



**Solange Pessoa**

Opening: November 22, 2016

## **Solange Pessoa: Memory and Disenchantment**

*Minas is no more* – Carlos Drummond de Andrade

*Minas Gerais has frauds, has chimeras* – Paulo Mendes Campos

Solange Pessoa's work carries a strong catastrophic feeling in relation to time and its impact. The memory that overarches her production is above all linked to Minas Gerais, the Brazilian state where she was born and currently lives. Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Milton Nascimento, Pedro Nava, Paulo Mendes Campos, Cornélio Pena, Lúcio Cardoso and many other *mineiros* whom the artist admires have also, in their own unique ways, revealed a mixture of love and disillusion for their home state.

In this exhibition at Galeria Mendes Wood, São Paulo, which is one of the best the artist has ever had in the country, almost every piece establishes an ambiguous relationship with memory and the impact of time on things and people. Her *Caveiras* (Skulls), in soapstone, resemble large pebbles that were washed up by the sea, whose round edges were patiently sculpted by the waves.

In her remarkable drawings on canvas, forms that look like real or imaginary animals, Pessoa revisits primitive inscriptions that she is very familiar with. By adhering to the irregularities of the cave walls, these drawings and paintings are led - in their transition to the artist's drawings – to graphic solutions that preserve a formal relatedness to her *Caveiras* by rejecting regular forms and by their somewhat organic aspect.

Despite their flat surface (the canvas), the style of the animals maintains the twisting, schematic and irregular aspect of primitive inscriptions. Geometry has no place in these archaic traces. Something similar happens to her *Fontes* (Fountains) and her bronze sculptures, which are all driven by a constructive process in which an act carried out by a hesitant hand has a decisive role in the constitution of forms, with a strong organic resonance.

None of the artworks in this exhibition bear resemblance to the industrial production of objects. The docility of the soapstone, a soft rock that instantly reminds us of the work of the noted *mineiro* Antônio Francisco Lisboa, known as Aleijadinho, plays a decisive role both in linking the

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objects to Minas Gerais and materialising the background meanings intended by the artist.

Despite her insistence on reactivating the traditions of her homeland, Pessoa's works are far from reinforcing the stereotypes surrounding the idea of being a *mineiro*, a vague notion, like any mythical formulation, that refers to an allegedly collective nature that the population of Minas Gerais should be proud of: a moody and reserved temperament, a fondness of local traditions, a marked discretion, and a good level of common sense, moderation and balance; all characteristics of a people that for a long time led a life of relative isolation from the rest of the country, with the resulting affirmation of self-sufficiency.

The way in which São Paulo modernists were attracted to Minas Gerais' historical towns is linked to the wish - mainly by Mario de Andrade - to contribute to the construction of a national identity that seemed to be already configured in Minas Gerais.

The soapstone sculptures *Fontes* and *Mimmesmas* help to explain this apparent paradox between affection and sadness, bringing closer together memories from Minas Gerais and, at the same time, conferring them with a reserved nature. In these sculptures, we simultaneously have the chimera of full self-sufficiency (the quintessence of the *mineiro* character) - inasmuch as the pieces fold onto themselves - and a hollow space that houses the coil-like forms. Putting your hand inside these bowls can cost your life.

This text – which is already longer than it should have been – aims to emphasise a pendular movement, which is perhaps the only possible reaction to something that is at the same time fascinating and painful. It is not a coincidence that this movement has influenced the greatest minds of this unique Brazilian state. However, I ask myself if something in this prudish and quiet society is not strongly linked to everything that Pessoa is opposed to.

I don't believe this is to do with cultural masochism; however, it is also practically impossible to adhere to the idea of a single Brazil, a country that, according to foreigners, has a hospitable and friendly population, even though at least 50 thousand people are killed and approximately 50 thousand women are raped in the country every year. In contrast, at



present, the Syrian civil war has killed a total of 300 thousand children, women and men.

Here we momentarily leave Minas Gerais to determine that Pessoa's production understands Minas Gerais in terms of the cycle of gold, at the start of Brazil's integration and the moment of creation of an internal market that the businesses of sugar cane and coffee hadn't managed to generate, functioning almost as the matrix of Brazil's misfortunes and virtues.

Due to the uniqueness of our ethnic background, composed by black slaves, European and Asian immigrants and the autochthonous indigenous populations, this truly multiracial society that - despite being unjust - has no significant ethnic and religious conflicts, has often been understood as the parent cell of a new socialism: less authoritarian and more fraternal and friendly. The 'Dialectic of Malandroism' by Antonio Candido, one of our greatest thinkers of all times, is perhaps the most brilliant formulation of this project.

Roberto Schwarz - another remarkable academic, who was greatly influenced by Antonio Candido -, despite acknowledging his former teacher's astute interpretation of Manuel Antônio de Almeida's book *Memórias de um sargento de milícia*, also criticises Candido. If being a *malandro* relies on an ambiguous relationship with the law, morals and good manners, wouldn't it be plausible to see traces of this practice in a despotic government that equally despises them?

This discussion is prolific and one of the most productive in the country and Minas Gerais is not exempt from this process. However, the backwardness of many of its regions tend to make the existence of these traces even more inclined to cruelty rather than the welcoming nature engendered by the traditional horseback travellers of Minas Gerais known as *tropeiros*.

– Rodrigo Naves