

São Paulo, República, first year of the 20s in the 21st century

Luiz Roque has lived in the neighborhood of República, in the Copan building, since his arrival in São Paulo from the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, in 2008. I dare say that since then all his works are to a certain extent impacted by the place where he lives. His retina – like mine – is impregnated by the neighborhood's peculiar rhythm.

The spasmodic movement of the public square is back-fed by the people who go past it, stay or disappear underground. República is a circular space, a resistance bubble and also a time bomb. It is from within República – a nerve point in São Paulo bringing together all sorts of people – that Pivô is showing a selection of Roque's works, including a film seen for the first time in Brazil (*Zero*, 2019), a film from his early career (*Filme Dourado* [Golden Film], 2010) and a film specially commissioned for the exhibition (*República*, 2020).

"Throughout the 2030s, public clinics for the treatment of transsexuals were deactivated. Since then, all procedures related to sex change and gender identity have been carried out in beauty clinics, and 2030 became known as the White Year."¹

In 2013, Roque created the fictional scenario above, a speculation on the degree of subliminal interference inflicted by the State – and the market – on our bodies. Also, in 2013, Spanish academic Paul Preciado – played by an actress in Roque's film – was still known as Beatriz. Trans-sexuality was still considered a personality disorder by the WHO², and the crowds on the streets of Brazil were starting to take sides, to the noise of rubber bullets and people banging pots.

I remember once leaving work at Copan trying to make sense of the disjointed information coming from the protests, whilst my eyes watered from tear-gas emanating from the square. At that point, a mixed feeling of expectation and apprehension took over everyone's bodies, the streets and state offices in Brasília. Now that the gruesome outcomes of the so-called "June Rounds" are widely known, the same streets seem more wary and the air thicker.

In his films, Roque deliberately bursts open time and space, enhancing the narrative traction of his sequences. Even when he sets a specific time and date, such as in *Ano Branco* [White Year] (Porto Alegre, 2013), the film remains open. It seems inevitable to watch it without going through an incessant exercise of rewinding/fast forwarding, between the moment it was captured, the present, and the date defined by the image.

The open-ended plot, the lack of biographical definition for the characters, the combination of filming techniques (HD, super-8, 16mm), the speed of editing and the music-clip pace, which are recurrent in the artist's audiovisual practice, intermix chronological times and deliberately suspend any teleological order. Roque's filmography does not stem from a premonitory or alarmist claim, but it is clear that his gaze derives from an extreme, vibrant present. He creates queer environments where the relationships between bodies trigger political dissent. It is through desire and the senses that the artist weaves

¹ Excerpt from Luiz Roque's film *Ano Branco* [White Year].

² In 2018, the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) published a new edition of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD), according to which being transgender was no longer considered a mental disorder. The last revision was published 28 years prior to that.

together pressing themes, such as bio politics, the failure of modernism, the culture of images and issues around mass surveillance and artificial intelligence.

In his most recent film, which lends the title to the exhibition, Roque complicates his usual equation even further by employing, for the first time, a documentary premise: the life of Marcinha do Corintha, a transsexual diva who has been a key figure on the São Paulo nightlife scene since the 1980s. Marcinha is the subject of a fictional documentary/interview set in República. Her massive face appears in a circle floating over a sort of semi-open bunker built inside the exhibition space. Granulated images of life in the neighborhood and portraits of enigmatic characters that inhabit the square, or perhaps the performer's memory, are intertwined with the first-person narration.

– I was the first one to go to Europe, she says from inside the circle.

Marcinha is pure image. Her well-groomed public figure is touched-up by Roque's sharp gaze. Her ultra-made-up face becomes a banner, and the complexity of her persona is celebrated in the film. Whilst she conveys fragments of her memories of being a migrant, the bust of Marcinha spins like an 'anti-biological' self-programmed clock. Her appearance seems more trans-human than trans-gender. The directness with which she explains her option to suppress her own desire – through the controlled use of male hormone inhibitors – contrasts with the anxiety of the young woman who submits herself to a clinical analysis performed by an automated doctor in *Ano Branco*. Roque adds a scene with the same character in his most recent film, once again playing with the idea of time/space. Are they the same person?

In *Zero* (2019), a lonely dog flies over the desert in an aircraft in inert motion. Electronic beats cradle the continuum, which is only interrupted by an oasis-like skyline made of futuristic skyscrapers. The contrast between the dust of the desert, the shining and spotless glass of the uninhabited buildings, and the animal adrift – perhaps the last living creature – is a disturbing warning of the consequences of some of the political and economic decisions made in the 20th century. The lack of human presence in one film and the lack of sexual drive in the other seem to insinuate that our species is perhaps approaching a new ground-zero, that could lead either to a complete revaluation or even extinction.

A new republic is immediately devised when this selection of films – inhabited by Roque's allegorical characters and those who follow their rhythms – is exhibited in the same space. The open sound of the videos reverberates on Pivô's reinforced concrete walls, whilst Marcinha do Corintha's piercing voice comes to the fore: "I no longer dream of living there", she says again from inside her circle. Luiz Roque's new protagonist swapped a glamorized concept of Europe – idealized by her and many others – for this self-proclaimed Republic, where non-binary dancers celebrate the arrival of a New Monument [*O novo monumento*] (2013) – or the end of modernism.

In ten years' time, we will reach the White Year, whatever that might mean in 2030.