

Jota Mombaça:

THE SINKING SHIP / PROSPERITY

SIX QUESTIONS posed by Lauren Sorresso to Jota Mombaça on *THE SINKING SHIP/PROSPERITY*, a solo exhibition at KADIST San Francisco, October 27, 2022 to January 28, 2023

LAUREN SORRESSO: WHAT IS THE STORY BEHIND THE EXHIBITION TITLE? WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Jota Mombaça: *THE SINKING SHIP/ PROSPERITY* emerges from many different places at the same time, but an important story behind it is my encounter with art critic and philosopher Darla Migan, PhD in Berlin a year ago.¹ During a conversation about museums and our role in their undoing and/or perpetuation, Darla said something like, “we now own it. Well, of course, the ship is sinking, but we are entitled to it.” That phrase stuck with me, as a deeply ingrained, complex acknowledgment of such a predicament: being entitled to the sinking ship.

As a figuration of prosperity, the sinking of a ship signals the material dispossession of the economic regimes which make planetary logistics possible, therefore activating a figuration of prosperity that is not entailed by the success of modern-colonial cycles of reproduction but rather by its interruption and failure. If that’s what we are entitled to—following Darla’s remark—then ours is the generative dimension of modernity’s collapse: its waves and currents; its sonic remains and fluid memories; its abyssal regions and watery resilience.

The exhibition title has, in this sense, the performative quality of stating an abolitionist position about the world as we know it, without necessarily implying a pre-existing formal regime to follow or dwelling too much on the apocalyptic drama. It is, thus, not only an announcement of what the exhibition is about, but the first poem from which the entire project derives; a prologue; and

an anticipation of what the works entail, engage with, and, hopefully, exceed.

1 - <https://www.instagram.com/darkdaimondarilla/>

LS: HOW DO THE DIFFERENT SITES AND BODIES OF WATER REFERENCED BY THESE WORKS RELATE? HOW IS THAT SIGNIFICANT?

JM: The different bodies of water inscribed in these works relate in a non-linear, mysterious way, forming a map of something we don’t know yet—the planet’s

emotion, which is a geography that refuses a cartographical gesture. These bodies of water speak of place, but they also defy locality, as what is constitutive in every relationship they form with the sunken textiles is one of currents and motion. Therefore, the poethical intention of the project is not to offer a geopolitical reading of these bodies of water in relation to the planetary trauma of climate change, but to allow some space for them to inscribe materially a feel that is not to be sensed as a scientific tool, but as a sentient landscape—as uncontained knowledge.²

2 - <https://www.sternberg-press.com/product/on-the-antipolitical-1/>

MOST OF YOUR WORKS, INCLUDING THIS EXHIBITION, ARE SITE-SPECIFIC. WILL YOU SHARE MORE ABOUT YOUR APPROACH TO INSTALLATION AND PERFORMANCE? WHAT KINDS OF ASPECTS DO YOU CONSIDER IN CREATING A CLIMATE OR ATMOSPHERE?

Installations are climates, or at least that is how I like to think of them. They are climates that either continue or discontinue the climate realities we are collectively experiencing on Earth. They have a temperature, a sonic marking, a geological inscription, a particular way of letting rain in and out, and a particular way of dancing or not with the winds.

Installations are climates. They interact with the planet, in ways that either preserve or obliterate it; and they are always attuned to the material conditions of their constitution, therefore being inherently site-specific, even though in their site-specific relationships they can also provide a path to realms that are not immediately inscribed by the locality of the site. They are always a 'here,' but sometimes they are also a 'there,' a moving geography, an outer space of social reality. They can form and deform perceptions, activate unusual readings, and provide the grounds for unrealistic dreams and accounts.

They are climates and as such, they possess, touching the different bodies they embrace, informing their rhythms and sensations in ways that are not merely representational—one does not need to understand or interpret a climate to feel its temperature coursing through their body. In

intentions, and to the different agents invited into the composition process.

We could take *Ghost 4(b): Visa denied is a poem upside down* (2022) as an example, to think with them on the will of the tides and their carelessness towards our exhibition schedule. When we realized that the tides would not allow this particular Ghost to join the exhibition for the opening, instead of trying to fight against it, we decided to accept it and learn with such impossibility. In a way, the message of the tide was determinant for the work's participation in the exhibition, even more than my first determination over it. When the tide spoke, it changed the positioning of *Ghost 4(b)* in the gallery, it interfered with their name and it also determined that my very absence in these early stages of the exhibition due to Visa issues should also be inscribed, materially, by the absence of yet another body.

This is how uncontained-unconstrained bodies demand to exist: in a relational diagram that is not based solely on modern and human determination. That is

centrality of the rational as the mediator of one's relation with an artwork; of course, they can be read, interpreted, and criticized, but such processes will never come to be without a sensorial, bodily-infused, conscious or unconscious intervention of said 'object of interpretation.'

