

Elizabeth Xi Bauer presents: *Phantom Dance*

Featuring Thiago Barbalho and Theodore Ereira-Guyer

Images dance, flickering on the surface of canvases, paper, and satin. Sometimes it is the support itself that wavers in the wind, but it is the image which de-facto appears and disappears. Thiago Barbalho and Theodore Ereira-Guyer's works find each other in the balance of presence and absence, appearance and disappearance and create a narrative of vitality within that precarious balance. The two artist's works might at first appear to diverge into opposite directions, but their practices converge in the formation of the phantasmagoric spectral image.

The concept of a phantom can be related to disappearance, or the presence of something that is enunciated through its absence. Georges Didi-Huberman's concept of the "rend" in *Confronting Images* (2005)¹ describes the image as something which is continuously appearing and disappearing, creating its own logic and legibility. Also influenced by the writings of Walter Benjamin, it was Jacques Derrida who coined the term "hauntology" in *Spectres of Marx* (1994)² in which the spectral is related to the impossibility of a present untainted by the demands of the past or, as described by the philosopher Fredric Jameson, "the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be"³. The image sits in the present as a messenger of time, of a single moment, but which also refuses to remain an unchanging iconology. The dance is a gesture of constant motion that references the past, the present, and the after-life of the image.

Theodore Ereira-Guyer's new series of prints leave behind single-sided surfaces to become architecture. Arranged in pillars in the exhibition space, the works are at once an architectonic force as a delicate and fragile combination of silk elements stitched together. This fragile mobility creates the pictorial plane for a carefully etched landscape which uses methods from printmaking to access an image through its negative. In order to make the process of corrosion more visible, Ereira-Guyer employs acidic washes that slowly erase the original image. What remains are the traces of mark-making which appear successively more abstract as the printmaking process produces new images that veer towards the monochrome.

The single-coloured column-like patchwork references concretism in Latin America such as Hélio Oiticica's *Grande Núcleo* (1960) which hangs suspended from the ceiling, creating abstract architecture out of simple geometry. Surfaces in Ereira-Guyer's work might at first appear to be corroding into absence but end up revealing a process full of life. Due to the choice of a green pigment, the squares become like gardens that are affirming and full of vitality.

In Ereira-Guyer's sculptures, printmaking methods are used on free-poured material such as bronze or plaster. In a series of animalesque sculptures plaster is poured over an etched and inked plate assembled with gum arabic (a form of resin used in the chemistry of pigments with an appearance similar to amber) and seeds called "sementes de lagrimas" or seeds of tears. The emotionality of the tear together with the indented image references fossilisation and its primordial connotations. In the bronzes, nature is allowed to push the material into a root-like portraits that also move in contrast to the still metal from which they are formed. One piece is covered in snails and asserts that even a rock is in motion, slowly eroding and becoming the architectural home of many creatures.

¹ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005.

² Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, Psychology Press, 1994.

³ Fredric Jameson, Marx's Purloined Letter in *Ghostly Demarcations* published by Verso, London, 1999.

Thiago Barbalho grew up in the North of Brazil surrounded by vivid tropical colours that compete for visibility among entangled fruits, flowers and leaves. His images often contain colliding bodies and cosmic compositions that float in endless space. Whether trees, microorganisms, or cartoon-like animals, the drawings appear to fill space as if possessed by a horror-vacui that prohibits the notion of absence. This filling of the void is however, not opposed to the monochrome but harmonious in the concept of *plenism* which extends back to Aristotle's treatises on nature which he says, "abhors a vacuum." The drawing expands, eats, and consumes the paper after the style of the Anthroposophous Manifesto by Oswald de Andrade⁴ in varied materials including pencil, acrylic, and ballpoint pen. Barbalho's works follow the natural logic of the cosmos as they appear to react to the necessity of the paper to be consumed by continuous patterns.

The appearance of handwritten scrawl developed after Barbalho's previous life as a writer and publisher. The gesture of handwriting is here abstracted into a much more complex language in which the image is in a constant state of creation and destruction. Writing follows a set of grammatical rules and established logic which the image sets free into a complex contagion of elements. If the vibrancy of the colours at first appear joyful, closer inspection reveals that joy is mixed with fear. Colonies of bacteria devour patterns while creatures feast on one another. Viruses can be read as a symbol of the fragility of life after the Covid-19 Pandemic which severely affected Brazil. Barbalho's canvases often feature a composition floating in graphite-lined matter that evoke the impossibility of absence – even air is vibrating with invisible particles. The colourful appearance of a fruit is spectral in that it is one step away from rapid decomposition.

Phantom Dance is an exhibition that reveals the visible and the invisible that appears and disappears, it is the invocation of the *spectral* as complexity. The phantom is the image that only exists in its interpretability – our constant human drive to create and understand images as life-force. Notions of erasure are recovered in both works as additional layers of meaning that do not deny what was there before but add a historical imperative to look beyond the surface of the image. In these works, appears a lively fullness, dark natural behaviours, and the necessity to produce through the process of filling, providing, and erasing through a dance of process between these two bodies of work.

Thiago Barbalho was born in 1984 in Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil, and lives and works in São Paulo.

Theodore Ereira-Guyer was born in 1990 in London, and lives and works between London and Lisbon.

Exhibition organised by Maria do Carmo M. P. de Pontes

Exhibition text by Àngels Miralda

This exhibition will run from 21st April to 3rd June 2023, Wednesday to Saturday, 12-6 pm or by appointment

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⁴ https://writing.upenn.edu/library/Andrade_Cannibalistic_Manifesto.pdf