

## **BRUTAL PURITY**

Paulo Sergio Duarte

For, in a measured way,  
The brutal is also necessary,  
For the pure to recognize itself.  
Hölderlin (1)

### **The intimate of the landscape**

Ivens Machado's arch is there – in downtown Rio de Janeiro, at the entrance of Uruguaiana Street, where Assembléia and São José Streets both end, facing Largo da Carioca, where the homonymous street starts. A one-minute distance from José Resende's sculpture *O Passante* (The Passerby). They can see each other. Great bustle, people coming from all directions, cars and buses rushing by, a transit of things, of men, women, children. As if it were not enough, drivers honk their horns: a din, not a noise, a hellish din, with all the imaginable sounds – vehicle motors, preacher sermons, street vendors in their stalls advertising their wares, brats whining and whimpering, music pouring out of from cd stores, beggars and pulp fiction sellers. In a silent way, only those that hurry past – employees and liberal professionals – the spitfire showman, *O Passante*, and Machado's arch. They seem like beings of all species, we don't know any more if we're in the middle of a page of a short story penned by João Antonio, or in the realm of the anthropological essay, or if we are experiencing – live and in color – the fantastic zoology created by Borges. With the evening arrive the drunken beggars, the destitute families of teenage parents and the poor workers who, at the end of the day, don't have the money for the fare to go back home during the weekdays – the street dwellers. The arch is caught up in this complicated web with which we have grown used to, although we can't stand it. Caught up? No, it has adhered, it has opted for participation.

Only the old, stately church and monastery of Santo Antonio, from atop the remnants of the hill, torn down in the 50s to open up an avenue and to initiate the landfill at Gloria, contemplate the urban scene – more dignified than the huge buildings of the surrounding state-run enterprises. The rest is pure ground, moving between the asphalt, the cement, the stone and the subway mouths that spit and swallow people.

Except on Sundays, when the city center is deserted.

The arch wakes up, alone, imposing itself – it's slanted, or better, it potentiates the well-known neo-concrete torsion, that subtle one, making it evident in a brutal and inelegant stride of someone in a hurry. But, static, it stops – it doesn't go forward nor backward. As if sorry for adhering so precociously to that living, and poorly woven, net. Depending on the viewpoint of the observer, it wants to go the open space – Largo da Carioca – or it wants to go on down Uruguaiana Street. With the reinforced concrete showing, it's rough and tough and stocky, like a countryman described by Euclides da Cunha (2). It's not in conformity with the elegance of an aesthetic so well assimilated by 'design'. From constructivism it inherited movement, abstraction, that's all; but potentiating them for the scale of disorder in the world it will have to be inscribed into.

We know triumphal arches. They inaugurate in the Western world the idea of what a monument was to be – they punctuated the Roman Empire. Constantine’s arch is still there in Rome, displaying the lay and political use of an artwork to celebrate the anticipated Emperor’s feat – humanists would later on call it historical. A work made as a memento, for the future, of the victory of the powerful. Prospective vision, a novelty, different from Hellenic tradition, a Latin invention (3). Ivens Machado’s arch springs from the wish of modern power to punctuate the city with artworks to, purportedly, humanize it, camouflaging disaster, much in the same way as a doctor trying to heal metastasis with small grafts of ‘healthy’ tissue. The contemporary arch knows that it is not about any triumph – ambiguous, it doesn’t accept defeat, it’s a strange work of art. It doesn’t try seduction, yet it doesn’t shy away – it makes itself present and, after Sunday, despite the daily bustle, it doesn’t get mixed up with the rest and it shows up, individualizing itself. Yet, at the same, time refusing order, or better, what is commissioned by power, it almost hides itself, it doesn’t fall into the temptation of aestheticizing the chaotic and destitute human space. Machado’s arch will always be a radical anti-monument. Sympathetic, an intimate of the landscape, contained in its mass, it doesn’t celebrate anything neither opens new vistas. There will never be, here, the perspective that culminates in the Triumph, through the clearance of the Carousel, with the Tuileries, the Concorde Obelisk and the Champs-Élysées in the middle of it. The gaze doesn’t end at the Étoile – it’s another public space here.

