



Solange Pessoa
Earthworks
May 12 – June 17, 2023

Earthworks features a selection of earth and fresco paintings, ceramic sculptures, and one video relating to Solange Pessoa's enduring relationship to land and spirited use of organic materials. Multifarious and experimental in its approach to material, Pessoa's oeuvre is at once transgressive and cohesive—in a league of its own determination. Though drinking from a well of cultural references—including Brazil's Tropicalia and Antropofagia movements, Indigenous craft, the Baroque, Land Art, and her own dreams—her peerless approach is rooted in her intuitive and unbridled exploration of organic matter and form. This inquiry begins with the artist's native region of Minas Gerais, Brazil—a terrain with complex histories of biodiversity, indigeneity, industry, and colonial encounter—but vastly proliferates to encompass a broader geography uniting distant localities through familiar textures and matter. Working intuitively with clays from different areas, Pessoa exposes herself to an amalgam of profound traumas and triumphs of the land. She operates as a conduit to express this emotional spectrum through her work.

As is customary to the artist's practice, many works in the exhibition are produced through an intense and corporeal entanglement between the artist and the Earth itself, a process of craft and intuition. A series of large organic paintings made with red clay propose a visual lexicon inspired by flora and primordial organic forms. On the floor before them sits a "landscape" of *Domingas*—abstract ceramic vessels with curved edges made of red clay. A natural extension of Pessoa's study of the Earth's materials into three-dimensional space, they evoke both the permanence of ancient topographies and the permeability of the human body.

Impressive in scale, both the earth paintings and the *Domingas* imply a full-body range of movement, described by the artist as being charged with a Dionysian energy. Their bold and gestural figurations signal the intense and physical process behind their creation. The scale of Pessoa's work is determined organically, balancing peaceful moments in both sublime and intimate encounters. Together, they embody a libidinal and transcendent power that fuses terrestrial and corporeal spirituality.

A grouping of black-on-white silhouette paintings of embryonic abstract shapes seem to shiver with the anticipation of life. Whether the anticipation is exciting or anxious is resolved in the viewer's eye. Their ambiguity demonstrates Pessoa's ability to account for polarity within cycles of being, bridging the gap between existential tensions of light and dark, growth and decay, life and death.

With *Earthworks*, Pessoa debuts a series of new fresco paintings created using a variety of natural clays as pigments. Rife with lush depictions of fertile plants, the frescoes ripen with a spirit of renewal in harmony with the artist's perennial exploration of reproductive cycles vital to propel life. Their intimate scale and rich palette operate in contrast to the larger earth paintings, yet maintain a kinship with them through their softened, vegetal contours.

Pessoa's interest in time is palpable throughout the corpus of *Earthworks*, but is perhaps most resonant in *Lonjuras*. The video traverses a sequence of lingering observational shots of nature taken on routine walks over several years. Documenting recursive patterns of textural change in her surroundings at an unhurried pace, *Lonjuras* presents a meditation on the weight of environmental witness and geological time scales. An unconventional nod to the vanitas genre, *Lonjuras* reflects on caves and rock formations sure to outlive our mortal coil, honoring what Pessoa refers to as the *time of the Earth*: a temporality beyond human conception.

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In her 2018 monograph, it was revealed that Pessoa's umbilical cord was buried in her grandmother's yard. This biographical detail provides a certain context for interpretation which suggests a metaphysical tether between the artist, the ground, and all that rises from it. Conceptual and aesthetic impulses at the core of *Earthworks* are imbued with a prophetic urgency—a *homecoming* of sorts. Approaching natural clays and sediment as a primary medium for *Earthworks*, Pessoa taps into the range of emotional and spiritual properties that emerge from the charged ancestral soils of our planet, realizing a body of work abuzz with its own distinct telluric life force.

Text by Danica Pinteric.

Solange Pessoa (b. 1961, Ferros, Brazil) lives and works in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

Her selected solo exhibitions include *In the Sun and the Shade*, Mendes Wood DM, Brussels (2020); *Longilonge*, Ballroom Marfa, Marfa, Texas (2019); *Solange Pessoa*, Mendes Wood DM, New York (2018); *Solange Pessoa*, Blum & Poe, Los Angeles (2017); *Solange Pessoa*, Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo (2016); *Metaflor-Metaflora*, Museu Mineiro, Belo Horizonte (2013); Museu de Arte da Pampulha, Belo Horizonte (2008); Museu da Inconfidência, Ouro Preto (2000); Palácio das Artes, Belo Horizonte (1995); and Centro Cultural São Paulo (1992).

Pessoa received a grant from the Pollock Krasner Foundation (1996-1997), and has participated in group exhibitions in Brazil and internationally, including the 59th International Biennale di Venezia – *The Milk of Dreams*, Venice (2022); *Reclaim the Earth*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2022); *Living Worlds*, Fondation Cartier, Lille (2022); *Invenção de Origem*, Estação Pinacoteca, São Paulo (2018); *La Fin de Babylone - Mich Wunder, dass ich so Fröhlich bin*, Koln Skulptur #9, Cologne (2017); *New Shamans* (2016), *High Anxiety* (2016), and *No Man's Land: Women Artists* (2015) at the Rubell Family Collection, Miami; *Arte e Patrimônio*, Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro (2014); *Mostra do Redescobrimento*, CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux (2001); and *Heranças Contemporâneas* (1999), *Encontros e Tendências*, Museu de Arte Contemporânea de São Paulo (1993).

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