



May 12 Ruben Natal-San Miguel's "Women R Beautiful" Exhibit

REVIEWS



Ruben Natal-San Miguel, *Negesti* 2019

Written by **Taraneh Niakan**

Ruben Natal-San Miguel, born in Puerto Rico, is a New York photographer known for his authentic portraits. I spoke to Ruben over the phone about his exhibition at Postmasters Gallery in Lower Manhattan, "Women R Beautiful." His show was scheduled to open in March, perfectly planned for Women's History Month, although it was the same day that NYC closed down all non-essential businesses. Despite the closure of his show, Ruben's photographs are gaining traction on the internet.

Through his exhibit, Ruben aims to celebrate women. Ruben tells me about how the trauma he's endured inspires his work, speaking with his heart on his sleeve. He pulls from his experiences as a 9/11 survivor and as a victim of a vicious hate crime last year that resulted in numerous surgeries. Last November, Ruben lost two great women in his life. His mother's passing happened almost the same day as the murder of his neighbor, a diplomat for women's rights.



Ruben Natal-San Miguel, *Girls From The Hood Sitting On The Stoop (Landlords)* 2019

"Women R Beautiful," is a retake on Gary Winogrand's iconic photo book released in 1975, "Women Are Beautiful." Ruben felt that Winogrand depicted a narrow definition of beauty, so he wanted to do his own version. He photographed women of different ages, races, cultures, and religions. He portrays older women, younger women, trans women, Black women, Brown women, and Asian women.



Ruben Natal-San Miguel, *Lady Money Sings The Blues* 2011

He explains how he works – camera in hand and fashionably dressed. Mostly photographing strangers, Ruben says, "If I don't feel a connection with the person, I will not take the photo." He describes being in Crotona Park and seeing a stunning woman putting on her makeup. "Who are you?" he said to her, "You look amazing!" He explains, "I'm there to find the soul of the neighborhood and to find people who I can celebrate." He prefers not to stage anything and instead to find them in their environment. One of my favorite photos in the series is a woman in a colorful laundromat. He excitedly tells me a bit about her; she is a trans woman and a twin that was doing her laundry dressed up at the laundromat where she grew up. He captures meaningful moments like this intentionally.



Ruben Natal-San Miguel, *Installation view*

He describes another photo of a woman with vitiligo. This photo is gaining traction, now framed as a part of the Permanent Collection in the Mint Museum in the same room as Andy Warhol's Marilyn Monroe. He loves that one photo touches so many people.

Ruben wants people to walk away from his photos recognizing the humanity and dignity of these women. He says, "These people are stylish. These people have a great sense of themselves as most New Yorkers do." He says these portraits are intended to be viewed up-close and in-person, so they can experience the moment as he did.



Ruben Natal-San Miguel, *Easter Twins* 2019

Taraneh Niakan, "Ruben Natal-San Miguel's 'Women R Beautiful' Exhibit," Musée Magazine, May 12, 2020 <https://museemagazine.com/features/2020/5/12/review-ruben-natal-san-miguels-women-r-beautiful-exhibit>

Regarding COVID-19, "When this is over, I'm gonna go out and photograph – that's what I love to do." He's looking forward to capturing the vitality of post-quarantine life. "I think people will be so hungry for human connection, and I think I'll be able to get some good portraits."

Ruben Natal-San Miguel's work shines with humanity, connecting his audience to his subjects. He ensures me, "My show will open; trust me."



Ruben Natal-San Miguel, *3 Muslim Girls* 2019

Link to Ruben's "Women R Beautiful":

http://www.postmastersart.com/archive/ruben20/ruben20_direct.html

ADMINISTRATOR

Ruben Natal-San Miguel, Postmaster's Gallery, Women