But there had been antecedents of this experience of mine facing the arch in downtown Rio de Janeiro.

### **The impudence of the raw shape**

I remember it well. It was at the 1981 São Paulo Biennial. I saw a big chunk of reinforced concrete, an ovoid shape, purposefully imperfect in its movement and finishing – it hung suspended by various steel cables that transpierced it and fanned out towards the higher wood beams supported by iron-sheet pyramids. It was studded with broken-glass shards all over its surface – the common aspect of the tops of outer walls enclosing properties in Brazil – a threat to the body of the candidate to transgression – physical limits evidencing the beginning of a private space. The blades of the shards sparkled in their greenish, brownish transparency. The phallic shape insisted on fixating itself with all its weight – aggressive in its brutal articulations, no virtuality at all; it was sheer presence. It evidenced the raw material and the work, with the sacrifice of the shape that common sense waited for. But it was far from being amorphous. Supposing that we could reduce it to the opposition raw/cooked, we would be in the world of raw shapes. Yet, of a perverted, inverted rawness, for it is anti-natural, calculated in its details, to inscribe itself as denial within the territory inherited from the precise shapes of constructivism. To render it more complicated, strangeness and familiarity coexisted.

My experience with that work in the 1981 Biennial would confirm itself each time I was confronted with new works by Ivens Machado.

I noticed that, along with the metaphors, these evident meanings that its rawness shoots out in two clear directions – low-end urban architecture and the sexual universe –

they side by side, metonymically, by contiguity, produce other senses in its physical structure. I insist that rawness digests the constructivist inheritance, in a critical sense, within the historical context of Brazil's post-constructivist moment: in the economy of materials, in the substantive presence; rather materializing than qualifying meanings, in the manner of the best hard and dry texts, with no adjectives, difficult to be totally realized. And, above all, in the rules of its articulations, in its movements, in a clear-syntax grammar, as a scripture that discards the luxury of figures of rhetoric to make itself explicit in its lexicon and in the formal connection between its elements. But written with rough, impudent calligraphy, without the fineries of good jewelry. In 1979, Eduardo Jardim pertinently observed:

“Against a project that is not worried about the definition of purposes and the function of art, the works by Ivens Machado represent a blockage. This is the first reason for the broken-glass shards on the walls. A frontier that limits *against*. At first sight, it's about restoring a traditional difference. At first sight only, and I will say why. Against the idea of a tactile art, where the artwork would be the accommodation of gesture and experience, the objects made by Ivens Machado prevent any intimacy. Things cannot be touched. If I touch them, I will get hurt. It's materially necessary to shy away from the tactile, from the smooth handling, from the good playfulness.

It occurs that here the relation artwork/public is retrieved in a different sense as it is held in tradition.

Here, at the same time that the limit denies, shuns, it also instates. And this is the fundamental trait of these works. Ivens Machado's output constitutes the initial landmarks of a territory that is the territory of art. When it says 'I am not', it's also saying: henceforth artistic production has its own space. This is the second reason for the presence of the glass shards. In the first place, defenses; in the second place, foundations. So, it all works as a wall – that is at the same time a divider and that which fences in the plot of ground where the house is built.” (4)

Such is the critical rigor of Ivens Machado, which may be eclipsed by the courage to expose, in a brutish way, social tensions in symbiosis with sexual tensions. The issues presented are not so few. Let's first examine the eclipse, that which inhibits the reading of structural rigor and acts in favor of the senses that I improperly called evident and that gave to the strange shape its familiar aspect. Evident meaning is that one that burns off mediation, one that overtly surrenders, dispensing with imagination, evoking the senses in an immediate fashion. Mediations exist in this work and there are many. Why did they give me the impression of being absent? I believe that, firstly, it's because of the materials that powerfully act in the work, for they have nothing unusual in them, being rather trivial, we come across them every day. (5). Then, for the ostensive presence of the raw shape that wishes to be excessive, an exaggeration, but paradoxically, with a discreet frequency, as we shall see in future unfoldments. It grows when it eliminates polished finishing, it seeks to identify with details of the bare and ugly precariousness of low-class habitations spreading throughout the slums and the outskirts of Brazil's big cities, where the essential is materialized by necessity. A form so opposed to the abstract, minimal essentiality dictated by the religious and moral values of the fancy objects, furniture and rural architectures of

puritan denominations in the U.S. that proliferated during colonial times. (6)

