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ESCOLA
DE ARTES
VISUAIS DO
PARQUE LAGE

Artists Ana Almeida, Ana Clara Tito, Carla Santana and Laís Amaral, from the Trovoa collective, in dialogue with curator Ulisses Carrilho

UC: 'The Tales of Hoffmann' was an opera created with a great historical distance, which still guided the woman as a muse, objectified. In the plot, there are three of them and this was the starting point for their creation and choice of colors. What is the challenge of acting in a narrative without summoning figuration or literal representations through abstraction?

Ana Almeida: I think the challenge was not in not evoking figurative representations, but in working on a narrative that is idealized by an author that can no longer be accessed. To think of a palette based on a story to which we are not connected, and even adapting this to the technical needs that a work destined for a stage has, has certainly taken us out of our comfort zone.

Ana Clara Tito: Speaking as someone who does not have an artistic practice in painting and who does not only do abstract works, abstract painting was a non-obvious, more subjective way of mixing our perceptions and opinions about opera and the history of opera in themselves. There was a search for starting from a mental journey, I understand the idealization also through this bias.

Carla Santana: Using visual signs to react to an existing narrative, composing from their own understandings and perceptions. Abstraction, for me, appears as a language that allows a work produced collectively to induce multiple forms of graphic, emotional and subjective expressiveness.

Laís Amaral: Thinking about abstraction from an already existing narrative allows us – in fact, it requires – a work linked to sensations. Choosing a palette of colors as symbols, which takes into account the specificities of each “muse”, for example, is to enter an imaginary that links the context and time of the creation of the opera to our readings of reality, experiences.

UC: In addition to the narrative issues, you had the challenge of working on a large scale — there are more than two hundred square meters of painting — and with the idea of spatialization and scene, from elements in dialogue with costumes, choir, cast and lighting, to name some of the elements in this work. How did this process of spatializing the idea of painting take place?

Carla Santana: Through abstraction we seek to understand painting not as an isolated fact, but as an active dialogue with the events of the opera, in frank addition to the reception and perception of the public. The painting evokes a plane, a psychological background, a conscience. It provokes the audience through a general composition, and at the same time, full of fragments of the narrated experience. In contact with all the elements of the show, each part of the work recreates a sensation.

Laís Amaral: The painting is collectively done on a monumental scale. When it is also joined to a collective musical work, which depends on the syntony of bodies, it becomes a whole vibration. A kind of musical activation over the image. One collective body activates another collective body.

Ana Almeida: There are very technical and practical issues regarding this spatial distribution. They start by thinking about which are the privileged visual points of the screen and which areas can only be seen by the audience. It was important for us to think about how to understand this visual hierarchy without falling into the trap of leaving aside the balance of the whole, even if on stage, for those who watch the opera, the perception of the whole is completely different from ours.

Ana Clara Tito: A lot was done through color. The color palette was the first thing to be decided and passed on to André Heller, precisely so that he could think about costumes, light, and other elements in relation. Colors also had to fulfill certain technical needs of the scene situation, in terms of saturation and brightness.

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UC: I remember our first technical visit to the Municipal Theater and the frescoes and ornaments present in the architecture of the space; a great opulence that made us comment on Beyoncé's music video at the Louvre Museum. This relationship between the massive, the popular and the pop singularly interests me. The Municipal Theater of Rio de Janeiro is one of the largest and most important cultural institutions in the country and this presents itself in an unavoidable relationship with the bourgeois tradition and erudite culture, which until recently was considered a counterpoint to popular culture. How is this relationship with these temporalities historically inscribed in your work? Do you see more of a desire to take over space or a break with tradition?

Ana Almeida: We were not concerned about taking space or breaking with tradition. By inviting us to the project, the curatorship of Parque Lage and the direction of Theatro Municipal had knowledge about our work. We create according to what we have already developed in our personal research and also in languages that interest us. Given this, temporal relations do not depend on how much we speculate about them.

Ana Clara Tito: This is a concern more of the institutions than ours. It is not us who are concerned with updating an opera. We are concerned with guaranteeing freedom during the creation process of the work and in its relationship with our previous artistic production, with our vision as a group.

Carla Santana: I see it as an update, to recreate through another temporal perspective. Use the contemporary, a linking verb in space-time.

UC: Operas are also visual spectacles; however, we start from music. And even though contemporary art goes beyond visuality, in painting, the eye, the retina, is called upon above all. In addition to the piece composed by Offenbach, they recently worked in collaboration with a music video by Gilberto Gil, a great musician and composer of Brazilian music. Can you say a few words about the relationship between sound and image, rhythm and painting? When viewing images of the painting process, a concern with the composition of this image becomes clear.

Carla Santana: I can make a friction between instrumental music and abstract painting taking into account the sensory and untranslatable load. Both are the creation of worlds that cannot be defined by the word. Music is a poignant cultural spectrum in our social life, it ends up influencing our gestures and taking it to many other dimensions.

