

GLADSTONE GALLERY

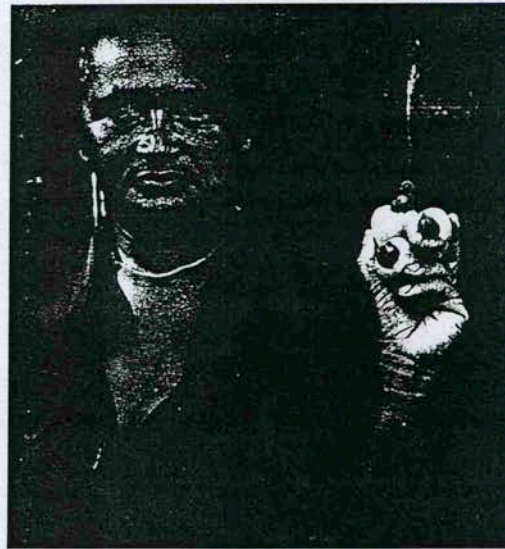
Hunt, Ian, "Sharon Lockhart," *Frieze*, May 2000

SHARON LOCKHART

Museum Boijmans Van
Beuningen, Rotterdam

Some anthropologists disparage what they perceive as 'up-river' anthropology, the implication being that a desire to understand distant cultures prevents the work in one's own backyard from being done. It is part of the wit of Sharon Lockhart's new film and photographs, *Teatro Amazonas* (1999), that her subject is at once a long way upriver and part of a metropolitan centre: the city of Manaus in Brazil. It's a place that recalls Werner Herzog's film *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), the story of a crazed rubber baron's dream of building an opera house in the jungle.

An opera house was built in Manaus. Lockhart shot her film in its auditorium, and worked with an anthropologist to 'cast' a representative audience from different sections of the town. She then filmed them from the stage, in a fixed shot, listening to music composed by Lockhart's collaborator, Becky Allen, and sung by the local choir, Choral do Amazonas. It is a piece of music without rhythm, essentially a long, fading sound which lasts 24 minutes. The vowel sounds selected were local. When the singers draw breath, it creates the only noticeable shifts in the dynamic of the piece. After a while, the ambient noises created by the audience become apparent – they fidget, fan themselves, look around and listen intently. As a result, the point at which the music stops is hard to register.



Sharon Lockhart
*Maria da Conceição
Pereira de Souza
with fruit, Apuí,
Salvador, Pará,
Brazil*
1999
Colour
photograph
44 x 33 cm

It is part of the wit of Sharon Lockhart's new film and photographs, *Teatro Amazonas* (1999), that her subject is at once a long way upriver and part of a metropolitan centre: the city Manaus in Brazil.

The film is shown only at specified times, and watching it becomes a commitment you share with the audience in the film – their signs of impatience interrupt your ability to become lost in the music. The film's engagement with the contractual nature of cinema-going is intriguing, but it is the sheer unfamiliarity of contemporary music and music-making of this kind, in Manaus as anywhere else, that provides *Teatro Amazonas* with more political fuel than a

mere staging of separated gazes.

The black and white photographs of families from the region were made in tandem with an anthropologist, however no details of her research on kinship are made available – Lockhart only supplies the names of the people in the pictures. More than one portrait was made of each group, and family homes were photographed unoccupied. An orderliness in the way objects and people are arranged in

the images is contrasted with the ordering processes of anthropological research, but both photography and anthropology are revealed to be adaptations, not necessarily cultural imposition or theft. The re-photographed and enlarged snapshots, which belong to the families, often possess similar formal qualities to Lockhart's portraits.

For every anthropologist clumsily working down a list of questions there is another that may be able to articulate something about a society in the form of structural understanding or a story; to give something back over and above the anomaly of the encounter. The spectator attempts to measure the anomalies

on show: the magazine pages and advertisements papering the walls in a country split by inequality; the paper chains; an old woman's smile; the iconic importance of the sewing machine, broom, television and radio; the rag rug, which used to be known in the north of England as the clippy mat. The families in Manaus were allowed to keep the Polaroids (Lockhart originals and of course technically unique works, unlike the exhibition prints). Elsewhere, their portraits exemplify a dignity in coping and in keeping going of which they are proud. Part of that justifiable pride is a measure of reserve before strangers.

Ian Hunt