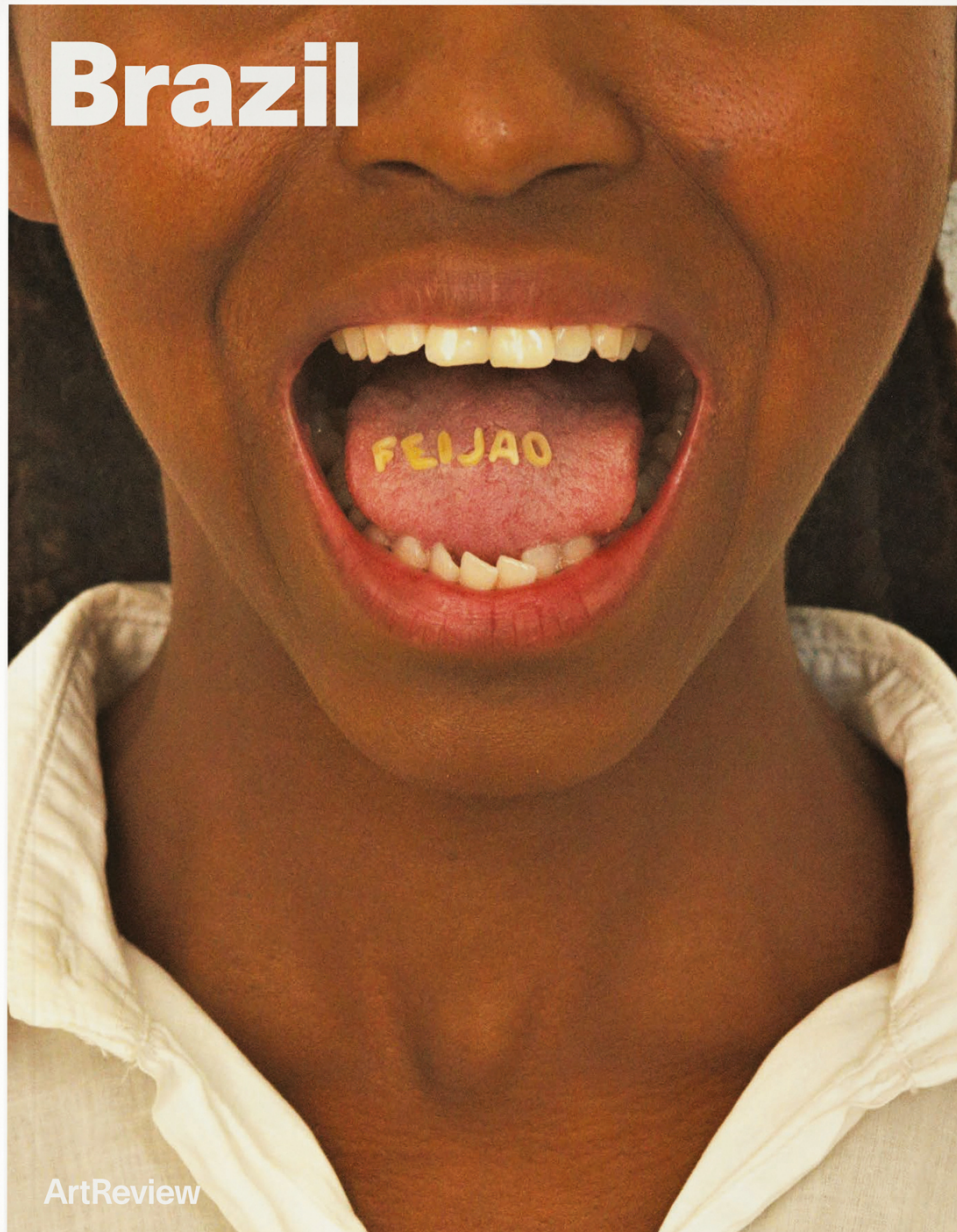


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PORTRAIT OF HOME



Paula Sampaio, *Rodovia Belém-Brasília: carvoaria*, 1997, gelatin silver print, 28 × 40 cm. Courtesy the artist

