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DALILA GONÇALVES

NEM TUDO NO NAVIO SE DETERIORA NO PORÃO

Dalila Gonçalves's Layers of Time

You could think of Dalila Gonçalves as an alchemist, after all she has described using 'materials to speak of themselves.'¹ Hers is not a workshop grinding away at making gold though. She is interested in the value of more humble matter: sand speaking of sand, for example. Individual grains poetically shifting shape to form something new – but still sandy. Her exhibition title at Lehmann + Silva, 'Nem tudo no navio se deteriora no porão', loosely translates into English as 'not everything in the ship rots in the hold'. As far as Gonçalves is concerned, it sails into new territory.

Everything changes with time's inevitable passing. Just think of how skin starts to lose its elasticity, soft wrinkles deepening, concertinaing – our body even replaces itself with an entirely new set of cells every seven years. Rocks erode, smoothing out kinks as water and wind washes over, or sediments amass, building up layers. And what of diamonds? Carbon condensing over centuries, coal becoming clear, polished perfection. Time ticks on. For Gonçalves, it can take different registers. She recognizes the time of daily life as being accelerated, linked to speed and industry, while conversely there is the time of nature, slow and organic, and even the time of the weather, working away at the earth's materials, forcing it into new configurations. Her work examines this cross over, where life meets nature, where 'activity' merges with 'silence' to make a new sound, to form something *other*.

In *Desgastar em Pedra (Segundo ensaio)* ('To Wear in Stone (Second essay)', 2018), a giant blue patchwork hangs from the ceiling, draping itself over the floor. Made of nearly 240 individual sheets of sandpaper, each square has been

1 Dalila Gonçalves interviewed by Louisa Elderton, December 2018.

striped of its coarseness, delicate tones of turquoise, lapis lazuli, cobalt and sapphire catching the light as you walk around the object. Nearby, a bright ultramarine rock rests, weighty and textured when compared with the buoyant, flowing tapestry. Formally, the installation combines the geometric language of Minimalism with Yves Klein's 'Sponge Sculptures' series, where he saturated sponges with paint, then drying and mounting the forms upon stone bases – painting tools becoming sculptures. Similarly, Gonçalves's method transforms one medium into another, in this instance, sandpaper into sandstone (remember, sand speaks of sand).

Working with a community of people from her home in Portugal, the town of Castelo de Paiva, Gonçalves asked them to soak each sheet of sandpaper to remove its layers of grit, a time-consuming and even ritualistic process. I imagine the fingertips of her participants becoming simultaneously coarse and wrinkled: ruffed up by sand and saturated in liquid. She has described how, 'Normally my work is about the collection of materials from daily life and the process of different layers of time.'² Gonçalves gathered these loose sediments to combine, shape and solidify them into a pitted tongue-shaped stone. So she literally did 'wear in' stone, as the work's title suggests, translating one material into another, its structure, shape and texture shifting out of two-dimensions.

What happens to time when we act collectively, when each of us gathers with our own different perception of time to work towards one goal? We share an experience of time while we're together, though for one it might be fast, for another slow. Our own time registers define us. We are individual sheets of paper knitted into a whole; we are Gonçalves's metaphor.

While hers is a clinical observation of materials, concerned with taking matter to its limit, it too is poetic. During a 2018 residency at the São Paulo-based art and research centre Pivô, Gonçalves became fascinated with the floor of her studio, one that itself looked like sandpaper, bearing the marks and scuffs from having been repeatedly trodden upon.

² *Ibid.*

As the artist phrased it, there were 'different layers of time'³ underfoot. Making the video *Concerto* (2018–19), she turned this floor into the site of a dynamic painting, one that moves and changes. Colourful discs of sandpaper spin above this surface, their own eroded faces contrasting with the mottled abrasions beneath. In one, red and orange concentric circles slowly rotate, while another sees a patch of brown that has been slowly worn away, another that appears as the speckled iris of an eyeball, another marked with crisscrossing geometric lines. Each camera angle shows a new painting, turning. The influence of 1950s Abstract Expressionism, where the likes of Mark Rothko created colour fields that pulsed with vibrancy, shifts into something kinetic: moving, revolving, whirling. Gonçaves response to what has come before in art history, to the layers of time buried beneath her.

Her colour fields are also *synesthetic*, tone translating into sound. In the film, a microphone rests upon the top of her spinning forms, black and red wires emerging from a bronzed disc. Complex textures of noise result: scratchy and inconsistent, the rough abrasions tickle the microphone with erratic notes. The artist invited a double-bass player to respond to this sandy symphony, the strings of their bow gliding across the instrument to produce a mournful mood of longing. Simultaneously, planks of wood are pressed against the sandpaper discs, wearing themselves down as they play. Together, the discordant but pure organic sounds of the double bass merge with the industrial scoring of the sandpaper, to score a musical script. Colour becomes sound as the organic and industrial meet.

