



Eomar, Favela do Metro, 2013
 First I photographed Eomar in front of his home in 2012, it was a lone four-story building standing amidst the rubble left behind by the demolition of his neighbour's homes. When I returned in 2013 his home was gone as well.



Douglas, 2013
 Douglas is photographed in a replacement housing complex called "Minha Vida Minha Casa Realengo".



View in Laboriaux, Rocinha, 2013

OLYMPIC FAVELAS

Photographer Marc Ohrem-Leclef documented the impact of the "pacification" in the Cidade Maravilhosa: Rio de Janeiro.

The 2014 World Cup in Brazil and the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro are foreshadowing. These two mega-events are used by the government as justification to transfer poor families to the city periphery often without prior notice and no compensation. In Rio alone, some 1.4 million people live in slums, the favelas. Thousands have already been forcibly evicted. Many more inhabitants are facing removal from their homes. The government explains the transformation of the urban environments with preparation of the required infrastructure for the world's two biggest sport events. The actual intention is to clean the city of its visible poor and to exploit new territories for business and luxury condominiums. Like every so often induced by shady spectators in real property.

In 2012 Marc Ohrem-Leclef traveled to the favelas of Rio de Janeiro to document the effect of the forced removal on the people. He portrayed the inhabitants and their living space in empathetic shots. He shows people, who, despite their poverty, face the anytime possible divesture of their homes proud and upright. We had a conversation with him about his experience in Brazil.

How did you come up with the idea to take pictures in the slums of Rio de Janeiro, the so-called favelas?

It was less a general idea and more-so my desire to photograph and tell a specific story unfolding in those communities, as the city prepares to host the World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games. I had for the first time been sensitized to the issue of forced evictions as a result of a sporting mega-event during the preparations for the Beijing Olympics. The general idea of the paradox of destroying historic neighborhoods and displacing the residents for an event that historically is meant to unite people, that impressed me, and stuck with me. So when I heard about similar events taking place in Rio, I began researching specifically the policies of evictions as enforced by the government and the concept of "pacification" of the favelas. Having been to Rio to shoot for commercial clients a few times, I felt a direct connection to the events and felt drawn to research the singular reports existing in early 2012.

Please explain your strategy on how you managed to get close to your motifs, the people?

It really begins way ahead of being in Brazil: my experience in working with remote and disadvantaged communities has taught me that most often it is best to find a 'middleman' to connect with the people that are part of the community, especially when a language barrier is present.

My research consisted of two parts: find as much relevant and recent information about the removals, which in early 2012 was only of minor interest to the international press; then find a way to get into the favelas that would be safe, respectful, and productive. Many of my requests to NGOs in Rio—which seemed like the most likely potential partner with connections to affected people—were left unanswered but I then established positive communication with a small local NGO. They appreciated the fact that my focus was going to be portraiture, not news-type photographs of the evictions. So with their help I was connected with local community leaders. They introduced us to residents, and me and my guide *Café* began a slow process of explaining carefully who we are, and what I was trying to do by photographing people who were threatened with evictions, or had already been evicted.

Were there any problems, was there any hostility? I guess one cannot just mosey into a favela pull out a camera and start taking pictures?

Never. As described, no, you cannot just walk in and expect to be able to photograph people who are part of a community under extreme stress, like the ones I chose to enter for OLYMPIC FAVELA.

Walking in without any connection to someone in the neighborhood who introduces you may be dangerous, but most definitely not productive. I strive to make honest portraits of whomever I photograph. You cannot do that unless people trust you. To win that trust took a lot of time, many long conversations. In fact, often the people I photographed were disappointed I was 'only' photographing and not recording their stories. Once they opened up they had an urge to share their worries and describe their fears, and their fight to protect their communities and their homes. The way I organized it, there was never a moment of hostility towards us, not once. Some tense moments, yes, mostly when military police showed up, but the residents of the favelas were generous and kind to us.

In many of your portraits, the person is holding a torch. What's the reason behind it?

