

Día Eléctrico

Alexandre Estrela, João Maria Gusmão

But instinct is something which transcends knowledge.
We have, undoubtedly, certain finer fibers that enable us
to perceive truths when logical deduction,
or any other willful effort of the brain, is futile.
My Inventions: The Autobiography of Nikola Tesla

Dear visitor:

Whether you are an art lover, *bon vivant*, policeman or collector, phantom philistine, thinking sucker, serrano ham or simply detest everything that passes by, spare us a pinch of attention. In this exchange of the world for a few paragraphs, we now travel to the underground, to the Eustachian tube of Dionysus' ear, the pristine concavity from which our ancestors emerged to paint hunts. As brute as they were, in the course of making tamales with atoles, they also tasted the magical savour of shadows animated by fire.

Few know that beneath Cerro de las Campanas there are beautiful wall paintings in various shades of blood, from blue to grey-brown, depicting the class tensions of antediluvian times. Other prehistorians, some Berkeley Yankees, proceeded to rigorously date the pictographs and were astonished when they received the results of their efforts: the Pleistocene pigments were only a few hours old! Either these were not Pleistowhatever or there was a hell of a cock-up. Once the shock wore off, they opted for the cock hypothesis, but in this case it was a tiny dick.

In fact, the culprits of this true falsehood were not humans but only protozoans. The concept, the scheme, the design of the drawings was in fact the work of our hirsute grandparents, but the artists were the pigments! Humiliated palaeoanthropology recognised that these images of the bittersweet interaction between animals and lithic workers, which retained a striking intensity of colour, had been colonised by bacteria and fungi. The pictures are alive! These fungi, of the darker Chaetothiales phenotype, were responsible for accompanying the outline of the drawings, acting as a border and container for the different colonies of creative bacteria. The bluish-coloured demiurgic micro-crabs and the tiny, active, tawny-coloured spirochetes continue today, as they did more than 10,000 years ago, to pursue the pleasures of their nanopincels with judicious abandon. The state of nature never ceases to amaze us.

But dear friends, what seems essential to us here is to underline the prophetic practice of primitive peoples, who in their first artistic gestures foresaw and generated a symbiotic relationship with no expiry date between black fungi, blue shellfish and red bacteria. Let us reminisce, brothers and sisters, the strangeness these troglodytes must have felt before the inception of the moving image, in their bodies projected by fire, smoke and fungi in the deep cave, the orgy of mothers and the midwives of the alpha waves, dressed in short French sailor-style miniskirts. Yes, yes. The vestals of the psychosomatic, the reapers of the hypnagogic, the furies of the kinescope.

This is also the experience offered by the temporal cycles of the machine-images of Alexandre Estrela and João Maria Gusmão. The animations, proto-cinemas that evolve in unstable iterations, are anchored in simple conceptual schemes. Starting from them and proceeding through fugues and variations, both artists introduce chaos. This mayhem appears through the almost oriental calligraphy in João Maria Gusmão's pictograms, in the almost synaptic intuition that appears in Alexandre Estrela's automatic drawings, in the randomness of analogue processes through technique in João Maria or the digital algorithmic generation in Estrela. However, as in the infamous caves of Querétaro, chance is always contained within a drawing-scheme or a cinematographic concept.

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3.11.2021-15.01.2022

Día Eléctrico is based on the idea of animating or giving life to abstract, pre-linguistic or other archetypal forms. The exhibition that crosses the work of the two artists is structured as a cycle in two moments: the day, where the light precisely defines the graphic marks, in which the spectator wanders through a gallery populated by drawings and pictograms, and the night, dark and full of illusions, conducive to pre-cinematic displays: analogue arrangements that promote ghosts and disembodied forms that acquire meaning in movement, and others, in the form of automatic drawings that, subjected to digital contamination, take on a life of their own and acquire animated life in front of the visitor. They are beautiful, hypnotic, perpetual movements, as in the infinite painting offered to us by the micro-organic tradition of our beloved Mexican caves.

Let us consider the question of language as João Maria Gusmão's departure point for this exhibition. On the one hand we have his pictograms that we see reproduced in several rooms, on the other, magic lanterns that propose Cartesian images with infinite possibilities in psychedelic shades. His written signs are mental representations based on synthetic readings that correspond to ideas. From a series of imprecise graphic gestures that represent rigorous concepts, the artist determines and selects the scheme that best represents each of his thoughts, later expanding them through photographic processes. They are expressions that suggest reading and narration.

Furthermore, he presents works that make use of analogue and pre-cinematographic light machines. They are images without body, geometries excited by beams of light, forms that suggest and undo themselves. Rotating screens of colours that reinforce figures and shadows that relativise our perception in a random operation.

Tackling drawing differently, Alexandre Estrela presents a series of black and white drawings of indeterminate interpretation. Pure abstractions free of any referent. An operation that precedes language. For the exhibition, the artist has used drawing as the bone structure of a luminous choreography. The lines printed on the paper of abstract figures determine the limits for the projection of mobile elements, "cells of light and shadow" that interact with each other, completing or unbalancing the composition. Within the limits of the drawing, the excited particles of light move in ever-changing "living" cycles, according to computer algorithms. Their presence and body are disclosed in a non-narrative realm. They are animated drawings whose internal meaning is offered by movement, and having a narrative, manifests itself internally in their primary forms.

