

Relict

I. Cinzas [Gray]

What is original in São Paulo? What memories remain in a city that has already been rebuilt at least three times, on its own ruins? Even the Colégio dos Jesuítas [Jesuit School], an integral part of the initial old village, was demolished and reconstructed. Our palimpsest city, therefore, rejects the notion of original. Everything is accumulation and superposition, historic and material assemblage. Here at the Beco do Pinto – the steep lane built in colonial times to link the historical hilltop to the Carmo Marsh – some “archaeological windows” can be spotted on the ground, in the form of granite slabs and Portuguese mosaic. They are windows to past times, which reveal other historical layers, with other heights and different materials. Along this ground, descending in stepwise fashion, Fernando Limberger constructed nine “windows” in the form of plant beds into which he dumped a wide variety of urban materials – all of them gray – in an indiscernible jumble that mixes proto-construction with the rubble and debris of a city undergoing a continuous process of demolition. “Aqui tudo parece que é ainda construção e já é ruína” [Here, everything looks like it’s under construction and already in ruins] goes a line of song by Caetano Veloso, citing the celebrated definition of São Paulo given by Lévi-Strauss in *Sad Tropics*. The voracity of money and the haste to inaugurate new things does not allow new constructions to come into their full being and to age with dignity. Everything is precarious, because everything wants to be forever new. But what endures in city like this? What sort of archaeological vestiges will it have in the future? Considering this, the artist gathered urban rejects in the area around the Pátio do Colégio, and mixed them with pieces brought from other places: fragments of various objects including benches, storm-drain inlets and pipes, gratings, concrete beams, curbs, and other assorted concrete scraps, as well as pieces of aluminum and plastic, blankets used by street dwellers, powdered ashes, sand, and various types of plant life occupying the cracks in these scrap heaps. In the visual hallucination of grayish monochrome, everything is brought together and made equivalent, as in a palimpsest. But these gray things are also like the looting of a gravesite. The remains of something that was once alive, and that can serve as fertilizer for new forms of future life.

II. Verde infinito [Infinite Green]

On the Casa da Imagem's terrace, in the open air, a sculpture of ceramic vases painted green, rising skyward in a movement of vertical ascension, is crowned by an ipê tree seedling. This is another monochromatic installation. In a dense forest, the tree trunks and branches likewise seek the sky, reaching the greatest height possible, competing for sunlight, in order to carry out the photosynthesis essential for life. Here, however, for this lonely plant, there is no competition, making the forced verticality of the sculpture somewhat enigmatic. Its rather anomalous skyward growth flirts with surrealist absurdity. This dreamlike estrangement of reality bears proximity with Brancusi's infinite column, and with the world of fairytales – like "Jack and the Beanstalk" (a childish herbaceous version of the myth of the Tower of Babel) as well as newer fables, like the animated film *WALL-E* by Pixar, in which a robot tries to save the last seedling on a devastated Earth dominated by trash heaps. This *Verde infinito* rises up and grows in a double movement, as a criticism and, simultaneously, a utopian analogy in relation to the work *Cinzas*, located below it. Will it go right up into the skies, crossing through the atmosphere? Will it make contact with other beings, sending out an interplanetary cry for help? Will there be sufficient vases to raise it that high?

III. Retomada [Recovered]

In *Retomada*, time is treated in a concrete way: within the area of the Casa da Imagem's garden, in a plant bed, various species have been planted, and will grow for a period of five years. The existing garden was removed for the planting of a new one, designed by the artist. The choice of species was based on historical and scientific studies, seeking to reproduce, as closely as possible, the autochthonous vegetation of this place – the plant life as it existed in this area at the founding of the city, around 1554. These plant species of the hillside, the marsh, the savanna and the Atlantic Forest were collected in expeditions to places where specimens reminiscent from that period can be found living yet today. And here we arrive back at a problem that pervades the set of works by Limberger in this show: what is the “original” in the case of São Paulo? Is it possible to return to an original situation? In the field of urbanism and architecture, we see that as the city progressed, it successively erased its historical tracks. Therefore, perhaps the DNA of São Paulo, in this case, is precisely that of a non-origin, and, therefore, of a non-identity. Even the geographic reality of the slope of the historical hill, so important in the choice of the site by the Jesuits, is hardly perceptible today. In the case of the site's geography and botany, however, it is possible to allude to the original plant life in the area, based on science with perhaps a dash of fictional license. To this end, Fernando recurs to the instigating concept of the “relict,” which instead of describing a homogeneous and continuous situation, has to do with the idea of an enclave, of a vestige, of islands of apparently anomalous plant life. In the words of geographer Aziz Ab'Saber, a relict is “any plant species found in a specific location and surrounded by various zones of another ecosystem,” the relict is, thus, a survivor. Something that remained amidst strange bodies. Perhaps it is a very appropriate metaphor for the situation of anyone today, in Brazil, who can still see some value in culture and in nature.

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