In Machado, the visible reinforced concrete – sometimes pure, gray, cast without the exactitude of planar molds, sometimes mixed with color pigments, evoking the poverty of those shacks and joints that surround us – underdevelopment certificates in the arrogant globalized world. Departing from ‘brutalism’ which emerges as a modern architectural style, yet moving away from it by using the coarse finishing of low-end architecture. However, these bodies attuned with the materials used by them, reject any trace of humility – they are bodies in revolt; from the eruptions in their own skins up to their configurations that are strange to the ambient, not seeking frivolous communicability.

They’re there to disturb, in a certain way. Wouldn’t it be much better if time had stopped at the Bossa Nova days, at the intelligent and subtle neo-concrete torsion? We would still be in the sublimation field, in the best sense of the term. For those who think so, everything subsequent to it fell downhill, in ludic experimentalisms, in cheap figuration politicization, in conceptual dematerialization. But some works, like those by Ivens Machado, emerge – and they are not alone – that without rejecting the reflexive moment of the concept, make it a point to materialize with a plastic poignancy that does not allow for peaceful continuity of tradition – a characteristic that accompanies the best production in contemporary art both in Brazil and in Italy, in this period of time. All this without any pact with ‘post-modern’ hullabaloo. Its excess, when we examine the development of his oeuvre over time, it oftentimes discreet, reserved, resulting from subtraction, but without any shyness. But in this, he gets weakened in the trade of forms. And, above all, that dash of ‘primitive’ that he conveys to us is a refined choice, not a naive one. A belief in the universal human persists, sort of a possible Kant, that is only rendered viable with the change of Rousseau’s sign, the bad savage – the contemporary learned artist producing according to the conditions the world offers him and that he has to reinvent. This built-in awareness embedded in his work asserts its identity but weakens its circulation. The market and the curatorial show-business don’t like that – restrained excess does not suffice them, for the hullabaloo is lacking.

### **Revealing to develop**

The sexual dimension is weightier. It is offensive in the way it manipulates prejudices, the way it handles taboos, the way it breaks up with false hypocrisy and exposes the failure of the full accomplishment of desire.

It’s no use negating the visual aspect of the work, putting it on a secondary plane. At certain moments, as in the show at Galeria Saramenha in Rio de Janeiro in 1979 and at the 1981 São Paulo Biennial, they are actual erotic nightmares that take shape before our very eyes. And here again, in the associations with the body and with phallic order, the work comes in opposition to the plentiful and easy imagery of consumerist society, so much in tune with the witty refinements of publicity, by means of a raw and brutish sensuality. It’s easy to realize that physical intimacy with these bodies/sculptures will cause slashing and bleeding. There we have, perhaps, what would be concealed under Jupiter’s cape. Sitting on his throne, with Thetis, the most beautiful of the fifty Nereids at his feet, beseeching him. An act that, as we know it, was not consummated due to the fear of the male in relation to

the prophecy, according to which someone even mightier would be born from such a union. A scene depicted by Ingres, on a painting which is today an icon of the male domination over the feminine (7).

