

North

By Olivia Ardui

Text about the site specific "North" . Carpe Diem Arte e Pesquisa, Lisbon, PT, 2014



Carla Chaim's North consists in an inquiry on the discipline of drawing, a technique that she has been continuously challenging, always seeking to defy, expand, and unfold its principles. With this purpose, the artist uses one of the most prosaic and universal tools employed for drawing, namely the graphite, which inherited the Greek etymology related to the act of writing or drawing. If indeed the artist's work can be included in the field of the graphic arts, one might say, nonetheless, that she draws in negative, as her intervention is structured around an inversion of some of the main conventions of the discipline, but also around a mirrored dialog with the exhibition space.

Firstly, despite the fact that until now the practice of drawing is associated to the act of delineating a surface with a tool, usually a pencil, in North the graphite is not used to trace lines or outline shapes, but rather it is reduced to powder and spread out in a rectangle shape that doubles the measurements of the room. In this case, the graphite ceases to be a tool in order to exist as pure materiality occupying and filling a given surface.

Formally, the strict geometry of the dense black graphite extension appears as a counterpoint in the space it occupies, the green room of the Pombal Palace. In fact, the rococó sensibility attested in the profusion of wavy colored ornaments that adorn the walls and ceiling of the room contrasts with the austerity and almost

minimalist aesthetics of the graphite rectangle that covers a considerable part of the floor.

Carla Chaim's drawing-installation also contradicts the drawing that structures the exhibition space itself, as it also diverts from the guidelines that sustain its architectural plant. Through the simple gesture of dislocating the graphite rectangle from the axis of the room, the black surface seems to stand out even more from its surrounding context, sustaining and reinforcing the contrasts already mentioned above.

Thus, one might say that North is a particularly auto-reflexive work regarding the practice of drawing in Carla Chaim's research: not only by experimenting with the graphic arts' emblematic tool and surpassing the limits of a bidimensional surface, but also by confronting the underlying norms of the architectural design of the colonial building of the Pombal Palace, and all its reminiscences of an ornament tradition.

Through these contrapositions, Carla Chaim's intervention destabilizes perception, misleads the experience that the spectator can have of the exhibition space, inviting him to consider it under a new angle. The visual polarities triggered by the installation may open up new horizons to the understanding of wider geographic and historic polarities.