

### Third Act — Fugido

A parade of entities crosses the gallery diagonally. These are sculptural bodies made from fragments of organic, inorganic, and artificial matter – anthropomorphic beings whose hybrid nature evokes an indeterminate existential dimension, at once past, present, and future, as real as they are fictional. This procession of figures forged from wood, stone, bronze, clay, paper, and aluminum signals a physical form in constant mutation. Though seemingly inert, they are charged with vital force; they share a common essence, animistic in their spiritual, formal, and aesthetic potency. They carry within them a multiplicity of times, histories, and past lives, tortured and nurtured by the hands of the London-based Brazilian artist, Anderson Borba.

Like para-exiles from our reality, these recalcitrant creatures move toward a plane of communion between dead matter and living substance, animated by features endowed with a tacit eloquence. They seem to communicate with one another in a language made of visual codes, material remnants, and a violent organic dynamism. At times hollowed out, at others filled to the core, these bodies appear to be heading toward a secret ceremony, gathering at the roadside in a conclave of worldly, extra-human beings, promiscuous in their extreme physicality. Beauty and brutality converge in mutilated, saturated forms – somewhat shadowy, somewhat solar.

For many years, Borba has been bringing to life a collection of figures degenerated by their excessively organic form. In isolation, they remain simply sculptures; in company, they enact a choreography of universal bodies, as if each part were performing the whole. One being emerges from another. Though singular in form, they constitute a single organism – they belong to the same species, they share a common soul. There is something religious in this arrangement of sculptures within a shared space, as if they had gathered to deliberate on their destinies and their origins. More than that, they proclaim an ancestry yet to come, sinking their roots into the collective field as if laying ground for a future-past. They are unrecognizable within our given history, even as they bear traces of a memory that reaches back to antiquity, passes through the twentieth century, and arrives at a future forever precarious in its possibilities for existence.

If, on one hand, his sculptures call to mind the Shigir Idol, carved 11,500 years ago, on the other, they evoke the columns of Brancusi, or the hollowed bodies of Barbara Hepworth, or even the convulsive abstraction of Jack Whitten – from prehistory to modernism, only to later distort the contemporary. Yet his work soon allows us to veer away from the teleological narratives of the West, to take side roads and find these vertical figures' affinities with African totems. Unlike those, however, they are not there to represent a clan; rather, they symbolize and unify their own lineage, or one yet to come. Hence they are impregnated with the latency of the future, hence their blend of historical inheritance and science fiction: a new body emerges, something cyborgian, adulterated, transformed, transmuted.

Along other side trails, Borba's works bear a kinship with Brazilian crafts, folk art, the *carrancas* that protect homes and boats. In this sense, the *Fugido* [Runaway] of the title carries historical and biographical implications, manifested in works that first took shape in England, where Borba studied sculpture at the Slade School of Fine Art. When it comes to art history, however, and in the wake of cultural anthropophagies, there is indeed something appropriative in his work, insofar as it bears traces of the modernisms mentioned above. Yet there is something greater at play, something that goes far beyond the Western matrix. Borba's work, even as it embraces modernism, repels it – for the solidity sought by the European movement is shattered in the precariousness of the sculptures erected by the artist – solid, yet equally on the verge of collapse. Hence the impossibility of attributing a definitive cultural heritage to his practice, as his works grapple with a broken desire, a flawed projection of a sculptural body, wounded and ownerless. Biographical forces are also in motion; the Umbanda practiced within his family surfaces in his work, though not in a way that defines it in essentialist terms, for the spirituality emanating from his sculpted entities is profane, perishable, and mortal. Still, a residual paganism persists among the sculptural beings when gathered in liturgy, in assembly, in convoy – as in this gallery.

The runaway speaks of the emigrant and the immigrant, who twists academic references into a drift of return to native soil. But the runaway may also speak of the fugitive, of the exile implicit in the physical forms of these contorted, blemished, dehumanized beings in their damaged constitution. Equally, the runaway carries within it the idea of one who has strayed from the main route, taken side roads and parallel paths.

I like to think that Borba's sculptures have a life of their own: once upright, they travel their paths, murmuring their silent, aesthetic vocabularies. And as if that were not enough, this semantic wellspring overflows with a sensuality that insinuates itself through body and fashion – stemming from the artist's early training. But this fashion has more to do with the political eccentricity of Rei Kawakubo designing for Comme des Garçons and producing her anomalous, exaggerated sculptural bodies than with the high-street fashion of equality among all bodies. Trailing mantles and talismans, the sculptures parade their rags endowed with an abundance of nobility and integrity. They retreat toward another world, toward a para-reality that outshines our own. On the catwalk devised by Borba, all reveal their anomalies.

And on the walls are brutalist works made of wood and strips of paper, like windows into Borba's distorted world, convulsed by sculpted forms and gleaming, skin-close images extracted from the pages of magazines – nothing is quite so natural in this artist's world. Like a kind of off-air television, the disintegration of once-figurative images becomes a collage addressing the impossibility of absolute representation. Between glossy magazines and brutal bodies, equally brutal landscapes emerge, whose epidermis is as

sensual as the body of animals, human or otherwise. When the second skin of mass media meets the fissures of the lacerated, sculpted body, pop is ultimately rejected in the name of an extreme, human physicality. There seems to be no hierarchy in the artist's use of materials, for everything is noble, everything is refuse and is matter, alive – as if, in the impossibility of finding a definitive form, the artist ensures life for that which we cannot name.

This third act, or closing chapter of the trilogy that began in London at The Approach gallery with the exhibition *Secret Ceremony*, and later unfolded at CAMPLE LINE in the Scottish lowlands with *The Unearthed*, now completes the cycle with *Fugido* [Runaway]: something or someone that has escaped, evaded, or drifted away, like the more-than-human entities sculpted by the artist, which elude the predictability of form, push beyond the limits of material plasticity and what we understand as existential manifestation in this vast, old world without gates.

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