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ERIKA VERZUTTI

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When describing Erika Verzutti's work there is a tendency to make lists. "Heads, breasts, genitalia, vases, fruits, vegetables, animals and monsters,"¹ for example, or "Mickey Mouse, an eggplant, beach scenes, a swallow, a church, shrubbery and climbing vines."² Undoubtedly this impulse stems from the work itself: informal, dense, inherently elegant yet unabashedly crude. Installations composed through a process of seemingly unedited accumulation are in fact carefully delineated by their abundance of media, reference points, processes, accidents, and anecdotes. Loose but not disparate, Verzutti's self-sustaining environments enumerate their elements while also functioning as their container. A ceremonial attention to placement (taking into account both the physical practicalities of the gallery and the more esoteric elemental positioning of the space) is reflected in her venerative compositions. The prismatic strength of Verzutti's practice lies in the fecundity of a discrete object being equal to that of an intricate network of such objects.

Verzutti's new body of work for the 2013 *Carnegie Internacional* expands on her interest in revealing the beauty and symbolic power of common (both in the sense of low/undesirable and familiar/populist) objects. Just as a lattice of old paintbrushes bristling from a bronzed pineapple became the courtship display of an amorous peacock (*Pavão*; 2008) in *Pet Cemetery* at Galeria Fortes Vilaça, here a collection of tropical fruit is erected as a sharp totem of some implied ritual. Verzutti is known for her bronze and cement casts of fruit and vegetables; her use of the casting process as a means of object making can be read as metaphorical rather than utilitarian. The multiplicity inherent in the process of casting objects (the models, the off-casts, the discarded molds and materials) results in many layers of removal from the original form that felt the artist's hand, though each of those layers necessitates the very touch it seeks to obscure. In this way, a finished object holds within itself the knowledge of every cast that contributed to its final form.

The figurative and material links within a single object enable a reactive relationship to the creation of the whole installation in a process the artist describes as a progression, allowing her to "determine new shapes, new works,

sprouts." This "continue and expand gesture,"³ as Verzutti names it, is one that she has employed before. It is seen in her collages of pastries expanded by watercolor drawings, such as *Crocante* (*Crunchy*; 2006), which bear a playful resemblance in tone and technique to Man Ray's collages *Nut Girls* (*Les Filles des Noix*; 1941). This two-dimensional layering is brought into sculptural proportions through a more topographical abundance akin to Mike Kelley's *Framed and Frame* (1999). Verzutti's more recent application of this reproductive gesture occurred with *Bicho de 7 Cabeças* (*7 Headed Monster*; 2010), where she invited seven artists to design a different head for one "body" she created—the heads and the body responding to one another throughout their respective processes of creation.

This understanding of an art object as a bodily container echoes the Neo-Concretist view of a sculpture as a "quasi-corpus," or "a being whose reality is not exhausted by the external relationships of its element; a being that can be deconstructed into parts for analysis but can only be fully understood through a direct phenomenological approach."⁴ A mid-twentieth-century Brazilian movement, Neo-Concretism rejected mechanized and overly intellectual approaches to art making in favor of a sensual, intuitive relationship between the artist and the object whereby the work of art is seen as "being similar to a living organism."⁵ Though Verzutti's work resonates with aspects of Neo-Concretism (as well as *Tropicália*), curator José Augusto Ribeiro has noted that her "relationship with previous art is not resolved in a pure and simple citation ... references to art history are open and prospective, affective and analytic in a single blow."⁶ Certainly, Verzutti's semi-abstractions exhibit none of Neo-Concretist Lygia Clark's early geometrics or her later explicitly participatory works. However, a connection between the two artists is found in their shared location—what Regina Célia Pinto, in her writing on Neo-Concretism, describes as "somewhere between nature and culture."⁷

Many elements of Verzutti's new installation move away from casting in favor of a more explicit veneration of nature through culture. For instance, *Cinco Ovos* (*Five Eggs*; 2013) presents several ovoid forms nestled into a platform of bronze held up by four wedges of mineral stone. This altar, when read alongside the slender vertical rope of *Egg Tower* (2013), makes manifest familiar themes of germination and reproduction previously elucidated by way of process. Still present are the anthropomorphic characters reminiscent of *Pet Cemetery* and the cast vegetation of *Batalha* (2010). The addition of shrinelike presentations as well as objects acting as texts or hieroglyphic tablets, such as *The Book of Gems* (2013) and *Lua* (*Moon*; 2013), augment a sense of ceremonial mystery. Upon entering her gallery one has the feeling of having stumbled upon a site of ritual, composed by way of Verzutti's idiosyncratic sacred geometry.

—Lauren Wetmore

1. José Augusto Ribeiro, *Antonio Malta and Erika Verzutti*, exh. brochure (São Paulo: Centro Cultural São Paulo, 2012).
 2. Rodrigo Moura, "Indirectly, Flowers," in *Erika Verzutti* (Rio de Janeiro: Cobogo, 2007), 88.
 3. Email to the author, January 9, 2013.

4. Ferreira Gullar, quoted in Frederico Morais, *Neoconcretismo: 1959–1961* (Rio de Janeiro: Banerj Gallery, 1984), unpaginated.
 5. Regina Célia Pinto, "Quatro olhares à procura de um leitor, mulheres importantes, arte e identidade" (Four Views in Search of a Reader, Important