BAR + LC Interview

LC: Your creative process is clearly based on a collage approach, on a combination of images that creates a third meaning. By appropriating everyday objects, you foster a kind of anti-hierarchical order by turning things upside down and using large, small, and differently colored elements to create your pieces.

In your current work, I noticed a faster pace and a shift away from the narrative, largely due to the exclusion of images of animals. It is more abstract. You employ a variety of backgrounds, colors, and shapes, yet you do not highlight the function of the objects. Do you think there's a certain celebration of accumulation right now, at the expense of something more narrative?

B: Well, Leda, I think both my work and yours build on things that already exist in the world, that were created for other purposes, and we work from these found materials. Indeed, the production of this exhibition is a bit more abstract. Some sculptures are more economical, while others deal more with volume and mass. Although several figures and images that are very common in the world of ceramics still appear, they eventually become lost in this accumulation of fragments of objects that are no longer recognizable. When I increase the scale of a work, I almost always need more pieces. That creates this buildup, this fuss. And keep in mind that the world of pottery has an incredible, almost irresistible imagination when it comes to the animal kingdom. There are animals painted in all sorts of bold ways, a zoology all its own, in which the elephant and the lion are very popular, even though they aren't part of our native fauna.

LC: Moving on to the frog, to the little owl…

B: Yes, they are very common in the ceramics we come across all the time at the flea market. The Buddhas, the elephants, and the *figas*[1] are also very popular. Besides all

[1] Figa: a traditional amulet in the shape of a hand, with the thumb tucked between the index and middle fingers, believed to ward off the evil eye and bring good luck.

the superstitions concerning how you should place them around the house for good luck…

I've been trying to explore the least recognizable parts of these objects—the ones you can't identify as a wing, a leg, or a towel rack. Parts and textures whose origin isn't very clear. There are several works that are made using the bottoms of these objects: it's no longer the animal's head, but the base that rests on the table—the part with a hole in the middle that you can't identify.

A recent shift in the work is that, while the accumulation of objects continues to create volume and transform their functions, there is now also greater attention to each object individually.

LC: I believe that's an important shift, since the animals—such as those in the collections of baby elephants, frogs, owls, and dolphins—were responsible for creating a more kitsch interpretation of the work. This current arrangement, based more on colors and on shapes you didn't explore before—like the bottoms and handles—highlights this object, which takes on a slightly more hybrid, unpredictable, and strange character. I think there's been an increase in the strangeness in your work.

B: I agree. One change I've noticed is in the use of color: I explore combinations of colors as well as shapes.

LC: Precisely, I think this accumulation in your works speaks a lot about the invisibility of things today, because there's such a proliferation of objects and offers—things you buy online that will arrive at your doorstep within 24 hours. This is a great depiction of today's consumer society, which, due to this excessive supply, has come to believe that it needs to buy things all the time—a sort of hunger for the new!

B: The world is packed with stuff! Things increasingly tailored to specific functions. This ease of buying anything at any time has greatly heightened the feeling that we need more and more things.
At these secondhand markets that I go to, I see a lot of people who love hacks. This is a group that resists buying a new item. They prefer to find a solution, come up with an idea, or invent something to solve a problem. They are very creative, and don't surrender to the conveniences of the modern world. Plastic, on the other hand, has replaced ceramic in many everyday objects.

LC: Yes, it is a *Plasticland*! These creative hacks, as you said, end up representing a certain resistance to the attitude of throwing away and buying everything again…

B: That's it. It's funny because I buy these objects, I create a collection of them here in my studio to develop my works, and I go to these flea markets. It is a very interesting universe, because you run into all sorts of things and, often, the question remains: who will want this? Who will buy this? This is useless! But in this world of secondhand goods, at these flea markets that are sometimes even a little *trashy*, where things are really worn out, it's amazing how, deep down, there's this idea that everything can be reused. There was a time when I was looking for some Buddha statues. Then, at one of the market stalls, I ended up being known as "The Buddha Guy".

LC: The religious one!

B: An old lady used to say: "Here comes the Buddha Guy!" Another time I was buying some porcelain dogs, big German shepherds, and the seller asked me: "But what are you going to do with that?" Right away, before I even had a chance to answer, the other saleswoman said, "He's going to put it in his living room, of course." I found it really interesting how salespeople imagine what I'm going to do with the things they're selling. Who am I? A collector of dogs? Buddhas? Teacups?

