

Open since March 1st, 2013, MAR celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2023. Being a Museum, being located at Mauá square, being part of Pequena África [Little Africa], listening and talking to its audiences, following a calling: many are the challenges faced when attempting to renew the sociocultural meanings condensed within the word “museum”. Museums originate from the so-called “cabinets of curiosities”, collections of trinkets alongside works of art. However, those cabinets were owned by specific social classes: the aristocrats and the elites. The curiosity of safekeeping went hand in hand with violent acts, theft, plunder, seizure of pieces belonging to indigenous traditions. Thus, colonialism, apart from invading lands, mainly in the Americas, Africa, and the East, hoarded foreign riches in its coffers.

Based on that, being a Museum means turning such actions into warnings so that these same arbitrary acts will never be repeated. Therefore, Museu de Arte do Rio faces and updates the challenge of not coopting discourses but, instead, becoming an environment built through dialogue with its audiences, its neighbors, with the schools and with the history of Brazil written by those who, in fact, are representatives of the indigenous peoples, of those of African descent, of the marginalized.

Going beyond issues regarding intersectionality, congregating genders, classes, and ethnicities, MAR is dedicated to telling stories, those which, according to Ailton Krenak, will survive the end of the world itself. Thus, we build interests and dialogues with popular culture, with the biographies of infamous characters, with the latest works of art produced, as well as with different training programs. Therefore, we notice that the city has welcomed us during our most difficult moments as an institution, caused by the lack of cultural policies.

A Museum will always be a pronominal place, of dialogue with representativity, SELVES/OTHERS. Telling stories and telling them collectively so that we have legitimacy when we pronounce the word: WE!

IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF PROTEST

Building, erecting, and demolishing are verbs that the city of Rio de Janeiro has forced itself to conjugate, even amidst an atmosphere of protests and uprisings. MAR is located in one of the ends of Central avenue, currently called Rio Branco avenue, one of the first renovation projects of the administration of mayor Pereira Passos. With the ideas of progress and embellishment of the city, most of the changes implemented since the nineteenth century evicted the poor to more invisible regions, the hills and favelas. Therefore, embellishing, changing the uses of a location, evicting residents, demolishing houses and shacks constitute one of the city’s traumas.

Things would not be different by the time we arrive, in 2013, with the Porto Maravilha project, which also implemented positive and contradictory ideas. The region of Mauá square and its surroundings, called Pequena África, was the stage for disputes and protests. At the opening of MAR, right by its entrance, the mob of unhappy citizens greeted artists and government officials. Digging, demolishing, and depriving of distinctive characteristics were inevitable ways of dealing with colonial history, since this region close to the Valongo wharf received one of the largest amounts of enslaved people in the world. Today, MAR is one of the facilities designed to review the traumas, remake the bonds, raise awareness, and take action so that the memory is, in fact, collective and restorative.

THE USES AND “COUNTERUSES” OF THE PLACE

The Museum which today hosts education programs, exhibits, and events was once the Mariano Procópio bus station. Currently protected as historical heritage, its marquee still stands, which used to protect the population that boarded buses to Baixada Fluminense, going to places such as Éden, Caxias, Nilópolis, and Nova Iguaçu. Traffic and the merry cries of peddlers, fare collectors, shipping clerks, and greasy spoons used to fill the area known today as MAR’s Pilotis.

Due to its location in the port of Rio, Mauá square would be known as the backdrop for a hustle and bustle that became typical, and even historic. The relationship between sailors and prostitution, foreigners and workers in Downtown Rio at the end of the workday comprised the clientele of bars and nightclubs.

All of this wealth lived side by side with the local residents of the neighborhoods of Saúde, Gamboa, Santo Cristo, in the hills of Conceição and Providência. Thus, the term “gentrification”, in the early years, accompanied the function and commitment of the Museum, which little by little got closer to its neighbors and, with the dedication of different teams, is still earning its spot in the area.

The uses and “counteruses”, a concept created by Rogério Proença Leite, make us pay attention to the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of public policies. A cultural facility located in an urban area must face open questions: For whom? How? Why?, forsaking, once and for all, the imposing gestures contained in the planning. To a museum, not always the uses, but mainly the counteruses, define its identity.

