

REWRITINGS, ABSENCES AND DISTORTIONS: A CONVERSATION WITH REGINA SILVEIRA

REESCRITAS, AUSÊNCIAS E DISTORÇÕES: UMA CONVERSA COM REGINA SILVEIRA

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1970s, Regina Silveira has been tracing a unique path within the context of contemporary art. With a solid background, with both national and international recognition, Regina has the quality of being an artist who moves through different languages. Video, print-making, photography, virtual reality, urban projections, animations, sculptures and site-specific projects, among others are creative devices in the hands of this artist who won't hesitate to *dare*. *Rewritings, absences and distortions: a conversation with Regina Silveira* debates some of her works and the exhibition *Limiares*, showed at Paço das Artes on 25 January 2020.

KEYWORDS

Contemporary Art, Curatorship, Regina Silveira, Paço das Artes

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Research with different media is not only a resource for expression, but also a deep investigation into the conceptual, creative and visual possibilities of technical images. From a graphic image placed on a sheet of paper to an adhesive vinyl print intended for the public space, the artist hybridizes traditional graphic techniques with resources obtained through digital software, re-signifying and reinventing the expressive possibilities of the visual language.

The hybrid character present across all of Regina's works, or post-media, as Rosalind Krauss would call it in her book *A Voyage*

on the North Sea: *Art in the Age of The Post-Medium Condition*¹ is not just about research on language, nor is it just a strategy to reach different forms of circulation and exhibition circuits.

Obviously, the metalinguistic trait is present in many of Silveira's works, as is the case of *Campo* (Field), one of her first videos, made in the early 1980s. In this project, the artist draws, with her own finger, the image's visual field. Oddly, the video shows no images, as her finger leaves no mark on the path it outlines, except the image of the artist's own gesture. But it is not only image that the video discusses. *Campo* also speaks of absence and invites us, as spectators, to imagine the drawing that the finger would be tracing, if it could leave vestiges on the canvas. Absence and perception.

Freud, in his essay entitled "The Uncanny" (1919), addresses the fantastic tale "The Sandman," by E. T. A. Hoffmann. In his essay, he discusses how an author can, by narrowing the boundaries between reality and fiction, evoke an unsettling feeling in the reader. According to Freud, the uncanny is characterized precisely by something that is familiar to us, and which suddenly becomes eerie. The uncanny is also what is repeated, but which simultaneously presents itself, at each repetition, as something different. Paradox.

Much of Regina Silveira's work is made up of repeated marks, shadows and indices. In this *rewriting*², in this distinct repetition, the indices always appear in different way, producing an uncanny feeling in the viewer. Often, the artist uses familiar objects, displacing their presumed usual functionality and form: distorted objects, elongated benches, dizzying windows, shadows that metamorphose and reveal different realities, deconditioning the way we see and perceive reality.

This is the case with *Morfes*, one of the first videos developed by Regina Silveira. In this work, we hear a set of syllables and words

¹ Rosalind Krauss. *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2000.

² *Rewriting* is a concept developed in my book *Reescrituras da arte contemporânea: história, arquivo e mídia* [Rewritings in Contemporary Art: History, Archive and Media]. Porto Alegre: Sulina, 2015.

being repeated. Apparently familiar, we try to understand what they mean, but are led to realize that it is some sort of sound mantra that accompanies the ‘parade’ of a visual composition made up from the sequential framing of ordinary objects from our daily life. Objects distort and metamorphose as if they were ‘strange’ creatures that inhabit our world.

Morfás continues the series of graphic works entitled *Anamorfás*. Made in the 1970s–1980s, the artist subjected ordinary objects to a series of geometric distortions, significantly altering the visual and also functional characteristics of the objects portrayed. Not incidentally Haroldo de Campos—as Regina Silveira narrated to me and Ana Magalhães on the occasion of the exhibition *Paradoxes of Contemporary Art: Dialogues Between the Collections of MAC-USP and Paço das Artes* (2018)—writes the poem *O banal fantástico* [The Fantastic Ordinary] referring to *Anamorfás*.

