

CARLOS NOGUEIRA
nem o tempo passa | not even time passes
25.11.15 – 07.11.15

“Ce n'est plus du tout le but qui me passionne mais la recherche, seulement en tant que recherche. L'océan de poésie dans lequel nous sommes plongés finit par être tellement coutumier qu'on n'y fait même plus attention... Tout est regardé en fonction du travail en cours et n'importe quel spectacle sera, avant toute autre chose, prétexte à notes et photographies.” Letter from Michel Leiris to Zette, 27 October 1931 ¹

While visiting the remarkable “Leiris & Co” exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Metz recently, this quote from a letter written by Michel Leiris to his wife echoed with Carlos Nogueira's ideas for this, his first, exhibition at 3+1 Contemporary Art in Lisbon. Less known on the international stage than some of his peers despite notable projects abroad in Brazil, Italy, Switzerland, representing Portugal at the Venice Biennale in 1986, a striking sculptural intervention on The Economist Plaza in London in 1998 and prestigious invitations to discuss his relation to architecture. His site-specific installations and various art forms tend to be extremely elegant but subdued, abstract and angular, veering close to Minimalism, Conceptual Art, Arte Povera and Land Art. For those who are unfamiliar with his practice, with some imagination useful pointers might be drawn from mentioning Robert Rauschenberg and assemblages, Donald Judd for edge and rigour, Richard Serra for monumentality and the environment, On Kawara and postcards, Michelangelo Pistoletto and mirror paintings, but also Carl Andre, Dan Graham, and Cy Twombly for instance.

Nogueira's “constructions” and “drawings”, notes and photographs are constantly at work informing each other. Chronology and dates are of little importance. The flow of form and thought carries back and forth through time, repeatedly utilising certain materials (iron, glass, concrete, stone, wood) or applying methodologies in symbiotic connection with changing situations, landscapes, buildings or bodies. His never-to-be-resolved quest combines industrial and elemental, transparent and opaque, opening up and resisting, inside and outside, planes and volumes, lightness and weight. Black and white, shades of grey and brown constitute his core spectrum, with occasional remains or developments in colour – and nature.

Permanence is a word of significance in Nogueira's vocabulary. He explains that he loves journeys that begin and never end. Language and its particular tonalities are evocative materials. The title of this exhibition is a line from one of his own poems which often punctuate his catalogues or bring complementary dimensions in the titles of his artworks: ²

THE WINDS BLOW IN OFF THE SEA
GAINING STRENGTH, GAINING STRENGTH,
OUT OF THE NATURE OF THINGS ALL THIS WILL END
AND NOT EVEN TIME PASSES

It holds the essence of this project in that Nogueira has assembled works from different periods that he sees as connected for this particular occasion. What pre-existed takes on new meanings. Like fragmented but overlapping layers of a story, two drawings or assemblages – *olhou para ele durante muito tempo. continuou então a desenhar* [he looked at it for a long time. then he continued to draw] (1997) and *da sucessão dos dias e das noites* [of the sequence of days and nights] (2001) – occupy the space with the larger *desenho esquivo* [elusive drawing] (2015). The latter is composed akin to two windows in wall-mounted metallic frames - these incorporate found and revisited shutters, and slick industrial double-layered panes of glass (one mirrored and the other opaque). One of the oblong glass elements completes the overall balance of the work by resting tilted on the ground.

Every simple detail clearly counts. Horizontals, verticals, and various oblique lines coalesce, differ and punctuate the space. Classical geometry, design and architectural knowledge come into play in these arrangements. In a catalogue essay in 2002, Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith describes his work as “enhancing vision”, and goes on to write: “The modes of disorientation generally practiced by Carlos Nogueira are gentle and beguiling” ³.

