

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

The Amazon You Never See

Campbell Britton · Wednesday, May 30th, 2012

Americans may envision exotic endangered Indian tribes when they think of the Amazon, but Brazilian-born LA resident [Jorge Vismara](#) reveals the life spirit of Amazon River inhabitants that most of us didn't know existed. With an eye for the communion of souls between artist and subject, and a thirst for the unexpected wherever he goes, Vismara is a photographic powerhouse who seems never to miss the most engaging moment.

Five uniquely captivating photographs by Jorge Vismara are currently on display at the [Deco Building](#) in Los Angeles, after being featured there in last month's multimedia group show Tempo. The digital photographs, measuring 30"x40" on metallic paper, convey images of the *caboclo* people who inhabit the banks of the Amazon River. (The Brazilian Portuguese word *caboclo*, in its narrowest sense, refers to the progeny of mixed breeding between Portuguese and indigenous Amazonians, although now more broadly used for these denizens of river bank villages.)

The shots originate from a life-changing trip along the river Vismara took as part of a Brazilian government expedition to expand cultural exposure for the marginalized village inhabitants. The photographer, however, feels that *he* received a gift of cultural exposure, as he was entrusted with documenting "the contrasts and diversities you can find at the very edge of civilized life . . .". A [book that details his transformational journey](#) in photos and commentary was the first result of Vismara's efforts publicly available in the US.

He now has taken these five works from the book's original selections and digitally processed them with a new manipulation technique he developed and calls "naked colors." The technique succeeds in suggesting the surreal impact the Amazon voyage had on him, in addition to conveying the most essential elements of the subjects in composition. The two examples that accompany this article are a case in point, although it's most arresting to experience them in their larger-than-life sizes.

"Beyond" (above) captures an Amazonian woman's pensive and penetrating gaze as she ponders something unknown to us. Her youthful face contrasts with her weathered and rugged hands; retaining color in this print would have been superfluous to the subject's essence.

Conversely, Vismara's portrait of a young girl slathered with raw smudges of circus greasepaint ("I'm an actress in the circus," below) features extreme and discerning color saturation. In this instance, the manipulation of color highlights both the girl's glistening, joyful eyes and their cause – an interactive workshop with a circus performer who was also a member of the expedition.



But Brazilian themes are far from Vismara's major interest. A true internationalist, Vismara has traveled in over forty-eight countries as a passionate observer. And, as a modest man as well as a tireless photographer, Vismara privileges respect for the cultural and religious conventions of his subjects (whether they are people or events or even landscapes) over his own personality and desires. Avoiding the merely exotic, he believes that the camera can be a bridge between the soul of a photographer and that of his subject. Nothing in his work is premeditated or fraught with equipment set-ups. He shoots simply and spontaneously, reflecting the moments in which he is touched by a feeling of communion. It's all about "intuition, technique and patience," he says.

Vismara was spurred to reconnect with his photographic roots during numerous trips to Bali, where arts practices and spirituality are a staple of everyday life, and has won the admiration of international colleagues for the compelling and intimate way he captures the artist in performance. He has since produced four photographic books (two are entirely dedicated to performances), with two more in the pipeline. Vismara's website is chock-full of evidence attesting to his talent, skill, and productivity. There are many avenues one can follow to see his work online; my personal favorite is a page of over [seventy-five links to his diverse photo essays](#).

It is uncertain how long the five photographs will remain on exhibition. Vismara will personally escort interested viewers who contact him.

Jorge Vismara Photography at the Deco Building, 5209 Wilshire Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90036.

Contact Vismara at jorgevismara@gmail.com or (818) 971-9771.

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