

Title	histórias	Author	Adriano Pedrosa
Date	2006	Artist	Valeska Soares
Publication	SOARES, Valeska. <i>Follies / Capricho</i> . New York: The Bronx Museum of the Arts; Monterrey: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey; Ontario: Art Gallery of Hamilton, 2006.		

histórias

[Unlike the more limited English 'histories', the Portuguese 'histórias', much like the French 'histoires' and the Spanish 'historias', may identify both fictional and non-fictional texts, thus marking at once the historical, the anecdotal, and the literary.]

Valeska Soares
texto por Adriano Pedrosa

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as an alternative, one may consider *história*. Unlike the more limited English “history,” the Portuguese *história*, much like the French *histoire* and the Spanish *historia*, may identify both fictional and non-fictional texts, thus marking at once the historical, the anecdotal, and the literary. The Portuguese *estória* means “story.” . Nevertheless, the *Dicionário Aurélio* recommends the use of *história* for both historical and fictional narratives. For the *dicionarista* this constitutes an exceptional situation that rejects more precise distinctions (the *passion* and *raison d’être* of the *dicionarista*, after all), in favor of definitions that encompass (much like Freud’s *Unheimliche*, or uncanny) their opposites. This encompassing has crucial implications: throwing the historical discipline into fiction and vice versa, blurring the boundaries that demarcate them, in fact, abolishing them altogether by bringing them under a single heading. This singularity acknowledges the impossibility of history (in its English usage), of translation, of representation, of recording. Ultimately this constitutes a dis-organizational gesture.

If once I was alluding to, evoking, marking, or suggesting binary oppositions (the essay and the paper, the French and the American), although always taking into consideration their perils and limitations, I will conclude by attempting to offer a term which, while alternative to history, does not offer itself as its symmetric opposite. For *história*, or perhaps the *história* that is alluded to here—an ideal, paradigmatic, utopian, at times impossible *história*—accepts both history and story. This *história* blends the critical and creative text (and it is difficult to be precise about exactly when and where). Criticism and literature merge; the reader is not the consumer of the work, but its producer (much like Barthes’s notion of the text that wishes to be re-written by its reader).¹ *História* could then be said, in Pascal and Malebranche’s terms, to be even more “degenerate, impossible [...], not very serious and even dangerous” than the essay. It may lure you with closure, completeness, conclusion, consummation, but only as a deliberate stratagem.²²

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1 “[...] the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text” writes Roland Barthes in *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992) p.4.

2 in association with stratagem: *slyness*, *astuteness*, and *subtlety* are underlined and privileged over *enmity*, *adversity*, and *hostility* towards the confronted object.

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which seems close to the hotel, though in which the writer has apparently not yet been. He is uncertain. There he finds a small and poorly lit bookstore filled with new and used books. He is alone at the bookstore, except for the clerk, an old bearded man in gold-rimmed spectacles who examines a pile of a dozen or so leather-bound books, leafing through each volume attentively—the encyclopedia, perhaps? The writer wanders through the bookstore’s small rooms, one leading into another in an improbable architecture, squeezing himself carefully through the narrow corridors. Among the overstuffed and untidy bookshelves dedicated to literature, philosophy, psychoanalysis, American history and world history, art history and criticism, architecture and design, music, theater, dance, fashion, politics and sociology, travel and tourism, healthcare and self-help, cooking and gardening, the writer encounters familiar titles and authors under new and old book covers, which bring him comfort in such an estranged setting: Alys, Barthes, Calvino, Drummond, Eliasson, Freud, Gonzales-Torres, Herkenhoff, Irigaray The writer accidentally stumbles into a particularly crowded bookshelf, and an old volume falls on the floor: a French edition of Prévost’s *Le Jardin Secret*. He picks it up, and, as he opens it, a fragment of a letter, typewritten, unsigned, and undated, is revealed: “V., I think of you more often than I wished [sic] I did.” He returns the fragment to the book and places the book back on the shelf, between copies of a Mexican edition of Prado’s *Jardín Cerrado* and a Portuguese edition of Ribeiro’s *Jardim das Tormentas*. He reaches for a copy of the