In April 2014, MAR was the Popular Choice Winner, in the Museum category, of the Architizer A+ Awards, the most important international architecture award, with a project by the firm Jacobsen Arquitetura.

RUBBLE

“Stratigraphic Blurring” was the first MAR exhibit devoted to a reflection on what was going on in the Museum’s surroundings. Still in 2013, the year it opened, MAR welcomed artist Yuri Firmeza, from the state of Ceará, along with curator Clarissa Diniz and the MAR team, who roamed the region collecting rubble, bits of cement, toys, and broken and damaged street furniture. Thus, Yuri aimed for the complexity contained in the word “memory”. Held in one of MAR’s exhibition rooms, the exhibit created a large central area in which the rubble was located, and it presented three videos: one with a montage of institutional videos and videos of the Porto Maravilha campaign, in which the simulation effects showed the so-called improvements in the region, its promises for the future, another in which an elephant moved slowly, and a third video, in which the artist’s grandmother reacted to stimuli contained in very old songs, dancing and moving in another time, the time of the memory that, thus, coexists with the relic of the rubble.

MORRINHO

Renato Dias, currently working in MAR’s assembly team, has first come to know the Museum as an artist, in one of the first exhibits. Morrinho, a project launched in 1997 in Pereira da Silva, a favela in the neighborhood of Laranjeiras, as a children’s game, was one of the works shown in the exhibit “O Abrigo e o Terreno” (“The Shelter and the Earthly”), curated by Paulo Herkenhoff and Clarissa Diniz. The installation was composed of bits of colored bricks that, when arranged in a pile, resemble the shacks built in Rio’s hills. Renato, one of the artists of the Morrinho collective, shares with us some details of this activity:

“By the end of 2012, Paula Trope invites Paulo Herkenhoff to visit Morrinho. Paula had been invited to show some works in on the Museum’s opening exhibits, and the photographs of Morrinho were featured among the works. Paulo wanted to go see the mockup to think about the possibility of taking it to MAR. Since there were many people doing construction work in the Museum, in the assembly, we started to integrate the locations of these people, writing their neighborhoods in the mockup”.

ESCOLA DO OLHAR AND VIZINHOS DO MAR

Ever since its planning stages, still with other teams, MAR, which originally was going to be an art gallery that would house private collections, had the pairing Museum/School as one of its priorities. A challenge that followed the history of another museum in Rio, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM), which opened in the 1940s. A reference source. Being a museum that houses a school and a school that houses a museum was one of the most repeated comments in the constitution of MAR. The school, Escola do Olhar, then, starts in a grand manner, with programs with connections to schools and universities, aware of social issues, strongly impelled towards the highly debated “historical reparations”. Janaína Melo, the first education manager in MAR, repeats a fact that maybe marks the turning point in the sensitive and methodological observation that MAR had to be a place where people feel listened to. In one school visit to the Museum, a group of teenagers get in a circle and start dancing the “passinho” in the Pilotis. Janaína, then, asks all the teams in the Museum to get down and notice the vitality of the place, beyond the elitist art, sealing the commitment of creating a complex network in the intercultural relations. If MAR arrives in the neighborhood after imposed urban planning works, the commitment to connect to the region is one of the pillars for the systematic and recurring actions of Escola do Olhar. Having coffee at the neighbors’, an everyday routine activity, was then returned as an invitation, now programmatic, “come have coffee with us”. Thus, one Saturday a month, the neighbors come and have coffee with the educators of Escola do Olhar. There, the conversations become more intimate, filled with demands, discussion topics, desires, compiled into texts and images in the publication of a newspaper by the neighbors.

THE COLLECTION

The collection of Museu de Arte do Rio, throughout its ten years of history, has been establishing a comprehensive dialogue with contemporary and historic works of art. A collection amassed by civil society, based on the donation by artists, gallery owners and collectors, as the governance model between the city and private organizations such as Odeon, OEI, and FRM, implemented during the administration of mayor Eduardo Paes. The nature of the collection stands out, which is ethnographic, with collections of Indigenous, Afro-Brazilian, African, Maroon, Jewish, and Islamic art. The development and establishment of our collection presents paths and foundations that tell us and share the visualities of a comprehensive production of art in Brazil and elucidates the importance of museum collections and their commitment to the memories, identities, subjectivities, and the senses of otherness in a constant flow. The collection is currently com-

posed if a library and two reserve collections, one of them open to the public, with approximately 10 thousand museum works, 8 thousand document collections, 15 thousand bibliographical works, including 4 thousand rare and special volumes, and books by artists.

