

Title Cristiano Lenhardt: Hollow monuments, scraped radiators
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Hollow monuments, scraped radiators

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1) future

Cristiano Lenhardt's latest production involves, among other things, the appropriation of obsolete objects and defective parts, using graphic motifs and graceful shapes to either screen off or reveal light. Until now, I had acquired scattered knowledge of his art production in a solo exhibition of his objects, a few film screenings in group exhibitions, and lithographs in different shows. Indeed, I did not have a grasp of the entire corpus. The works were sometimes narrative, sometimes not; they established different relationships with culture and talked with various forms of image production. Here, this seems to be a virtue. Lenhardt's vigor resides in his disquiet and in his ability to create such varied pieces using a relatively simple vocabulary.

Geometric shapes frequently attend his work in different manners. They may appear in prints and clothing fabrics; they may be used to control the light output of consumer electronics, or serve as inspiration for constructive sculptures. Even so, given its status as work by a single artist, recurrences are commonly found here and there. Lenhardt's poetics is not structured; it derives from interests manifested with more or less intensity in each work.

In recent years, the artist's geometric work often showed a graphic bent. One can clearly see his effort to deal with patterns and to reverse its rigid organization. The artist superimposes designs, intervenes in them, and shows their wear and tear.

Over barred objects and papers folded in a certain order, the artist makes delicate interventions, almost nothing: it is a small incision here, a scratch over there, a print that does not fit entirely in the crease it should color. Sometimes, the action of the artist is more like an accident, with a tear. But what seems to lose force are solemn, imposed structures.

Interestingly, in different narrative work, something of that fragility is revealed. Maybe it is an unconscious interest. For example, sometime ago, the artist staged solemnities in a touching way. In them, rigid gestures appear more fragile than they seemed.

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2) past

Cristiano Lenhardt enacted a flag-raising ceremony on the roof of São Paulo's Copan building in 2006. Everything was done properly. Accompanied by only a bugler playing the ceremony's military salute, he pulled the halyard to slowly hoist a flag fluttering in the wind. It was done solemnly but there was no garrison, podium, uniform or audience. No attempt to deceive anybody. Lenhardt simply hoisted the flag as if it were an ordinary everyday activity.

The event gave rise to a film called *Copan - Ao Vivo* [Copan Live]. In the footage, that scenario broadened its meaning: one could tell it was not just a farcical civic event, but an imitation of its own television screening. With solemn shots cutting to an attentive non-audience and all the other conventions we associate with a celebration of this genre, so dear to teachers of OSPB¹ and retired military.

That flaky re-enactment brought to mind ceremonies that morning TV used to broadcast on national holidays such as September 7, Independence Day in Brazil. Monotonous breakfast-time TV programs. My impression is that this type of broadcasting prompted a new format for the solemnity. Framed by TV cameras, flags hoisted in schools, barracks, squares and rallies constituted a different *mise-en-scène*. There was etiquette for the musical repertoire to be played, the posture of the people revering the flags, and the graveness required for it all. All participants had to submit to this rigid structure. A proper framing for their bodies was another prerogative. We saw only the central elements that mattered; the margins were to be ignored. However, in Lenhardt's film and in much of his oeuvre, the structure that organizes elements is there in place, whereas component parts or elements are fragile and sensitive. His elements are sounds, actors, and scenes. All we see are the margins.

We see them in the enactment mode, but even more so through the relation of the flag-raising ceremony to the camera. Rather than closing in on a grandiose scene removed from the ordinary world, the camera places the scene in a jumbled world. The image does not focus a particular event; it features events as just another action among others in the city. The film takes the flag hoisting away from a kind of proscenium stage, relating it to the place of its enactment - including street noises and atmosphere of the surroundings.

The image relates the event to its context, changes some spaces unrelated to the flag-raising into parts of its scenario, and casts buildings, objects and wind as its characters. Thus it enables viewers to put the scene in perspective. Although executed without illusionistic pretension, a gesture of such pomp

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and circumstance has its meaning altered when placed next to other things. Perspectival space is nothing but a space of proportional and geometric relationships where we see some greater figures and other relatively smaller. The event becomes almost nothing. Its scale is quite small next to large constructions. Its sounds are just wisps near the noise of air and noisy car waste that the road brings into the image.

