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FOUR ARTISTS

Aracy Amaral, 1989

A professional development founded on creativity and impregnated with stamina, intent on approaching what can be understood as "Brazilian art"; international information is implicit: none of them evades it, but it is added to each one's individual personality. It is in that sense that I also see as a "holy wrath" the way each of these four artists - Leda, Monica, Sergio and Ana - ask themselves about the art made in our country, their curiosity about what has already been done in this particular century, and how they truly decide to embrace the cultural miscegenation that rules among our artistic expression. I think that "hybrid", to Romagnolo, would try to express this creative acculturation occurring in our midst when foreign information is received, captured and altered according to our OWN frames of reference.

But to him, Romagnolo, the importance of frames of reference is of fundamental significance, insofar as they search for "ineditism, freedom and verticality". Ineditism in the sense that they do not relinquish the quest for originality - which they pursue, whether or not the result be positive, whether or not they be unanimously accepted for what they do.

The traditional posture of the artist - who does not wish to be like any other - is in this case maximized as an objective, despite all the likeness that surely exists between what they do and what is done by other artists of their generation. But it is a real, lucid and deliberate search.

And the most neuralgic point of this search is to acknowledge our cultural dependence and to enhance, through this crossroads of influences, what is added by our circumstances and what can assign an interest of space and place to what is made as art among us.

It is inevitable that "freedom" be imposed in order to reach this state of things which cannot be called a "goal" But in fact much of the Brazilian artist's freedom in our time - practically in this whole century - (except Goeldi, Brennand, Abramo, Caram, Aguilar and a few others), much of this freedom also rests on the inexistence of an effective art market that would urge them to remain in an already accepted direction. Thus we see a Brazilian artist who changes his style with casualness, who experiments, who provokes, who dares, unlike the subdued first-world artist who, as soon as he has found an accepted line, perseveres on it as if supported on a trademark.

In these comments on Sergio Romagnolo's words, which he finds hard to express but which imply a true concern for these four artists, "verticality" can be understood as a deepening of their artistic development. Here is the most troublesome pivot for, we may ask, what does deepening mean in art research? If the artist has already overcome his formation period, that deepening forgoes one or many advisors and will solely depend on his sensitivity, on his most personal criterium, to retain a quality control that I see as essential when one sizes an artist's path.

Sometimes I feel that young artists should think a little less of themselves inasmuch as there are some works that should be done or redone or eliminated lest they remain as records of inconvincing creative value. If it is already hard nowadays to define what art is, not everything an artist makes is good, especially in his first age. Furthermore, there are no geniuses. Or rather, they are so exceptional that it is as if they did not exist. The contrary is pure fallacy.

Three Queens and one Jack

Leda Catunda, Ana Maria Tavares, Sergio Romagnolo, Monica Nador. They belong to the same deck but they are different from each other. For their value, for their image, for developing distinct games depending on the circumstances. What unites them is, of course, the fact that they belong to the same suit, and I mean a common origin - the São Paulo-Arrnando Alvares Penteado Foundation, a center responsible for the teaching of most of this generation by the same artist-professors (we should no doubt add to those four Georgia Creimer, Isa Pini, Iran, Jac Leirner, for example, and the list goes on).

And they have all got the same eagerness for working, for questioning what they - and others - do, the same dissatisfied curiosity about the problems of art and its place in today's world and about what could be Brazilian art; vital impatience towards clichés related to "recognized" or disdained trends in plastic art production in Brazil. Which is healthy.

At least they are a few who are concerned not only with individual recognition but with question raising. Especially since they belong to the first generation of Brazilian artists who is observed and considered abroad at the very moment it arises - an astonishment for other artists from previous decades who fought so much for this foreign look, which these ones, for various reasons, have already got since their appearance. A responsibility, as well as a stimulating push.

But in spite of that reception, of that celebration as dangerous as premature, of the demands that some of them already receive as much from their country as from abroad, they already feel the "weight" of the competitive artistic milieu, they perceive discrimination or the slight irony aimed at them for their not being rigorously within the "conceptual" or surface qualities trend that characterizes many works of the artists revealed in the second half of the eighties.

