

## Under Construction

Cauê Alves

English version: Steve Berg

In the mid-1970s the Brazilian federal government began construction on what was supposed to have been the largest national hydroelectric power plant ever built – the Tucuruí power station located on the Tocantins River in [the state of] Pará. Conceived amid the rhetoric of a country that was proclaiming its self-image as though it were still on the threshold of becoming part of the select club of developed nations, under the aegis of a debt-ridden State, albeit one that invested in grand projects which would sustain the economic growth of its Northern region and, thus, bring about Brazil's definitive modernization, after successive postponements brought about by the economic crisis into which the country plunged, it would be another nine years until the Tucuruí power station was completed (in 1984).

Ana Holck's Construction Site series, based on photographs taken in the late 1970s by her father (a structural engineer who was deeply involved in designing the plant), reveals aspects of our contradictory and late-coming process of modernization. The photographs do not disguise the construction's monumental scale, a metaphor for Brazil's giantism and the "land of the future's" continental proportions. But if, on one hand, the images reveal traces of a modern utopia and a belief in technological progress and rationality as infallible paths for overcoming the tardy development of a nation still in its infancy, Ana Holck's work (which is given additional force by a certain dated quality in the images and their predominantly sepia tones) presents an explicit juxtaposition of lines and structures that are not quite so rigid and imbue the construction with a less solid, somewhat unstable appearance.

Despite the optimism that, to all intents and purposes, had been practically relinquished by the 1970s, except for the military dictatorship's overly optimistic patriotic discourse, it is common knowledge that the project of Brazilian modernization never truly came to fruition. Ana Holck's work, conceived at a certain historical remove, provides us with elements that allow us to understand the difficulties involved in its effectiveness. The

very fact that the plant is under construction and that the construction work took longer than originally planned broaden our comprehension of the modern project's incompleteness. No matter how vertiginous or somewhat unconventional certain angles and framings may be, the artist's work points to some extremely revealing ambiguities between project and realization, between construction and deconstruction and between permanence and provisionality. The connections that the artist establishes between the iron construction grid that would later be covered in concrete and the grid superimposed by her allow us to rethink the relationship between things apparent and things hidden just as the superimposing of new layers would have us reconsider the relationship between image and reality.

Beyond re-signifying a personal archive and attributing new values to it, Construction Site re-situates our formative contradictions: the engineering, the project and the toughness of iron are juxtaposed with the irregularity, the fragility and the lack of support of lines drawn by the artist directly onto blow-ups that were later re-photographed. In this process, drawing and photography fuse and an interlacing takes place between the grid in the foreground and the photographed space. Mounted in the light boxes that are often used for advertising and publicity purposes throughout the city, it dialogs with both the self-image that the country made and projected, and with reality as experienced in the streets which, even then, possessed none of the formal clarity of modernity's grandiose urban projects.

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