**THREE ARTISTS LOOKING FOR A HISTORY**

When the artists Felipe Góes, Fernanda Izar and Jeff Chies invited me to participate in this project, they already had in mind the outlines of what they wanted: an exhibition of their works with the collection of some Sao Paulo’s countryside collections. The works choice and the bond construction between them was my job, as an invited curator.

There was, in the artist’s desire, something beyond their will to amplify their works reach and present them to the public in places that they have never been before. There was a question, which since the beginning, captivated and provoked me: how the art that they produce today relates to the preserved and maintained history of these institutional collections? It is not about history taught in some art courses in Brazilian universities; it is not the history of Brazilian arts that, slowly, is consolidated overseas, which has its highlights in 1922’s modernism and in the 1960’s neo-concrete. It is, however, fragmented history, partial, even sometimes built “by accident” that, not without much troubles, these institutional collection, such like Araraquara Municipal Pinacotheca, kept building.

By searching for these transit to their works, these artists were already pointing out that there was an interest, an affinity, an identification in which they would like to give a better thought and therefore, perhaps, they requested my contribution. The fact the three of them bring their research to the specific field of the painting, surely eased some mediations. The Araraquara art gallery collection is mostly composed by paintings, although we can also find some engravings, tridimensional objects and, more recently, photographs. There were an initial confluence around painting and from it the exhibition could be articulated.

A really relevant issue of this work that we were about to perform was the fact that this collection have not been well studied yet. The city art works were recently gathered, in 1998, in a Pinacotheca, but a lot of information is still missing about them, about the artists and, specially, how they got there. The collection division, done by the time as a Pinacotheca, is fragmented in three parts: “Belas Artes School and its Students Collection”, “Paulo Mascia Collection” and “Others Artists”. This exhibition decided to focus on the Belas Artes School legacy. Founded in the late of 1920, it soon lost the financial support and started to be managed by former students, becoming the Free School until 1941. In 1941, it was totally closed, returning to open in 1948, with a three years regular course, which trained Art teachers. In 1969, definitely closes down.

In this part of the collection, there are works of teachers and students of the School, and also works acquired in the Fine Arts halls that were conducted by the institution. The collection includes a production that we could call academic arts, in which João Dutra and Vicente Leite, who comprise the present exhibition, are exemplary. They are academic, meaning that they sought to be aligned to the traditional academic production of the European arts, are paintings that, even acclimatized in Brazil, base the European arts as model to its production (specially the one done before the vanguards hatching in the early 20th century). We also chose to this exhibition a work of a so-called primitivist artist, Percival Fernandes who, alongside many others primitivist artists that are included in the collection, clearly did not went through a formal arts education and has a very free production. Soon became clear also that there were in the collection many interesting Brazilian modernism works, from well established artists like Volpi and Zorlini and, in a more local context, Amêndola. Next to it, two great surprises: two paintings from important modernist artists with international recognition, the Italian Vedova and the Dutch, Ouborg.

Inside this frame is where we are looking to highlight a number of possible relations between the collection works chosen for the exhibition, which were done, mainly between the late 1930’s and the early 1950’s, and the artists who are producing today. The task now was to think the legacy of these artists generation once more, “the 1940’s”, a marked period in Brazil by the consolidation of the modernism repertoire in the artistic production. This consolidation, as pointed out by many theorists, was not continuous and an unison movement. Unlike, it was marked by comings and goings, conveniences and particularities. The collection’s irregularity (which does not seem like have followed any clear line to consolidate itself) echoes this problematic process.

But we are in 2014, far away from the year of production of those works. What could we think today about this adaptation process or modern language recreation in Brazil? In what ways the artists who are producing today relates with this language, which once was seen as radical and today perhaps have become, itself, a “modern academy”?

Felipe’s works are paintings that, often, take the landscape as central motive. In the limit between the abstraction and the figuration, his paintings let you see the way they were done: the diluted paint, the marked brushstrokes, the drawing yet sketched. Forth these paintings, we realize, mostly, an atmosphere: a cloudy day at the beach, with a grey sky and sea, a silhouette of a pine tree seen from a distance, in the dusk, or yet the dust in an unpaved road at noon. In these landscapes, the scene lightning – the indifferentiation between sea and sky, the dusk backlight and the light abundance at noon – works by taking out of the painting its sharpness and details. We are removed towards the memory field where everything appears without clarity, but still with the image strength of the lived scenes.

When we look to Felipe’s paintings comparing to Vicente Leite and João Dutras’, from the collection, we realize that, though Dutra also concentrate in light gathering in the dusk and Vicente Leite painted a mountain chain in the sunny Rio de Janeiro, the way the paintings were done are very different from Felipe’s paintings. The classic framing of the collection paintings contrasts with the cut tree which we see in one of Felipe’s paintings. Likewise, in another Felipe’s painting, we get the feeling that who painted was in the road, observing the landscape, while the road in João Dutra’s painting appears far away, with a distance, to an observer-artist who is out of the scene.