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VIZINHOS DO MAR

Just as the morning coffee is a ritual to start the day, Coffee with Vizinhos is the place where Escola do Olhar begins its cultural actions with the people of the territory. In this first act, of meeting and of otherness, we challenge the enormous ball of yarn that each person carries to weave a Community net, based on unique, unprecedented, and unrepeatable stories and experiences.

With Coffee with Vizinhos, we begin to pull the first threads that develop into regular activities and specific projects, such as: Occupations and Knowledge of the region, presentation of works at/by/with the territory, Gallery Talks, Socioterritorial Research, and Vizinhos Newspaper. With these actions, the knowledge of the territory seeps through the Museum's structures, connecting it to the everyday lives of Pequena África, providing different perspectives.

The Vizinhos do MAR program encourages the potentialities of the local residents by promoting environments for experimentations. We acknowledge that the everyday lives that circulate throughout Pequena África are intertwined with ancient art, whose languages are updated by a youth connected to current complaints, without cutting the threads that connect it to its own history. Therefore, Vizinhos do MAR is a vehicle through which the residents of the region of the port express themselves, strengthening the feeling of belonging and the appropriation of the space for the creation of what we believe is a living museum.

THE ABRAÇAÇO (BIG HUG)

MAR VIVE is a civil society movement conceived by contemporary art professionals to champion the continuity of the programs offered by Museu de Arte do Rio and Escola do Olhar. It was created in November 2019 through reflections of the initial group, formed by Joana Csekö, Luiza Interlenghi, Martha Niklaus, Paula Trope, Regina de Paula, and Rosana Palazyan, due to their shock at the news that workers were being fired and that MAR would close its doors in December 2019. The collective quickly expanded and multiplied on many fronts. The group is currently composed of 84 participants.

With the dismantling of cultural public policies in Rio de Janeiro, the crisis in MAR was the trigger for our union and the actions that followed. Our first action was to write a letter/manifesto to be delivered to the mayor of the city of Rio de Janeiro, in care of Secretary of Culture Adolpho Konder. In a few days, our letter, developed as an online petition, got 44,479 signatures, a figure that reflects how much the public regards the Museum-School. While writing the letter, we felt the need for an action. Thus, the Abraço came to be. With the idea of welcoming in mind. It would be a sort of sym-

bolic exchange of love with MAR, which, through its activities, has a love proposal with our city. At the same time, with all that we have been experiencing, given the recent pressure and limitations to art and to cultural institutions, we were also in need of that big hug.

Abraço took place on November 26, 2019, and it was a comprehensive action: for art, for culture, or freedom, for museums, for institutions, for their workers, and for Rio. We got positive feedback for our mobilization. Always prioritizing dialogue, these actions led us to delve deeper into the political issues in the institutional context. We were welcomed by representatives of the entities involved by the management of the museum – Rio’s Municipal Culture Office, Odeon Institute, and MAR’s Board of Advisors. In these meetings, we strived to get a better understanding so that we could advance in our struggle to keep MAR open. Today, we realize that this trajectory provided us with a great lesson.

We know how important it is for artists and art professionals to achieve a more accurate understanding of the forces that shape and keep cultural spaces working. We understand our need to be heard in the management of cultural institutions. We know that our participation can contribute actively to the preservation of the institutions we hold dear. The presence of artists and art professionals on the Advisory Boards of museums and institutions is ever more necessary. Thus, we will be able to hold each other accountable, to walk the same path, and to fight for art, for culture, and for the excellence of this field which all of us are part of.

We live in one of the toughest moments for culture in the country — in every level, from Education to Arts —, with the stripping and dismantling of our most precious institutions. And we know why: Education and Art generate thought, critical thinking, affection, belonging, a power of creation, of freedom, of love, and of life. Education and Art also play the role of resistance, of proposing strategies and actions that can tackle terror and obscurantism.

One of the fundamental features of contemporary art is effusion, transversality, the act of not inhabiting an isolated place in the world, but, instead, taking part in the development of fields of knowledge and sensitive perception. Contemporary art is ever more porous, permeable; it seeks contaminations. Likewise, art venues must also constitute new ways of participating in the symbolic and material life of societies and of exchanges with the communities to which they belong.

