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mais desenhos de casas com luz. e escuridão
more drawings of houses with light. and darkness

CARLOS NOGUEIRA

11.05.18 – 23.06.18

Inauguração 19h – 22h, 11.05.18

Glimpses of the labyrinth

*la e vinha
E a cada coisa perguntava
Que nome tinha¹*

Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen

First Level - Matter and its names

The work of Carlos Nogueira is a search for the name of things and their place. As he names, that whose name has been sought reveals its being. This is how we come to know nature. We name things: house, twig, book, line. And then we define the house as the place to be furnished with varied notions and objects. We define the tree as the sacred and primordial locus of a line, and the book as the house of the project, of the word. Memories, mirrors, forks to eat with, glasses, bodies. Lines make up all the words we keep in there. Houses, like boxes. And ruins, when time erases the parts of the house that have lost all purpose, upon the departure of its former inhabitants. Sometimes they become inhabited by other beings: trees that grow inside them, trees that use those sheltering walls to rise towards the stars, breathing upwards and hoping for transcendence. Taking memory up into the skies.

Let us consider some examples. In *casa quadrada com árvore dentro* [square house with a tree inside], the tree has once been a nymph, it has been desire, it has been Greece in the sculptor's memory and in the memory of those who see his work. Today it is a sculpture, wise and white, and its purity foretells the body of what will become a memory and a ruin, natural vegetation, spreading out as it breathes, seizing the stone, taking possession of the site. In *da natureza das coisas tudo acaba* [from the nature of things it all comes to an end] – the title of a 2014 exhibition, taken from a line written by the artist himself –, some of the pieces were dwelling places for objects that bear witness to constant change, to the passing of time, to the multiplicity of meaning. In them I perceived, yet again, the evocation of the house as a sensorial and emotional labyrinth.

I have always been fond of houses. Carlos Nogueira's houses have no ceilings, and I like ceilings, because I have always seen them as mirrors of the possible space, of the plan, of the brand-new place, yet untrodden. I still do today, as always, the same exercise of laying on my back on the bed, looking up and raising my feet towards the ceiling, and then imagining myself strolling through it, inhabiting that space as

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¹ *She went back and forth / asking each thing/ the name it bore.*

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immaculate as a blank piece of paper. Carlos Nogueira's houses have no ceilings because they have no need for them. They are open to possibility, like the foam of a wave. They are open to time, like the recurring tides. Like breathing.

Houses are the antechambers of dreams, the archetypes of home, the metamorphoses of an idea – an architect's project or the projection of a desire (I was about to write a *design*), pieces with which we go on broadening our senses and defining our path, our steps, and the ways we will inhabit and share what we still haven't lived.

Houses are the places where we are born, and we inhabit them in many different ways. They may also be the places where we become the stories of others. That is why graves are also houses, last abodes, boxes packed with memories that do not really belong to their inhabitants, but only to those who look at them from the outside. Perhaps I should say, to be more precise: to inhabit is to understand from within, so the houses we inhabit are those we can understand from the inside. As for the others, merely contemplated – because their inhabitants no longer exist, except in the memory of others –, they are already pointing out to the labyrinth. Or to the realm of the sacred.

Second Level – Time and its faces

With the houses he creates – houses of the living and of the absent, even if they're all nothing but desire –, Carlos Nogueira opens the door to a mystery. And it is that intimacy with the labyrinth that guides the sculptor. In a way, it is as if time draws him closer to the sources of light, making the materials purer. The sense of beholding archetypes always prompts me to associate Carlos Nogueira's work with a certain idea of Greece. There is something Greek, something metamorphical, about his work. It may be the presence of white, after time has erased every colour.

White condensates everything, it verges on silence, a skimming flight over the surface of things. White is an overwhelming experience. It blinds us. It builds up walls. It contains. It obliterates. But it also potentiates. Into the silence of seemingly smooth surfaces, Carlos Nogueira introduces rupture. Only this will allow the outflow of light, the intrusion of the night (or the line), the infiltration of shadows, the engendering of creases where our gaze gets caught, and which may be ultimately used to define a landscape, to outline the visible. Without creases, without shadow-casting rugosities, the city – just as a human face – would be flat and devoid of history.

I have a difficult relationship with white. It simultaneously stands for memory and potentiality, for the past and the future, an essential metaphor of time. There is a deep sadness to white, which always makes me think about absence. There is an immense solemnity in words like whiteness. A coldness sweeps through some words that are like places.

I feel that Carlos Nogueira is well aware of the dangers of purity and evenness. The dangers of perfection. Only this can explain his exploration of memory, the insertion of noise into silence. The humane outlining of the house, concrete and precise, etched in quicklime, in stone, in the landscape, intended for the shepherd, the nymph, the wayfarer in search of a resting place amid the splendour of the fountains, is at the very heart of his work. And it is so through his devotion to Chronos.

