

Time Machines, Repertoires of the Imagination: the universes of Marcelo Cipis and Yuli Yamagata

By Thiago M. Moyano¹

*"Alice sighed wearily. "I think you might do something better with the time," she said, "than waste it in asking riddles that have no answers."
"If you knew Time as well as I do," said the Hatter, "you wouldn't talk about wasting it."*

- Lewis Carroll

At the intersection between the circulation of images driven by the market, as well as those that shape us more deeply, on the body, desire, and consciousness, there is a path towards the intangible: tricks of mirrors and illusions. These images, echoed throughout time and space, gradually form a shared repertoire that is explored in a wide range of social life dimensions, be it through the capital machine, in the fetish of commodities, or on the level of our subjectivity, in processes that outline our habits, aspirations, dreams, and fantasies.

Immersed, in their own ways, in universes of innumerable possibilities, the works of Marcelo Cipis and Yuli Yamagata, placed in dialogue in this exhibition, share similarities in their themes, strategies, and ways of making (or taking away) sense of the worlds they create, always playing with the limits of time-traveling imaginaries. These dialogues defy the boundaries of classic dualities that seem to have been established as ways of organizing life: fact and fiction, dream and reality, cause and effect, time and space, among others. In these works, time itself invades the field of spatiality, surfacing from distinct and complementary forms, be it through direct references to the 1950s, in the furnishings of Cipis' paintings, be it through the choice of mixed techniques from other traditions, as in Yamagata's *shiboris*.

Each of these artists, however, has a clear visual expression, which brings about new languages while threading narratives via techniques, materials, and other tools that give life to their creations.

"If I were not perfectly sure of what I have seen, sure that there was not in my reasoning any defect, no error in my declarations, no lacune in the inflexible sequence of my observations, I should believe myself to be the dupe of a simple hallucination, the sport of a singular vision. After all, who knows?"

- Guy de Maupassant

The glamorous elegance from the jazz era and the well-fitted lapels from Marcelo Cipis' world is always followed by a charming smirk that moves (sometimes very subtly) to the corners of the mouth, enjoying a kind of subversive pleasure. This sense of humor, not necessarily concerned with discretion, comes to light through explicit transgressions of references that delineate an affective memorial somewhat recognizable: in *Varinha mágica*, the color palettes immediately take us to Estrela's or Parker Brothers' playful universe of board games. There are also forms and lines that have been taken from an art-deco aesthetic, both for the design and the large-scale proliferation of products, elements from the advertising universe, riddles, and puzzles, whose templates have been deliberately discarded. In *Quadro figurativo*, tricks between the linguistic sign and the composition of the image are able to entertain its spectators while suggesting more existential questions at the same time. Some of these works, such as *Resqúcio Art-Deco*, seem to be part of an archeology from our recent past, like fragments from a world that no longer exists, carefully removed, well kept, collected, and organized side by side.

In Cipis' works, the absurd freely navigates as a child skipping in an amusement park, and the magic that the works suggest, direct or indirectly, work like a conducting wire for such energetic charges coming from the imagination. Human bodies made out of geometric shapes – or sometimes simply the metonymic human forms of *Perna-pião* and *Perna pêndulo* – are set next to anthropomorphized animals, such as those seen in *Sindicato dos animais*. These animals, in turn, acquire, aside from a finish of the greatest elegance, the apprehensive gaze that confronts, confuses, and questions how optimistic one can be in

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relation to the universe to which they belong. In this case, fables seem to go back to another aspect of their origins, in which so-called innocent, light, and joyful narratives also carry the seeds of a much denser, and even melancholic, content.

Nevertheless, such conclusions are not drawn solely via the themes explored in these works. Through the systematically employed technique, present in all of these pieces (figurative or not), of extreme precision and well-designed contours, or through the fine brushstrokes, other tensions and productive oppositions come to light, adding yet another layer to the fantasy framework they seem to fit in so comfortably. From such a playful universe, which maintains a remarkable aesthetic rigor, there is also a wealth of speculations and glimpses of a future seen from the standpoint of a given space in time. In this sense, fantasy elements go hand in hand with Sci-fi features. In *Cipisland*, paradoxically, the future looks vintage, as in a *Jetsons* cartoon, set in 2062 through the lenses of the previous century, in the early 1960s. However, since we are dealing with a time that has never come into being, one simply cannot place it in the past either. These images keep hanging over time, comfortably grounded in a world of possibilities.

Thus, the eye seems attentive to a certain past, but don't be fooled: we are actually facing the Future of the Fantasy, reconstructed, in one of its versions, through the aesthetics of the 1950s.