Therefore, as stated in our letter/manifesto: “MAR is a unique institution. A true Museum-School, which discusses and ressignifies the city and its symbolic possibilities. Inclusive, open to the diversity and plurality of our cultu-

re, its activities and exhibits attract visitors from a broad urban perimeter, who seldom had this opportunity before. Educational practices make audiences feel represented and come back to visit the Museum. MAR's collection is composed of more than nine thousand museum pieces and twenty thousand collection items, with a comprehensive historical profile. A public asset estimated in 150 million reais. This powerful collection, one of the most important in the country, was amassed through donations made by artists, gallery owners, and collectors who trusted MAR's guidelines". Therefore, ensuring the integrity of this institution seemed to us a responsibility and a calling.

MAR will not close! The MAR VIVE group is still on the alert. We will remain vigilant, united, strong, and reiterate our will to fight for art, culture, and life in a more comprehensive manner.

We would like to thank the members of the MAR VIVE group, who from the start joined the movement without hesitation. This union welcomed us and made everyone stronger. It had been a long time since we had been united around an issue. We would like to acknowledge those who joined the movement in a generous and participatory manner: Ana Miguel, Anna Linne-mann, Bárbara Dias, Carla Guagliardi, Clarissa Diniz, Cláudia Noronha, Daniel Murgel, Fernanda Junqueira, Fernanda Lemos, Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda, Joaquim Paiva, Leandro Barboza, Luiz Guimarães, Maurício Dias, Nara Reis, Paula Alzugaray, Regina Pessoa, Renato Bezerra de Melo, Simone Cupello, Suely Farhi, Walter Riedweg, Zie Diniz Guimarães. The following people have also supported the production of Abraço: Adriana Rattes, Brígida Baltar, Carlito Carvalhosa, Elizabeth Jobim, Ernesto Neto, Márcio Menasce, Marcos Bonisson, Maria Luiza Mendonça, Miguel Kallemback, Raul Mourão, Ricardo Basbaum, Ricardo Porto. The following Brazilian and foreign curators collaborated with testimonies in support of MAR: Anibal Jozami, Aracy Amaral, Bia Lessa, Bruno Zraggem, Damien Christinger, Diana Wechsler, Fábio Cypriano, Felipe Hirsch, João Fernandes, Lisette Lagnado, Luiz Camillo Osório, Luiza Duarte, Marcelo Araújo, Márcio Doctors, Maria Igenes Montovani, Mercedes Guimarães, Milton Guran, Moacir dos Anjos, Roger Buerger, Solange Farkas, Suelly Rolnik, and Tania Rivera. We would like to thank former artistic directors Evandro Salles and Paulo Herkenhoff, as well as members of the MAR team, such as Amanda Bonan, Pollyana Quintella, and Andréa Zabrieszach, who kept a precious dialogue and supported MAR VIVE. Finally, we would like to thank all those who attended Abraço.

MAR VIVE Group
February 2020

Text about the history and actions of the group, presented at the seminar held at Museu de Arte do Rio on February 12, 2020.

#MARé Meeting — celebrating the seventh anniversary of MAR

During the event, the text was read by Paula Trope and Rosana Palazyan, both representing MAR VIVE.

ABOUT THE FUTURE

We wish, thus, to be a Museum that is aware of the relationships with its different groups of visitors, with the territory, with the subjectivities, and to be able to mobilize paths to get close and understand the meaning of time and of things, and to have the city of Rio de Janeiro as a historical and symbolic surface for the structures and practices that contribute to preserve the cultural collective memory and the tangible and intangible Brazilian heritage.

We have been paving a way that fosters close contact with the life experiences, with the contexts and their interfaces, institutional aspects that place us before the crushing and urgent social issues of the present, translated into the development of public programs, actions, exhibits, development of collections, artistic-pedagogical projects, and other compositions.

To rethink the place of the museum before the issues of otherness present in contemporaneity is to also contribute to the expansion of Brazilian art history, prospect for possible futures. Thus, we highlight our commitment to get entangled with the pluriversalities of the national cultural matrices and to present narratives that are part of the development and of the ideologies of this soil, these people.