LC: An eccentric.

B: Yeah, something like that.

LC: I feel that the three larger sculptures have a botanical character[2]. They start from a single vase and rise upward, giving the impression of sprouting, because they climb higher and pile up at the top. The way you arrange them makes them look like a tree made of dishes. The little ones also have a sinuous way of organizing themselves. They're incredible! You know the one with two little vases, one over there and one over here (*Vênus e Marte* [Venus and Mars]), and another one that sticks out of the top of a little sugar bowl (*Passeio com Migudo* [A Walk with Migudo])? They are limited to fewer images, but they maintain a connection to the idea of a flower, which emerges from a bud and reveals a pistil. It's very elegant.

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[2] *Farol*, *Ponta de Lança* and *Sacolão volante*

B: This idea of an almost tree-like structure, with branches that branch out further, is a recurring theme. A few years ago, I took a trip to the *sertão* [backlands] and came back with drawings of various cacti, because it's really interesting how those cactus arms grow, how they rise up and balance themselves.

About ten years ago, I also held an exhibition[3] featuring works made from sink legs—arranged vertically and laid across the floor—that showcase that wonderful color palette from the '60s and '70s. The idea was inspired by the romantic architecture of public parks, where stone fountains were built to form ponds, with fallen tree trunks serving as a representation of nature. Parks with bridges made of branches, all of which are actually made of concrete, designed to look like tree trunks and rocks, or that branch lying on the ground, creating a sort of naturally abandoned atmosphere.

So I made these works with that very representation of plants, that botanical perspective, in mind. These sculptures deal with the issue of balance—how they support themselves, how they develop and project from the wall into the space.

LC: I am also referring to the climate in Brazil, where there is so much sun and so much water that, on the concrete overpass, suddenly in a little corner, right on the edge, things that nobody planted start to sprout. These are plants and flowers that, even without soil, insist on growing and begin to hang down from the bridge or the walls of shopping malls!

B: That thing you said about sprouting is great. It is a very interesting image. Sprouts from a crack! It's the force of nature. It also resembles a structure observed under a microscope. Like those lyrics from the Talking Heads: "There was a shopping mall. Now, it's all covered with flowers…"

LC: I found the large sculptures intriguing, mysterious in their construction, and the small ones intensely poetic. They are complex for those who see them as a synthesis of meaning. Do you feel that, Barrão, in your own work? That you're at a more mature stage, that you can take risks?

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[3] *Lugar nenhum,* Galeria Fortes Vilaça, São Paulo, 2014.

B: Absolutely... Last year, I held a retrospective exhibition at MON[4], gathering twenty years of my work, and this year I published a book covering forty years of my work.[5]

These two experiences allowed me to see works from different periods side by side for the first time. Today, I certainly feel more mature, but it's not like I used to feel less comfortable with my work. I think my persistence and willingness to keep trying are coming through. I don't know, maybe I've gotten better…

LC: Getting better and better, just like wine.

B: We keep creating rules and conditions for our work, broadening, affirming, and expanding the boundaries of what we do, defining what is and isn't allowed. In this process, we also define ourselves: “I’m also this, I also make that.” I have been incorporating other materials; I’m using resin, plaster, and bronze. In these works, the relationships between the objects are more synthetic, less baroque. Some are reminiscent of haiku. It’s an attempt to broaden my repertoire. One thing I’ve noticed is that the watercolors and drawings I made early on, in the 1980s, were sketches of my sculptures. I liked to draw, but I didn't really have a subject. So, I would draw diagrams illustrating those sculptures that made sounds, that functioned, that rotated, and that had engines. They were a sort of plan that showed how those sculptures worked. Now, the watercolors and drawings continue to deal extensively with the three-dimensional, sculptural aspect. They have volume, but they are no longer plans for sculptures. It seems like they can no longer leave the paper, because they propose things that couldn’t be realized in the three-dimensional world. I’m really enjoying drawing and doing watercolors. That’s because sculpture, objects, and resin pieces require energy and physical vitality. You carry, pull, stretch, prepare the glue, tie things down, and secure them with tape so they don’t fall. You put them on the wall, take them down, put them on the table. You cut, saw, deal with dust, and make noise. It's a physical and somewhat tiring relationship. The relationship with paper and drawing, on the other hand, involves a very interesting form of contemplation. It is quite different from the effort required to build a sculpture. I spend a lot of time immersed in the paper, in a state of deep absorption where I seek out the next step through observation, figuring out how to solve what’s right in front of me. I like to start a watercolor without any

[4] *Teia à toa*, Museu Oscar Niemeyer, Curitiba, 2025.