Among these four artists, the most complex personality is certainly Monica Nador. In the beginning at this decade the apparently insecure Monica appeared as the only young artist untied from the imagery proposed by the others in her generation - which therefore set her apart. Her great works (exhibited at the MAC in the beginning of 1983) stood far from the images taken off mass media or inspired by European painting in the late seventies or early eighties or by American painting; she pursued an obsessive, abstract, gestic but restrained calligraphy, with rare chromatic rigor. Next we saw that Monica expanded in space, dealing with shaped canvases set to walls, although her painting basically remained the same: straight-line traits, with two overlapping colors, covering the whole surface as if fashioning a fabric that left the space/setting visible in the unseaming of her calligraphy. Thus light penetrated by filtering through the brushings, coming from a second plane - emptiness - glimpsed in one - or two-color chromatism.

Intense modifications have affected her personality since then, in this elusive artist who has not been rewarded with the neoexpressionists' success. Psychoanalysis, exercises with the unconscious, meditation and even physical exercise began to mold her body. Little by little meditation and oriental religiosity began to play a significant part in her life, altering her view of painting. Today Monica speaks casually on the role of decoration and art's function as an ornament to life.

So we see her, away from the unidirectional and monochromatic trait of 1983, as she keeps pursuing paintings drawn with ornaments, frets and grecians. Not as the center of perceptive attention of her paintings, but as a necessary complement of meditative abstraction which finds as a starting point her glittering "monochromatics" the empty centers of her great canvases. After a brief journey through mandalas and suggestive images referring to prayer rugs, we see that her painting reflects the useful possibility of the mind's reaching transcendence and peace, through abstraction in front of a painting.

Thus monochromatism against framing ornament, far from seeming an adventure reflecting just a phase of her development, reveals us her predilection for repeated, obsessive gestures that already characterized her 1983 production, although here and now with a willful connotation that has much to do with the role of art united to religious practice.

We have always found it very hard to deal with Sergio Romagnolo's works. We were bothered by their bad finishing and by the inspiration of his themes when he began to make three-dimensional works, for we considered that perhaps it would have been more pertinent for him to continue his development as a painter, focusing the super-hero dynamics on great surfaces.

Even when he transposed those comics characters to three dimensions or when he recovered the great American city's garbage can, we still saw him remain as a servile follower of his internationalist, São Paulo city generation's imagery. Then suddenly concerned with questioning "Brazilian art" - and he has always acted a little as the "intellectual" among these four artists -, he began to resort to day-to-day, more current objects: the saint, the basket, the guitar, the image on the pedestal.

Here, no doubt, occurs an irony in the elaboration of these pieces, made in hand-molded polystyrene with fire from industrial electric heaters.

No precision of outlines passes through those images, but perhaps an anti-research of the form, only to be observed the construction of banality through the language of precariousness. Next to the somewhat childish discourse the 80 generation's production (Leonilson, Cozzolina) through its limited vocabulary, one can dearly perceive the contradiction in craftsmanly worked industrial materials, the hand molding on the figure appropriated to obtain a definitive(?) form, the junctions roughly evidenced as if in a live exhibition of the process's incoherence. Of course the industrialized materials used by the artists are not a discovery of this generation but a legacy of the sixties, of the pop years. It is in this trend that I see Sergio Romagnolo as well as Leda and Zerbini, for example, as neo-pop issues, sometimes bitter in the eighties. Although I would personally prefer, despite the evident irony, to observe more concern with execution quality, the lack of which lets his production appear more as a sketch, as a lattice of intentions and less as a successful realization. In short, more as a gesture and an attitude than as a completed work. Maybe I am wrong.

In a paradoxical relationship with Romagnolo - for these four artists reassert their common postures, although each one in his personal universe - one finds Ana Maria Tavares's work. I have already written somewhere that she has revealed since her appearance a mural vocation, addressing with great vitality the parietal surface. It is fact. Her two-year studies in Chicago after FAAP also endowed her with such mastery of techniques and challenges as to fashion her as one of the most interesting artists in her generation. Her physical fragility, her girlish and feminine delicacy are in vivid contrast with the technical equipment she handles by herself (electric welders, carpenter's tables, files for mechanical or manual surface polishing, hoses, iron tubes and cables, etc). Her complex installation in the last Biennial already revealed her willingness to present a multiplicity of ideas that boiled inside her head - which to me may have encumbered for its excess that space/triptych of hers, if one can refer to a three-dimensional triptych.

One has already perceived, however, several directions stemming from that proposal, one of which, in expressive synthesis, represented her in the "Modernidade" exhibition in Paris. The line-filaments suddenly turned into an intricate web of black-lined tubing, in several diameters, set to the white wall - manual, white and black drawing trait already eliminated in maximal chromatic reductionism, they reveal the expressivity of those elongated forms to which, also in the present works, is added the significance of shadows, subtle projections that complete the visual character of her work.

