

CARLOS/ISHIKAWA

Antonio Tarsis
Symbolic Genocide
29 May - 3 July 2021

O céu em pedaços (Sky in pieces)

Antonio Tarsis originally began this series by collecting matchboxes that had been used and thrown away in the streets of Salvador. These are manufactured by a popular brand and found widespread across households in Brazil. Much cheaper than a lighter, the discarded matchboxes are pervasive in areas where drug dependency is high. Hand assembled yet mass-produced, the materiality of these objects reacts easily when exposed to the elements, recording traces of sunlight and water. Tarsis employs the boxes as colour and symbol; reconfiguring, aligning or accentuating parts to compose collages with the tonalities, creating new images suggestive of a painting, a landscape, an abstraction.

There is an immediate overlay – a crossing of memories – between the object's intrinsic meanings and the image suggested by the reorganization of its pieces. There is a concise simplicity in Tarsis's act of reconstituting visual, affective and social memory – or personal and collective identity – through this modest object. The incendiary potential is transformed into a constructive space.

The discourse around the displacement of the everyday object can easily empty it of its less explicit meanings. Tarsis is not interested in using objects to desecrate art, to explore the reverse of their utility or in their mere removal from everyday contexts. His work is a labour of collecting, individualizing colors and dismantling to give new order to urban fragments. The result of this process is a profound re-signification. The artist's work dignifies the fragments and the matchboxes are elevated to another scale of meaning, not to counterpose their original use – but as an acknowledgement of the material culture of a contemporary society in which an industrial and popular object intercedes something as primitive as fire.

– *Translated and adapted from the original Portuguese by Pedro Nery, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 2021*

Symbolic Genocide

The human imagination can formulate questions, develop facts, acts, objects and moments that record in our trajectories contours of what is right, wrong, good and evil. And with that same command, undo everything.

Symbolic Genocide is a series of embroideries proposing a narrative of erasure through the disappearance of images that form institutional symbols of the military police in Brazil – institutions that denounce a society structured by the conception of 'epistemicides', the disappearance of a mass of bodies that form an episteme. A way of thinking that forms a nation; an ethical, aesthetic, symbolic perimeter that leaves a void to be filled.

These works are embroideries; the act of embroidery consists of a perforating movement onto a soft surface with an object, usually metal. The objective of the act of perforation – introducing a material in a repetitive and exhaustive manner, with figurative or non-figurative results – is to adorn a surface. Through a deconstructed heraldry, these insignias embroidered in black, white and grey denote the warlike aspect of these military coats of arms and reflect the contradiction between the meaning of public safety and their identification with symbols of extermination, proposing the disappearance of these images as analogous to the genocide of a Black and peripheral population of which the artist is part.

– *Translated from original text by Keyna Eleison, Curator, Artistic Director Museu de Arte Moderna (MAM) do Rio de Janeiro, 2018*