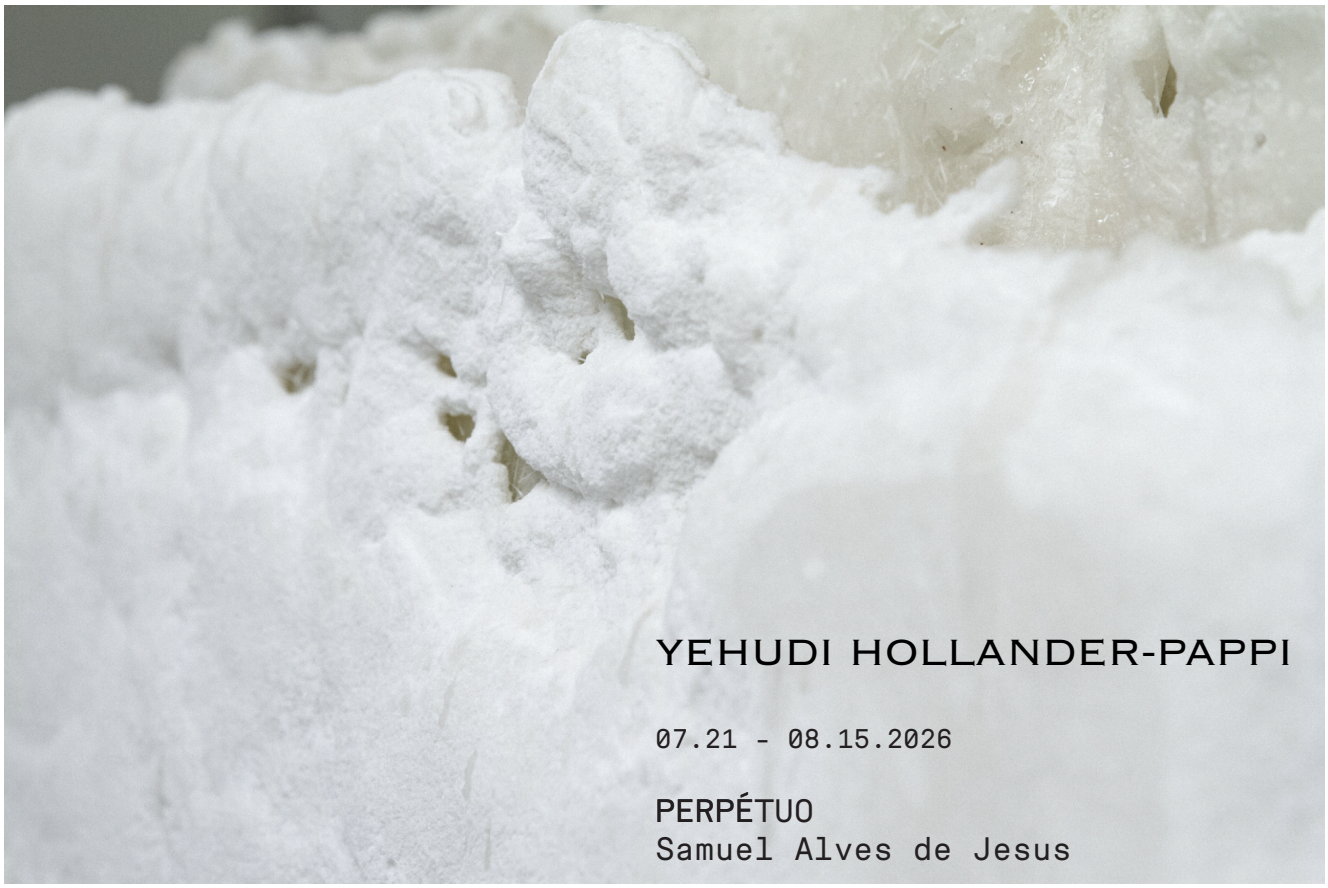


PERPÉTUO, SAMUEL ALVES DE JESUS'S FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION, PROCEEDS FROM A PREMISE THAT STRUCTURES HIS ENTIRE PRACTICE: MATTER AND WORK ARE INSEPARABLE. THE ARTIST'S RESEARCH IS ORGANIZED AROUND SALT, TREATED SIMULTANEOUSLY IN TWO ORDERS OF EXISTENCE. IN THE FIRST, SODIUM CHLORIDE AS A CHEMICAL ELEMENT, WITH ITS PROPERTIES OF CRYSTALLIZATION, CORROSION, AND MOISTURE ABSORPTION, WHICH DETERMINE THE PHYSICAL BEHAVIOR OF THE WORKS. IN THE SECOND, SALT AS A SYMBOL OF LONG DURATION: A SUBSTANCE PRESENT IN THE FOUNDING TEXTS OF THE WORLD'S MAJOR RELIGIONS, FROM THE COVENANT OF SALT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT TO EASTERN RITES OF PURIFICATION, AND ONE OF THE EARLIEST MEDIUMS OF EXCHANGE AMONG MEN, A UNIT OF MEASURE OF LABOR ITSELF, THE ORIGIN OF THE WORD SALARY. FOR ALVES DE JESUS, THE DISCOURSE IS CONTAINED IN THE PROPERTIES OF THE MATERIAL, AND THE WORK CONSISTS IN MAKING THEM LEGIBLE.

WHAT ARTICULATES THESE TWO ORDERS IS GESTURE. PART OF THE CRITICISM DEVOTED TO SCULPTURE OVER RECENT DECADES DESCRIBED GESTURE AS THE MOMENT IN WHICH PROCESS BECOMES FORM: THE ACTION OF THE BODY REMAINS INSCRIBED IN THE MATTER AFTER THE BODY WITHDRAWS, AND THE WORK FUNCTIONS AS THE RECORD OF AN INTERRUPTED MOVEMENT, A TRANSITORY STATE FIXED AT THE INSTANT THE SUBSTANCE TAKES ON CONSISTENCY. TO POUR, TO ACCUMULATE, TO