*We must not blame our poor symbols if they take forms
that seem trivial to us, or absurd [...] however paltry
they may be, the nature of our life alone has determined
their forms.*

- Angela Carter

In Yamagata's world, radical futurities seem to take over the scene at first sight. Her way of making images, the treatment she gives to materials of lively elasticity, and the color scheme that permeates her works, everything seems to head in sync towards universes forged in Sci-fi fiction, in dystopias, or even in speculative fiction, like in Angela Carter's novel, in which a post-apocalyptic New York is created with a gloomy flavor. In this sense, to form and delineate images that gradually acquire force and movement, a very recognizable repertoire from the entertainment industry comes to the surface: Hollywood productions from the 1980s and 1990s, like the **Mad Max** and **Alien** series, or even **The Terminator**, but also **Ghostbusters**, through comic and playful elements, such as the ubiquity of a radioactive green.

The grotesque materiality of her sculptures and Lycra-based painting-sculptures, of these images that are, at the same time, erotic and violent -- but still carrying a good amount of humor -- transports the gaze from something that has been to a time that hasn't arrived yet. However, amidst such visceral elements, there are many narratives that deal with the metaphysics of time, or even with the possibility of its suspension, resorting to an extremely refined subtlety. Despite the exaggerated colors, shapes, and volumes, there is a reorganization of domestic objects, almost as if they belong to a collection that makes us face conflicting dualities. The suggestion of an outer space, for instance, is orbited by miscellaneous everyday objects which, hanging over this new dimension, end up creating another time. Besides, the very domesticity that can be explored in these images works inevitably as an anchor in reality, but place us in tension with something that can be ominous, unknown, or dark.

In parallel fashion, her figurative works are undeniably fluid and allow themselves to be invaded by a few niches of abstractions, as seen, for example, in the volume and lines of the gown worn by the **Figura de costas**. From such strategies, the works showcase multiple layers that add complexity to the scene, but which also allow us to contemplate something that cannot be fixed to a certain locked meaning. Aside from that, the corn cob is once again present, a shape that has systematically followed the artist's work, sometimes represented in an opaque yellow that seems to come from a palatable reality, other times of a bright yellow from classic cartoons. In **Três pés** and **Janela e flores**, the use of this food-object produces continuities and discontinuities with other elements that take us to a realm of everyday trivia. The extremely popular ingredient bursts into other representations and gains new functions in even less predictable objects, such as in the sculpture **Planeta ordenadora**, through a computer keyboard, which, in a society dominated by mobile devices, already reeks of something from the past. The very materiality of these cobs may work as part of figurative images, but also create, in lines that are not uniform, smaller and random drawings that are open to a wide range of interpretations. To such a union of the improbable, a meeting point between Fantasy and Sci-fi, one can add various tensions related to time, which, without being stuck to a pre-established route, invite us to the most diverse journeys in space.

Such fusion between Fantasy and Sci-fi is, then, placed once again, with humor, in different versions of time, as in an overly accelerated multiplication of images, be them traditional or familiar, from the movies, ads, or even from a random social media feed. The treatment found in this visual language operates as some form of mediation; a mirror, with all of its deformities, offering contours to our own imagination.

Time folds, he said, meaning that as time goes on and on it buckles, in the extreme heat, in the extreme cold, and what is long past becomes closer. You can demonstrate this by pleating a ribbon and sticking a pin through: Point Two, once yards away from Point One, now lies just beside it. Is time/space like an accordion, but without the music?

- Margaret Atwood

Projecting time in space, or spatializing time, demands a constant exercise with both written and visual language. In such efforts, Marcelo Cipis' and Yuli Yamagata's works have the ability to make us confront different versions of time, its passage, and even the possibility of its suspension altogether.

Thus, it is no surprise that the reunion of both of these visual languages amplifies the fruitful soil of all sorts of speculations. In the painting made in collaboration for this exhibit, **Cipuli**, many of the elements that are integral to these two distinct identities, from different generations, coexist not in conflict, but populating different layers that make us suspect they even belong to different dimensions within the same space. The space itself, by the way, could not be more adequate: a living room – carefully decorated with furnishings that could be in a design fair – also allows us to see signs of the passing time, in the presence of a flower vase, or in small traces of decomposition hinted at by a green shadow in some of its corners. An abstract human body, placed under the rug, the central piece of the scene, is marked by the presence of exposed bones, as in a fatal injury. These bones, however, remind us of classic cartoons, adding yet another layer of humor to the image. At first sight, the colors, lines, and contours may comfort the viewer with the familiarity of a domestic scene, but a second look brings up mystery, a certain degree of danger, and an enigma that will never be solved.

This is how both of these worlds – Cipis' and Yamagata's – sometimes coexist and complement each other, sometimes create opposites, reflections of each other's negatives. But they open up space to be invaded, mixed, and opened to all kinds of speculations. This exhibit, placing such distinctively marked visual languages side by side, is a generous and open invitation, in the pace of a dance, two steps here, two steps there, in which we are constantly displaced through time/space, without having to walk within the lines of any given boundary.