This would be another revelation in Ivens Machado's oeuvre. Here, the word is construed, not in the sense ascribed to it by theologians and philosophers, but by the photographers of the Portuguese language. (The Italian, the French, the British and others – more 'technical' – prefer 'development' to define the chemical procedures that transform, in the darkness, the film sensitized by light into an image captured on the film's surface.). We, in Portuguese stick to the revelation of the mystery in the lab, keeping the magic of photography within the word, before digital resources turn it definitively into a museum item. So, to reveal, for Ivens, works as unrestraint, and let's say what psychoanalysts know – unrestrainedness is not the return of the repressed. It's the operation in which the refused material is exhibited alongside its symptom. They are worked out together – material and symptom – fully entitled to all free associations. But it's a subtle operation, that the engineering mentality, so operative, takes long to grasp. Unrestrainedness is a development, in the sense of photographic technique, of a situation, whose synthesis-image might as well be that one depicted by Ingres – the picture revealed, who would show up and flesh out in three dimensions would be Machado's *Consolador* (Dildo). Zeus metamorphosed in his significant form. Fair Thetis – who is almost effaced in her action – would vanish in a reversed attitude to that in *Saint Theresa's Ecstasy* by Bernini, exposing the narcissistic loneliness of the male god, in an inversion of the Freudian theory on feminine sexuality. To my mind, this is one of the poetic cores of the erotic dimension in Ivens Machado's output.

Poetics that gets aggrandized when it finds its expressive means and also his other gravity center, in a distant identity with the materials and the visual aspect of the houses of the poor. Let's observe that the dislocation of the significant bears in it the social dimension, but not via a quaint, easy and banal intimacy. This would happen if there was an individualization of the social issue and a socialization of the sexual one. We would be on the grounds of a vulgar culturalism or, worse, on a regressive return to representation. There's no mimesis of low-end houses, but a dislocation of their materials and their constructive technologies to the aesthetic field. To grasp the interactions among these dimensions is one of the keys to get to know Ivens Machado's works. Starting with the persistence of autonomy in both fields – the social and the sexual – symbiotically mated through form. A rough path that has certainly demanded an integrity and sensitivity that are hard to be conquered.

One of the temptations of the contemporary social scientist here in Brazil might be the one of interpreting Machado's formal solution via Canclini's 'hybridization' (8). Would this be a recent milestone in art history, and more than that, characteristic of Latin-American cultures? It seems that this isn't exactly so. How to understand the well-known *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* and the series of studies that both precede and succeed it? Wouldn't we be, there, on one of the pillars of modern art, well into sheer hybrid cultural territory, in the extent where demands, other than the formal ones, dislocate the African masks to the girls' faces? And what to say about the cubist collages starting from 1912? Beyond formal revolution, which accomplishes Cézanne's project, further away from

planar truth and its complex graphic grid, banal products of cultural industry, and of industry *tout court*, are not being mobilized as raw material? Newspaper pages, musical scores, shop ads, liquor labels and cigarette packs? There's no emancipation movement of these materials; the cubist formal power allows them to participate oftentimes *in natura*, with their 'contents' downgraded to the position of mere supporting roles in poetic experience. However, here also, it's not enough to refute, in the name of formalist rigor, what's evident in pure visibility – fragments of urban reality, or better, reality made into pieces, which many assume as a post-modern trait. So, modern form, in some of its paradigmatic manifestations, from the standpoint of a sociology of culture, is already born hybrid and ratifies the fragmented character of reality. Not everything is Morandi and Mondrian in modern art.

If hybrid culture is not enough, metaphors smuggled from science do not suffice likewise. In a rational reading of mechanics, it is an anomalous body, this one that gravitates between two centers. And the metaphor of the magnetic field is no solution to designate the social and sexual indexes that are present in the work, because they show up united as one whole and problematic body. They are not attracted to each other – they are objectified in one whole. We will not also find the false topological exit to avoid another 'intellectual imposture' (9). The price of Ivens Machado's engineering is high: concepts are not easily trafficked, and it is not contained in that which the pragmatic wing wants – a practice of immediate results in which well-defined and well-distributed forms are to be found, as the symptoms in a nosological case history.

Diverse from 'purely' organic pathologies, here, body and existence, cohesively, would be the symptoms of each case and would only surrender in the full process of their apprehension. Like a body that does not fit into medical knowledge, at the moment that the work conforms with it, it rebels against it. In the process of Ivens Machado's works, its knowledge possibly lies in the experience of formation/deformation, capable of being understood within the binomial conformity/revolt. I have already pointed to the impossibility of this issue being solved in a hasty way due to its resistance to be framed within the perspective of cheap culturalism. It would be too easy to ascribe to the social dimension, in the work, something equivalent to the principle of reality and, to sexual dimension, the presence of the pleasure principle, that in its exacerbation would reveal the death wish. Everything would be very close to comic book meta-psychology – schematic and 'clear'. Let's put aside the handling of such concepts to the professionals of free-listening.

