

Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel

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Swept Dust – Manoela Medeiros

(for my love)

In 1978, a team from Mexico City's power company was about to begin excavating an area in the city's historical district: The idea was to bury the electrical cables that would power the local subway. Before reaching 2 meters in depth, they were surprised to encounter a huge stone weighing 8.5 metric tons. It was a disc of about 3.2 meters in diameter with engravings made in the 14th century representing Coyolxauhqui, the Aztec moon goddess. Some years later, based on this and many other discoveries that would follow, the Mexican president decreed the demolition of 13 buildings in that region so a large archaeological excavation could be carried out. On the site, more than 7,000 important artifacts were found (many of them related to ancient ritual offerings) besides Huey Teocalli itself: Finally, the

Templo Mayor...

Archaeology is a science that studies material evidence of human presence to better understand how ancient peoples lived. Somewhere between verification and invention, archaeology is linked to the construction of hypothetical narratives about the past from discovered "vestiges" that may have resisted the passage of time. Dealing with fragments of extinct societies, this science strives to reconstitute cultural processes that have disappeared. Therefore, archaeology shows us that the ways of living are constantly in dispute and mutation.

The archaeological methodology is based on stages that range from identifying and prospecting a site to analyzing the discovered artifacts. Excavation is certainly one the most fundamental phases: it is the moment when the dust, which had been deposited and settled with time, is removed from an artifact. "Excavation" is precisely the name this artist from Rio de Janeiro, Manoela Medeiros, (1991) has given to the procedure she adopted to execute most of her work to date. Through this technique, the artist removes specific layers of paint from a wall using special tools, until reaching the more rigid underlying coating. Manoela usually makes geometric cuts on the wall surface and relates them to objects or to other geometric forms filled with fragments of paint taken from the previous "excavation."

By revealing the different layers of paint under the surface of the wall, Manoela indicates the transitory aspect of things and, therefore, the relationship between what is maintained and what transforms. In fact, the artist's entire production to this moment has arisen from a deep interest in the relationship between the body, the space, and the passage of time, and has been constructed as abstractions resulting from formal exercises. In the exhibition "Poeira Varrida" ["Swept Dust"], the artist's first solo show at Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel and a result from her residency in São Paulo, her pieces are based on the arid and violent experience of the city, while reflecting her research about rock art, pre-Columbian art, archaeological ceramics, ritualistic body painting, hieroglyphs, geoglyphs, fossils and so forth.

Even if the selected terms naming the pieces in the exhibition (such as "Vale," "Fronteira," "Território" and "Declive") are borrowed from geography, the relationship between these terms and other characteristics from her work (matter, form, technique, etc.) does not create codes that illustrate criticism, bold assertions or solutions for the world in which we live. If Manoela produces archaeology with her work, it is an inadvertent archaeology, which enunciates instead of narrating the past, connected to the counter-memory, insists on the presence, maintains things

in a problematic state without presenting a pre-determined solution, unearths the valley, the frontier, the territory and offers them to the public while relying on the power of the parallax. It is an archaeology whose last stage is the excavation. The analysis of vestiges is no longer part of the artist's processes. The public should do it.

Because it directly deals with discontinuity, archaeology may help us grasp the human drift since it is capable of providing us with instruments that argue against the notion of a single time or a single history associated with the idea of progress or evolution. While the relics may be used to construct an allegedly absolute discourse about history, they may also indicate the fact that history is just an invented memory – among many other possibilities.

Oswald de Andrade, once discussing ways to approach the Golden Age of Matriarchy, said that it would be necessary to create a “science of the erratic vestige.” Interestingly, “vestige” derives from the Latin word “footprint” and erratic might mean “wandering,” “straying.” The science of the erratic vestige would be a sort of archaeology poring over remaining relics of a past that continue alive, in movement, unstoppable, inconceivable in their completeness, unsolvable.

At a time when part of society begins to realize and denaturalize injustices, Manoela makes an effort not to build her work by making clear political speeches. In a context filled with suffered and marked injustices, in which many artists have chosen to answer the emergencies of the world by putting forward or making pointed criticisms, elaborations or solutions in their works, Manoela creates her pieces with a sort of naivety, as if, candidly, she opted for inadequacy instead of common sense.

Manoela sought to produce a work immune to contradictions simply by not balancing on a discursive, narrative, explanatory or historic (ever so loose when powerful) tightrope. On the contrary, her work extends throughout the possible areas of affection without guidance, supported by the complex network formed by the diversity of fruitions, questionings and elaborations.

The current exhibition consists of games of geometric rhythms and imperfect rhymes, from a series of reflections, repetitions, distortions and refutations – some more evident than others. In this show, Manoela also experiments, for the first time, in building objects that seem to emerge like eruptions, mutations, urban warts arising from materials of the city and the gallery. Here, who whisper to us about the impermanence or other aspect of time are not witnesses from ancient times, but rather the substance and relevance of things that point out the disputes that surround and energize what is perennial. In “Swept Dust,” still under the echo of excavation actions, objects from indecipherable times and senses emerge. The result is an engaging cartography in the hiatus, whose geometrical motives transversely cross both the work and the public. These intersections are quasi-visible indications of open paths, marks that suggest new excavations or future eruptions.

... Since Mexico City was built over a large lake, there are, presently, many regions in the city that are dangerously sinking into the ground as a consequence of fast urban growth and overpopulation. Some areas have sunk over 12 cm in just one year. However, the Templo Mayor has experienced a reverse situation. The temple began to emerge from the ground ever since the weight of several layers of earth from colonization that had been pressing it down, beginning in the 16th century, were removed: as of its excavation, this pyramid, which was the center of the Aztec religious life, has been moving steadily upwards.

Bravo.

Bernardo Mosqueira
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