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Renato Pera: against the smooth surfaces

Leandro Muniz

December of 2009

The floor of a house is partially removed, generating organic forms yet still allowing passage. The negative space is filled with dyed black water. The dark mirror, viscous and abstract, perhaps carries memories of recurring floods in neighborhoods of São Paulo, of water rejected by the city and the workings of the urban body. That which is generic, on becoming material, brings tension to specificities of the space, of the place, of the relationships between things, people and ghosts. Something highly possible for thought and experience in art, that blurs the lines between liquids and solids, the blood that runs through the veins and the flow of the streets, with the elusive and self-reflective moment of self-understanding and elaboration. History and fictions intersect, because narrating things, narrating the world, first of all, involves the choice of forms. Between the mystery of things and their codes, an action of contact, like a skin that recovers a new body and then falls apart.

November of 2022

A series of speakers emit technical reports and the news of violent murders that have occurred in the city. A massive panel displays colored lights, smoke and disco balls at an empty party. The optical effect of the diffraction of light is reproduced in drawings, digital animations or by applying rhinestones. Bacteria drawn onto weekly planner paper, gray paper or multiplied on panels and in videos. Sheets of plastic bear cockroach protuberances, droplets or combine different elements, such as a fan and a potato. The amorphous forms of sperm are recast in ceramic and placed on a table. Tattoos done by a blindfold tattoo artist. Bricks inscribed with "meat", "bone" or "the infinite". Opaque or metallic paper covers the windows, doors and walls. An open framed structure in the form of cobbles is covered in little strips of metallic tape. Skulls made from fiberglass, ceramic or clay, some painted some not. Billboards show the artist wearing plastic vampire teeth, sunglasses applied with Photoshop and drops of fake blood spilling from his smile. A life drawing class in which the model is dressed like a Disney character. Images of plastic

skulls dressed up and forming a frieze. Enormous drops of shining fiberglass are attached to the gable end of a building. Digital drawings of windows are reproduced to scale 1:1 in backlights or at a reduced scale, like studies, in prints on MDF, or as architectural models, in paper reproductions. A pigeon in flight or in freefall is the module for the creation of gigantic pattern. So many others. Listing, classifying and describing always come with their intrinsic limits.

September of 2022

We could create an entire theory about the homogenous and the porous, just as with the opaque and the shiny. Pressure the smooth surfaces. Disturb them.

December of 2020

The artist beheads himself and explodes his own head. The image of his head. With no mechanical connection to the social, political, sanitary and psychological tragedies of the moment, but without ignoring them, these animations synthesize the most direct and generalized feelings of the time. Heads full of information explode. Note that the head is hollow, like the casing of a wasp that changes its exoskeleton. A dose of irony in his own image and the narcissism intrinsic to artistic practice. But also the range of images of severed or deformed heads throughout history. From the creation of the *Acéphale* magazine by the Surrealists, directly criticizing the limits of modern reason, in a radical and romantic elegy to that which does not pass through reason; to Tarsila do Amaral's man-devouring beast, with its diminished head, immense hands and feet, perhaps interpreting the lack of rationality in Brazilian culture at that time, romanticizing the instruments of bodily labour, among so many other symptoms of the ideological ambiguity of the artistic elite at that time. There is also the histrionic Queen of Hearts in *Alice In Wonderland* cutting the heads off her servants. *Heads will roll on the floor*, sings the indie band Yeah Yeah Yeahs. In this case, in the infinite black space of the screen, with its mechanical and also cosmic data.

December of 2022

Decisions - the raw materials of any artistic practice - are taken in contexts and contingencies of all types: desires, economic conditions, space, deadlines, even possible relationships with the social and political dimension of the time and our journey through time. Matter also informs the image through tensioning, continuity or contradiction. As such, the only possible path is multiplicity and its perceived unity after the fact, in a time which is also of

many superimposed layers of actions, with ghosts, aliens, future beings and our presence up against the surfaces of places. If the task of explaining things is null, then forming questions that encompass them and emulating their mode of functioning may create narratives with some power of explanation and practical application, beyond the generalization of concepts and the categories we use, yes, untrustingly, and as mere tools for approaching the world. But then it is already too late: the tools inform the subjects, just as fiction speaks of reality.

