

ELECTRA

10.2020

- José Marmaleira (1/2)

Pedro A.H. Paixão: What Drawing has Brought from the Past

An exhibition by Pedro A.H. Paixão at Galeria 111 in Lisbon in the first half of 2020 is revisited here by the art critic José Marmaleira. In *Aurora. Desenhos e Outros Materiais*, this Milan-based artist creates work which is as consistent in its results as it is in the theoretical thought that underlies it, as it encounters the canonical genres of art history such as drawing and the portrait.

At the reopening of Galeria 111 in Lisbon, *Aurora. Desenhos e outros Materiais* [Dawn, Drawings and other Materials] by Pedro A.H. Paixão (1971, Lobito, Angola) marked the beginning of a new monochromatic cycle in the artist's drawings: oleander pink, after a decade of 'warm gold-tinted red' (2007-17) or bluish turquoise, in a cycle dedicated to the Belgian Congo.¹ These four drawings emerge from the darkness as intense beams of light bearing the colour of the flower produced by this toxic shrub. Hidden by wooden structures, the drawings were hard to spot. Visitors had to negotiate the walls and enter the cinematic space so that they could discover each drawing, as if it could be an apparition, a projection, an initiation. Pedro A.H. Paixão has brought his drawing closer than ever, and perhaps with unprecedented intensity, to the experience of entering a 'dark room, alone or accompanied, and listening to someone who has something to say to us'.² To paraphrase the artist and his idea of a spectator in the cinema, it was 'as if all the drawings contained a secret, as if they were all whispered'. Whispered, not revealed.

There were more drawings than those four, pencil-drawn in oleander pink. Some were in graphite, black and white again, faces, situations and landscapes, which gave the show the appearance of a *Lichtspiel*, the word used for cinema in early-twentieth-century Germany. Inside, plays of light revealed drawings of luminous intimacy, hinting at fiction, at something palpable yet finally fleeting. Those who have been following Pedro A.H. Paixão's career can certainly recognize the relationship that his drawings – as art and mediality,³ technique and pure gesture – establish with the exterior in their political and anthropological dimensions. Even when he gets close to painting, without ever getting there – and this happens in many of his works – his drawings propose a reflection about something that exists beyond drawing, but envelops it; that is,

historic processes, the political and biographical past, *what has been* and *what has happened*. Finally, this exteriority becomes drawing – which the artist perceives as a form of thought, a contemplation of the relationships and potentialities that exist between us and that which is exterior to us. These are all developments that manifest in the production of images that emerge from the scarlet, turquoise and oleander pink monochrome backgrounds. To Pedro A.H. Paixão, monochrome is not a limit of drawing, and its formal configuration does not depend exclusively on the physical conditions of the line, but is rather a sensible, atmospheric background and an extended potential from which drawing is formed, channelling the ghosts of the past and allowing us to contemplate their spectres, their commotions, their echoes rippling through time. The surface is a passage for apparitions that come from the deep and are materialized by drawing, by its irresistible contours and silhouettes. Meticulous and patient, drawing is art as reification but also as the materialization of a thought – which does not imply that the artist forsakes pure opticality, the experience of which remains, but now in service of an encounter with an extrinsic and transfigured experience of contemplation that challenges and will keep challenging us, a gift of thought.



Pedro A.H. Paixão,
Il pentito, 2018

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The exterior is that which, lying outside the drawing, activates the drawing and all of its necessary internal and introspective processes. The issue of migrants crossing the Strait of Sicily, the castaways of Lampedusa, the colonisation of the Belgian Congo, the pink of the flowering oleander, or the paternal family archive with its fragments, photographic images, charts, maps and many other document types, traces of memory. *Aurora, Desenhos e outros Materiais* was born from this archive. The encounter with the magical dimension of the octopus among the underwater banks and the view of a flowering shrub – elements that came together in the drawing *The Beak of the Oleander* (2018), shown at Galeria 111 – on an Italian island where the artist lived for two decades coincided with the study of found objects and the desire to explore the open dimension of the past (but not history). The past of his great-grandfather, Maurício Marques da Paixão, a Portuguese freemason who built his life between Lisbon and Novo Redondo (now Sumbe);⁴ and the past of his great-grandmother, Aurora Duarte de Castro, an Angolan whose history was never told and persists as a taboo. Nothing remains of her life except for two or three lines on a certificate of baptism and the echo of an old photographic portrait of her as a young woman, not the photograph itself, but a Polaroid shot that captures it lying on a shelf. It is that same fragmented Polaroid that the artist holds in his hand in one of the slides, and it was from this photo (in a photo) that the artist drew *La lupara* (2020), a central work in his *Lichtspiele*.

1. In work shown in the exhibition *Tabou*, in 2018, at the Irène Laub Gallery, curated by Sofia Lemos, and in *Mundo Flutuante: Trabalhos 1996-2018*, a show curated by Nuno Faria at the CIAJG – Centro Internacional das Artes José de Guimarães, also in 2018.
2. *Ibidem*, p. 29
3. According to Pedro A.H. Paixão, 'mediality' is that which 'reveals the place of possibility adjacent

to beings and things, something that not only allows them to be imagined but – above all – thought of in correlation, and beyond their limits of identity, which normally capture them in their particular forms of matter and in specific historical dimensions.' *Ibidem*, p. 72

4. The headquarters of his company Marques Seixas, an agricultural and commercial empire in Kwanza-Sul, central Angola.



Pedro A.H. Paixão,
Oleander, 2020