

## **Inventing (reducing and expanding) the landscape**

In keeping with an important part of her oeuvre, the group of works that make up the present intervention by Fernanda Fragateiro explores the idea of landscape, a subject that may absorb or include other elements that are fundamental to the artist's work, like the house, the body, the language and the materials needed to represent them.

Over time, the landscape has taken an increasingly important position in a body of work that has always focused on the historical conditions of construction/interpretation and reception/interpretation of the subjects it explores.

The body, which is rarely depicted in explicit terms, is part of a totality in which house and landscape are both content and container, expression of materials and forms, recipients and producers of the language that interprets them and spurs them to take on new meanings. This body generally belongs to a spectator whom the artist sees, since the planning stage of every work, as an integral/casual element in her pieces: a natural but aware figurant and user of the spaces those pieces create and occupy.

Language, too, precedes, integrates and extends many of her works, since each one of them is based on a thorough bibliographic research and many are completed by the inscription of texts that are more than captions: being materials of the piece itself as important as a metallic understructure or a reflecting surface.

The materials in her pieces fulfil, in general, three decisive requisites: understructure, surface finishing and filling of gaps. We are dealing, here, with sculptural pieces in which constructive know-how exists as both an image and an essential reality (the modular pieces that make up the works), where the finishing replaces a decorative logic with various logics of representation in space (inside and outside the pieces, employing polished plates, mirrors, perforated planes...) and the gaps can be filled by the free circulation of spectators/users, by subtle plays of light or by rough materials (earth, brick) that may inspire us to rethink the whole from a material, non-poetic viewpoint.

About 3000kg of brick waste fill the container installed by Fernanda Fragateiro in Sala do Cinzeiro 8. The delicate look of the box is due to its lining of mirrors; structure-wise, it is a heavy piece of iron. The mirrors, with their various plays of light, change the box's shape (absorbing it into,

and stretching it across, space) as they become form and content. The box's operational lightness is then, again, contradicted by its filling, which is significant in chromatic and textural terms even before being so in thematic ones.

The suspended piece implies a suspended space and time. The room chosen for its display heightens that condition, being subterranean and darkened. By means of that exhibitiv approach, Fernanda Fragateiro attributes a museological status to the contents of her receptacle, here the aforementioned brick waste.

We have here a powerful work of synthesis or concentration of landscape as 'natural' evidence and 'historic' reality. The brick (baked clay) is an integral part of nature in its condition of earth that exists directly and potentially in the landscape and is also an integrant part of history, in its condition of element whose use by man conveys the evolution of an economic, technological, social, cultural and ideological reality. The brick belongs to the realm of construction and is, indeed, an essential element of the building that hosts the exhibition.

Metaphors apart, it is the first serially-produced module: it allows for the construction of houses and cities, stands behind the urban revolution of the Fertile Crescent and supports the paths taken by those humans who split from Nature and myth towards the Industrial and other Revolutions. A complementary introductory piece conveys to us the sense of action/time and expanded space/material memory that essentially constitutes Fernanda Fragateiro's approach to her intervention at Central Tejo.

Written on the gallery wall is "Ask not just what landscape 'is' or 'means' but what it does", a sentence by historian and essayist W.J.T. Mitchell. To read it implies a lot of effort, since it is painted over in white. The white paint is partially scraped off onto a horizon-long polished steel plate, which reverses and mirrors the letters and proves its usefulness as a receptacle for the scraped-off paint. This whole process of recognition, concealment, revealing, reversion, creation and preservation of memory is capped off by the 'main' piece.

The mirror-box's title - *Construir é destruir é construir /To build is to destroy is to build* - though evocative of Gertrude Stein's tautological chain ("A rose is a rose is a rose"), nonetheless breaks the unity of that monotone by replacing noun fixity with the progression implicit in two

verbs, especially given the fact that the two convey contradictory actions.

However, invisible forms of punctuation/reading nearly become visible forms of superposition/sequencing, thus reconstructing a chain of coherent meanings. It is a matter of presenting, in the compact space/time of sculpture, a full history of (intervention in) landscape: the clay, torn from the ground that fills with craters flooded with water and wastes, is transformed by human moulds and kilns into bricks that are then laid on top of each other, rising as buildings that are later demolished, returning to the earth as rubble that again fills the ancient clay-pits or is used to pave paths. A cycle that brings the earth back to the earth, thus closing the symbolic circle of the dust returning to the dust.

Yet, while the piece may validate such a lyrical or symbolic reading, it is nonetheless evident that such an interpretation goes against the programmatic wishes of the artist, who insists on exploring a cycle that includes land expropriation and possession, the recruitment and exploitation of workers, the accumulation and investment of added values, urbanisation and suburbanisation processes, social differentiation and exclusion.

Maybe that desire for subjective denial is revealed in the fact that the reflections in the mirrors of the piece operate, not as a light that transports us, but as one that retains us - which cannot fail to remind us that the landscape has its owners. The piece thoroughly confirms itself as a critical project of civic participation, by taking the distension/expansion of its expressive means to the outside of the building. There, the artist inscribes a long (30mt), chromatically vibrant (orange) and perfectly visible (1mt high) sentence.

This is a radical instance of the way Fernanda Fragateiro uses language in her oeuvre, because here it possesses the public expression of an unexpected graffito, whose support surface is neither a sculpture nor a piece of architecture specifically conceived with that purpose, but simply a wall that separates the river from old industrial facilities, a 'found' architecture.

The sentence creates/includes the very lines of perspective established by traditional western landscape representation as a framework of visual appropriation. The sentence in question, 'The landscape has no owner', definitively politicises the artist's intervention. Written by American

Transcendentalist essayist and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), it is always (either taken in its original idealistic reading or in a materialistic interpretation) a criticism on the appropriation (Bakunin would say 'plunder') of the landscape, of what belongs to all of us, of what can and must be shared by all.

Placed in a public riverside space, on the wall of a fully-functioning Museum and facing a well-used path for pedestrians and cyclists (currently being remodelled by the City Council), part of a complementary sculptural project by the artist (still at the planning stage) for one of the quay's deactivated pontoons, but equally aware of old and new forms of occupying these urban areas, the sentence expands the meaning of the interior pieces onto a double dimension of landscape intervention and civic participation.

Language and the discursive thought it supports return to the landscape - not to the landscape's impossible purity (before its becoming ideology), but nonetheless taking that impossible purity into consideration.

In keeping with an important part of her oeuvre, the group of works that make up the present intervention by Fernanda Fragateiro deal with her interest in the relationships between the public and private spheres. More precisely, we have here a desire of exploring the difference between the individual body who looks at the pieces in Sala do Cinzeiro and the collective body of the spectator, who, as a community, makes use of the public space, appropriating (in the most varied ways) 'the landscape', a reality made possible by the conception of the most intimate pieces.

In this context, the sentence inscribed on the wall comes to act as both a connection between the two spaces/times/dimensions of intervention and a mirror-image of the pieces presented inside. By writing 'The landscape has no owner', the sculptor reverses as in a mirror, the previously mentioned images: she brings to the outside what was inside, upholds the totality of the landscape against its symbolic concentration, using it as an active element rather than a mere caption, making it work not as a metaphor but as a deliberate design.

João Pinharanda