



PEDRO VAZ

A vida sensível / Sentient life

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A Vida Sensível / Sentient Life

The work of Pedro Vaz is marked by a strong sense of consistency and coherence. A look at his personal trajectory provides understanding of the strength and depth with which he has, over the last few years, questioned the concepts that exist around the subject of the natural world, the definition of landscape and the interpretation of representation. That same consistency and coherence, which is also present in the texts that accompany each of his works, is a step further towards, or perhaps a new look at, the relationship between man and nature, in the form of an act that is very close to the experience itself. *The representation of landscape [in his work] becomes a phenomenon of social fiction*, Pedro Pousada states in *Stimmung* (2014), which references the vocabulary of Heidegger. On the other hand Inês Grosso, in her text *Atlântica* (2015), states that: *Pedro Vaz explores the relationship between contemporary man and nature from the starting point of a vision that is non-anthropocentric, ecological and integrated*. The issue at hand is the search to *bring nature and culture closer together to enable sensibilities that are distinct from those that have arisen as a result of the colonization of natural spaces*, i.e. the deconstruction of the *concept of landscape as a symbolic mental construct that is essentially human, an idea that has been defended throughout the history of art*, according to Lilian Fraigi in *Terra Firme* (2018).

This short summary of references does not come without mental effort, and together with the set of problems that are dealt with, require an almost prodigious level of perseverance. We find all these questions in *A Vida Sensível*, the artist's new exhibition at Galeria 111 in Lisbon. The issues presented by *Arte Povera* and *Land Art*, embodied in the work of artists such as Richard Long, Richard Serra and Robert Morris, continue to be felt. The dichotomy between subject and object, the forms of manifestation of the landscape, nature as an interior vision, walking as a form of knowing, images, memories, coexistence and new ways of looking are all here. Pedro Vaz is basically seeking to overcome the metaphysical vision of the landscape that today we would call anthropocentrism, which is nothing more than the legacy of a type of modernism in which the landscape is presented as the stage or panorama, with the subject setting the scale for the entire scene. None of this is present in the work of this Portuguese artist. On the contrary, according to Agamben each of his works can be read as a step further towards the deconstruction of that device – that is, they approach the external world from a viewpoint that is closer to phenomenology, or even perhaps poetry. Vaz does this with the confidence of those artists who seem to repeat the same painting or film *ad infinitum* (Pollock, On Kawara, Godard, Lynch, Bergman, each one dealing with its own issues) but which in reality present an infinite number of tools which are constantly being renewed in order to investigate those very questions. These artists can be said to have their own individual languages, and the language used in *A Vida Sensível* is similar to the one we already know as belonging to Pedro Vaz. We are immersed



in images that are ambiguous, out of focus and superimposed with audio-visual layers, in an exercise that I can't help but associate with the theories of quantum physics; the principles of uncertainty and the incomplete theories which, in that field, put an end to the idea of being able to access a full and complete reality. An immersion that is also found in the undefined brush strokes and tints of colour, in the contrast between the artificial and the natural and the interior and the exterior, and which lead us to *The Landscape Boxes*, on which he has been working since the beginning of his career.

The artist regenerates his methods of working by carrying out research in the field, in this case in Sintra, near Lisbon, where he walked and later painted the sheets of paper in the form of a dense and labyrinthine forest.

The landscape here is neither a pure product of nature nor a social construct. It is not the subject that sets the scale, nor is it the external observer.

We find ourselves perhaps somewhere in the middle, in a type of *Médiance* as proposed by the geographer Augustin Berque. In the *intermediate space* referred to by Emanuele Coccia to define what he calls a *sentient life*, and which is nothing more than a new paradigm with which to view the visible, a form of defining the real by means of images, *before reaching the soul, but far away from things*. That interval *between objects and ourselves (...)* in which the object becomes sensitive, "*phainomenon*". One of the new departures in this exhibition is perhaps the central role and greater level of freedom attributed to the viewer by Pedro Vaz.

An example of this is the video, *Ser* [being], which we find on entering the exhibition. In this video the artist continues his phenomenological reflection on landscape by means of an almost dream-like environment, half-way between the real and the imaginary, within the line of sight of human vision, which began with the fixed planes and camera movements of *Terra Firme* (2016). There is also something in the artist's work that is very close to the idea of landscape that was found in the Spanish school at the beginning of the last century, as seen in the work of Giner de los Ríos, Miguel de Unamuno and Ortega y Gasset. The idea of nature as an education, as a physical experience, as an inner yearning; something spiritual, according to *Unamuno* ("I feel that this landscape, which is simultaneously soul, psyche, marrow, but not spirit, eats at my soul").