November of 2017

Is it possible to give cliches and weak images another life? That their bodies may bring other questions and experiences beyond those already codified? Or emphasize their codes? Or at least recognize them as codes and lead us to think of what to do about this? A skull, in this case. From rock band t-shirts to the pirate ships of cartoons, from the hallucination of scientific determinism to *memento mori* in art history, and its the serene moralism (or relief) that comes with the reminder of death. A spent icon. Applied as a tattoo. Dressed up as a demon forming a decorative band. Founded like a brick. As a mere support for an expressive painting. The multiplication of bodies for something already so used perhaps reminds us of its validity. Or of the search for its improved materiality. Or its banality. Better still would be to forget the dynamics of exclusion in an attempt at a stronger and more definitive reading, and to accept the generality of the icon which in each new formalization embodies new problems, with no difference between the dense and the superficial.

October of 2010

Black. Pink. The color of the bricks and the red. The contrast guides the relationship between things. The homogenous, in truth, shows that which is irregular and subjacent to the surface, just as the smoothness only emphasizes the multiple textures in its surroundings. Is it still worth asking about the limits between the presence of bodies and that which is virtual and inhabits us *in another way*? Which? The asepsis and perturbation of surfaces coexist among columns of artisanal paper which reproduce scales, windows and doors covered in monochromatic paper and sheets of plastic from which sprout protuberances demarcated by the softening of the material by heat. The dichotomy between clean and impure is posed and quickly undone, as with so many others in this practice: classify and declassify, rigidity and malleability, contextualization and generalization, standardization and difference, perfectionism and error. The multiple approaches to analyze an image lead to a path along which certain questions perhaps speak better of its

connection with things than of categorical affirmations. A diffuse discourse without origin, center or mystery, which says something through the contact between surfaces.

June of 2021

Differentiating types of brightness. The brightness of the eyes is different to the reflective surface of water touched by the sun, of wet hair or polished marble. No. It is cheap paper whose laminated sheen evokes something of a low-cost technological future. Or of polished fiberglass, used in the car industry and in playgrounds. Reproducing the brightness of mechanical lenses. The feeling of the sublime and of the suspension of time that the image of flares generates in cinema has something of this attempt to communicate the ethereal states of sunny days, of loving encounters or the creation of the universe. Their geometrical structure could not be further refined to take account of something as ambiguous - at times matter, at others energy - as light.

January of 2018

“Two billboard posters with the same image, type of printing, pasted up in the same way and produced by a business specialized in outdoor media, one installed inside a museum and the other in an advertising space in Ribeirão Preto/SP, during a commercial period of 14 days” describes the artist on his website. Curious, this obsession over such a precise and supposedly objective description, given the somewhat bizarre, absurd or ironic dynamic of his action. What were the internal production factors and pressure lived through the days that led to the formulation of this work? We may speculate infinitely, but what matters is a change or something significantly new: if drops of blood and skulls were to appear thus far as subliminal iconic forms, like something found in a shop full of plastic, then the sublimation of these billboard images does not eliminate the organic and the drip. The *fake* has something of *real* tragedy. Clearly the different codes mobilized by the practice (from the iconic to the gestural, from the projective to the expressive) coexist, but another aesthetic-propulsional category comes into play at this point, involving recipes for blood sauce and all of the doubts surrounding how to formalize the dimension of violence, attraction and repulsion for blood, for sperm, for the cut caused by a tattoo or for the bones under the skin.

November of 2020

This is not the first time we see vampires. Beforehand, the artist dressed up with fake teeth and sunglasses created on Photoshop and put himself inside

and outside of the museum, on billboards, which while dealing with these different scales, the institutional interior, that still resonates its dimension of domesticity of a mansion, probably of the 19th century, and the street, the city. They also called into question the dimension of establishing the subject himself: I am flesh, plastic, fake blood and some image-editing. The psychoanalyst Christian Dunker, in *Reinvenção da intimidade: Políticas do sofrimento cotidiano* [Reinventing Intimacy: Politics of Daily Suffering], at some point creates a history of the monsters that inhabit the modern imagination: bourgeois vampires that feed on the new and are full of mystery in the 19th century, Frankensteins and their constitution pieced together from fragments of bodies in the 20th century, zombies and the bombarded and amortized subjectivity of the 21st. This is a rough summary, but contains relevant information to the artist's practice. Not by chance then that he has recently become interested in zombies. In the midst of asepsis and rigor, the language of monsters.