What is it about that merging of industrial and organic that so fascinates Gonçaves? Where man tries to harness nature, to shape and mould something new from its raw materials. To become alchemists. Of course nature too attempts alchemy. Take, for example, the bee nest (distinct from the word 'beehive', which denotes a manmade structure used to house honey bee species). Within these nests colonies of bees work together to form an internal structure made from beeswax of hexagonal prismatic cells. Here they store their gold: oozing amber honey laced with pollen and packed into

3 *Ibid.*

these chambers. Perhaps humans are just like these little buzzing bees, working together to harness nature and use it for our own ends, collectively finding purpose in the process, trying to make sense of it all.

Gonçalves's work *Vazios (Empty)* (2018) is a porcelain cast of a bee's nest. Appearing at first glance as an undulating sheet of bubble wrap, its pristine white, puckered surface gathers together tiny bubbles. Foraging for these objects, Gonçalves then uses a practice of pressing porcelain into each of the bee's honey cavities, clay consuming the negative space created by the hollow of beeswax. Just imagine matter filling this impression as the artist's thumb pushes it into place, one hole after another disappearing. Emulating the lost-wax technique of bronze casting, Gonçalves places the whole form – clay cast and mould– into the kiln, and the heat of the oven melts away the wax. What is left? The ghost of the bee's home; a former moment in time that was dynamic and busy, now fixed and preserved, present but also destroyed. She documents a memory that we stand in front of in the gallery, waiting, watching.

Philosopher Henri Bergson explored issues of time and memory, specifically considering the tensions between watching and waiting, arguing that 'there is no perception which is not full of memories. With the immediate and present data of our senses we mingle a thousand details out of our past experiences.'⁴ He used the example of sugar granules dissolving in a glass of water to consider the anxiety that is induced for the observer in the process of waiting for something to change, underlining that personal consciousness is imperative in actually making us stand our ground to wait for a resolution: 'the glass of water, the sugar, and the process of the sugar's melting in the water are abstractions ... in the manner of a consciousness'.⁵ So the viewer's own memories and their will to wait feed into their experience of time and their subjective understanding of any moment.

In front of Gonçalves's work we might fill each cell with

4 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, translated by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Zone, 1970), p.24.

5 Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, Random House, Inc., 1944, pp. 12–13.

our own memories, the individual moments that comprise our lives. We might never catch the exact moment that the sugar dissolves in the glass, that the wax melts in the oven, but we know it has happened, just as we know time is passing, second by second, minute by minute, cementing our existence into its layers, before we too pass, our bodies enacting alchemy, becoming earth.

Louisa Elderton

Orquídeas en la mesa de billar. Dalila Gonçalves

De entre las numerosas imágenes que Agnès Varda nos regala en “Los espigadores y la espigadora”, película del año 2000, son dos las que llaman particularmente mi atención: su mano que se empeña en atrapar camiones gracias a un juego de perspectivas desde el coche en el que viaja, y las patatas con forma de corazón desechadas por no cumplir los cánones estéticos que la industria alimentaria impone al consumidor. Una mano curiosa, fractal, llena de pliegues e historias, que en ocasiones se vuelve monstruosa a causa de un zoom casi microscópico sobre sí misma, y campos de ruinas de un tubérculo al que, por imperfecto, se le niega su función elemental. Sin miedo del paso del tiempo, ni de la funcionalidad construida, la cineasta encuentra belleza y potencia en estos y en otros desechos y se convierte, con su cámara, en espigadora infatigable de retazos y relatos.

Ya sea en las inmediaciones de su Castelo de Paiva natal o en las diferentes ciudades por las que transita, Dalila Gonçalves lleva años recolectando objetos y fragmentos de su entorno más cercano a los que intuye una nueva vida. Sometidos a un trabajo tenaz de experimentación con técnicas y materiales diversos, no sólo evidencia la omnipresencia de la intervención humana aun en los procesos de apariencia más orgánica, sino también cómo la pequeña industria local se enfrenta al mismo riesgo de extinción que practicas más artesanales.

Esta exposición nos transmite cierta noción de un territorio y de las problemáticas que lo afectan: las piezas nos hablan de una realidad social, familiar; de una fuerza común que se teje a través de valiosas redes de apoyo. La artista estira los límites entre cuerpos de cosas para llevarlos a un nuevo estado: arena de lija que hace roca; nudos de madera son cielo estrellado; piel de corteza y sangre de árbol; arrugas de cerámica, error y memoria, o una pelvis que nace de un panal. Se sacude así la nostalgia de un tiempo en decadencia tal y como lo conocemos en pro de la sugestión de un nuevo paisaje mediante color, texturas, tacto y engaño al ojo, apariencias no estancas y distintas escalas que nos llevan de obras muy íntimas a otras que nos envuelven.

