

"Assentamento", by Bernardo Mosqueira

(to my love)

The exhibition "Assentamento" (Settlement), Jaime Lauriano's second solo show at Galeria Leme, presents 8 works that continue his research on the vivid inheritances of colonization in Brazil, around an axis formed between violence and resistance. In recent months, just as the national political crisis has strengthened, a parliamentary group that defends the interests of large farmers against workers' rights, this artist has returned much of his interest and production to agrarian issues in the country.

The title of the exhibition refers to the settlements of landless workers of INCRA (National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform, fundamental federal instrument for the struggle for land in Brazil), while alluding to a sacred gesture of the religions of African matrix.

In Candomblé, one of the meanings of "settling" ("assentar") is "planting the axé", that is, making the ground of the "terreiro" a sacred, living territory, a direct extension of all members of the community, where axé comes in the form of force and to where axé goes in the form of sacrifice. At a certain point in the settlement process, the members of the "terreiro" collaborate in order to "plant" some of their vital energies on the ground, thus making them all responsible for the site. "Assentamento" (settlement) is, more commonly, the consecration of an object constructed and dealt with from secret and ancestral knowledge to materially represent an "orixá". From the religious point of view, making a "assentamento" is to strengthen the connection between an individual or group and the orixá from a spatial delimitation, is to create a sacred place to worship and care for the deity in the most appropriate way.

It is interesting to note that the settlement of landless workers is also a process that allows people to become responsible for a territory in order to become potent and productive, engaging their work and their most primordial energies in the direction of a more balanced life. These two types of "settlements" have historically been developed as forms of resistance of unprivileged people. This two-folded approach proposed by Lauriano inspires us to think of the power of creating a stronger network of solidarity between the struggle for land and the anti-racist battle.

Jaime Lauriano's work investigates colonization in Brazil not only by turning to historical data and events of the past, but by looking at the persistence in the present of the echoes of the violence of colonization and of popular resistance. For this, the artist creates documents that we can use to rearrange our thoughts and memories and also counter-cartographies that we can use to locate ourselves and others in the contemporary exploitation landscape.

In the work "Invasão" (Invasion) (2017), Jaime creates a map that exposes the relation in Brazil between the use of state force and the procedure of territorial occupation. To this end, Lauriano juxtaposes references to different situations such as the process of Portuguese enslaved colonization, the deforestation of the trans-Amazonian, the construction of huge hydroelectric plants on indigenous lands, the reintegration of previously idle land that was occupied by the homeless population, the eviction of alternative urban communities from abandoned real estate, the forced removal of low-income population to exclusive infrastructure works for the Olympic Games, etc. The work is a drawing made with white traces on a red fabric, which can allude to the bloodiness of these processes and to the flag of the landless movements.

In "Combate #1" (Fight #1) (2017), Lauriano organizes on the wall instruments used in work in the field referring to the cartographic design of the Capitánias Hereditárias. This system of division and territorial administration was in force during the first phase of colonization in Brazil, where the patrons, responsible for the 14 giant fractions of land, had an intimate and direct relationship with the Portuguese Crown. The mixture between feudal and proto-capitalist principles, structural to that system, represents the root of the way in which large landowners today deal with the Brazilian territory, their private interests, and public power.

The link between the naturalizing survival of images of slavery and the maintenance of a racist culture is the object of interest of the installation “O trabalho de Debret” (The work of Debret) (2017). In this work, Jaime gathered commonly used objects (t-shirts, mugs, decorative objects, etc.) recently bought in tents, shops and virtual auctions in several cities with plates textually exposing real reports of people who were subjected to different types of racist attacks. Brazil is a country that has lived for more than three centuries of violent enslavement of black men by white men until less than 130 years ago. This work, even if it is an installation, respects the same kind of fragmented structure and the same vibrant organizational procedure of Jaime’s maps. This work also highlights the importance of raising this issue and creating more positive images, narratives and experiences for black people in Brazil.

In the work “Armas de fogo o meu corpo não alcançarão” (Firearms my body will not reach) (2017), Lauriano uses a package to transport grains from Africa to Brazil as a support for the encounter between the image of a pillory and part of the prayer of St. George. It is interesting to note that while the pillory, a major symbol of the brutality of slavery, was made from screen printing (a graphic process whose technology carries within it the will for repetition and productivity), the prayer was drawn manually with white and black pomba, a kind of sacred chalk used in many Candomblé rituals.

When Jaime alludes to elements of Afro-Brazilian religiosity, he recognizes that for many centuries this was the main space of resistance of black culture in Brazil, a true civilizing nucleus, the living school-museum of Africanness, the greatest responsible for the survival of a culture that understands the body as the abode of power and not of sin, which understands joy as the greatest of virtues and not universal love, which values more the aggregation of people than the concentration of income.

The European white modernity (whose surviving privileges are guaranteed by Brazilian laws) had its great interest invested on time and the sense: progress, speed, productivity, effectiveness, and the end of the pause are its issues. However, non-hegemonic cultures of African origin are interested in space and power. Axé itself, the vital power, the fundamental element of Afro-Brazilian life, is actually the power of realization, of creation, in space - which is very explicable for a diasporic culture that has gone through processes of deterritorialization and was cast on a land that could not be theirs.

The exhibition “Assentamento” gains even more strength when there is an attempt to flexibilize the definition of slave labor in the country; in which INCRA has been dismantled in exchange for support from the ruralists in Congress; in which native and quilombola people have the rights over their questioned lands; in which the “grilagem” in the Amazon is regularized by a Provisional Measure increasing the deforestation and the concentration of land; in which by the new labor legislation a landowner can return to the work of peasants only with housing, food and more work in inhumane conditions. Articulating elements of the colonial past and this alarming present, Lauriano points to a tragic character in our history and, thus, inspires insurrection and revolt for a new liberation from slavery. But, this time, with prominence of Afro-Brazilian workers, besides princesses, and with the strength of the orixás.