COMPRESS, TO LET DRY: OPERATIONS THAT PRODUCE FORMS WHOSE LOGIC IS THAT OF CONSEQUENCE. IN ALVES DE JESUS, THIS UNDERSTANDING OF GESTURE TAKES ON THE FUNCTION OF TRANSMUTATION. MANIPULATED SALT BECOMES BODIES, TOMBS, SYMBOLS, AND SURFACES THAT ADDRESS DEATH, LIFE, FAMILY, AND SPIRITUALITY AS POSSIBLE STATES OF ONE AND THE SAME MATTER. IF GESTURE IS WHAT REMAINS OF THE BODY IN THE WORK, HERE IT IS ALSO WHAT ANTICIPATES THE BODY THE WORK WILL COME TO DESIGNATE.

THE EXHIBITION OPENS WITH AN OBSTACLE. IN THE GALLERY'S FIRST ROOM, NEXT TO THE ENTRANCE, A SOLID BLOCK OF 14,000 KG OF PURE SALT OCCUPIES THE SPACE: A RECTANGULAR, MONOLITHIC FORM THAT ALMOST BLOCKS THE VIEWER'S ACCESS. THERE IS AN EVIDENT VISCERALITY AND AMBIGUITY IN THIS WORK, AND BOTH MUST BE EXAMINED WITH RIGOR. THE CRITIQUE OF MINIMALISM DEMONSTRATED THAT THE UNITARY OBJECT IS CHARGED: BENEATH THE APPEARANCE OF PURE LITERALNESS, IT EXERCISES A KIND OF POWER OVER WHOEVER

ENCOUNTERS IT, IMPOSING ITS MUTE, IMPERSONAL, UNCOMPROMISING PRESENCE, AND REPRODUCING WITHIN AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE A RHETORIC OF AUTHORITY. ABSOLUTE FORM PERSUADES THROUGH SCALE AND SILENCE. ALVES DE JESUS'S BLOCK CONSCIOUSLY ASSUMES THAT RISK. ITS FORMAL CERTAINTY, THE SHARPNESS OF ITS EDGES, THE REFUSAL OF THE IMAGE, POSES THE QUESTION: WHAT DISTINGUISHES THIS MASS OF SALT FROM AN EXERCISE OF DOMINATION THROUGH FORM?