Today, in the pieces of this exhibition, Ana Maria Tavares intensifies the reductionist datum, although she reaffirms she has no intention of halting at this aspect of her production because, according to her, minimalism may occasionally interest her without setting itself as the master line of her work. This clarification emphasizes her fascination to express "the hype of other trends, the flowing energy", which may be defined in a few words as the active coexistence of simultaneous convulsion and ordering line. Thus, in this exhibition, she presents two wall-set pieces and three "tables" with the same characteristics. The dear intention is to bring the pieces to the eye and not to make it incline to perceive them.

And the tables are but a platform raised from the floor, standing apart in the room cube and attractive in the intrigue of their dislocation through mechanical wheels as if to personify rationally projected beings with high tension organic elements ("Mesa Díptico - O Beijo"/ "Diptych Table - The Kiss"). At the same time she abandons some pieces that rest or rise from the floor - sensuous and organic in their sinuous indolence as opposed to the industrialized materials of which they are made -, we feel a reassertion of the dionysiac / apollonian limit, constant in her creations, where rhythm is an equally important datum. Extremely well executed, her sculptures reflect the technical mastery indispensable to her expression. Made of anodized aluminum elements covered with dull-black epoxy paint, some tables imply the return of color through copper - or emerald-colored sticks.

When Ana Tavares refers to the challenge of occupying a space from her observation of nature - the trees, for instance -, that statement is but a reiteration of the singular fauna created by her, simultaneously stiff and rigorously composed and therefore instigating to our perception/emotion.

Leda Catunda's vein, for another, reasserts the originality of her proposal: the support directs a work to be made with multiplicity of materials at hand - piassava rugs, blankets, plush, towels, leather, imitation pelt, garments, mattresses bedspread or plastic lace, puzzles, etc. - transfigured in their appropriation. And the idea to Leda is more important than execution quality for her "assemblages" with paintings, a hard act in certain works, follow in a rapid rhythm of fulfilled ideas, yet keeping the same coherence. She is to me an author of effective combine paintings in the sense one uses in referring to the sixties works of Robert Rauschenberg. That is, painting is applied as a liaison element at this moment of her production, among the joined objects, with no quality as paint but acting as the elements that impresses body and two-dimensional physicality to the relief of her works.

And in these last works, she curiously presents herself at the threshold between the slightly nostalgic connotation of New Realism, and even of the artists of the famous "The Art of Assemblage" exhibition in the early sixties, and the artists of the eighties generation, in her gestic ease, in her resorting to humour, to the appropriation of images already produced by industrialization, to the transfiguration through craftsmanship of the industrialized object, quantified, with surprising maturity and vigour, with apparent naiveté in her conceptions of savory liveliness that reflect a determined personality.

Graffiti invasion in São Paulo, passing from streets to galleries, matterism and informalism waves characterize this second half and end of the eighties through the younger artists view. This is evidence that information keeps flowing and several artists changed their ways of painting because of the new trends, just like another, younger group would already arise, under more restrained, albeit expressive principles, among whom we would mention São Paulo's Gianotti, Serra, Paulo Pasta, Sister, Flávia Ribeiro. Matterism, monochromatism, informalism, in nuances of greater asceticism and freer expression. Why the evasion of form? What is the reason - if there is one - for the difficulty of so many in speculating on abstract or figurative forms? Mere admiration of the sixties masters? And little by little even Gianotti allows a glimpse - parallel to dense matterism, line innuendo and concreteness of letter application - on measured informalism (after his period of evident admiration of Mira Schendel's work); as with Flávia Ribeiro, if surface elaboration is almost monochromatically perceptible, one can already discern gestating forms, more interiorized than effectseeking.

As for the matterists, in this sort of all over composition, a space of calligraphies, gestures and dialogues with the surface, it seems that a sign of melancholy/violence emerges with preeminence - as if in an example of speechless doing, like the Sisyphus myth intense and paradoxical. Mainly in Brazil, considering this generation's vital need for expression. A generation sieged by the country's dramatic economic circumstances, stalling the cultural development of the artistic environment, breaking initiative, curtailing the diffusion of a vigorous production.

It is in that sense that the organization of this exhibition takes on a peculiar character, as it is carried out by the efforts of the curator-artists, producers themselves of the event. With a titanic will to project their creativity.

So as to terminate only then the cycle of the emergence of art work, from the instant of creative conception until reaching the diffuse receptor. Once more the artist leaves the isolation proper to the nature of his work to be able to communicate his message. A sign of our here/now.