

# The approach

## Anderson Borba

### Secret Ceremony

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Text by Bernardo José de Souza

"The shadow escapes from the body like an animal we had been sheltering."  
—Gilles Deleuze, Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation

*These are entities endowed with the power of organic transformation, of becoming something else, entirely —of feeling anew, violently, even— as if the very architecture of their beings were dismantled and reassembled whenever they fell under the gaze of strangers, compelling a total reconfiguration of their place in the world. They may approach one another, or perhaps set their distance for a fortuitous moment, just so that they can clinch again, thus becoming one collective body devoid of singular identities: at once universal and particular; whole and void. And although they can appear oblivious to the glance of others, they might as well perish if no one dares looking at them —at times inert, stoic as a totem, at others seething with life, as if jolted awake by the shimmer of danger glinting just before the corner of their eyes. They feed and are fed from the urge to transmogrify, invested with the desire to turn into something unfathomable, prone to "becoming animal, plant, molecular, becoming zero", to borrow the words of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.<sup>1</sup>*

There appears to be a tacit, silent, almost ritualistic exchange between the sculptures gathered under the hand of Brazilian artist Anderson Borba. Made from randomly found or purposefully acquired pieces of wood, seldomly mixed with bronze and scraps of glossy magazines, these creatures emerge as embodiments of souls torn apart, and disassembled limbs coming from different ends and sharing distinct memories. Though brought together as a single form, they bear the weight of an entire world —each fragment haunted by past lives, now coalescing into a new being forged in the aftermath of rupture, resistance, and remembrance. Figments of the artist's imagination, these sculptures come to life always when confronted with the human eye —and whether in assembly, they are no longer sculptural bodies, but totemic entities—summoning visitors into the gravity of a secret rite, where presence becomes entanglement and witnessing borders on initiation.

Henceforth, the present exhibition could be sensed as a liturgy of sorts, or perceived as a conclave of assorted characters, each and every one of them the conduit of forgotten narratives, or of the ones yet to come. While eschewing distinctions between the natural and the artificial, it creates its very own rationale and fictitious scenarios: spaces of mutation and visceral defiance against the dominion of articulated language —as if silence itself were howling from within the sculpture's hollowed, often absent guts. They may even attempt at disguising their past lives, yet something in them remains irreducibly faithful to their restless, living essence.

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 169`

Born in Santos (1972), a seaside city near the cosmopolitan capital of São Paulo, in Brazil, Anderson Borba was raised in a working-class family, strange to institutional art, though devoted to Umbanda, a syncretic religion of African origins, also derived from Spiritism, whose rituals involve music, dance, trance, offerings, and the adoration of Orixás: deities incorporated from the Candomblé cult, and often associated to Catholic icons in Brazil, both religions brought together by force of Portuguese colonization.

Totemic and animistic in its ritualistic nature, the Candomblé has unequivocally been informing Borba's artistic practice (as well as Brazilian popular art and craft), albeit much of his inspiration could be attributed to his years of formation in London, at the Slade School of Fine Art. If on the one hand his sculptures materialize as actual totems, on the other one may well argue that they resemble Barbara Hepworth's hollow pieces or owe their verticality to Brancusi's columns, to Giacometti's elongated bodies, and even to the inscrutable ancient sign of the Shigir Idol. Rather latent in his work, however, is the influence of *anthropophagy* as means to digest or even devour what is foreign, as implied in the Anthropophagic Manifesto (also referred to as the Cannibal Manifesto), written by Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade in 1928. This highly politically charged literary tour de force would indelibly shape Brazilian modernism as a counter force to the grand narratives produced by its European matrix: an all-encompassing, globally overthrowing ideology —one, it must be said, not fully devoid of underlying colonial impetuses: of progress, rationality, functionality, or even of the repudiation of tradition.

Be that as it may, either derived from modern western culture or ancestral belief systems, Borba's sculptural practice —or imagined cosmology, if you will— is as much about the past as it is about the present or the future. The artist resorts to organic matter —materials that have either borne a soul (once pulsed with purpose or spirit) or been stripped of their function in the world. He will then burn, carve, glue, paint, and reshape the wood to the point of granting it with eloquent features, thus enticing our senses beyond the constraints of material culture within its western contemporary boundaries.

Entangled into one another, corrupted in its intrinsic organic-inorganic ballet, almost promiscuous in the blatant exhibition of inner parts, the gathering of sculptures in this gallery space speaks about endurance as much as *destructive plasticity*<sup>1</sup>: something irrevocable has been lost. The original form —or identity— has been unmade, flawed, irreparably altered. This plasticity of the accident —here understood as the artistic transformation of structural matter— invites the public to congregate with other beings, other entities which are strange to the discursivity of human language, given that they are partly animal, partly plant, partly humanoid, partly extraterrestrial.

In their ever-shifting anatomy and behavior, these “sculptures ‘come creatures’” resemble what Deleuze and Guattari would call a *body without organs*. Endowed with mutation prowess, capable of affecting each other as much as affecting with equal force what is alien to them, they lure the visitors into a ritualized encounter, in which artwork and audience subtly exchange roles, giving way to a silent, solemn dialogue pulsing beneath the surface of verbal language. *Blocks of sensation*<sup>2</sup> that stand on their own, not as monuments to the past, but to the present of becoming or, alternatively, to a future form yet to be grappled with.

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1 Catherine Malabou, *Ontologia do acidente: ensaio sobre a plasticidade destrutiva*. Florianópolis: Ed. Cultura e Barbárie, 2014.

2 Gilles Deleuze, Francis Bacon: *The Logic of Sensation*. London: Continuum, 2003.