In this case, the artist takes this idea further, an idea which is almost animist or at least undefined, like a fixed camera – in which the movement that is present in other works stops, and a phantasmagorical creature arises which impedes any possible simplification or a dual subject-object point of view.

What is the form we are looking at? An anthropological being? An unstable forest form?

Where then, can the artist's eye be found?

In the person, or in the lens of the camera?

Vaz uses this aesthetic standpoint to propose a more measured and less invasive vision, an opening up to time and space, in a reading that is a reflection of the conditions in which the image is presented, conditions which are clearly contemporary.

This brings to mind the film by Apichatpong Weerasethakul in which there is the constant possibility of the arrival of a *genius loci* – the protective spirit of a place – which here seems to take on this very suggestive form.



Much has been written about the *presence of the body of the artist* in the videos and works of Pedro Vaz. However it seems that in this case, it is the body of the viewer that takes centre stage, as we see in the installation in the second room of the exhibition. The artist once again appears to be taking a step forward in the development of the idea of a nature that is almost fully immersive and all-encircling, playing on the form of the labyrinth, of going for a stroll, of *flânerie* and, in which the paintings change into more than simple representations of reality – i.e. objects – being instead presented as instruments for the generation of experiences.

Perhaps Vaz is recreating those marvellous journeys in nature which have always been part of his work. Nature is no longer something that we look at from the outside or which we try to recreate within the space of an exhibition, but is instead a reality which creates itself, which surrounds us, and which might even become the cause of our disappearance.

It is an impossible dream, an unreachable horizon, but it is also a gesture that has a place in the artist's journey. The same applies to the transparent containers of nature entitled *Natureza contida [nature contained]* which are part of the sequence of *The Landscape Boxes* mentioned previously, which suggest cuttings from nature transported to an artificial environment. Once again we come across uncertainty:

Are these relics or fetishes?

Are they remnants or products?

Are they ecosystems, the layouts of which seem to have been created purely for purposes of observation, with all the contradictions and criticisms that this implies? We cage the plants just as we cage the animals.

And then we think of the *Axolotl*, the tale by Julio Cortázar in which a human observes the animal of that name through a transparent glass.

Little by little, the main character starts to doubt as to just who is the observer and who is being observed.

And this is, in the end, the heart of the matter: the finding of a new way of looking around us.

Aurélien Le Genissel



Pedro Vaz (Maputo, 1977) degree in Fine Arts by Faculdade de Belas Artes da Universidade de Lisboa in 2006.

Pedro Vaz lives and works in Lisbon.

Solo exhibitions [selection]

- 2021 *Limem*, Parque natural de Monsanto, Lisbon, Portugal
A vida sensível, Galeria 111, Lisbon, Portugal
- 2020 *Lagoa das Éguas*, Project Room, Galeria Presença, Oporto, Portugal
- 2019 *Movimento Coaxial*, Kubikgallery, Oporto, Portugal
- 2018 *Cabana*, Sesc Itaquera, São Paulo, Brazil.
Terra Firme, Colégio das Artes, Coimbra, Portugal
Supersition Wilderness, Centro Cultural Português no Luxemburgo, Cidade do Luxembourg
Azimute, Galeria 111, Lisbon, Portugal
- 2017 *Supersition Wilderness*, Galeria Enrique Guerrero, Cidade do México, México.
Peralta to Boulder Canyon, Phoenix Institute of Contemporary Art, Phoenix, EUA.
Caminho do Ouro, Kubikgallery, Oporto, Portugal
- 2016 *Terra Firme*, Galeria Baró, São Paulo, Brazil
Capsula, Carpe Diem Arte e Pesquisa, Lisbon, Portugal
- 2015 *Atlântica*, Baró Galeria, São Paulo, Brazil
Neblina, Galeria 111, Lisbon, Portugal
Monólito, Casa da Cerca, Centro de Arte Contemporânea, Almada, Portugal
- 2014 *Tour du Mont-Blanc*, Temps D'images 2014, Artistas Unidos – Teatro da Politécnica, Lisbon, Portugal
Tour du Mont-Blanc, Temps D'images 2014, Galeria 111, Lisbon, Portugal
Tour du Mont-Blanc, Temps D'images 2014, MNAC: Museu Nacional do Chiado, Lisbon, Portugal
Stimmung, CAPC – Círculo de Artes Plásticas de Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal
- 2013 *Monólito*, Temps D'images 2013, Carpe Diem Arte e Pesquisa, Lisbon, Portugal
Monólito, Temps D'images 2013, Museu Nacional de História Natural e da Ciência, Lisbon, Portugal
Laurissilva, Galeria 111, Oporto, Portugal
Laurissilva, Galeria 111, Lisbon, Portugal

