

Ana Dias Batista

“Area, range, domain, sphere.”

Mendes Wood Gallery, Oct. 2011

Conversation

Carla Zaccagnini - After our meeting, I kept thinking that the objects you build present themselves in an intermittent existence, like those optical illusion games where sometimes you see a goblet, sometimes two profiles facing one another; at times a frog, at times a horse. As if it were not possible to apprehend them as a whole but in parts, now the road, the slide, the park, the horse race, the moon; then the materials or the forms that constitute them and the social uses that characterize them.

Ana Dias Batista - I was a bit reluctant to accept your idea of an intermittent existence. But there is a piece that works exactly like that. It is the one we did together, the poster for the journal Número. The image that I proposed, in response to your work of folded beer labels, is sliced and interspersed, creating a rule for the text to be written. Sky and mountain cannot be seen except one at the expense of the other. I found it fun to think, then, that the intermittent feature is a characteristic of one of our conversations. Or of my work in one of our conversations, such as this one.

I think my works do have these two different instances, to which equal weight is given. On the one hand, the materials they are made of, their social uses, their circulation, the techniques that are associated with them. On the other, something perhaps of the order of representation. These referents that have names then enter: the road, the horse race, the moon. Except that the objective is not to represent them directly, but to resort to the representations that exist (I am interested in the most simple and schematic ones) and socially circulate. These representations are themselves treated as materials loaded with social uses, as much as flip charts, or decorated paper rolls for packaging, or engraved plates, to stay with the examples of the road, the horse race and the moon.

But I will tell you why I was reluctant about the intermittent existence. Although these instances are clearly distinguished in the experience of the works, I don't think you should not see one to see the other. The two instances are not polarized, but juxtaposed. The interest of the work is to discover the affinity, for example, between this “rustic” technique of engraving - which guarantees, with the manifest gesture of the gouge, the rural atmosphere of country house signs in closed condos - and a very common image of the surface of the moon ...

Is the objective then to find the surface of the moon on the condo sign or in the

chocolate shops signs in Campos do Jordão? To glimpse the possibility of the unfolding of a horse race on a roll of gift paper and of the road movie on the flip chart? Is it to look at the world searching for the possible overlapping of things with name (and with a history of representation) and materials already marked by a history of uses?

But from which universe of representations do these issues come and from which social space do these materials come? It seems to me that, on the one hand, maybe by the somehow random focus of these examples, there is something almost nostalgic in the choices, in the moon, in the horse race and in the road; as if the three elements had come from the same era: the image of the moon on the black and white TV, the image of horses in the binoculars, the road on the windshield of the new car. Or a comment about a wish for speed, for the distance, for going beyond (though the horses run in circles); a dated wish of space conquest, taming of the horse and domain of the territory; something between Yuri Gagarin and Jack Kerouac.

Conversely, the materials or techniques chosen have a more entrepreneurial or bureaucratic, repetitive or artificial load, as if devoid of libido. There is something on the order of standardization, both in the idea of work and in the idea of leisure (whether in the country side or in a shopping afternoon).

It seems to me that these two overlapping realities belong to different social universes. Or maybe it is possible to imagine a certain consequence, the space race ending on the flip chart. Where do these choices come from, by what kind of interest or view are they guided?

The image of the Hipódromo (Hippodrome) already occurred to me with a second mediation, besides the binoculars: these amusement park attractions, where the horse and the rider fuse into a single piece of colorful plastic, and run in jerky motion, in profile for the observer-player. Even though horse racing does not inhabit the imaginations of prosperous young men, children and writers anymore, the attraction keeps running in amusement parks, in a strange condition, of quasi independence in relation to the original referent. It is curious that it has been "updated" by replacing the jockey for Pluto or Goofy, and not the horses for cars...

In fact obsolescence has a role in my work. I don't know if it is nostalgia – the work does not regret what was lost; it does not suggest that the past was better than the present. What interests me in obsolete objects is that they allow us to understand certain operations of the society from a distant perspective; they betray the origin of current problems. The end of the validity of their most evident social effects leaves some remains, such as the attraction in the park, which are things with a very particular status.

Regarding the instance of the materials or the techniques, you are right. In general, they are in full force, and they may be diverted from their neutral, standardized and apparently harmless condition, by the already worn representation that juxtaposes.

The horses run in circles (because that is wrapping paper). The moon is heavy and is on the floor (because that is solid wood). The road lines, frozen in still frames, insist on always returning to the starting point (because they rely on the flip chart pages).