### **The itinerary of the work**

For a moment, the best thing is to get away from symbolic violence trying to pore over the genealogy of the work. It can teach us how the artwork negotiates in dangerous terrain without de-structuring itself nor falling into trite representations.

At his first solo show in 1974 at Central de Arte Contemporânea (10), Ivens Machado exhibited the conceptual drawings that dealt with ruled paper, common in school notebooks. They possessed, moreover, a handicraft facture that, in the late 70s, would be replaced by direct interference in the rule-printing machines. The central issues of these

series of works were analyzed by Fernando Cocchiarale, as for instance, in this excerpt:

“The drawings by Ivens – 1974 – faithfully reproduce, at a first glance, the ruled lines in a notebook. The drawing activity is reduced to the monotony of a gesture that organizes space according to writing’s requirements. The sheet is occupied in its entirety, in conformity with this logic’s viewpoint. Tight mesh displayed with all the possible forcefulness of its instrumental rendition. All of a sudden, we become aware that something has happened. The notebook page doesn’t function as it should. There are, for instance, a few severed lines that hang like a virtual trap for writing. On another drawing, disrupted lines were reunited by a small knot. To the logic of power of such a space marked out for scripture, the artist imposes another logic. Pages of a notebook that will never be written on. The entirety of their space is compromised by a dysfunction of one of its parts. Disrupted lines break the logic that regulated them. Moreover, they will never bear any writing on them because their presentation is dislocated from their usual context, safeguarded by the new statute they possess – the statute of art.” (11)

But in these drawings, reduced to minimal materiality, in which the semantic field seems to get erased, there’s no more the revolt of the ill-behaved lines? Rebelliousness, by the way, had been already detected under the form of transgression of the norm, by Cocchiarale, in another passage of his text. This calculated lack of discipline in the work is preserved as an index of art’s function and its possibility in contemporary world, as if existence, to be explored in its fullness, depended always on negativity regarding the rules of the world. There we have the thread that sews his work since its origins until today. A line not always so ostensible as in the glass-shard sculptures.

We saw the drawings. It’s necessary to bring to mind that the glass-shard sculptures, which started in 1979 are a moment of extroversion in his work, formerly contained within a strictly conceptual and critical weaving. Substantive change when confronted with the previous restraint, always retained within an aseptic framework. But other procedures had already dealt with the experience with space and, to a certain extent, with volume, and at its core, the body. Via documents and interviews with Ivens, I got to know about the 1975 exhibition at the Rio de Janeiro Museum of Modern Art, which was split into two spaces. In the first bright ambient, several walls are erected in increasing heights. Artistic comments on real-life walls found throughout the city, samples of which were documented by photos affixed on the museum wall. A video continuously reproduced the action of the artist jumping over a hurdle. In the other space, a dimly lit ambient, there were marks of the artist’s possible ‘achievement’ on the wall: the artist kept continuously jumping with his arm raised, scribbling his height ‘marks’ on the wall. New drawings, not those with the tidy calligraphy of writing apprentices contained within the limits of the margins and the ruling lines, and which had already been criticized and questioned by Ivens in his earlier drawings. On the contrary: these are drawings traced on the borders of the body in action.

In these works, aligned with the typical conceptual investigations of their time, the fundamentals of what is to be later explored in permanence are already there – architecture and the body as limits. At its base there is, from the formal point of view, an investigation that is opposed to the one that has been unfolding up to our days. There is a thematic continuity, with a violent language metamorphosis starting in 1979. For instance, when they

evidently become furniture, chairs, at the Funarte show in 1988 in Rio de Janeiro. These works are weird and annoying, primarily to eyesight. Besides that, there is an interplay with their opposite, the large-scale sculpture *in situ*, motionless in a corner – three elements that are unfolding as well as interpenetrating. This exhibition draws part of its forcefulness not only from the individual works, but from the whole, displayed in a rigorous setting, imparting a double life to it – isolated works and an installation. Little by little we see the work learning lessons from its aseptic past, dosing its revolt in a rebelliousness that gets consolidated in form. A past that taught the rules of a well-articulated structure which permitted its dangerous interactions without the risk of collapse.