Laís Amaral: I feel that my painting practice is very sensitive to the influence of sound. I believe that this can be a way to re-integrate the senses, the movement of the body itself refers to a dance, guided or not by music, there is a very strong vibration in this practice. Likewise, the image, in this case the complexity of abstraction, in its infinite paths and sensations, can drive the rhythms in the perception of the viewer.

UC: Even though they are a collective, there are four artists in frank collaboration in this work. How did the poetics of each of you contribute to this great composition?

Laís Amaral: I have dedicated myself a lot to abstract painting, in this journey I have been observing how it activates me and how it activates people, the collective. I am particularly interested in abstraction, the movement of undoing a reality set through intuition. Of course, there is a collection, cutouts that the specifics of your own look allow you, plastic choices. But what has interested me most is the power of the gesture. It is accessing the sensitive and enabling the activation of the sensibilities of each person who sees it. This for me is very clear when I paint for example natural phenomena, things we feel but don't see, organic processes. About the experience of making an abstract painting with three artists, it was very positive for me to realize the creation of a collective intuition. Something we were already aware of in a way, but not on this more material level. There was an aggregation of sensibilities, choices, looks, a detachment and also a great confidence in each other. It's very powerful to see this in this work, sometimes I drew something and someone else complemented it, erased it, sometimes it was the same way and in the end it made a lot of sense.

Ana Almeida: When I was aware of the demand for a painting canvas, I – whose main medium is painting – was vehemently against collective painting. Mainly for not having references to works in painting that work the individual expression made by several hands. Also, for not understanding how the union of languages could happen in a single screen and in a cohesive way. Fortunately, I was quite wrong, and actually it was a lot easier than I thought. When together, hands-on, it's very easy for us to trust the knowledge of conceptual thinking, color and composition that each has. For me, it was amazing to see this trust in practice between us. While everyone painted freely on the canvas, we often gathered together to look at the set and understand

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where detailing was lacking, which texture relationships we'd like to create, which color relationships weren't cool yet and needed to be worked on, which imbalances needed to be resolved, and whatever else was needed to align. Most of the time, consensus was pretty quick, even though everyone was painting in different ways, with different strokes.

Carla Santana: A particular and common interest to the collective is that each one of us has a very plural language, research and expressivities. Each one is exercised individually, so the sum of this is multiple interests and several worldviews. Before, abstract painting had a limited relationship to my eyes, I was able to play and dance with colors and shapes over a giant dimension. It was a poetic, practical and sensitive fray. Handle your writing in communion with others. My line of research continues to understand social and subjective relationships, when I am-I am a social body, when I am-I am an individual body. And each time I realize that this dichotomy leaks and overlaps. In this work, for example, I do not depart from this reasoning, however, I enter into a form of plastic expression that I would not explore so intensely if not collectively. The media I usually work with are other, such as photography, sculpture, drawing, in which the body carries out the questions it highlights. It was of extreme impact to expand the possibilities of both gestural-body and visual-graphic expressiveness.

Ana Clara Tito: I believe this was a job that had dwelt in us for some time. Whether for the desire to do something on this scale, or for organizing collectively, in exchange and communion. Today I see how much more mature we are in our relationship as a group. The enhancement of our research and individual trajectories has always been very important. I think that we came together as a group also with this objective, which a priori might seem contradictory, to strengthen and strengthen our particular practices and interests, while sharing much of what we thought or knew. All this dynamic, very special and unique, proved capable of building deep connections and relationships. The painting process itself, the eight-hand sensitive construction of a large panel, was so fluid that for me it can only be the result of this whole exchange relationship, trust and independence that we have been building for the past two years. We walked around the canvas adding layers to what had been done by someone else before, building from the thinking of those who built it before and, for me, even this walking through the canvas is visible in the final result. In my researches I address a lot of mental and emotional states and their possible materializations, their freezing and visualities, while I explore lines of relations between public-private and collective-individual, starting from the body to build works that mix photography, performance, installation. As I've been exploring handwriting with three-dimensional materials, launching myself into abstract painting was a very interesting experience. At the same time bringing my recurrent concerns with light, texture and three-dimensionality,

UC: Recently, you made a collective call, the "Nacional Trovoa", which consisted of a series of exhibitions and decentralized public programs, in several cities in Brazil, thinking about and managing the production of black and non-white women. Institutional racism in the arts system works quite incisively. But a community of artists has been thinking about urgent anti-racist actions, which go beyond the pacifying discourse of diversity. How is this feminist and anti-racist political dimension in your production?

Ana Almeida: Through the experience of freedom, in critical-practical performances.



Detail of the panel, painted by artists Carla Santana, Ana Almeida, Ana Clara Tito and Laís Amaral.



The artists Laís Amaral, Carla Santana, Ana Almeida, Ana Clara Tito.