

The End of the World is Here

We must urgently decree the end of the world. The end of history, the end of art, the end of great narratives have already been declared. Such decrees have the main meaning of showing that almost no one has been included in the official version of the facts. In the middle of city squares, festooned heroes, military officers, miscreants. In the national symbols, idealized paradises, touristified, emptied of people, catering to consumerism and tourism. In the peripheral areas of cities, the military tanks, the armored police vehicles, the patrols. On the other hand, the enjoyment of leisure, pleasure, of the main halls are only or the whites of the elite. To those racialized, cleaning, serving, the exoticized displays of bodies.

Jaime Lauriano brings, in “The End of the World is Here”, new stories, other stories, with the hope that we can still alter the great narratives, nullifying them, smudging the paintings, toppling monuments. There will still be time, according to Ailton Krenak, to tell new stories. One of the most reiterated actions in decoloniality is precisely to question official images and include those subordinated in the narratives, kept out of the national ideals and projects, obviously, those of African descent and the indigenous peoples of Brazil. A monument, as Achille Mbembe tells us, never performs with the past “a conscious work of symbolization”. On the contrary, the different dominations are carved onto the individuals and the common areas, in the streets and museums. The result is different layers of abashment towards those subordinated, preserving the worship to those Mbembe calls “bastard-spirits”.

Beyond the memorable events immortalized by monuments, other survivals become the object of struggles and revolts. And Jaime Lauriano writes on the main gate of MAR “the history of the blacks is a warrior happiness”, paraphrasing the lyrics by the great Gilberto Gil dedicated to a hero that waited three hundred years for recognition: Zumbi dos Palmares. In other words, besides telling more stories, we still seek the path of a warrior happiness, in the political protests, in the social issues, in the dirt courtyards, in the social circles, and in the banality of an equal and inclusive everyday life.

Colonization

Art and History – with two feet firmly planted on current dilemmas – are the core elements in the work of Jaime Lauriano, which confronts different perspectives, from fiction to documentary and essay. Aware of the fact that the cries of our past resound ominous, it is imperative that we seek ways of exorcizing them in the present. Lauriano develops a practice in which the past is cleansed and cleansed once more, purified, and stripped so that, in some way, it ceases to act traumatically upon the present.

Asserting the value of the Brazilian man

The sentence that is the title of this installation was extracted from the letter to the readers sent to the big Brazilian newspapers on July 22nd, 1970, by general Emílio Garrastazu Médici, then President of the Republic of Brazil. Médici wrote: “In this moment of Victory, I bring to the people my tribute, relating myself entirely to the joy and thrill of every street, to celebrate, in our incomparable National Soccer Team, the very own assertion of the value of the Brazilian man”.

Unlike what was pointed out by Médici in this excessively patriotic text, which celebrates national unity, the reality of the Brazilian society then was the exacerbation of inequalities and the ripping of the social fabric. This becomes patent when we analyze the violent persecution by the State against any movement opposing the military dictatorship. Driven by the third victory in the FIFA World Cup and the illusions of the “economic miracle”, the dictators of the time developed, with the help of mainstream media, a complex propaganda system to hide the torture apparatus.

In the images shown in the installation, we find reproductions of newspapers, magazines, and other periodicals of the 1970s. Overlying these “official” materials, drawings were made, and adhesives were stuck which represent the orishas and other candomble deities. This procedure attempts to symbolically reprocess the violent past that insists on repeating itself as farce.

In this year of 2023, we are once more reminded that the legacy of the military dictatorship is rather latent in our society. On January 8th, a mob of authoritarians stormed the Federal Capital, destroying the symbols of our already weakened – and unequal – democracy. Watching the seat of the three branches of government in shambles evidenced even more that the processes of amnesty, which mark our history, did not and will never lead to a supposed and biased pacification of a nation that does not even include all the peoples that inhabit its territory. Therefore, it is more than necessary that we employ all our efforts to show the contradictions that provide the foundation for coupist, fascist, and authoritarian narratives.

Concrete experience

This series of works attempts to establish relationships between the works and actions developed by artists who are part of the Brazilian concrete and neo-concrete art movements and the violence contained within Brazilian history. Jaime Lauriano shows how simple shapes, such as that of a triangle, may reveal, all at once, the constructive trend of Brazilian art and the perversities of the slave trade and its trade routes.

The work “Concrete experience #9 (circle of pleasures)” is conceptually and plastically based on the work “Circle of Pleasures”, by artist Lygia Pape. In this work, one of the most important by the artist, we come across 16 bowls placed in a circle on the floor. In the bowls, we find a mixture of water and food coloring. In an invitation to experiment with colors, the circle of pleasures was a seminal work in Brazilian art history. In its reinterpretation of this work, Jaime Lauriano replaces the food coloring for cleaning products and alcoholic beverages, which, when found in possession of Black people, in certain situations in Brazil, are classified by the police as explosive elements.

Retreat

The “Retreat” series investigates the relationships involving the manifestations of the African diaspora and the worldwide black popular revolutions between the 1970s and 1990. In these investigations, Lauriano has developed an archive composed of visual and sound elements that are typical of Every place visited, to then mix them with the lyrics of songs and chants sung in certain popular festivities and rituals.

The works reveal reflections on how images of current protests, religious symbols, and lyrics can symbolically confront or even cancel the violence contained within Eurocentric art history. In these pieces, images extracted from paintings such as Henri Matisse's "Dance", compete for narrative space with drawings of black women holding hands and protesting the death of their children caused by the State. Thus, for the exhibit "The End of the World is Here", the artist made a set of paintings that were inspired by the surroundings of MAR and all of its history of resistance and cultural production.

Justice and savagery

Texts and images of people, mostly black men, tied to lampposts are featured in the headlines of the main Brazilian newspapers. In their online versions, such news stories resonate in the comments left by the readers, who, excited by such events, elevate the "vigilantes" to the status of national heroes.

In the 1910s and 1920s, in the United States of America, it was common to see photos depicting African American bodies hung by a white population. Displayed as trophies, these bodies constituted monuments that celebrated white supremacy. However, they were featured in postcards with the same triviality of a landscape worthy of celebration. In Brazil, cases such as these were not typically publicized, for then there was an attempt to portray the country as a mixed-race society that experienced the pinnacle of social democracy.

Separated in time by more than a century, and after many revolts and protests, the two situations show how the current wave of violence against African American bodies is directly linked to the practices of colonial violence: public lynchings, imprisonment in lampposts and town squares etc.

Such practices may also be found in the torture sessions of the Brazilian civic-military dictatorship. Some of these sessions were performed before an audience of people from different parts of civil society who, through the purchase of a ticket, watched the sessions of rape, electroshocks, beatings and different types of attacks against human rights by the agents of the dictatorship.

"Justice and savagery" displays images of lynchings perpetrated in Brazil. Alongside the images are dialogues extracted from comments left by the readers of the online versions of the main Brazilian newspapers. Such a practice perversely updates Brazil's colonial and dictatorial past.