

# Later they shall also bloom

This text is derived from an exchange of e-mails between Luísa Soares de Oliveira and Cristina Ataíde during the preparation of the exhibition.

L. S. O. Thinking about the works that you are going to exhibit, and the drawings and photographs that you showed me in the studio, yet again, but this time in a different way, your work is concerned with the possible cross-overs between different domains which have tended to exist separately in our culture: animal, vegetable, mineral, art, human.

I am thinking especially of the sculptures that you showed at the last Lisbon Fair – the hollow trunks that resembled masculine torsos, and also of the work you will be showing at the White Pavilion: trunks that seem dead but that are alive, elements of nature that also turn out to be art. What does this suggest to you?

C. A. It all has to do with SEEING. Looking closely. Allowing yourself to be seduced by things around you. Testing the limits of your perception.

How can we enter into things by observing them? Get inside them? Blend with them...turn ourselves into them? And the things themselves, can they sense us? Can they communicate with us, incorporate us?

I can be a wing, a cloud, I can be the sky, or a lizard, a mole, an ant. A seed struggling against the clods of wet earth, it pushes them aside to get past, to rise, rise up to the light and make me into a plant.

Endless cycles – animal – vegetable – mineral – human – vegetable – life – animal – mineral – death – human – vegetable – life – etc. etc. ... repetitive...circular...un-ceasing...One.

And the hollow trunks? or bodies? or skins? skins that may be clothed, skins that are waiting for bodies?

And the twigs? The twigs are in a suspended state. They are not dead, they are alive, but they need to be tended, cared for, cosseted. If they are not wrapped in cotton and watered, they die. They have to be tended to enable them to sprout, to flower, to live.

L. S. O. The comment about looking closely is very interesting. It is interesting because, firstly, everything in our day-to-day lives leads us to see without observing. I mean, the multiplicity of images that surround us are mostly regarded as the vehicle for a message that precedes them and which, in western culture, enjoys greater prestige than the image itself. An example of this is advertising, where everything is done to transmit the message about the product without any effort on the part of the observer (the point about looking closely which you spoke about). Obviously, the product could be a person, a politician for example. So, all images are subordinated to an economy that ends up giving them lower status than ideas.

Your attitude seems to be different. In your work, images (or objects, which also end up suggesting images to us) have an intrinsic value that straightaway destabilises the meaning that someone might wish to attribute to them. A trunk is a body is a skin is a sheet of bronze. Looking closely, as the result of a deliberate act by the observer, may today seem as strange as, for example, believing that matter can look at us. Looking closely these days is the result of deliberate techniques (the dark box that is the cinema auditorium, for example...) and never, or hardly ever, the product of deliberate action.

Which leads me to the following line of thought, provoked by one of the videos that you are going to show: nature is shaped by looking, and it only exists insofar as we can see it. The idea of nature is, however, contaminated from the outset by the human presence, totally contrary to what the Romantics and Neo-Romantics imagined.

C. A. Staying with this point about the video and the idea that the landscape is shaped by looking at it, by me looking at it, I want to twist this concept of viewing. The viewing of a landscape, a landscape that exists because it is viewed.

But what is left of the landscape when viewing ceases? When we are blind or simply when night falls? What happens to the landscape then? Does the landscape exist at night? There, my body blends with the video camera, we become one, and it is touch and hearing that guide us. Another sense emerges.

Listening, listening to the sounds around us. Following the sounds that construct this non-existent landscape. The footsteps, the leaves crushed under foot, the broken branches, the sound of the wind that reinvents the trees, the rain that enlarges space. The sounds of the city that spread over this landscape and give it form. And fear! The fear of the next step, of the abyss, is there a precipice there? The fear of the other. Is there an other? Is it watching us? Following us? Surprising us? Or is the other's fear greater than mine? Or the other simply does not exist. Only I exist in this landscape that I cannot see and which is waiting for dawn to be born.

L. S. O. Obviously the landscape exists while you are asleep, because while you sleep you still exist - or another exists for you. There is always somebody, a subject that is thinking about the landscape, who is seeing it. I suppose that when you speak of the importance of Seeing it is the presence of this subject that you are referring to - in other words, whoever sees does so because he has a body endowed with senses - touch, but also smell or balance (hence the abyss!) that makes sense of everything around you.

If, in some purely abstract hypothesis, the subject did not exist, the world would be an immense vacuum empty of meaning. I realise that I am focusing all understanding on the subject but I am doing so on purpose. Switching this line of thought to the particular, it is you that gives meaning to the grass that surrounds you at Tapada da Ajuda, to the sounds of the night while you are filming in darkness that nature recreated for study and delight (!) The sound of cars crossing the Bridge while everything seems to be swallowed up in the quiet of the night is also an illustration of what I am trying to say.

I recall the story you told me about the day when you were in India and wanted to put pigment on the wells by a river - was it the Ganges? You were questioned pretty closely by the people who lived there, and who probably attributed their own cultural meaning to the river. To them, you were introducing an element of disturbance into that reading, hence the question that they raised with you. Or the other story, of the paper leaves soaked in water, where the boatman understood what you wanted to do and rowed of his own initiative to the spots where the river had more residues. I think he understood your vision...

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