Group Exhibitions

- 2021 *100 anos, 100 artistas*, Gare Marítima de Alcântara, Lisbon, Portugal
Preliminares, C·A·M·A – Kubikgallery, São Paulo, Brazil
- 2020 *VER/DE*, In_Situ, Estufa Fria, Lisbon, Portugal
ALTAR, In_Situ, jardim do Mosteiro de Tibães, Braga, Portugal
Presente Contínuo, Centro de Arte Oliva, São João da Madeira, Portugal
60 Dias, parte II, Kubikgallery, Oporto, Portugal
60 Dias, Kubikgallery, Oporto, Portugal
- 2019 *Como falar com as Árvores*, Galeria Z42 Arte, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
O Olhar Divergente, Arquipélago, Centro de Artes Contemporâneas, Azores, Portugal
Do que Permanece, UCCLA, União de Cidades e Capitais de Língua Portuguesa, Lisbon, Portugal



- Além deste solitário carrossel*, Galeria 111, Lisbon, Portugal
Muitas vezes marquei encontro comigo próprio no ponto zero, Casa Museu Júlio Pomar, Lisbon, Portugal
- 2018 *Frente, Verso, Inverso*, União das Cidades Capitais de Língua Portuguesa, Lisbon, Portugal
Poste, Galeria Extérril, Oporto, Portugal
Second Nature, The Kreeger Museum, Washinton D.C., USA
Depois do choque, os trópicos, Galeria Luísa Strina, São Paulo, Brazil
Il tesoro è sempre più grande di quello che hai stretto tra le mani, Museo del Paesaggio, Torre di Mosto, Italy
- 2017 *Imaginação da Pedra*, Consulado Geral de Portugal em São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil
Paisagens, CAMB – Centro de Arte Manuel de Brito, Oeiras, Portugal
Force, Strength, Power, Galeria Baginski, Lisbon, Portugal
Raul Lino Hoje, Casa de Santa Maria, Cascais, Portugal
- 2016 *LOOPS.LISBOA 2016*, MNAC: Museu de Arte Contemporânea do Chiado, Lisbon, Portugal
Interlúdios 216, Galeria Baró, São Paulo, Brazil
Palácio Amarelo, Portalegre, Portugal
Segunda Natureza, MAAT | Museu de Arte, Arquitetura e Tecnologia, Lisbon, Portugal
Artistas de Angola e de Moçambique na Coleção Manuel de Brito, CAMB – Centro de Arte Manuel de Brito, Algés, Portugal
Periplos, Arte Português de Hoy, Museu y Centro de Arte Contemporâneo de Málaga, Spain

Awards:

- 2020 *Apoio de Emergência ao Setor das Artes*, Fundo de Fomento Cultural, Lisbon, Portugal
- 2017 LOOP DISCOVER Award (Finalista), Loop Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain
- 2016 *LOOPS.LISBOA 2016* (Finalista), Museu de Arte Contemporânea do Chiado, Lisbon, Portugal
- 2014 *Apoio a Projectos de Investigação Artística*, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon, Portugal
Premiado pela Beers Contemporary Award for Emerging Art, Beers Contemporary, London, UK
- 2011 *Apoio a Projectos de Criação Artística*, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisboa, Portugal
- 2009 Open call, Brina Thurstmen, Frieze Projects, Frieze Art Fair, London, UK

Collections

- Coleção Luciano Benetton: Imago Mundi, Italy
CAC Málaga Centro de Arte Contemporâneo, Spain
CAPC – Círculo de Artes Plásticas de Coimbra, Portugal
MAAT – Fundação EDP, Portugal
Coleção Manuel de Brito, Portugal
Coleção Norlinda e José Lima, São João da Madeira, Portugal
Fundação Carmona e Costa, Portugal



Casa da Cerca, Centro de Arte Contemporânea, Portugal
Centro de Artes e Cultura de Ponte de Sôr, Portugal
Coleção Marin Gaspar, Portugal
Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, CAM, Portugal
Coleção Cleusa Garfinkel, São Paulo, Brazil
Coleção Juan Entrecanales Collection, Madrid, Spain

Sponsors:

Lenso Advanced Solutions has sponsored the *A vida sensível* exhibition in the development and creation of the illumination for the terrariums, *Natureza contida, 2021*.

At the end of the exhibition, the contents of the terrariums will be returned to their native habitats (the Sintra mountain range).



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