March of 2020

Drawing bacteria. In tandem, drawing the effect of the diffraction of light on mechanical lenses. Both fleeting, both mutants.

May of 2015

Art as an attempt to build knowledge denounces its limits, methodologies and possibilities. Classifying windows, for example. An average typology, in theory, presents a general relationship, based on a range of specific models. Really? The immediate question when we see inventories and displays: and all those things that do not fit? That were not included or that did not become visible in the light of day? And what about the platypus and the monsters? Techniques inform what we see. Representation is, first and foremost, fiction. In Maria Victória Gaburro De Zorzi's Master's dissertation, *O "Dicionário" de Documents (1929-1930) e a Antropologia de Georges Bataille* [The "Dictionary" of Documents (1929-1930) and Georges Bataille's Anthropology], we learn that the author's impulse to declassify, comes from his training and practice with strategies for documentation and archiving. Perhaps here lies the fine line of irony that runs through these works. Something which, exposed to life's pressures and contingencies, in time returns as violence, but until then, remains latent.

October of 2022

Not all that is synthetic is in fact closed in on itself. We see these immense droplets in fiberglass - noting in the scale something hallucinatory in these objects, something like an advertising icon, but smaller than the body, yet larger than hands are able to apprehend. Shiny surfaces, like the hoods of cars or buildings in glass, nail polish or new domestic appliances. Positioned on facades, blind gables or privileged walls, they incorporate, activate or are perceived in relation to the surrounding space. And what do they say of these spaces? In a chapter of *Poetics of Relation*, Edouard Glissant teaches us that in the cultures that appeared during the process of colonization, classic ideals, and their finalist and purist tendencies, were not realized. Our logic is baroque. Beyond any aesthetic of the excesses, refinements or dramas, this implies a relationship full of intricacies and nuances, but, in particular, a recognition of the limits of the actual tools of constructing the image and knowledge. Something always remains in the shadows, beyond the frame or muddied, even in the crystalline images of mirrors. Minimal interventions, not because they point towards any "essence", but because they make something vibrate which is already latent in the space, which, for a time, can be seen in its less practical and functional dimensions.

March of 2017

Covering walls, doors and windows with paper. Opaque or shiny. If, at a distance, these blocks of color seem whole, while getting closer we see the edges, the cuts and the gaps. In this game between closeness and distance, the ambiguous feeling of something that protrudes from the surfaces - like those other sheets of plastic - but also of a virtual space, like a computer montage. Without forgetting that, in the end one is dealing with a fly poster that does not carry any information other than its material substance. Images and spaces made of a material that is as ordinary as ambiguous.

August of 2022

Perhaps more than ever before, the tension between histories, more than histories, specific tragedies and their generalization as narrative and grouping. Perhaps more than ever, moreover, the way in which fiction reveals the real: I listen to the phantasmagorical descriptions of these murders and this violence in hushed tones and simultaneously, along the alleyway, I see, in my head, the permanence of these atrocities today. What is new in this production is that, until now, the idea of violence was generic. Now it comes from technical reports, news reports and extensive research in the archives of the city's institutions - this body that also models the work's vocabulary. And even if it is only made of sound and the horns that emit these narratives, for me, it is

cinema, also implying another experience with time. Of the work. Of the city. Of memory. Superimposed. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag reminds us that representing violence is null. Forgetting it, even more so. As such, we can say that *Rumor* is based on real facts.

Leandro Muniz (São Paulo, 1993) is an artist and curator. He has a Master's Degree in Theory, Criticism and History of Art at ECA_USP, and graduated in visual arts at the same institution. From 2019 to 2021 he was a reporter for seLecT magazine. In 2022 he presented the solo exhibition 'Domingo' at Casa de Cultura do Parque and has shown work at Museu de Arte do Rio, Espaço das Artes USP, and Sesc, among others. He was curator of the exhibitions 'Sala de vídeo: Aline Motta', 'Sala de vídeo: Melanie Smith', 'Pulso', 'migalhas', 'Disfarce', among others.