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and the cotton that once preserved them now mummifies them. The beautiful gradually begins to adopt morbid features. Gardens, labyrinths, and mirrors are recurring themes in Valeska's fictions, and testify to her Borgesean inclinations (Jorge Luis Borges, Argentina, 1899-1986). Vanishing Point (1998) is composed of stainless steel tanks that allude to the labyrinthine shapes in diagrams of classical European gardens, transformed into minimalist sculptures and filled with a perfumed liquid. In the museum, this work establishes a precise dialogue with the architecture: centered on one of the exhibition space's aluminum columns, its geometrized reflecting pools cast back an image of the mirrored tiles of one of the walls, whilst relating to the Pampulha lake, next to which the museum is situated. Once more, the sweet perfume, which at first is seductive, soon turns into its opposite through its intoxicating excess.

Two works appropriate bibliographies, references to other histórias [In the original Portuguese, história refers both to histories and stories. T.N.], which were compiled and published in exhibition catalogues as "texts" about the artist by the curator, and composed of titles that contain the word "mirror" (Untitled, 2002) and "garden" (histórias, 1998), in Portuguese, French, Italian, Spanish, and English. The mirror histórias were applied onto the museum's mirror wall in vinyl — a work exhibited here for the first time; the garden histórias were inscribed in bas-relief on copper rings that wrap around false columns on the mezzanine, also articulated in relation to the original columns of the museum.

Three new works appropriate the actual space and history of the building in a more direct manner. Valeska created a series of photographs by appropriating and manipulating period films of the Casino from the 1940s. In one video Valeska creates a loop using a shot she appropriated from a film featuring regular visitors dancing at the Casino's nightclub, in which the camera moves in a half-circle. A video appropriates a loop from a 180-degree shot from one of those films that features regular visitors dancing at the Casino's nightclub. Another work, Tonight (2002), the artist's first video installation, produced with the museum's support, was recorded and projected inside the nightclub. It consists of digitally superimposed images of lone dancers who meet one another fortuitously on the screen. The video plays with the codes of ballroom dancing, separating couples and disrupting the dominance of the man over the woman, evoking desire, projection, and incompleteness.

Valeska's works are an open and generous invitation to interpretation. In them the artist combines seductive and precarious, beautiful and alien, potent and fragile elements that are imbued with personal histórias and references, or that invite us to project our own. In the end, it is up to the viewer to accept the invitation to interpretation, as he/she discovers the fictions whose trajectories have only been opened by the works, but which ultimately are left to us to construct and explore. As with desire itself.

— Adriano Pedrosa, curator

Valeska Soares (Belo Horizonte, 1957) Lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Translated from the Portuguese by Veronica Cordeiro.

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There has been an insistence on a textual approach to the works. For that purpose, one makes use of literary strategems (in association with stratagem; slyness, astuteness, and subtlety are underlined and privileged over enmity, adversity, and hostility towards the confronted object). The work becomes a text, its interpretation, a reading. It must be noted, however, that there is no linearity in the text (in the work as such)—the succession of words, sentences, paragraphs, pages, and chapters is deceptive. There is no progress, only trajectories. Thus, more than prose, poetry, essay, or criticism, it is the map that offers itself as analogous text to the work (as text). Only in the map can we begin our journey from any point (and not only on the cross street or continent which we find ourselves). Yet the map presents a representative disturbance-indisposition-discomfort: its charts of colors, lines, and typologies, its strong graphic and vectorial inclination—all point to a desire to represent the landscape and orient the subject, affirming precisely where he finds himself. We thus return to the literary text, more justly to fiction. Yet one must abolish the enumeration that so often finds refuge at the foot of the page, unweave the pages that are bound and collated. (There is something enchanting and profoundly significant in the design of certain French editions which, even today, still insist on requiring their first readers to slice the pages of the recently acquired book, so that only then they may [or not] unveil the text which the book holds. [See, for example, *Mal d'Archive*, by Jacques Derrida, in the 1995 edition of Editions Gallilée, Paris]). *Histórias*. This is where we find ourselves.