

Cartoneras

Portraits of women in Argentine today

By Brenda Hoffman

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All the photos came out of my admiration and desire to help the people who fight to construct a better world.

With the support of the city hall of Paris, I was able to go to Buenos Aires to meet these dignified, courageous women.

The day after my arrival, I had an appointment with an Argentinean writer, Eduardo Anguita, who belongs to the humane rights group of Matilde Vara, which fights for the rights and working conditions of the cartoneros. Eduardo Anguita and two of his colleagues introduced me to the urbane world of recycling.

The “cartoneras”, as they are called, invited me into their homes to drink the local beverage mate. Spending entire days together, I accompanied them in their journey through the city. They taught me the job of “recuperation” and opened their heart to me by telling me the story of their lives.

The “cartoneros” are Argentineans who had a job before the crisis of 2001. In 2002, there were as many as 100.000 cartoneros in the streets of Buenos Aires (approximatively 14.000.000 inhabitants)

In 2003, in the metropolis, one could find as many as 40.000 cartoneros. The law 992 had just been passed, giving a legal status to this activity.

30% of the cartoneros are women, but many amongst them are leaders in the movement.