

THE HUFFINGTON POST

Stunning Self-Portraits Make You Think Twice About Interracial Identity In South America

The Huffington Post | by Katherine Brooks

Posted: 04/25/2014

Brazilian artist Adriana Varejão has been exploring themes of interracial identity through an unlikely medium -- self-portraits. To confront and challenge concepts like colonialism and miscegenation in her home country, she turns her own visage into a canvas and translates the many skin colors that populate Brazil into a palette of paint. The result, "Polvo," presents racial diversity through the face of one woman, daring the viewer to lose themselves in her nebulous color wheels.



ADRIANA VAREJÃO Polvo Portraits I (Seascape Series) (detail), 2014 oil on canvas and paint set triptych, each: 28.35 x 21.26 inches (canvas), 72 x 54 cm 12.2 x 20.08 x 3.15 inches (paint set), 31 x 51 x 8 cm Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong Photo by Jaime Acioli

Varejão sought inspiration from the 17th and 18th century practice of Spanish *casta* paintings, portraits that aimed to document the variety of skin colors in Latin America and reframe them in ways that sliced and diced mixed-race ethnicities into far more than black and white. "Mixing was the norm," The Economist asserted in 2012, referencing the interracial mixing that occurred even during Brazil's days of slavery. "The result is a spectrum of skin colour rather than a dichotomy."