

Biography: Sebastião Salgado

Sebastião Salgado discovered photography while working as an economist for the World Bank. He is now one of the world's greatest photographers

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Sebastião Ribeiro Salgado was born in Brazil on February 8, 1944, in a small town of 16,000 inhabitants, Aimorés, in the state of Minas Gerais. In the 1940s more than 70% of this region was still covered by the foliage and trees of the Atlantic Forest, one of the 25 environmental "hot spots" on our planet. At that time this coastal Brazilian forest was twice as big as all of France; today it is reduced to only 7% of what it is was then, and in Sebastião's birthplace the forest is even more sparse, at 0.3% of its initial size.

When Sebastião was young, the town of Aimorés offered only the first part of secondary school, so he left in 1960 to live in Vitoria, a coastal town 185 kilometers away that was the capital of the state of Espírito Santo. There he completed his secondary education in 1962. The next year he went to the university to study economics and finished in 1967, the year he married Lélia Deluiz Wanick. They are the parents of two boys, Juliano, 28, and 23-year-old Rodrigo who has Downs Syndrome. They are also the grandparents of a six-year-old boy, Flavio.

They left for São Paulo where Sebastião received a Masters in economics and Lélia finished her twelve years of conservatory training in piano. In 1969 they moved to Paris, and Sebastião studied for a doctorate in economics while Lélia began her architectural studies at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts.

In 1971 they moved again, to London, where Sebastião worked as an economist for the International Coffee Organization. He travelled often to Africa on missions affiliated with the World Bank. It was then that he first began taking his first photographs. On his return to London these images began to preoccupy him, and he abandoned his career as an economist. At the beginning of 1973 he and his wife returned to Paris so that he could begin his life as a photographer.

At first Sebastião worked as a freelancer and joined the Sygma photographic agency in 1974. During the few months he remained at Sygma he photographed stories in Portugal, Angola and Mozambique. He joined the Gamma photographic agency in 1975 and worked on many stories throughout almost all of Africa, Europe and Latin America. In 1977 he began a long photographic essay on the Indians and peasants of Latin America. During this period Lélia also finished her architectural studies and continued her post-graduate work in urban planning.

In 1979 Sebastião left Gamma and joined Magnum Photos, where he would stay for 15 years. Along with many reportages in several countries for a variety of European and American magazines, in 1984 he finished his work on the Indians and peasants of Latin America. This work was published as his first book, *Other Americas*, in France, Spain and the United States.

From 1984 to the beginning of 1986 he worked, along with the humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders, on an 18-month project documenting the African famine. He published two books, *Sahel, l'homme en détresse* (Sahel: Man in Distress) in France and *Sahel el fin del camino* (Sahel the End of the Road) in Spain. The two books and a number of photographic exhibitions were created specifically to support the efforts of Doctors Without Borders.

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From 1986-92 Sebastião travelled to 23 countries to create a series of photographs on the end of the age of large-scale industrial manual labour. In 1993 he published the book *Workers: an archeology of the industrial era* in eight countries. More than 100,000 copies of the book were printed, and a large exhibition has been circulating throughout the world to more than 60 museums so far.

In 1993 Sebastião began another series of photographs, inspired by *Workers*, which would be called *Migrations*. This project would bring him to 43 countries, on every continent, to document the peoples who abandoned the countryside for the cities. As part of the project, for example, he photographed nine megalopolises which had experienced enormous increases in population during the last two decades due to various forms of migration. The books, *Migrations*, and *Portraits of Children of the Migration*, were also published in 8 countries with more than 220,000 copies in print. Eight sets of a large exhibition were simultaneously produced to be shown throughout the world. As well, more than 3,000 sets of 60 posters were created to be shown in union halls, churches, cultural centres, schools, etc. An educational program also was produced to accompany the exhibition in several countries. More than 3 million people are estimated to have seen this work.

During this time other books have also been published: *Les cheminots* (France, 1989); *An Uncertain Grace* (USA, Great Britain, Japan, France, Portugal, Italy, 1990); *The Best Photos* (Brazil, 1992); *Photopoche* (France, 1993); *Terra* (Brazil, France, Portugal, Italy, Great Britain, Germany, Spain, 1997); *Photopoche Serra Pelada* (France, 1999).

Almost all of these books, as well as most of the exhibitions, were conceived and created by Lélia Deluiz Wanick. Lélia and Sebastião also formed Amazonas Images in 1994, the year when Sebastião left Magnum Photos. Amazonas Images is a press agency which may be the smallest photographic agency in the world, representing only one photographer. Lélia and Sebastião also have worked together since 1991 on the restoration of a small part of the Atlantic Forest in Brazil to its natural state. In 1998 they succeeded in making this land a nature preserve and created Instituto Terra, which includes an educational centre for the environment. More than 500,000 trees have been planted, and the project is at the heart of a much larger community effort focusing on sustainable development in the Rio Doce valley.

Sebastião Salgado is also a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador and an honorary member of the Academy of Arts and Sciences in the USA. He has received numerous prizes, including several Honorary Doctorates and many other accolades for his photographic work.