A paradigmatic moment of this conquered balance and of the dialogue with his own story is the permanent installation at Palazzo di Lorenzo in Gibelina, Italy, in 1990. Milton Machado recalls that “such unusual objects, whose solidity, weight and volume determine this monumental quasi-architecture are, though rustic, like *Trambolhos e Murunduns* (Encumbrances and Entanglements) surprisingly graceful.” (11). Gracefulness there in Gibelina is far from the *Consoladores* (Dildos), *Trambolhos e Murunduns* when the artist indicated by the name his deviation regarding constructivist norm, taking an overt stand in favor of the annoying. At Palazzo Lorenzo, there is abidance to architectural memory, different from the respect and the intimate conversation with the reality of the poor, when he transposed to the modules of his installation the semblance of the medieval buttresses. Precisely the structural elements that, in Gothic cathedrals, were visible from the outside – the well-known exposed vertebrae that support the edifice. But in Ivens Machado, as Milton Machado puts it, it is “quasi-architecture. (...) And, if they were plants, they would be carnivore.” (12). In fact, it is just a work of art and, as it is, it does not support anything, save itself. Memory is borne in it – such as the walls erected at MAM-RJ in 1975, they follow a sequence of increasing heights. If we take notice of the craftsmanship, we promptly appreciate the coherence – we are facing the same brutalism of low-end architecture, pursued along the years, now disciplined by a formal demand that keeps on not surrendering peacefully to understanding. It insists in bearing in its surface eruptions and colors, the marks that are not in conformity, in the conversation of the crusty stones with their older sisters, visible on the Palazzo walls. Finally, the tallest ‘buttress’, which would impose itself as the remembrance of the last of the 1975 walls, does not stand up. The installation is inaugurated with it still lying on the ground. It’s another sculpture, an autonomous one, and it can be seen diverging from the remembrance of itself – the buttress. It does not simulate any supporting action, it just sleeps, without exerting any strength besides that of its weight against the floor. Form dominates revolt, and this one controls form.

Would I be building up an exaggerated fiction originating from the photo? I’ve never been in Gibelina. I see the reproduction of the work and I feel entitled to talk about something I haven’t directly experienced. How come? Because I have seen many other works by Ivens Machado? If I read the musical score and I don’t listen to the music, would I be closer to the artwork than when I look at the photo, never having met the sculpture and its space, or the painting and its brushstrokes? Would this be the constant difference? My body will say it to me. The *épures* of the ear are different from those of the eye.



I only know that the work, which has transgressed its orbit in revolt, is now one of brutal purity.

Rio de Janeiro, August 2001

Notes:

1 – *Denn unter dem Masse/Des rohen brauchet es auch,/Damit das Reine sich kenne*. From the poem *Die Titanen* (The Titans), by HÖLDERLIN.

2 – Reference to Brazilian writer Euclides da Cunha (1866-1909). Civil engineer and journalist, depicted the war at Canudos in a book that is a milestone in Brazilian literature: *Os Sertões* (The Backlands) (1902).

3 – Cf. ARGAN, Giulio Carlo, *The concept of architectural space from the Baroque era to our days. A course at Instituto Universitario de Historia de la Arquitectura, Tucumán, 1961*.

4 – JARDIM, Eduardo. Demarcating art's territory, in Ivens Machado, Galeria Saramenha, 1979.

5 – Academic sculpture had already incorporated reinforced concrete. Extraordinary constructivist works such as the monumental walls by Sergio Camargo for the auditorium at Itamaraty Palace in Brasilia, and at the head office of Itaú group in São Paulo, are made from concrete modules.

6 – It would be worthwhile, in case it hasn't been done yet, for North American art historians and sociologists to explain minimalism via this cultural bias too.

