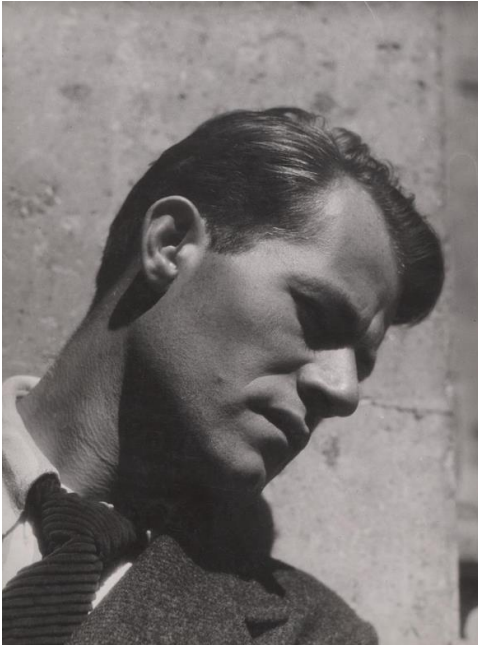
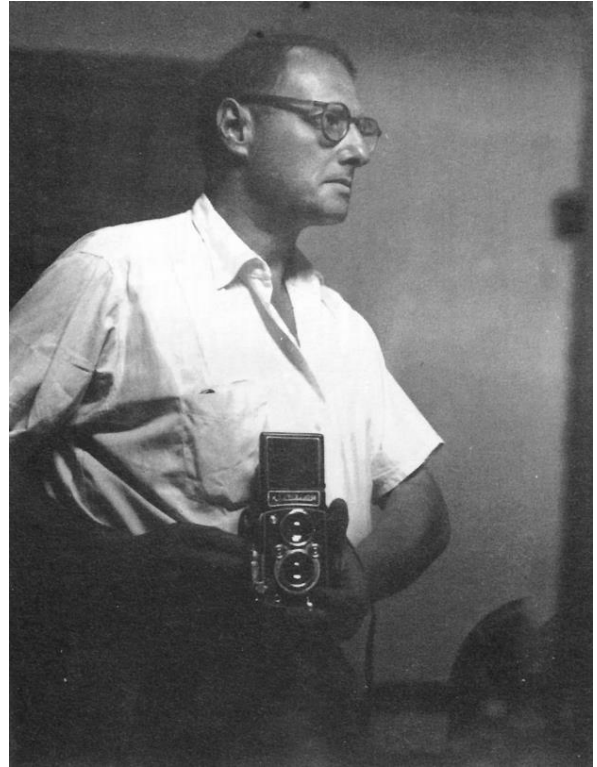


#79 January 2023 Cameraderie
Pierre Verger (1902-1996)



Portrait by Lola Álvarez Bravo, ca. 1950
(From #75, Sept. 2022)



Pierre Verger is somewhat unusual and lesser known as a photographer, but I am choosing to discuss him this month because of his interesting story, and of course his fine photographs.

Verger was a high school drop-out, and later in life took up photography. He undertook to become a self-taught ethnographer, and (from the Wikipedia article) “devoted most of his life to the study of the African diaspora—the slave trade, the African-based religions of the new world, and the resulting cultural and economical flows from and to Africa.” In this he was very successful, receiving a doctoral degree from the Sorbonne. He became an established professor and created a foundation to continue his work and hold his tens of thousands of photographs.

Here is Verger’s Wikipedia article: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Verger

Here is the link to the Pierre Verger Foundation:
<https://web.archive.org/web/20040413034434/http://www.pierreverger.org.br/br/fundacao/apresentacao.htm>. It is in Portuguese, but Google Translate does a good job of converting it to very readable English. The site has many of Verger’s photographs, although I found linking to the photos only sometimes to work and often to not work. The website states one of the Foundation’s purposes is to “study and prepare publications related to the reciprocal influences between Brazil and Africa in general and, mainly, between [the northeastern Brazilian state] Bahia and the Gulf of Benin [on the west African coast].”

One of Verger’s images was in The Family of Man exhibit (#22, Sept. 2017; #69, Feb. 2022) in 1955 at MOMA—see it below. Here are several of his excellent photographs.

Feira de Santana [city in Bahia State], Brazil, 1950s.



Shot from a low point of view to emphasize this man's innate dignity.

Candomblé Joãozinho da Gomeia [a priestess of the Candomblé Afro-Brazilian religion, named Joãozinho da Gomeia], 1950s.



Verger became an initiate of the Candomblé religion, and officiated at its rituals.

From the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) “The Family of Man” exhibit of 1955.



Verger deliberately shot the flowers and pots, cutting off the women's heads. This unique framing got his image into the MOMA exhibit.

I can't identify this image. Obviously, a fisherman.



Some commentary on Verger suggests that his great number of photographs of men working, wrestling, or doing gymnastics had homo-erotic overtones. Perhaps.

Shanga, Mali, 1936.



A festival dance. The Foundation website states that many of Verger's photographs are historical and capture things no longer seen in current culture.

Footnote to #67 and #70 Smoke

In #67, I discussed one of Hiro's images of a slow smoker, and in #70 I gave a footnote about a recent image in The Washington Post of the same sort. It seems that shooting the slow drift of cigarette smoke out of a model's nose or mouth is a common subject. What I cannot tell is if each photographer (of the three I have so far noted) had independently come up with the idea, or if Hiro was the first and everyone knows his image, or if the idea has always been floating around in the vocabulary of photographers.

Here is yet a third image of this concept, recently appearing as in illustration for a short story in The New Yorker.

The New Yorker, September 26, 2022.

Photograph by Ana Cuba.

Illustration for fiction short story, "Easter," by Caleb Crain.



The photographer has shot the smoke drifting up around the model's eyes, I suspect to suggest that the vision of the main character in the story is clouded.