In the first room, when Felipe’s work are related to Volpis’s paintings, we see in the more abstract paintings of the younger artist kind of a fitting of different color zones, which settle themselves in their places. Something similar happens to Volpi’s houses where, though we can see the figures with clarity, there is a formal simplification that makes them emerge as colored cutouts: rectangles, triangles and squares instead of doors, windows and roofs. The relation between Felipe’s grey paintings with Zorlini’s marine is immediate. Before these two paintings we can see a sort of emptiness: the sky and sea, specially, the representation of a distance: the distance which they are shown to us.

In Fernanda Izar’s case, in “Radio” series, which we brought one painting, we can see sort of a modern abstractionism heritage found in Amêndola as well and, in a different way, in Ouborg. We know that Ouborg, Dutch artist who lived most of his life time in Indonesia, when return to his country, got close to surrealism and produced works related to the unconscious, to ancestral memories, to whatever escapes, by nature, from a more direct understanding. In this period, among his interests there were the microscopic images and its portraits. Analogously, in “Radio” series paintings, Fernanda begins from human body parts (medical exams which show the insides of the body) and transport them to the painting. In both cases, there is the interest to paint something that exist, but is not seen by naked eye. In Amêndola’s case, the painting we chose to the exhibition also present organic forms, but yet with no external reference. In this piece, looks like the artist have created a number of tensions and accommodations between form, color and movement that are settled in the painting itself.

When, recently, Fernanda’s paintings become more figurative, in “Registro” series, like the big landscape in room 2, the artist brings a more freely way to paint, with organic forms, from her previous painting phase. Therefore, the stones that are in this painting of architectural proportions, are also sort of soft matter like the medical exams. The similarity with the primitivist artist Percival can be seen there as well: in the way they portray objects and situations that appear in their works in a particular way. We can classify both works as landscape paintings, but they are not done like this genre normally do in the academic tradition. In Percival’s case, the displacement from a referential is so big that we could say he paints a fantastic landscape, which only exists, so to say, in the artist imagination.

Jeff Chies appeared maybe as the most lonely figure. He works with paintings in big dimensions, the dimensions from his own body. The painting is seen as struggle place of the artist, who records the painting action itself by strong expressive gestures which impregnate the painting surface. In room 1, his painting present a drastic chromatic reduction and, therefore, the artist gesture, basically vertical and horizontal lines (more than curves and round shapes), assemble a kind of grid, formed by the interspersed movement of the two colors. In room 2, in a more recent work, the vivid colors emerge and the grid which structured the first painting disappears. When we look this painting in room 2 in relation to Percival and Fernanda landscapes’ we can find sort of a chromatic coincidence: the blue, pink and brown, can be seen, in Jeff’s painting, as a deconstructed landscape evocation, where the sky and the land can be found mixed and fused.

In room 1, if we look at Vedova’s painting, we see how the Italian, in this phase, already was giving goodbye to the modernist grid and moving to more radical experimentations. Here, also, there is no apparent motive for the painting, but only a kind of movement record rehearsed by the artist while painting. The colors begin to timidly reappear: only the primary colors like blue, red and yellow, mixed with what seem to be the background white of the canvas. Vedova is the artist from the collection that most approximates to the researches of today’s Jeff works. Traditionally classified as an informal artist (although he had reservations to that title), his works leave any known form to bring up a totally new creation, not based in social known memories, references or signs anymore. He used to claim: “My works are not creations, but earthquakes. There are paintings, but they explode.” Something similar we could say of Jeff’s work, which present itself as paintings, but are more like records of the artist movements, an attempt to impregnate the canvas with actions, with a sequence of happenings, a sort of instantaneous clustering of forms that emerge although are about to reform. It is known the Vedova’s approach to music, this art form that exists *in duration*, (meaning that only when the music is playing, by instants that succeed binding each other). Jeff’s works approach to music as well in this temporal meaning in which it is represented: they are paintings that record an instant, about to disappear.

When we think about this 1940’s generation legacy, we realize that is not only in the artists’ works that reach their own, new and powerful poetics (which is the foreign cases of Vedova, Ouborg and the Brazilian Volpi) that the new generation who is producing art today is built. But instead, the very consolidation of the modern in a tradition frequently lead the todays’ artists to look at what was left behind in the process of modernist depuration as contents that need to be recovered. Therefore, the academic art, pre-modern, the primitivists, the artists who appear laterally in the art history, are source of interest of the younger as well.

With no intention to conclude anything about the “modern heritage” and its influence in today’s context, which is something that would demand efforts beyond the limits of this exhibition, what draws attention is the way which these three artists retake issues from the past. The landscape painting, in Felipe’s case, the painting possibility as an initial gesture in Jeff’s abstraction and a more intuitive painting which refers to popular art, in Fernanda’s case, are some examples. We are tempted at this point to observe how this artists’ generation “unrank” history relating to the high modern tradition (as we can see in the first room), but also with the academic and primitivist tradition (in the second room). The dialogue opening with the Araraquara Pinacotheca collection works, at the same time, brings to present works of artists who produced decades before and tell the bases, not always so evident, of the recent works that emerges on the artistic scene of today.

Texto de Thais Rivitti

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