Ver or seeing is crucial though, as suggested, not only in a one-dimensional manner. Multiple perspectives are allowed and circulation encouraged. The passer-by is in no way conditioned but can be slowed down or frustrated in the viewing experience through deliberate blind spots, various reflections of the surroundings or of themselves. The domestic scale of the work proposes an intimate immersive moment and relationship. Physicality is enhanced since textural variations abound. Sara Antonia Matos elaborates on the consequent potentials thus: “This vertigo

– promised by Carlos Nogueira's work – consists in a leap into a bottomless void in which one is able to picture and understand reality and the real, knowing them as true without needing to know where the truth lies.”⁴ In the same catalogue, Gisela Rosenthal wondered: “could it be that, to attain a vision of reality, it is necessary to move oneself and one's projections from the centre of the image's surface, thus relinquishing the protagonist role human beings claim for themselves in all events?”⁵

The first 17 years of Nogueira's life in Mozambique hold vivid memories. He often states that he was “born where the wind blows differently” and recalls the sea, the sun, the sky, the forest, the smells, the weather, tolerance, rigour, immensity, connectivity, tranquillity. These impressions and his acute awareness of the specificities of each place seem to continuously emerge in his work with elegance, refinement and simplicity. This time sounds significant in the development of Carlos Nogueira's heightened receptiveness to the study of space: “I learn from each site, from the direction of the wind, people passing by, the incline of the mountain”. The connectedness and autonomy of Mies van der Rohe's 1929 Barcelona Pavilion springs to mind.

An iron, glass and sound installation dating 2006 is a key inspiration to this exhibition *desenhos de construção com casa e céu* [drawing of construction with house and sky]; it was photographed reflecting a plant. Before and beyond. A connection arises with Nogueira's outdoor projects and this Autumn coincides with the inauguration of two related projects in Santo Tirso: *casa comprida com árvores* is in the Sculpture Park. This work is closely related to *casa quadrada com árvore dentro* [square house with tree inside] (2012) commissioned by the City Hall of Vila Nova da Barquinha. Existing trees are embraced at their base by a four-legged concrete structure or protective sculpture.⁶ For Nogueira, they are paired or twined with the garden. Nature becomes the work of art. *And Not Even Time Will Pass*.

“I'm trying to seize the fourth dimension of this instant-now so fleeting that it's already gone because it's already become a new instant-now that's so also already gone. Everything has an instant in which it is. I want to grab hold of the *is* of the thing.” Clarice Lispector, *Água Viva*, 1973⁷

Caroline Hancock, August 2015

NOTES

Unless otherwise stated, the artist's quotes are taken from a telephone conversation in June 2015.

1. Author's translation: “It is no longer the end result that I am passionate about but well and truly research, research for research's sake. The ocean of poetry we dwell in becomes so familiar that we don't pay attention to it any longer... Everything is considered in relation to the work in progress and any spectacle will be, first and foremost, a pretext for note-taking and photographs.”

2. Nogueira tends to design his catalogues himself. This poem has been published on different occasions, for instance in *Carlos Nogueira. A ver*, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Centre de Arte Moderna José de Azerdo Perdigão, Lisbon, 2002, p. 19.

3. Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith, “Enhancing Vision: Sculptural Works by Carlos Nogueira”, op. cit., p. 30.

4. Sara Antonia Matos, “From the body of the space to the space of the body. A vertigo over infinity”, *Carlos Nogueira. drawings constructions and other accidents*, Fundação Carmona e Costa, Lisbon, 2008, p. 53.

5. Gisela Rosenthal, “Life passes through here”, *Carlos Nogueira. drawings constructions and other accidents*, Fundação Carmona e Costa, Lisbon, p. 27.

6. Santo Tirso Sculpture Park. Opening 22 October 2015.

<http://www.cm-stirso.pt/pages/331>

Vila Nova da Barquinha

<http://www.barquinhaearte.pt/pt/casa-quadrada-com-arvore-dentro>

7. Clarice Lispector, *Água Viva*, 1973, New Directions Books, New York, 2012, p. 3. Translated by Stefan Tobler.