[5] *Rima Colada*, Automática Edições, 2026.

plan—I just propose something and try to get somewhere. It is a little like improvised music, a little like jazz…

LC: The works on paper from the book are very cool, very well chosen. In this exhibition the sculptures stand on their own. In this way, the individual synthesis of each work overlaps with the resulting whole, as if each one had its own secret to share with those who view it. This exhibition runs counter to the current trend among some curators and exhibition spaces to promote a spectacle that engages the viewer, which, in my view, reduces art to something of a stage set. I think your proposal is solid. The work is right there, and it draws the viewer in through mental and emotional associations, because this pottery reflects a specific time, a specific place, and a particular experience. I think that's it… the pottery evokes memories…

B: There really is this phenomenon of "spectacularization", of these spaces that swallow you up; there's a lot of that. But there are these little gestures that leave a trace, as if someone had been there. The pottery carries an emotional weight, a memory.

LC: As I said before, I feel that you are very much at ease with your practice. It seems like you now have greater speed and confidence. And I ask you if you believe you're on track to make your latest [works] improve on your earlier ones. Do you see that happening at all?

Because we're past the midpoint of our careers, we're a little further along. And I'm concerned with wrapping up what I'm saying, you know? To be able to create some last [works] that expand on the meaning of the earlier ones. A circular synthesis of everything you've been doing. Back then, starting with that group you had with Ricardo Basbaum and Alexandre Dacosta in the 1980s, what was it called?

B: Seis Mãos [Six Hands]. To tell you the truth, Leda, I can't plan that. I work every day, and since I don't know when my last day of work will be, I'm just moving forward without thinking too much about the conclusion. I understand this drive to complete a cycle of artistic creation, to assert oneself and make oneself better understood, but I think I still have a lot left to do. And, if I end up thinking something was missing, I'll try to send instructions from the afterlife.

LC: So, for example, when you saw your work brought together at MON, didn't you think, "Now what am I going to do for my next exhibition?" It has to do with everything you've ever done...

B: I can see a little of what I've done, but I can't plan a conclusion. What can I do now? I'll keep doing what I do and, at the same time, explore what I don't yet know... It's hard to explain. I don't know if this will improve on what came before or not, or how I'll manage to finish this project… Things just happen. And, of course, when I look back at everything I've done, I realize there was a sense of persistence, because many of those ideas have been with me from the very beginning. That's very important: realizing that we've managed to hold on to them for so long. In music, there are so many hits that were created by very young artists, songs and ideas that were very spontaneous. In some cases, they paved the way for a brilliant career; in others, they ended up stopping there. I always remember one of your works, the one with the leopard-print rug.[6] It's an amazing work, and you were very young when you did it.

LC: Yes. That one with the leopard was in the retrospective I put together last year in the United Arab Emirates.[7] It was in perfect condition, well-preserved, and went well with the others. It's really interesting to have the past right in front of us and to feel that time is on our side.

B: It's a work that empowers you, gives you the confidence to do a whole lot of other things.

LC: It opens up new possibilities, right?

B: Yeah, you broke new ground and achieved something that gave you the freedom to do whatever you wanted. You got off to a really good, strong start. But I'd like to talk about my titles—I love titles, and I like the ones that suggest possibilities, that don't define the thing too strictly but add a layer of information.

LC: They add ambiguity.

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[6] *Onça Pintada II,* 1984, first exhibited at Thomas Cohn Arte Contemporânea, in Rio de Janeiro, in 1984.

[7] *I like to like what others are liking,* Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, Emirados Árabes Unidos, 2025

B: Yeah, they add ambiguity, which can give the work other meanings. When I chose the title *Troca de segredos* [Exchange of Secrets] for this exhibition, I realized it made sense in this gallery space, which is more intimate, more welcoming. The first room has a lower ceiling and a column, and all of this somewhat disrupts the sense of having an overview of what's on display. The viewer is always close to the works. I imagine that this situation allows for a more intimate, more personal understanding, as if the works had the space to stand on their own before the viewer, creating a closer relationship, rather than one that's purely collective. It's a face-to-face conversation. I had never imagined this for an exhibition. Usually, we think of an exhibition as a collection of works, in which the relationship between them creates a broader conversation. In this case, it's an exchange of secrets.