It is no accident that all this happened in a cave.

The Portuguese's cool beans mates.

Alexandre Estrela's work is an investigation on the essence of images that expands spatially and temporally through different supports. In his videos and installations Estrela examines the subject's psychological reactions to images in their interaction with matter. Each piece has several layers to which we are initiated step by step. The works are not just there to be watched, but rather to be unfolded. Each piece convokes synesthetic experiences, visual and sound illusions, aural and chromatic sensations that function as perceptive traps, leading the subject towards conceptual levels. With this strategy Estrela is constantly problematizing the elements that constitute the act of perceiving, splitting vision into further sensible dimensions towards the unseen and the unheard.

João Maria Gusmão, now working solo, has developed with Pedro Paiva (from 2001-2018) an enigmatic and complex array of practices and meta-practices, ranging from experimental film, sculpture, photography, to literature, curating and publishing.

Continuing the duo's project, Gusmão's research has been placed at the cross section between modern/postmodern experimental literature and contemporary philosophy, with a special focus towards analogue media and the aesthetics of primitive photography and filmmaking. Their cinematic and immersive installations are evocative of film as experienced firsthand by its inventors: not as a surrogate of the world but as a spectral manifestation of its withdrawal. The profound, yet metaphysical, materialism that is inferred by this approach questions our modes of existence and representation through poetics, resorting to paradox, thought experiment and absurd literary games, to provoke a consistent derisory relation with the established anthropocentric worldviews. By using alternative non-narrative film and moving image techniques, like magic lantern, documentary, slow-motion, animation and multiple exposures, Gusmão aims at a remote consciousness in the observer, both questioning its discourse (theory) and the conditions of visibility (image + duration).

Alexandre Estrela (Lisbon, 1971) lives and works in Lisbon. Selected solo exhibitions include *A Third Reason*, Rialto6, Lisboa, 202; *All and Everything*, Rufino Tamayo Museum, Mexico City, 2020; *Um Mês Acordado*, at Indipendenza, Rome, 2019; *All and Everything*, Den Frie, Copenhagen, 2019; *Volta Grande*, at Pivô, 2019, São Paulo; *Métal Hurlant*, at Fondation Gulbenkian, Paris, 2019; *Lua Cão* (with João Maria Gusmão + Pedro Paiva), a project curated by Natxo Checa initiated in 2017 by Galeria Zé Dos Bois in Lisbon, that traveled to the Kunstverein München, and concluded at La Casa Encendida in Madrid in January 2019; *Knife in the Water*, 2018, at Travesía Cuatro, Madrid; *Ouro Mouro*, 2018, at the Quetzal Art Centre, Vidigueira, Portugal; *Baklite*, 2017, at CAV Centro de Artes Visuais, Coimbra, Portugal; *Cápsulas de silêncio*, 2016, within the Fisuras Program, at the Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid; *Roda Lume*, 2016, at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Antwerp, M HKA, Belgium; *Meio Concreto*, 2013, at Museu Serralves in Porto, Portugal; *Um homem entre quatro paredes*, 2013, at the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, Brazil; *The Sunspot Circle*, 2013, at The Flat Time House, London, United Kingdom, among others.

João Maria Gusmão (Lisbon, 1979) lives and works in Lisbon. He formed an artistic duo with artist Pedro Paiva between 2001 and 2018. Past solo projects include a major overview of Eugene Frey's use of magic lantern at Nouveau Musée National de Monaco in 2019 and several curatorial projects. Highlights of JMG+PP collaboration include *Terço [Stye]*, Museu Serralves, Porto, 2021; *Lua Cão* (with Alexandre Estrela), a project curated by Natxo Checa initiated in 2017 by Galeria Zé Dos Bois in Lisbon, that traveled to the Kunstverein München, and concluded at La Casa Encendida in Madrid in January 2019; *João Maria Gusmão and Pedro Paiva: Peacock*, Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2017, *The Sleeping Eskimo*, Aargauer Kunsthaus, Aarau, Switzerland, 2016, *The Missing Hippopotamus*, Kkv Kolnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, 2015, *Papagaio*, HangarBicocca, Milan, 2014; travelled to Camden Arts Centre, London, 2015, and KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 2015, *One month without filming*, REDCAT, Los Angeles, 2015, *Since you have eaten the horse, you can travel to Rome by donkey: on dwarf philosophy*, Kunsternes Hus, Oslo, 2012 and *Passengers 1.7*, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, 2008.

In 2009, Gusmão and Paiva represented Portugal at the 53rd Venice Biennale. Additionally, their work was included in *The Encyclopedic Palace*, curated by Massimiliano Gioni; the International Art Exhibition at the 55th Venice Biennale, 2013; the 8th Gwangju Biennale, 2010; Manifesta 7, 2008; the 6th Mercosul Biennial, Porto Alegre, 2007 and the 27th Bienal de Sao Paulo, 2006.