

PIERRE VERGER

Pierre Verger was born in Paris on November 4, 1902. A man of means, he lived a conventional life for his social class through age 30, though he did not share the values in vogue at the time. 1932 was a decisive year in his life: he learned a skill – photography – and developed a fascination for travel. From December of 1932 through August, 1946, he spent nearly 14 years traveling around the world, living solely from his photography. Verger sold his photos to newspapers, agencies and research centers. He took photographs for companies and even traded his services for transportation. Paris became his home base, a place to meet up with his friends – surrealist admirers of Prévert and anthropologists at the Trocadero Museum – and make contacts for new journeys. He worked for the best publications of the time, although disinterested in fame, and was always packing to go: “I could not rid myself of the idea of a vast world out there, and my desire to see it propelled me toward new horizons.”

Change came quickly the day Verger arrived in Bahia. In 1946, with Europe ravaged by war, everything was peaceful in Salvador. Verger was quickly won over by the hospitality and magnificent culture he found in that city, and ended up staying. As elsewhere in his travels, he preferred the company of ordinary people, the simpler places. Blacks monopolized both the city and his attention. They were subjects for his photos, and became his friends – friends whose lives interested Verger down to the details. When he discovered *candomblé*, he fancied he had found the local population’s fountain of vitality, and began studying the *orixás* they worshipped.

His lively interest in African religions netted him a fellowship to study rituals in Africa, where he set off to in 1948. In addition to his religious initiation, Verger also embarked on a new trade that same year as a researcher. The history, customs and most of all the religion practiced by the Yoruba people and their descendents, in both Western Africa and Bahia, became the central topics of his research and subject of his labors. As a visiting fellowship researcher at several universities, he continued to transform his research into articles, talks, books. In 1960 he bought a house at Vila América, and in the late 1970s, set aside his camera and make his last visits to Africa as a researcher.

During his twilight years, Verger’s overriding preoccupation was to make his research available to an ever-increasing number of people, and ensure the safekeeping of his holdings. During the 1980s, Editora Corrupio undertook the first of those publications in Brazil. Verger created the Pierre Verger Foundation (FPV), to which he was benefactor, steward and president, and thus undertook to convert his own house into a research center. In February of 1996,



Verger passed away, leaving the foundation in charge of carrying on his work.

“Creating the Pierre Verger Foundation was the consummation of two of my great loves: the love I feel for Bahia, and that I feel for that part of Africa around the Gulf of Benin. Through its goals and activities it aims to bring this common heritage into sharper relief, to offer Bahia what it knows about Benin and Nigeria and make those nations aware of their cultural influence on Bahia,” declared Verger in the Foundation’s first newsletter. He donated all of his personal holdings – amassed over decades of travel and research – to the Foundation. These include dozens of articles, books, 62,000 photographic negatives, sound recordings, film and video footage, and a precious collection of documents, records, correspondence, manuscripts and objects.

Legally chartered in 1988, the Foundation is a private nonprofit corporation, administratively and financially independent, that to this day occupies the very house that for years was home to Pierre Verger, on the Vila América hillside in Salvador. Managed by a group of Verger’s friends, colleagues and admirers, the Foundation busies itself about the preservation and legacy of his work. Some of the peo-

ple closest to Verger during the final years of his life now figure among its employees, directors and curators.

The Foundation's primary goals are:

- To preserve, disseminate and research the work of its founder, Pierre Edouard Leopold Verger;
- To study and prepare publications relating, in general, to the mutual influence between Brazil and Africa, and especially between Bahia and the Gulf of Benin;
- To offer opportunities for interdisciplinary cooperation in such fields as the arts, anthropology, botany, music and history;
- To function as a center for research and information;
- To establish and maintain relations with international cultural organizations interested in African culture and the problems which beset the African Diaspora into the New World.

Services:

- To authorize publication and sales, under copyright, of photographs by Pierre Verger; and
- To make the holdings available to researchers.

Source: Fundação Pierre Verger

<http://www.pierreverger.org/br/index.htm>