Six artists on how their locales shape and inspire their work

Interviews by Mateus Nunes, a São Paulo-based writer, curator and postdoctoral researcher from the Brazilian Amazon

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Antonio Tarsis on Salvador, Bahia



Antonio Tarsis centres his practice on the social memory, colonial exploration and labour dynamics of the Afro-Brazilian diaspora. Through precise listening, his works – abstract compositions using mainly discarded boxes of fruit and matches – honour epistemologies, sensibilities, visual systems and materials rejected by the hegemonic discourse, in a critical reassessment of everyday history. Tarsis's work was recently featured in the 5th Bienal de Montevideo and the 13th Bienal do Mercosul, Porto Alegre, and will be presented in the upcoming 38th Panorama da Arte Brasileira, at Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo – MASP.

MN *How does Salvador inspire your work?*

AT Salvador has a very diverse and genuine cultural production dynamic. And it's not a cultural production focused on the idea of art. It's a production that happens very freely in the city's movement. It's amazing to be walking down the street, thinking about a problem, and hearing someone say something that, even though it's completely off-topic, solves your problem. I grew up in Sete Portas, which is a central neighbourhood in Salvador, with a popular market. There's everything there: people who fix stoves and fridges; who sell fruit, beans, mocotó, flowers; a macumba house, there's capoeira... It's a crossroads, a very important point for the orisha Exu. I grew up at this crossroads. I think working with multiple materials that led me to a path of research and synthesis comes from this experience of growing up in Sete Portas.

MN *Is there a particular place that you go to for inspiration?*

AT Cachoeira, which is a beach town near Salvador, inspires me a lot. It's a place with a lot of history, and tradition, and I always feel re-energised when I visit. The Paraguaçu River has a huge history – it's almost like the Nile River in Egypt, you know? Understanding that, from that river, there is a very rich legacy

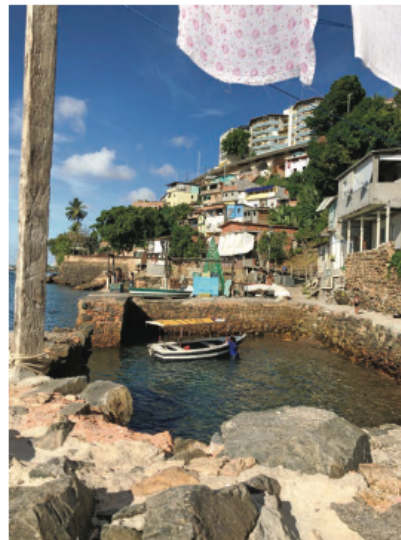
of life and the construction of what Bahia is. But in general the city of Salvador confronts you as a living organism, it's where the notions of 'specific location' kind of blur. You have to be open to absorb this dynamic of the place.

MN *Is there a local cultural institution that was important for your artistic path?*

AT The Biblioteca dos Barris, a public library. Since I am self-taught, I stopped going to school when I was twelve years old, I didn't participate in any formal cultural institution, but the Biblioteca dos Barris was the place I went to self-educate, where I read many art books. I didn't have money even for the bus fare, so I walked from far away to go there every day.

MN *Can you recommend a book that gives a flavour of Salvador?*

AT I would recommend *Captains of the Sands* [1937] by Jorge Amado. When I read it, I saw myself a lot in the book, you know? As if I were reading a story that was mine. The book brings a bit of the harsh reality of a young person from the outskirts, from the favela, who comes from an underprivileged position. It presents the dynamics of creating strategies for your life and surviving that. I think you can understand my Salvador through this book.



from top Antonio Tarsis, photographed by Dan Wilton; "Praia da Gamboa, in Salvador, where I learned to swim and which I used to frequent as a kid, before it became very touristic". Courtesy the artist