THE ANSWER LIES IN THE REST OF THE EXHIBITION, WHICH OPERATES AS A COUNTERPROOF TO THE OBJECT AT THE ENTRANCE. IN THE MAIN ROOM, A FLOOR SCULPTURE, ALSO IN SALT, HAS THE EXACT MEASURE OF A BODY. ITS RESEMBLANCE TO A TOMB IS DELIBERATE: A CERTAIN SCULPTURAL TRADITION TREATED THE TOMB AS THE FORM IN WHICH PERFECTION AND DISAPPEARANCE COINCIDE, THE PLACE WHERE PRESENCE IS CONSTRUCTED THROUGH ABSENCE AND DEATH IS TAKEN UP AS A FORMAL QUESTION. ALVES DE JESUS'S PIECE BELONGS TO THAT LINEAGE BUT DEFLECTS IT: SALT, A MATERIAL FOR THE PRESERVATION OF BODIES, TURNS THE TOMB INTO A PROMISE OF PERMANENCE.

IN THE SAME ROOM, A THREE-METER SCROLL HANGS FROM THE WALL, CLOSED, CONCEALING ONE OF THE ARTIST'S SALT PAINTINGS. THE WORK EXISTS AND REFUSES TO BE SEEN, AND THAT REFUSAL DISMANTLES THE LOGIC OF THE BLOCK AT THE ENTRANCE, WHICH IMPOSES EVERYTHING ON THE GAZE. IN THE FOLLOWING ROOMS, SALT SLABS LEAN AGAINST THE GALLERY WALLS LIKE BLANK SHEETS TORN FROM A NOTEBOOK, OR LIKE ANCIENT TABLETS OF LAW.

SALT ABSORBS MOISTURE FROM THE AIR AND RETURNS IT TO THE SURFACE: THE SLABS SWEAT, THE SCULPTURES WEEP, SO TO SPEAK. THE MATTER REACTS TO ITS ENVIRONMENT AND TO THE PUBLIC THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE RUN. IT IS HERE THAT THE PROBLEM OF THE MONOLITH IS RESOLVED: AGAINST THE ABSOLUTISM OF FORM, THE EXHIBITION PROPOSES SPIRITUALITY AS A TECHNICAL AND MATERIAL QUALITY OF THE WORK. WHAT APPEARED TO BE CERTAINTY IS, IN FACT, PROCESS.

THE EXHIBITION ENDS IN SOUND, WITH A SOUND INSTALLATION THAT OCCUPIES THE LAST ROOM: A POEM READ ALOUD, OR AN OUTPOURING, OR A WISH TO BE HEARD, SOMETHING BETWEEN IMAGINATIVE FLOW AND POSSESSION, A THOUGHT SO LATENT THAT IT ABANDONS THE ONE WHO THOUGHT IT AND TAKES FOR ITSELF THE BODY OF SOUND, THE MOST IMMATERIAL OF ELEMENTS.

AFTER SALT IN ALL ITS CONSISTENCIES, FROM BLOCK TO TEAR, THE VOICE APPEARS AS THE LAST STATE OF THE EXHIBITION'S MATTER. IT IS IN THE VOICE THAT THE TITLE FINDS ITS MOST PRECISE FORMULATION: PERPETUAL IS WHAT CONTINUES TO ACT AFTER LOSING ITS BODY. SOUND DISSIPATES AND BEGINS AGAIN; THE SPOKEN WORD IS LOST.

PERPÉTUO THUS BUILDS A COMPLETE ATMOSPHERE OF PERMANENCE. SALT, WHICH PRESERVES AND CORRODES, WHICH WAS CURRENCY AND COVENANT, SUSTAINS A TRAJECTORY THAT RUNS FROM THE MOST ABSOLUTE FORM TO THE MOST IMMATERIAL: THE BLOCK THAT BARS, THE TOMB THAT MEASURES THE BODY, THE SCROLL THAT CONCEALS, THE SLABS THAT WEEP, THE VOICE THAT PERSISTS. AT EACH STAGE, THE SAME MATTER DEMONSTRATES THAT ETERNITY IS AN ACTIVITY. IN SAMUEL ALVES DE JESUS'S FIRST SOLO SHOW, WHAT IS PERPETUATED IS THE REACTION: CHEMICAL, HISTORICAL, SPIRITUAL. THE WORK LASTS AS LONG AS THE MATTER WORKS, AND THE MATTER, HERE, WORKS CEASELESSLY.