



Reclaiming the Streets with Júnior Negão and Gisele Nascimento

Few people would recommend running through the favelas of Rio de Janeiro after dark, but Ghetto Run Crew is here to change that.



Cops can get testy when black-clad youths run through the Rio favelas after dark. All the more reason, then, for Júnior Negão and his crew to occupy the streets. “We are not a club, we are a crew, a cultural resistance,” announces Negão, who founded Ghetto Run Crew in Rio de Janeiro after a late-night run with his wife, Gisele Nascimento, in 2013. Today, many of the crew’s runs kick off at midnight. “Running at night was a way of engaging with other cultural activities that only really happened after dark, such as samba, skateboarding, and graffiti,” Negão explains. The crew suffered a lot of repression at first, principally because the police felt it was not acceptable to go running in the favelas at night. With persistence and determination, however, they have managed to create a movement.

Negão never imagined himself as a runner. “When you live at the top of mountains or hills, in the places where the favelas are, running is a normal part of life ... but I decided to use it as a

tool for social empowerment.” Favela residents are looked down upon by the rest of society and face a constant struggle to survive. Women have it particularly tough. “My mother, my wife, so many others, who despite being real-life winners, are still undervalued,” says Negão. “The idea with Ghetto Run was to bring these women together and, through running, provide them with the means to strengthen themselves as individuals.” Running became a gateway to confidence, the kind of confidence that transcends sport. “You can overcome any challenge in any area of your life,” explains Nascimento as she talks about what she’s learned from running. “Whether as a professional, as a mother, or as a daughter, I learn to be a better human being. And that does not depend on anyone else. It depends only on you.”

Independence is the lifeblood of Brazil’s creative communities, but it is a freedom that many worry is under threat as President Jair Bolsonaro’s attempts to shape the country according to ►