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Carlos Nogueira's works are still images of time, single instants in potentiality or in memory. Seeds for the future, remnants of the past, a serpent biting its own tail. White, black, and the colours that occasionally tinge them, converge to the same circle, to the root of silence, to what lingers as a vestige in the present, in what that word has to offer. This effort to capture time is evident in each one of his pieces. The memory of an idea. Its projection into the future.

It is as if Carlos Nogueira was telling us that time itself is, not a sculptor, as Yourcenar would put it, but the very body of sculpture, an intimate, intrinsic force that moves matter around, changing it, transforming it. It is not something that occurs from the outside, inflicted on matter by an agent who acts upon it. To Carlos Nogueira, sculpture itself is a kind of nature. Its face is time, a being with many faces that offers to each beholder nothing but a mirage.

Third Level – Silence, or the intimacy of reading

The temptation of practicing drawing as a gulp of air, with the chalky lightness of a word. Or the temptation of inscribing the drawing with lines that are like stray words. Or the temptation of recognizing drawing in every page of a book. That is how I would describe the artist's work.

The temptation of drawing space by using solely the black of night, the clarifying line that divides matter and its topos, the line that sorts out and contains, defines and declares: this is indoors, that is outdoors; in here, the private space, accessible only to the eyes of a few, to inward glances; over there, the public space everybody can see.

Carlos Nogueira's pieces demand the same amount of time one gives to the reading of a poem. His work is seemingly simple. But understanding it requires the payment of a levy, a time levy, in a search for meaning that ramifies like a crossroads. What creases, what shadows, what pathways does it put forth? What light? For many years now, white has been a temptation for me. The whiteness of a ceiling. Of a blank page. Of a pristine notebook at the start of a new school year. Of a book or a word still unopened. I owe this to Sophia. I always try to be accurate in choosing words with the proper brightness and substance, so they might convey with the utmost clarity what I see in things. I try. For instance: what remains of limestone in the lines of a poem, in the shell from which Botticelli's Venus emerges, in a broken and tide-eroded whelk which contains, in its current shape, that primordial movement we can also find in the wings of the Victory of Samothrace.

That is the reason, I suspect, that one of the things that enthralls me in art is the recognition of what is, to an artist, the fascination of matter, a vestige of its original world. An act of humility towards the universe, a way of inquiring into the name and the essence of each and everything.

Such a process of learning, of re-creating, requires a continuous effort, slowness, sacrifice. I believe it is necessary to re-do everything repeatedly, obsessively, to take the due time, or, as the Portuguese idiom goes, "to give time to time." Which amounts to giving life to time. Your own, and that of the entity that undoes it all. To give everything until the very end, to give everything with no fear of losing yourself in the attempt, without dreading to fall captive to Chronos, to the muses and their countless demands.

Ever since my first encounter with Carlos Nogueira's work I have experienced what I could describe as the

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jolt of recognition. The recognition of an archetype, of an essence. An ontological recognition – of what is. That feeling – or aesthetical proximity – stems from certain traits in his work that I would describe as precision and depuration.

Throughout his career, Carlos Nogueira has been deepening this process of depuration, both in his use of colour and in his approach to form. Not that he has ever been ostentatious in the use of any of these elements. But, with time, such deepening, this radical search for purity, has become increasingly clearer. That is what I find in the constant, solid and affirmative nakedness of the fundamental elements in his work. Carlos Nogueira's sculpture moves me, in its essential volumetric forms, in the silence it offers, intact, as the age-old memory of a primeval day. It is not by chance, surely, that noise is a word which stands as a wall around silence – like anything prone to falling, it evokes the fall of meaning.

I'm writing far away from any of his sculptures. I'm writing from memory. By the sea, to which Sophia had vowed to return for all the seaside moments she had failed to live before. By the sea that I saw for the first time, that I saw again through Sophia's words, and whose breathing I rediscovered in the whiteness of Carlos Nogueira's works. I write from memory, as if listening to the oracle.

The sun is about to set over the city. Tomorrow I shall leave again. There's just enough time for a final swim. I close the blue notebook in which I'm writing these notes, in blue also, blue as the sky and the sea. A succession of lines, possibly obscure, about what comes to mind when I think of whiteness.

Or of my first encounter – ritualistically repeated in each new revisit – with the work of Carlos Nogueira. Or with the sea. Or a whelk. Or a word. That is to say: a way of coming home.

Emília Ferreira
Lagos, Meia Praia, August 2017
Translation: Rui Pires Cabral