I like to listen to what every different work has to say about its rendering. I like to relate to my practice not as its master but rather as its channel, which means that to a certain extent I have to accept the lack of control as an unavoidable condition of the creative process. In this sense, the works are always uncontained, unconstrained by the practice that brings them to life, which does not mean they are not composed in relation to myself, my critical and more-than-critical

how, in my perception, the Ghost works in the exhibition speak of an anti-colonial, planetary, and transfeminist perception, even if they are not necessarily committed to the political readings that come with these categories in contemporary society. What they seem to be committed to is their own un-containment and unconstraintment, signaling to a form of being that insists on exceeding and, to a certain extent, interrupting the categorical apprehensions determined by modern-colonial determinations to make space for yet another register of reality and possibility.

What if, instead of sensing reality departing from the social realist categories of the world as we know it (i.e., modernity, coloniality, etcetera), could we reframe such categories and reading modes departing from the sensed realities we experience concerning the planet?³ In other words, what if we give up social realism towards a speculative composition of reality that considers the senses, and not only the human senses, as a trustworthy mediator? What realisms would then be enabled by such paradigm transformation? How would it then affect our sense of possibility?

YOUR RESIDENCY PROPOSAL DESCRIBED GRIEVING TIME, AND THE NEW VIDEO UNTITLED (ELEMENTAL POSSESSION) (2022) AND SOME OF YOUR POEMS REFERENCE TEARS. HOW IS GRIEF CONSIDERED IN THE EXHIBITION?

Grieving Time emerges in the creative process as a condition formed by the imposition of linearity and waitness as two temporal regimes enforced by modernity against non-white bodies and communities. It relates with a critique of both these dimensions, but it is constituted of a particular emotionality that cannot be reduced to its critical effect. Furthermore, it describes the ongoing emotional labor of mourning the deterioration of possibility, the time stolen by regulatory infrastructures of colonial society, and also the experience of abandoning and feeling abandoned. Abandonment is key to its process. To sink the materials and to let

them rest under the water is a form of relative abandonment. Every textile or metal piece sunken is abandoned to its own sort, subjected to the environment that constitutes the particular bodies of water to which they relate. I believe that what happens under there is also a form of emotional labor, that is formally inscribed in the materials through fish activity, encounters with sharp rocks, algae, mud, and underwater currents. In order to be converted into a Ghost, the linen and the metal just have to wait while the underwater forms and deforms them.

In my personal experience, migrating as a formerly colonized subject relates to some of the processes through which the Ghosts present in the exhibition come to life. Therefore, so often in the poems that accompany this body of work, there are references to migration that point to the material, not metaphorical, connection between the way the underwater transforms the textile and migration transforms the migrant. For example, this passage from "what is coming for you is only dawn"(2022):

"see:

a migrant travels alone on every bus
the question of being pending
indefinitely"

Alone on every bus, the migrant's material condition is to face a state of perpetual imminence, in which the environment can, at any time, turn against you. The quest to be, or the question of being, in this case, refers to a material condition rather than an identity issue, since what any migratory operation led by a modern nation-state—especially those irrigated by the colonial and imperial accumulation of

To wait while linear time unfolds can feel like an endless journey, as calendar days are not a temporal measure that accounts for the experience of time that the emotional labor demanded by such processes entail. Grieving time, then, becomes another term to describe what Ola Hassanain and Egbert Alejandro Martina refer to as 'the labor of waiting for the conditions to change,' waiting for the possibility to be released.⁴ All the subjects that make this exhibition, including me and the Ghosts, are marked by such labor. Grieving time is a research project focused on the relationship between bodies of water and social regulatory regimes of motion.

4 - <https://disembodiedterritories.com/Architectures-of-the-Un-inhabitable>

WHEN YOU REFER TO THE "RADICALITY OF SINKING," WHAT FRAMEWORKS OR ASSOCIATIONS DOES THIS CONCEPT EVOKE FOR YOU?

By "radicality of sinking," I want to refer to the process of abandoning oneself into the water's embrace, giving up the fantasy of control, and allowing water to take hold.

It is an image of desubjectivation that instead of focusing on human obliteration, speaks of elemental possession. This is expressed, of course, by the literal process of sinking, but also by the emotional manifestation of tears. If we accept that crying might refer to more than the human drama that gives it social meaning, being, thus, a moment of elemental possession, in which the water of the body takes hold and reshapes perception and feeling, then we can say that crying is always a form through which the body experiences the radicality of sinking.

For more information about the exhibition Jota Mombaça: *THE SINKING SHIP/PROSPERITY* and the works referenced here, please visit our website at <https://kadist.org/program/jota-mombaca-the-sinking-ship-prosperity>

SIX QUESTIONS was produced by Jo-ey Tang (Director, KADIST San Francisco), Lauren Sorresso (Communications), and Layne Takahashi in December of 2022.

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