As the scene progresses, the character of flag-raising as an extraordinary event is blown away by a strong wind from above, as is any semblance of its monumental significance. When viewed from close up, though fragile and not very persuasive from the point of view of verisimilitude, the event may be seen as solemn. Yet, viewed amid all those other things, it is like a grain of sand in the desert: its meaning is totally lost; it is no longer even a ceremony or monumental - just a gesture among so many others. No more solemn a gesture than that of a person flagging down a bus.

Given the inscription on the flag - AO VIVO -, the scene seems to be a current event, without aspiring to be a historic milestone from the past, to be revered by future generations, much less one foreshadowing some kind of future. Everything is so fragile. The costume is of someone who has to climb up on a rooftop to line-hang laundry to dry. The soundtrack is badly played, with wrong breathing and a few screeching notes (despite pretty flourishes). Everything indicates a certain imperfection being repeated on an endless loop, like things people do every day. It is a perpetual present of insignificant gestures.

With this operation, the artist empties the meaning of this ritual. What was once monumental, now becomes commonplace. The solemnity, or the march, seems too trivial to be treated as something serious. The monument crumbles. It becomes a trivial gesture. The enactment is graceful in its melancholy and meaninglessness. No matter how hard it tries, it does not mobilize passions or have strong civic or iconographic meaning. At best, it is a joke. The beauty of the scene is its fragility.

3) present

This process is featured in many of Cristiano Lenhardt's works. In his recent graphic production, at times the artistic aspect comes forth as a break in symmetry, at times, as a flaw in the structure of a radiator. But the artist does not seem to be making an effort to hold on to more rigid forms. Both prints and scraped radiators are based on well-constructed - and in many cases symmetrical - structures that organize space. His intervention takes the form of suggesting that relationships may invent a space within this space of strict

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determinations. It may appear as colored forms that suggest a constructivist painting, or may emerge as a light drawing, negating the asepsis of an automotive part.

But everything is somewhat flawed, somewhat diluted. It is structure that continues to dominate the construction of forms - as if this rigidity were to be diluted at a certain point in time, and forms asked for a kind of rest from the rhythm imposed beforehand by planning.

Rather than a refreshing rest, this would be a low-spirited rest of someone whose arms are sore at the end of a long day's work - a relief for those who pause after performing the same task for a long time. Like Tereza Batista, a character from one of Jorge Amado's novels, some of Lenhardt's forms appear to be "weary of war". And they build different spaces.

In 2008, Lenhardt started attending a lithography workshop. By 2010, he had incorporated graphic art as a key feature of his production. Patterns, not necessarily decorative ones, appeared in the costumes worn by his video characters as well as in his interventions in objects such as televisions and radiators. More importantly, he resolutely took up the development of a lithograph series on paper, adopting a work method in which regularity and irregularity seem engaged in a constant dialogue.

Here again, Lenhardt started from very clearly marked structures that relate to other compositions. Perhaps, as in Jasper Johns' words, there is a space inside the other, a space on top of the other.

His lithographs were conceived as works of folding paper. He thought of a form, divided the paper and folded it to get the rectangle into the envisioned form. Having shaped it into a small trapeze, for example, Lenhardt used his litho template to apply a graphic pattern on it. However, as soon as the paper is unfolded, the coloring gets dispersed. The sheet of paper retains a symmetrical pattern of creases or grooves resulting from the paper folding, and many white spaces separating homogeneous color areas from what had been a regular geometric shape.

To fill in the previously white area, Lenhardt uses another geometric shape on which he applies a different printed pattern or color field. Then, when unfolding this paper folding, two effects were observed: one caused by the creases or grooves, the other by the color printing. The traces resulting from paper folding suggested a symmetric space drawn in geometric, triangular and rectangular shapes. This would be a kind of grid taking up the paper - a structure that tends to be more regular and determines a pattern of occupation of space.

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The colored shapes seem to be looser. The relationship between a purple rectangle and another seems to be interrupted by a large white space that does not follow the guidelines previously established by creases and grooves. So we grasp different spatial relationships as we relate colored forms among themselves. There seem to be many breathing spaces between colors, while the soft paper folds create an almost decorative order. While creases and grooves determine regularity, colors inscribe spaces rather than patterns, thus negating the grid structure.

This color structure takes on a wide array of different configurations. Sometimes, this work gives us the impression that although not a constructivist artist, Lenhardt follows the manual of pursuit of the widest possible range of relationships in a very lean repertoire of forms.

