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New York's Puerto Rican Community in Portrait

Plus: Itinerant photographers of Guatemala and the aftermath of Japan's tsunami

By
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Ann Parker / Los Ambulantes; The Itinerant Photographers of Guatemala Vintage Photographs From the 1970s



Ann Parker's 'Juan Gonzalez, ca. 1970s,' is on view at Deborah Bell Photographs through April 30. PHOTO: ANN PARKER/DEBORAH BELL PHOTOGRAPHS & PAUL M. HERTZMANN, INC.

Deborah Bell Photographs

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Through April 30

Ann Parker wrote in her book “Los Ambulantes: The Itinerant Photographers of Guatemala,” “From that day in the spring of 1971 when I first chanced upon a group of itinerant photographers working with their old-fashioned cameras and painted backdrops in a Guatemalan marketplace I have been fascinated by their world and the images that pass before their lenses.” Ms. Parker (b. 1934) and

her husband, the writer Avon Neal, made several extended trips to Guatemala in the 1970s, allowing her to document the photographers, their subjects, and their open-air, portable studios. In Ms. Parker's portraits of the photographers Juan Gonzalez, Rosalio Elias and Estanislao Gonzales, the three men look serious and professional; their bulky cameras are mounted on tripods and take pictures that are quickly processed and given to the customers. “Recuerdo” is frequently painted on their backdrops—“memory” or “souvenir.”

In a culture where photographs were rare and treasured, having one's portrait taken was significant, and the person behind the camera as much a shaman as an artist. The woman in Momostenango stands with her feet together and wears a colorful native dress, a yellow apron, and a cloth head covering; she holds in her hands a wrapping with four live chickens. The country boy in Sololá wears native clothes and stands in front of a backdrop painting of the Palacio Nacional. Ms. Parker's pictures of these rural Guatemalans have great charm. The picture of three brothers and their families involves 12 people, including two infants and a boy on a papier-mâché horse.