Así como el agua horada la piedra, Dalila no se conforma con las superficies y rasca para ver qué se esconde bajo esa primera capa visible de las cosas. Es en ese desgaste siempre manual, en la descomposición y trasposición de la materia, donde posibilita el encuentro de universos a priori disociados: donde, finalmente, lo artificial y lo natural conviven en una inquieta armonía. Como ese gran jarrón de orquídeas sobre una mesa de billar en desuso que solía haber en su casa familiar cuando era niña. Una imagen poderosa, un tanto absurda si se quiere, que invita a un juego sin complejos con los objetos, a una tensión en las formas de lo esperado, a la potencia de lo inútil o a la belleza del defecto.

Beatriz Alonso

Ervas negras verdosas açafroadas nascidas das ruínas de uma estátua em Pompéia.

Olhe o relógio. Os instantes soam secos e nulos.

Há quanto tempo foi tudo isso? — se perguntou.

Os relógios marcavam o período consumido, que desatava seus laços, tamborilando os movimentos dos ponteiros. Permaneceu longo tempo sobre o gramado seco que ornava o recinto.

Ergueu o olhar para contemplar o tempo passado na superfície daquele material. As plantas cresciam ainda, tomando conta do que havia permanecido à luz, ajudando o processo de desfiguração; contudo, ele não poderia chegar ao âmago daquela imagem histórica; mesmo que a pintura houvesse desabado já fazia muito tempo e a pedra parecia se esfarelar. Olhou, entrando, com paciência inquisidora, entre as vicissitudes escuras daquela pedra, onde não ia fazia tanto tempo: através das veredas do tempo enraizado. Quanto mais permanecia, mais se sentia abandonada e impotente às ações dele. Em um ruído avesso ao som, aos pómulos desbotados de seus olhos, ela disse que ele poderia olhar o tempo que desejasse. E, assim ficaram: contemplando-se. Olhavam-se como se se conhecessem; de maneira que soubessem que há muito tempo não eram mais os mesmos.

Quando me aceitarás em tua vida? — soou vegetalmente. Um vegetal fornido de pulso.

Por vezes, sentia que a coberta de grama, crepitante sob seus pés, a conectava com aquela pedra. Sentia o calor de sua superfície nua, os acidentes de seu passado, as vibrações que o abraçavam. E, de súbito, enredaram-se, como espessos ramos negros, precipitando ora para um lado, ora para outro, os olhares nunca desviados, à penumbra da angústia de uma decisão. Seu ofício não era simples. Precisava de paciência e contemplação, mas, do mesmo modo que o incansável pistão do motor, tal qual infatigável abelha carregada de pólen, o tempo transbordava por todas as partes. Quando confrontada com aquele fato acenava à si mesma em sinal de derrota, procurando-a, encontrando-a e perdendo-a repetidas vezes.

Em torno deles, no entanto, na desorientação de seus sentidos, ou, talvez, em sua super sensibilidade, não encontrava nada além do sabor pesaroso esfarelado das cinzas amargas; se imbuído de um corpo: amarelecido, rachado, enrugado, sem viço e cheio de manchas por todas as partes. Essa foi sua ruína: ter ido contra seu tempo, retrocedendo.

Há quanto tempo foi tudo isso? — perguntou

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Durante todo o tempo não o havíamos visto nem havíamos escutado sua voz; entretantes, o tempo havia sido consumido.

A inquietude se apoderou dela, enquanto a terra revolvia, como se o tempo tivesse estado corrompido, de maneira que todo seu passado houvesse sido oferecido a um futuro árido. Tanto os tempos antigos como os nossos encontram o seu momento sob o céu.

Quanto tempo você vai poder oferecer resistência? – é o que perguntou a si mesma.

Depende de um fator que está fora do nosso controle – murmurou.

Sem suspeitar que os sinais estavam ali inscritos, costumeiramente descritos nos mostradores dos relógios, se despertou de sua contemplação por meio da trivial presença da passagem do tempo. Após haver registrado em fotografia aquela ruína, afastou-se.

Ela não disse nada após o evento, tampouco durante os dias que seguiram àquele encontro. Na verdade, o tempo que decorreu após o incidente permaneceu em seu pensamento, como uma ação ou uma falta de ação, sem contradizerem-se a si mesmos.

Quando já havia recuperado o controle sobre si mesma, alguns anos depois, sentada à mesa, para um café matutino, um ponto amarelado e esverdeado, iluminado pela luz enviesada, cadenciado pelo odor de mirra e mouro, fez seu olhar deixar de deslizar-se em busca de algo diferente naquela manhã. Redondo, como um ponto final, circularidade necessária e cotidiana, temida por ela, conectou-se àquela estátua pompeiana: à altura de seus olhos elevou intranquilamente aquele arruinado limão.