LC: That's right, I'm reading the titles of the works here, too. *Passeio com Migudo* [A Walk with Migudo]. Who is Migudo? Is it the frog?

B: No, it's Antônio, my stepson, Marta's son. I thought that one was a sort of nocturnal fable. A playful journey.

LC: I think this is the most narrative piece, with that queen up there. A queen owl, right? The queen of the situation. And the frog, kind of like, "Where am I? Where am I going?" Perhaps this is the work that's most closely linked to your earlier work. I think it's all connected, but this one has something truly fabulous about it—in the sense of a fable. The owl symbolizes wisdom, while the frog is always that prince who was turned into a frog.

B: It's more narrative, at least to me. But there's also that red one with the shell, called *Sombra Sonora* [Sound Shadow]. The one with the two little jugs spilling is *Vênus e Marte* [Venus and Mars]. There's another one, with some fruit, a large piece, called *Sacolão Volante* [Flying Grocery Bag], and the blue and white one is *Sessão de Telepatia* [Telepathy Session].

LC: I think a lot of people feel that the world is changing faster than we can keep up with. And I feel that my work—even my perspective and my understanding of others' work—is somewhat affected by that... Our work always responds to the world. And lately, the world has been a little rude. That's why I now see your work as a little more serious, less anecdotal. Do you feel that, or think about it when you work? In terms of

the concept, or your own attitude, is your creative process also a response to this new reality?

B: Yes, I think so. We're constantly being bombarded and pulled into this reality. I feel like I'm talking to myself more and more, turning inward. Maturity makes us more economical, but we have our studios, where, sometimes, time just slips by—it almost stops. It seems like we're riding a good wave. It's a refuge where we can gather our strength and create some distance to face this world that hasn't turned out quite right.

LC: Yes. That seems to be a global tendency. But I think that, in our case, there's a specific aspect that has to do with our history. Our history begins, in a way, in the 1980s, a decade that in Brazil was marked above all by the end of the military dictatorship. And then, it was marked by various illusions we experienced together—and they were truly happy illusions, filled with lots of music, movies, and theater. At that time, all of this was associated with a sense of freedom due to political openness and a noticeable improvement in the economy. Brazil had always been a poor country, and suddenly there began to be a greater flow of money into the cultural sector. But that didn't lead to progress, and I think we're now experiencing a regression, caused in large part by the violence of these endless wars, which have no justification and provide economic benefits to a few at the expense of the suffering of thousands.

B: We came out of a long period of repression and into an explosion of ideas and a strong desire to do something. "Do it yourself!" But it seems there's an anchor that, at various points in history, tries to stop the world. They're trying to divide the world again. And always through violence and invasion. It's like a street fight, where force and intimidation prevail. And really, in the 1980s, we experienced some incredible moments. It seemed like Brazil was going to do well forever.

LC: And it felt like we were the ones building it and setting the rules. There was a positive vibe from so many people, from the artists around us. It was pure euphoria. It felt like we were riding high, and honestly, I think we still are. Our generation has been fulfilling the mission of creating and delivering culture, art, and entertainment. This includes a contribution that powerfully drives the entire economy surrounding the cultural industry. Everything is fueled by what artists create.

B: From the 1980s until today, I've always worked in a group. First, Seis Mãos (from 1983 to 1991), and Chelpa Ferro (since 1995). We've been together for over thirty years. It was an opportunity to share new experiences and push our boundaries, which was also very important for our individual work. Sound was already present in my work from the 1980s. I've borrowed sounds and noises from the radio, television, or machines and engines, and I'm still interested in that. When I did the exhibition *FALA COISA*[8] at Carpintaria with Joshua [Callaghan], I presented a performance in which I prepared some scores and played them for the sculptures.

LC: But this exhibition doesn't have any sound, right? Sometimes I think I'd like to add some sound.

B: Yeah, right? It doesn't... Who knows? ... I think we still have a lot of work to do!

[8] *FALA COISA – Barrão and Josh Callaghan,* Carpintaria, Rio de Janeiro, 2022