of articulating the mediums. I have worked with smell, sound and music, with archival audio recordings, videos, ropes, performance, texts and inscriptions on and around images. In every case, photography has been at the heart of the projects, since it is the medium in which I feel most comfortable and I know best. I have more visual references than literary, for instance. But I have also written a poetry book, 1982, published in Barcelona, and the poetry is included in some of my essays.

Everything is open and can expand through collaborations with other artists, writers or musicians, and this is an area that I am interested in developing, like, for instance, the dialogues with images and my visual correspondences made with such artists as Martin Parr, Pablo Ortiz Monasterio, Horst Hoheisel, Cassio Vasconcellos, Joachim Schmid or Manel Esclusa.

I have just finished an installation of 10 by 20 feet, a billboard, which I made with students in a workshop at Tufts University in Boston. It will be exhibited on campus for a year. It's an installation called 'Human Tides' which includes photography, drawings, texts, and maps. It focuses on the main migratory processes that are currently taking place all over the world. Aside from Syria and the Mediterranean, Australia and Africa, we approached the migrations from Central America to the United States. In the piece we have listed 60 migrant detention centers based in the United States.

Away from the production of my own works of art, I am participating in some projects as a curator, such as the recent international visual campaign for the 43 missing students of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, Mexico. This Visual Action was made in alliance with 55 different NGO's. It can be seen at www.visualaction.org or on www.facebook.com/visualaction. Sixty images produced throughout the world to support the families and Tlachinollan – the organization that represents them – are currently in an exhibition at the Raul Isidro Burgos Rural School of Ayotzinapa, and they have been shown in several universities across Mexico and Argentina. We will continue to exhibit them in different contexts as part of the initiative to reach truth and justice in this emblematic case.

Photographers, artists, academics, human rights activists, and online media are also part of this initiative... Visual Action's mission is to transmit visual knowledge and to work together with Human Rights organizations to improve the use of visual tools in their communications. The goal is to develop their capacity to use visual language, with which they can improve their access to new generations.

You are one of the most important contemporary Latin American photographers. I would like to ask you, how do you see Latin American photography today? Would you say new tendencies are occurring in the region?

I am very optimistic in terms of the visual production in Latin America. New technologies allow images to spread more widely and visual projects get seen more easily, regardless of the location in the world in which they have been created. What is important is the quality, the originality of the viewpoint, and the engagement of the artist with his piece.

I believe in Latin America we have many contemporary photographers profoundly engaged with the medium and with the reality we live in. I believe we have many topics to talk about, and that we can do it with powerful, high quality images. Throughout the previous years, we have also developed many regional networks. There is a lot of Latin American exchange, debate, collaboration, and circulations of