There is another family of works that uses architecture as support and constitutive element. For example, in this exhibition, the Escada (Stairs). The Escada also brings a movement out of the plane, an unfolding, which is very clear on the Número poster, but takes place, as well, in the semi-transparent roll of the Hipódromo and in the wallpaper of Queimada (Forest Fire), where the fire images oscillate between a superimposed painting and a window with a back view. The flip charts are also subsequent planes that become sculptural. Is there something in your work that makes the transit between drawing and sculpture? Also, would there be, in this idea of plane, something of motion pictures?

The idea of elevation occurs to me. Among your many stairs, is there one that comes down, that goes below the floor? It seems that even with the cheapening of references; even if the horses of your race are not thoroughbreds, but thorough plastic; there is, perhaps as a side effect, a metaphorical power in the ascending stairs, in the road, in the horse race or toward space. There is something of a getaway route, of taking distance, of a possible escape (although the promise is not fulfilled).

There are no stairs going down, but there are no stairs one can climb either. This one that is at Mendes Wood has a closed access, and can only be experienced in the negative. The one at the back of the panel in Centro Cultural São Paulo is blocked by the railing, that extends to the floor. In the Escorregador (Slide), the movement of the flip chart makes the sheets slide on the stair - the real slide in the opposite direction to what the represented object would suggest. The evoked promises are in fact elevation and speed. They are metaphorical loads the referents carry, and the works manage, literally, to interdict. I don't think there is adhesion to these promises ...

Returning to the first part of your question, I think the work either operates on, or even with the surface, be it the walls, floor or ceiling of the architectural space or the exterior of the material used. In Queimada, the surface oscillates back and forth virtually, but maintains the minimum thickness of the wallpaper. In Crocante (Crispy), another piece in that show, the walls and windows ruffle. Even when the work becomes decisively three-dimensional – as in the moon – the whole tension lies in the

accidents of the surface (still, or for that reason, I named it "Its Core Consists of Iron, Nickel and Possibly Sulfur").

In a side view, the Escada is a cut in the plane of the wall, evidencing the grid that organizes our thought of space. I think the design, in the sense of this projective instrument connected to the plane, is always set. I'm not talking about designing a project to be executed. I'm talking about design as projective instance, of a rational, abstract matrix, which is present in the finished work. About sculpture, I really don't know. These surface developments seem more like provocations to the plane, and the plane interests me for its role (which is a historical datum) in the constitution of modern rationality itself...

I like the idea of including motion pictures in these thoughts about the role of the plane for the rational apprehension of the world. My work, here and there, remakes that first gesture of movies, of linking the frames in sequence. However, the passage from one frame to another, in the work, is usually slow and well marked. Truncated even, like the motion of the horses in the park attraction.

I agree. It is more like a series of provocations to the plane than an idea of sculpture. The three-dimensionality seems always reversible, as if it could be re-planned with simple gestures. Your reference to the plane as a constitutive element of modern rationality is interesting. Funny, because in a certain sense, modernity begins when the world ceases to be flat and becomes round. And maybe we could take the cue to talk about the Esquadro (Square).

I was thinking of Descartes, the invention of analytic geometry. Space determined by coordinate points in the x, y and z axes. Remember those charts? The idea of grid organizes, even today, the representations of our space experience. The logic of the planes provides an abstraction, a mathematical understanding of the world that is the basis of instrumental rationality. Rationality which, with modernity, gradually conducts the relationships of men with nature, and among men. Knowledge that also misrepresents... But that's just cheap philosophy!

The Esquadro (Square) is a glass piece, made in the exact proportion of a technical drawing square, but in giant size, from the scale of the hand to that of the body. This operation with the scale implies precisely the passage from the abstract, disembodied realm of the project design, to the real space where the body moves.

In relation to its size, it can be handled perfectly, but one needs to engage the trunk and the arms. What makes it impossible for the Esquadro to be applied to the

architecture of the gallery - over-designed, full of acute and oblique angles- is the material it is made of. This square is fragile and it would not support, in one piece, the use it suggests. On the floor of the room, leaning, it touches a window. It is made of the same material of the window; just as the moon is made of the same material of the floor, and the pocket, of the wall material. If the transparence, in the original referent, served the functionality (after all one wants to see the drawing when a line is drawn with the help of the square), here, emancipated, it becomes reiteration of the space. As if the objects that touch one another could share properties. Or meanings: area, range, domain, sphere.