7 – *Jupiter beseeched by Thetis*. Oil on canvas 327 x 260 cm. 1811. Granet Museum collection, Aix-en-Provence.

8 – Cf. CANCLINI, Néstor Garcia. *Hybrid Cultures – Strategies to enter and to leave modernity*. The question is not to easily discard Canclini's contribution to the understanding of contemporary cultural phenomena in Latin American societies, but to evaluate them in relation to their applicability in the aesthetic field, taking recourse to art history itself. Canclini's investigation, in a brilliant, clear and elegant essay is the synthesis of the best thinking of a whole generation that got dispersed in the discourses of academic specialities.

9 – SOKAL, Alan D. "Transgressing the boundaries: toward a transformative hermeneutics of Quantum gravity", in *Social Text*, 46/47, Durham, Duke University Press, spring/summer 1996). The article generated a polemic on academic ethics, serving however to unmask theoretical indigence disguised as pedantic terminology, as unattainable as inconsequential. Later on, Sokal would strike again, this time with a book, written in collaboration with a colleague, titled *Intellectual Impostures* (cf. BRICMONT, Jean and SOKAL, Alan, op. cit., 1999).

10 – Galeria da Veste Sagrada, Ipanema, Rio de Janeiro.

11 - COCCHIARALE, Fernando. "Knowing how to bluff", in MACHADO, Ivens, op.cit.

12 – MACHADO, Milton. *Sculpture Cycle Project: recent perspectives in Brazilian contemporary sculpture: Ivens Machado*, Funarte, Rio de Janeiro, 1988.

13 – Idem, ibidem.

15 – general view

16 – ceramic tiles and mortar

29 – permanent installation at Palazzo di Lorenzo – general view  
30 – red clay, concrete and roof tile shards, variable dimensions  
31 – bathroom ceramic towel-hanger  
33 – ceramic wall fixture  
exhibition maquette

Nota do Tradutor:

Na legenda numero 33, pode-se pôr ‘wall light fixture’, se for um trabalho que use iluminação. Qualquer outra dúvida, contate-me no 9144-1110.

In one of the most recent works – an installation for the show at Paço Imperial in December 2001 – Ivens Machado takes up the memory of patrimonial technology from rural Brazilian architecture: the wattle-and-daub adobe wall, though not making full use of this constructive technique. In order to adequate to the exhibition space, instead of the wattle-and-daub structure, a metallic net is used as groundwork the clay mortar. On the wall surface, which was built by the artist himself, affixed protruding sculptures project outwardly into space. These are made with cement and bear fragments of colonial-period roof tiles. As it has been occurring in Ivens Machado’s work since 1979, both material and form work together, without dissociation, for the production of meaning. And this always presupposes a complex weaving; social memory (rural low-end construction techniques) intercrossing with historical memory (colonial roof tiles); contemporary form and modern autonomy in a non-hierarchical dialogue with other cultural spheres, in a game of effective reciprocity. The continuous presence of social memory in the wall (on a larger surface than as encountered in real constructions), whereas historical memory shows up in pieces, as shards studded on a modern material – cement. The farmhand’s house wall – timeless, always the same, so far – is the sustaining groundwork for the strange projected volumes that jut out, visibly bearing shattered roof tiles from the colonial manor house cemented into the present.

We acknowledge the persistence of such a conquest: the social-historical dimension is present in the materials, no appeal to pamphleteering content, intertwined with the formal dimension. No compromise with populist figuration, be it political, be it from the universe of the merchandise, sticking to a brutalism and a strangeness that impose themselves as features of the artist’s work identity.

Amidst the great fair which contemporary art became, one cannot underestimate the formal consequences of such apparently technical and material options. They act towards the production of meanings, in contrast with the amusement-park atmosphere for specialists, as post-modern curatorship wishes to impart to a vision of art as a cultural variety bereft of historic foundation: the art museum as the new department store. Ivens Machado’s oeuvre swims upstream.

Paulo Sergio Duarte  
Translated by Paulo Andrade Lemos  
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