

Title	The Florists from Beyond the Grave	Author	Ana Teixeira Pinto
Date	2015	Artist	Tamar Guimarães
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The Florist from Beyond the Grave

In the manifold film and installation works of Brazilian born artist Tamar Guimarães the dead are always at work, and the past is as porous as the present. Mining historical records and archives, the artist's intricate narratives treat history as a dynamic and ever-changing system of correspondences and retrospective links. Staging a back-and-forth-movement between personal biography and collective history, spiritism, nation-building, colonial narratives and modernist forms, create a grammar of displacement and deferral, in which trauma is always present but never apparent.

A Família do Capitão Gervásio [Captain Gervasio's Family] (2013/2014) --a collaboration with Danish artist Kasper Akhøj-- portrays the mental landscape as a social rather than psychological territory. The film juxtaposes two geographies, the first material, the second spectral. Revolving around the community of Palmelo, in the State of Goiás, a town in which roughly half of the inhabitants function as psychic conduits to the world of the spirits, while also holding day-jobs as civil servants, A Família do Capitão Gervásio recounts a medium's psychic voyage, in which she charts twenty astral cities hovering above the whole of the Brazilian territory. These cities reflect the system of governance of their earthly counterparts, howbeit in an idealized manner, populated by benign and enlightened agents of social democracy. Shot on several locations, which, though miles apart from each other, are edited into a spatial continuity, A Família do Capitão Gervásio ties the medium's journey into the after-life's boundless and phantasmal modernity to cinematic spectrality--cinema, the ultimate modern medium is also the consummate ashen-grey world of the haunted and the ghostly.

But the artist had already surveyed the psychic healing of the social-body in a previous work, A Man Called Love (2008), taking as its starting point the story of Brazilian psychic Francisco Candido Xavier, to whom the dead dictated more than 400 books. In Guimarães film's he appears as a channel for the contradictions in Brazil's social and cultural order, whose symptoms are social as well as psychological. During the dictatorship years, Xavier's visions of spectral nation building partake in the left's yearning for social justice. His assurances of redemption, however, conflate social utopia with the after life, deferring the prospect of revolution. Much like spiritism and socialism's, the film *Canoas* (2010) portrays another missed encounter, that of modernism and modernity. Shot in "Casa das Canoas", the house of famed architect Oscar Niemeyer, during a cocktail party, the film lingers on the impeccable architectural lines surrounded by lush vegetation, the glamorous attire of the party revellers and the servant's immaculate uniforms, pointing to the zone of friction between aesthetic ideals and social reality, intellectual discourse and lived experience. Whereas in *Canoas* the servants are fully integrated into the both the social order and domestic design, Guimarães earlier works *Listed Entries on Jan Leton and Jan Leton and the Archive* (2006), deal with the slave as a cipher for everything foreign. Jan Leton, was, as far as accounts go, an African slave who was sent to the Bailiff of Skagen as a gift in the early 19th century. As a signifier for the first wave of economic globalization, Jan Leton is portrayed as totally alien to the parochial economy of the local village. The villagers are threatened by his blackness and the priest refuses to grant him a Christian burial. To emphasize his bestiality, Jan Leton is always accompanied by a monkey. He stands for the inaugural moment of exposure to the absolute other--as if such exposure could be circumscribed to one singular moment. Whilst *Listed Entries on Jan Leton* lists all references to the slave Jan in alphabetical order, Jan

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Leton and the Archive recounts the artist's search for his elusive character. The ever-changing nature of his story, rather than an insight into his seemingly eventless life, provides a reciprocating yet distorting mirror of the life of the local community and how it attempts to narrate itself, at times as cruel and possibly callous, at times as kind and sheltering, yet always candid and remote from the slave-trade. In Jan Leton, as is often the case with Tamar Guimarães' work, the past is in constant dialogue with the present, historical events, however, are not simple chronological moments, they are place-holders for political positions. And stories, here as in most of the artist's work, often appears as a puzzle, in which there are too many extra pieces --each of which pointing to a partial truth; each of which expressing the identity and non-identity of the parts to the whole.