Interestingly, sometimes this color allocation brings to mind the large empty spaces left in some paintings by Décio Vieira.² "Empty spaces" is not an adequate expression because Vieira's colored shapes were sometimes oddly spaced with more neutral colors. Although covering the surface of the painting in a regular fashion, the shapes had many gaps between them that were duly marked by varying brightness of hues filling in spaces.

At times, this distance suggests a breathing space, a serial order coexisting with another more sensitive one. Just as the most dissonant notes, they may be separated in a composition by intervals of silence, or by a more regular harmony line. Here the notes emphasize a more affective arrangement, as opposed to grid-type sequencing. Such coexistence in Lenhardt's works - although very different - seems to be of a similar nature.

In any case, although not eschewing the formal determination of structure imparted by creases and grooves in the paper, color points to distances and intervals that prompt us to see different spatial relationships. Life can be lived at a different pace that does not arise from the regularity of creases and grooves. I am thinking of prints such as *Azul marrom* [brown blue], *Vermelho verde* [green red] or those made with overlapping lines.

But note that all the colors and lines are faint or fragile. There appears to be no overlap between rigidity and softness. This kind of overlapping across compositions, or between groove and color in the case of engraving, re-emerges in Lenhardt's production on other objects taken from other circulation. Here their character seems even more revealing. Just as color complements creases or grooves but suggests other forms of experience rather than just following a structure, intervening on the surface of objects also seems to indicate something similar but in a more obvious manner.

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These are simpler works. The complexity of the prints is not even subtly touched on by the interpretation of color and line structures as opposite and complementary. Now, however, Lenhardt also uses non-artistic materials to explore their formal properties - televisions, automobile radiators, plastic sheeting and the state-lighting fixtures used by nightclubs.

I do not really know why, but they look like scrap. Their appearance is that of obsolete rejects of consumer society; the radiators give us this impression because they look like worn-out or damaged objects; the television sets are quite unlike those found in stores - not the newest appliances. Even the laser devices, although not decayed or outdated, look like toys, something superfluous.

Yet none of these objects is shown as consumer good, they are presented as surfaces on which the artist performs gentle interventions. Radiators are displayed just as they were found. Lenhardt does not intervene on them. They are planes divided by lines and breathing spaces. In perfect condition, they would look like a kind of perfect serial structure. But this is not the case. They are stained, scratched/scraped and dirtied. The gesture produces a wear-and-tear on the original industrial appearance of the object. Here the opposition is between the consistent markings that order the piece and the uneven lines showing what tracks the passage of time has left on a structure that is serially repeated. The uneven lines are totally unpredictable. The structure is precise. Overlaying all this order another rhythm appears, another pulsation.

Television sets are also featured, more like surfaces than volumes. Opaque surfaces shield their screens, shrouding their brightness. But Lenhardt makes incisions on these coverings, thus creating designs that greatly differ from the rectangular format of the TV screen. Like in earlier works, the artist resorts to minimal gestures to overlay different pattern designs, thus causing objects to change their behavior. Finally, after losing their function and their use, those devices may acquire an unexpected role and perhaps find a vocation.

In a work shown at Phosphorus in São Paulo, in 2013, Lenhardt placed two nightclub lighting devices behind a black rectangular screen, setting a strident color spectrum in motion to create a wide range of patterns. However, the screen allowed viewers to see very little of all that. So much the better.

The artist made two delicate incisions and that Rococo luminous weirdness looked like constantly changing light beams. The cover-up was to keep viewers from seeing anything; the lighting, to let them get lost in a repetition of ecstasies. The crack is like a beautiful day that does not change the order of events but take people to perceive extraordinary things.

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Cristiano Lenhardt's artistic *modus operandi* is more this key of discrete and fragile experience than the ostentatious aspect of decoration. Life slumbers on until passions are aroused. In his work, it is through these cracks that extraordinary experiences take place. Although working with crude objective forms, his poetics seems to speak to the intangible joys of intimacy.

1- Acronym for Organização Social e Política Brasileira (Brazilian Political and Social Organization), a subject introduced in the syllabus of Brazilian schools in 1962 that became mandatory in 1969, during the military regime. Supposedly an introduction to civic affairs and rights and duties of citizens, OSPB was often used as vehicle for nationalistic propaganda. This course was discontinued in 1991.

2- Décio Luiz Monteiro Vieira (1922-1988) was a Brazilian artist of the Neo-concrete movement. The unrestricted and gentle articulation of color geometric shapes in his painting approximates Cristiano Lenhardt's lithographs.