Distortion, strangeness and absence are also present in *Dobra* (*Banco de jardim*) [Fold (Garden Bench)]. In this project, Regina revisits previous works, exploring the distortions in perspective as a basis for the construction of three-dimensional anamorphoses, positioned in real space.

Located in the context of the garden of the new Paço das Artes building, visually stretched and distorted, the ‘garden bench’ is optically corrected as the viewer moves around it; visitors must place themselves in the center of convergence of the geometric construction that originates it. Here, the distortion doubles on the uncanny sensation: what is produced is a bench we cannot sit on and which we can only see from a certain point of view: an absent bench.

In *Fresh Widow* (1920), Marcel Duchamp presents us with a miniature window covered in black leather: a window that cannot be opened and that is impossible for us to see through it. The window, here, is seen as a machine, in the sense that it is also triggered by the viewer. Uncanniness.

Measuring 180 square meters, and made with adhesive vinyl, *Cascata* [Cascade] resumes, in a different way, the operations carried out by the artist in *Claraluz* and *Memoriazul*. As in *Fresh Widow*, the windows in *Cascata* do not open either. Once again, the absence is present. What we have are juxtaposed visual fragments, of the same color and scale, from photo records of the real windows of the exhibition space. Displaced from their ‘usual’ place in architectural space, *Cascata* creates a visual narrative in which the real windows of the space occupy strange places, falling vertiginously at the viewer’s feet.

1928. First scene of *Un Chien Andalou*, by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí: a cloud crosses the moon, morphing into an eye that is slashed by a razor blade. Uncanniness due to the approximation of disparate visual realities through the cinematic montage in the form of shock.

Lunar: Digital video made in 2002 by Regina Silveira, in collaboration with Ronaldo Kiel, for the set of the dance performance *RE-MAP*, of the Anita Cheng Dance Group. Transformed into a video installation in 2002, the project features two blue spheres that roll in an imaginary cosmic space and that move far and near each other in an unsettling way, destabilizing our usual perception.

Another work that dabbles on vision and perception is *Limiar* [Threshold], which shares its title with Paço das Artes’s inaugural exhibition, and consists of a video projection where the artist explores—as in other previous works—the conceptual, expressive, linguistic and political possibilities of light. As in Duchamp’s *Étant donnés*, we are invited to look through a small crack: here, image and script intertwine; the word *luz* [light] gives way to light as image and light source. Presented in several languages and alphabets, the word *luz* also dialogues with the writing of different peoples and cultures. Perhaps here the concept of light takes on an almost metaphysical meaning, as in Duchamp’s work: of a beginning, that which brings to life. Not casually, the image and the word are accompanied by a sound of breathing which, placed there in a strange fashion, gives us the feeling that the light is a body that breathes, a body that pulsates, alive, in this new beginning, as at the opening of the new headquarters of Paço das Artes.

Choosing the artist Regina Silveira to inaugurate Paço das Artes’s new venue—this historic achievement—could not have been more fitting. Artist, woman, teacher and a reference for many generations, Regina also holds the quality of having her work exhibited in group shows at Paço das Artes. This time, she presents us with a solo exhibition: *Limiares*.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Priscila Arantes is a researcher, curator, and professor based in São Paulo. She is the director and curator of the Paço das Artes since 2007. Arantes developed postdoctoral research at Penn State University (USA) and currently teaches in the graduate program in Design at the Universidade Anhembi Morumbi. Between 2007 and 2011, she was the program director of the Museu da Imagem e Som. In 2010, she was a member of the editorial board of the Bienal de São Paulo’s *Revista Polo de Arte Contemporânea*. She has served as a juror at Capes/MEC and was a member of the history, theory, and criticism committee of the ANPAP. Among her publications are the books *Arte@Mídia: perspectivas da estética digital* (Senac, 2005); and *Re/escrituras da arte contemporânea: história, arquivo e mídia* (Sulina, 2015).