Linda Benedict-Jones is Executive Director of Silver Eye Center for Photography in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She interviewed Vik Muniz in February, 2000.

VM: The work you are doing is in the recent months: Paris, London, Sao Paulo, New York. What do you hope your new photography work will be something that I find comfort in.

LBJ: Yes. He didn't have to labor too much on those prints. They would have been perfect. They would have been real photographs.

VM: I'm interested in mimicking the hardware of the two different time periods, the optics and 19th-century hardware. And I'm printing in the most primitive way possible for each period. So for early 20th-century, like, for instance, Pessoa.

LBJ: Yes. Fernando Pessoa is a great influence on my work. He was somebody who was always posing as though he were somebody else. So because of that, when I make, for instance, a 19th-century photograph, I'm trying to make myself to look like a 19th-century person. You can coach yourself like an actor does. Or for the 20th-century person or a 19th-century person. You can coach yourself like an actor does.

VM: Yes. I'm trying to be that person. I'm trying to think like them, you know, to think about what they would have thought in the way they were talking. And how they would have talked or thought about the way they looked. And you try to put yourself in that place. It's not that I was trying to really be that person, it's just that I'm trying to observe those people and try to understand them from the inside. I'm not doing biographical research or anything like that.

LBJ: Wow. That's a wonderful position.

VM: I'm looking for that, you know. It's very difficult to get into that character. It's very difficult to get into that period.

LBJ: There are those times that you're stuck. I think everybody gets stuck. How do you get out of it?

VM: Well, I think there are some people that are more skilled at it than others. I think that there are subtleties and that there are differences between reality and TV. It's all confused. There are those times when I've had to use the same techniques as used in the early '90s. In that case, I had to make the photographs look more like that. I used the same kind of film and the same kind of paper and all that. It's all very much a matter of technique.

LBJ: Yes. It seems like the work is more important than the technique sometimes. It seems like the technique is used to make the work more interesting.

VM: Absolutely. Process enters my work as a form of narrative. When people look at one of my photographs, they have a certain interpretation. That's the way they interpret it. They have their own personal interpretation of my work. They have their own personal way of reading the photographs. That's what I mean by process entering my work as a form of narrative.

LBJ: I understand you did a one-month residency working with street children in New York. Can you tell us what that was like for you?

VM: It was interesting and visually engaging. Because of so many rivers and so many levels, it's interesting and visually engaging.

LBJ: It was a big soap and that soap has to be sorted out later on.

VM: Yes. The work is already very complex to begin with, adding to it makes it harder to read and a little bit confusing. I think that's true.

LBJ: Yes. Process enters my work as a form of narrative. When people look at one of my photographs, they have their own personal interpretation of my work. They have their own personal way of reading the photographs. That's what I mean by process entering my work as a form of narrative.

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