



photograph

FOCUS ON: RUBEN NATAL-SAN MIGUEL

By Jean Dykstra



Ruben Natal-San Miguel, *Carlos (Very Bad Husband)*, 2019. Courtesy Postmasters Gallery

Ruben Natal-San Miguel was on his way to Postmasters Gallery in Tribeca from his home in Harlem with the last two photographs for his exhibition *Women R Beautiful* when he got word that New York City's mayor had closed all non-essential businesses to slow the spread of the coronavirus. The show was scheduled to open that evening. The series, which Natal-San Miguel made in memory of his late mother, can still be seen online on [Postmasters' website](#) (and, eventually, at the gallery). The title is a play on Garry Winogrand's series *Women Are Beautiful*, which Natal-San Miguel reimagines in much broader, more encompassing terms as far as age, race, and sexuality. "I like that work," he says of Winogrand's 1968 series, "but it always bothered me that it didn't represent the people I've been around and photographed my whole life."

Jean Dykstra, "Focus On: Ruben Natal-San Miguel," Photograph Mag, April 22, 2020 http://photographmag.com/focus_on/focus-on-ruben-natal-san-miguel/



Ruben Natal-San Miguel, *Easter Twins*, 2019. Courtesy Postmasters Gallery

The subjects of his series are mostly women of color; some are female-identified, some are mothers, some have tattoos, or green hair, or wear curlers. What they are not is timid or coy. The women in his pictures own their identities – their gazes are direct, sometimes challenging. *Emily*, 2019, gives off an Amy Winehouse vibe in her bathrobe and fishnet stockings, one slippered foot up on an open fire hydrant. *Carlos (Very Bad Husband)*, 2019, shows a woman in curlers, in profile, “Carlos” tattooed on her neck, surrounded by hearts that imply that she once held her husband in higher esteem that she does now, judging by the title.



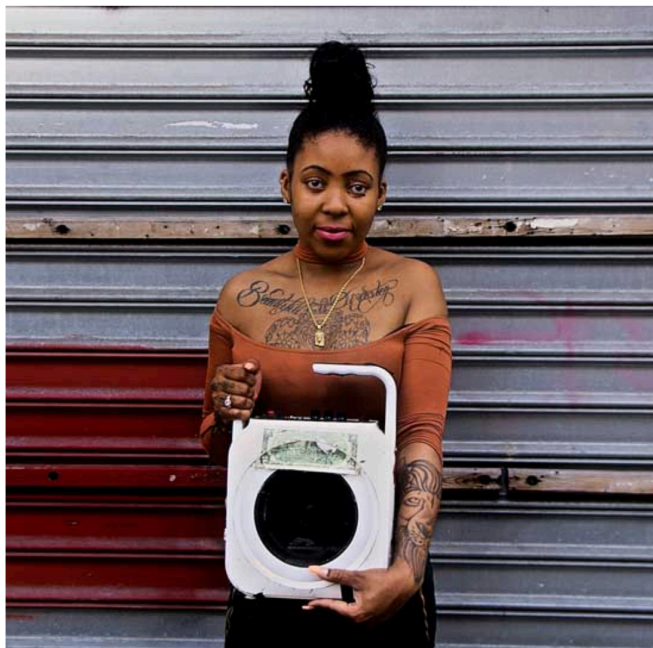
Ruben Natal-San Miguel, *The Bronx (Hoop Earring)*, 2019. Courtesy Postmasters Gallery

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The series is peppered with references to other photographers. *Easter Twins*, 2019, suggests that Diane Arbus's spirit hovers over this series as well as Winogrand's. And *A Great Day in Harlem (Female Police Officers)*, 2019, is an explicit reference to Art Kane's 1958 photograph of jazz greats arrayed in front of a stoop in Harlem, where Natal-San Miguel takes a lot of his photographs. "People don't have a lot of resources," he says, "but they have a very personal sense of style." It might be a large hoop earring, or a tattoo (Beautiful Disaster in ink across a young women's chest), or the matching red coats worn by the twins on Easter that catches his attention. Whatever it is, Natal San Miguel has a Bill Cunningham knack for capturing the iconoclastic style of New Yorkers. "I could photograph this city for the rest of my life," he says.



Ruben Natal-San Miguel, *Emily*, 2019. Courtesy Postmasters Gallery



Ruben Natal-San Miguel, *Beautiful Disaster (\$2 & Boombox)*, 2019. Courtesy Postmasters Gallery