

# ***SOUVENIRS FROM RIO DE JANEIRO*** **JOHANN JACOB STEINMANN, 1836**

In 1825, the young Swiss artist and engraver Johann Jacob Steinmann (1800–1844) disembarked in Brazil to take up a position at the Military Academy as the emperor’s official lithographer. Credited with introducing lithography to the country, Steinmann was responsible for producing maps and other official documents. When his contract expired, in 1830, he set up his own workshop, where he produced prints of city views, maps, and information sheets on the city’s customs and people. He maintained this establishment until February 1833.

Upon his return to Europe, Steinmann decided to publish an album of mementos from his trip, which he released in successive editions between 1834 and 1839. The 12 engravings were executed in aquatint by the Swiss artist Friedrich Salathé and painted in watercolor by Steinmann himself. He also created a printed frame with elements of Brazilian flora and scenes of indigenous and enslaved people based on engravings by the German artist Johann Moritz Rugendas.

The album was a remarkable success in Europe and Brazil and is still considered one of the best records from the time for both its historical importance and its artistic and technical merits. It was these qualities that attracted the attention of collectors such as Ema Klabin, who acquired this copy in 1983. Alongside the works of other traveling artists, it has been instrumental in forming an image of Brazil that has reverberations to this day.

Throughout the 20th century, several facsimile editions of the album were produced, always praising the beauty of Steinmann’s work and the Brazilian landscape, while ignoring the obvious: the violence implicit in the images of this fledgling country, born on the back of slave labor, where it was taken as normal for populations of ancient traditions to be reduced to mere decorative curlicues on a frame. As we reflect on our identities and our territory, it is imperative that we resignify this type of imagery.

Curator  
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