I came up with a concept to make a series of images in addition to the portraits while thinking about concept for this project in New York. My idea to try and make images other than the portraits was based on two motivations: one was to find a way of moving past portraits of people who seem to have lost their most basic rights as citizens and are struggling to find their footing to fight for their rights, however positive in their outlook they may be. The other motivation was to give them a tool to show their strength, defiance, and resistance. For that I chose to tap into historic depictions of liberation. But I also used Image Atlas to see how different cultures and regions of the world today read and show symbols of "liberty," "liberation," "resistance," and other keywords. It all came back to very basic gestures, and the torch as a prop plays beautifully on both sides of the spectrum: emergency and celebration, resistance and liberation. I was warned by friends that lighting torches in these communities may be dangerous, because gangs who until recently had a tight grip on them often used fireworks and gunshots to signal and communicate. So I felt very insecure at first if it was a good thing to try, but I had it in my head and we started asking the residents about participating in that part of OLYMPIC FAVLEA. Whenever I presented the idea to the residents, they immediately understood the concept and appreciated the opportunity of being represented in this moment of empowerment. it was a bit nervewrecking, but fun, too.

What inspires you particularly when you're abroad? The places you visit are rather "exotic"...

Choosing environments that are characterized by some form of isolation helps me confront my own romanticized perceptions regarding my subjects. Absent from outside distractions, I can deeply absorb the dynamics and forces that move them. As I immerse myself in their element, I gain a deeper understanding of the choreography they move to, both emotionally and physically. Whether that choreography is drawn by tradition or a certain work flow, I attempt to remain a respectful observer; attentive to the moments when a façade (the pressure of a certain role they play within their community), falls off my subjects and I can reveal an ambiguity, vulnerability, and tenderness. It is those unexpected moments that I hope to reveal. I believe that these fleeting moments of suspense, before a tipping point is reached, tell a more nuanced story than moments of resolution.



Vo' Zeze - Colonia Moreira, 2013
After her long time work as a seamstress at the municipal theatre of Rio, Vò Zeze built a spacious home in the community of Colonia J. Moreira in the city's West Zone. The beautiful home and garden she spent years building on now lies directly in the path of the planned Trans Olympic Highway.





Seu Barrao of Favela Vila Autodromo, 2013
This is Seu Barrao in his boat on Lagoa de Jacarepagua, where he fishes for a living.



Laboriaux, above Rocinha, 2012
Laboriaux is an example of partial demolition to prevent slum dwellers from returning. Bit by bit evictions lead to the collapse of the socially complex community.

Since you're from Germany I suppose that you have a slight interest in soccer even if you live in New York now. What's your opinion on the win bonus, e.g. Spain €550.000, Germany €300.000 per player, in relation to the average income of €690 per month in Brazil?

You are talking more about the fact that sports and sportsmen are highly valued commodities, and last but not least for the reason that many of us subscribe to that model of valuing athletes in such ways. I don't like to judge that - everyone has the right to choose how they spend their money and how to enjoy themselves. I am not interested so much in the sport, but in one of the human impacts these events have on the citizens of Rio. My heart is with those who have a hard time defending themselves against unlawful evictions, but I know the situation has many layers and aspects: I had invited a few officials from the city government and the Local Olympic Organizing Committee to participate in OLYMPIC FAVELA, because I do believe everyone has a right to be represented and heard. Not surprisingly, all but one declined: Major Pricilla de Azevedo, of Rio de Janeiro's Military Police, let me photograph her at the police post in Favela Santa Marta. I am grateful for her generosity to allow me to make her a part of my work, because her role and duties is an integral part of the story that drives current developments in Rio's favelas. In the end it is about capturing the honest human dimension of any given subject and their story for me, in the moment of the photograph, and hopefully beyond.

Marc also states that soon after he finished shooting OLYMPIC FAVELA in 2013, huge protests swept the entire country: largely, people were protesting against government overspending for the mega-events when funding for healthcare, education, and transportation is lacking. Interestingly, it was a broad swath of the population who took to the streets, crossing distinct lines of class.

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