

avaf – alisabel viril apagão fenomenal

Big Ben

During one of his frequent perambulations in the city's central region, a. encounters an extravagant architectural element that catches his attention. Bathed by a red light that emanates from an installation made with fluorescent light tubes à la Dan Flavin forming a square shape on one of the walls, an unusual atrium faces the passers-by on the pavement of Rua Augusta. In its interior there is also a fountain whose shape perfectly reflects the square on the wall, with a single jet projecting water vertically and vigorously from the centre and a wall decorated with a kind of futuristic tile whose shape and texture is reminiscent of Billy Kluver and Andy Warhol's Silver Clouds. Two common and plain elements complete the scene: an ordinary garden bench and a small tree planted on a nondescript pot.

The aesthetic experience of this eccentric environment of contemplation, with its discordant signs, which sometimes point to the high culture of the art museum and sometimes to the kitsch atmosphere of nightclubs, makes a strong impression in a., who feels inexplicably drawn by the place. The strange atrium is, in fact, one of the selling points of a strip-tease club appropriately named Big Ben, whose vast façade also includes a replica of the famous Westminster clock tower - a pop exaltation of masculine virility that probably pleases the clientele.

Months later, a. is still intrigued (although without knowing precisely why) by the image of that building that does not leave his thoughts so he decides to go back. At this moment, he is taken aback by an indescribable shock, as if his uncertain premonition had suddenly materialised into something palpable. The surrounding area of the night-club, where before stood dozens of local businesses and residential buildings, had been completely knocked out, a whole block in this central region entirely erased from the urban fabric almost overnight. Amid the generalised devastation, a single construction remained proudly erected, defying the voracious appetite of real estate speculators. There, the infamous Big Ben continues to exist, now transmuted into an allegory of the resistance of a particular urban memory and activity.

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Alisabel Viril Apagão Fenomenal is avaf's third solo show at Galeria Triângulo and it somehow marks the end of a cycle - at least provisionally - of almost a decade of projects that involved a large number of collaborators and simultaneously pointed towards a multiplicity of themes and references. These works, carefully documented in a monograph published in 2010 were, without exception, extremely complex and detailed, and demanded a huge curatorial and organizational effort from the two permanent members of the artist collective. The avalanche of colours, elements, characters and participants was a distinctive characteristic of these remarkable environmental installations, which created a series of specific relationships with the places where they were presented. References to the current political situation coexisted with narratives about heroic albeit obscure characters from the underground scene. Sculptures, drawings,

videos and performances by local collaborators were effortlessly incorporated with the aim of emphasizing topics which were relevant at certain times - the 'death of the author' taken to its most extreme degree. These spaces of intense sensorial stimulation promoted the contact of the audience with a series of images and experiences which in great part referred to behaviours and thoughts largely despised by the petit bourgeois status quo, selected by the artists due to their transforming potential.

In this exhibition, avaf seems to be moving in a new direction. At first sight, what we perceive is the absence of the vibrant colours that characterise previous works. Here, the palette is restricted and the space is dominated only by red, white and black - the colours of São Paulo. The walls of the white cube are painted black and covered with inscriptions that replicate the writing style of the taggings that are omnipresent in the city and the installation that occupies the ground floor features red metal structures supporting abstract compositions made with the traditional black and white tiles of São Paulo pavements. All these elements seem to indicate that now there is a thematic unity that did not exist in avaf's previous works, not due to incapacity but precisely because their research is moving somewhere else.

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In the beginning of it all, the Big Ben. This paradigmatic case of real estate expansion pushed exclusively by private interests was the starting point for a reflection on the recent transformations of the urban fabric in the city of São Paulo. The new luxury developments, veritable blinded towers that uncontrollably spread across the city, value above all the isolation from everything that is outside their walls - security is the key word -, fully ignoring the impact caused on the existing urban dynamics of their surroundings. The architectural model of the peculiar Big Ben atrium is therefore a kind of homage to the building that remained as the solitary symbol of resistance against the gradual erasure of the Baixo Augusta region, for many decades characterised by its vibrant social integration and intense use of public space. According to avaf, although this integration has above all a hedonistic character, it represents a specific identity of São Paulo that is currently under the threat of extinction.

On the walls, the taggings show the vacuous words that are invariably repeated on the adverts promoting the new São Paulo fortresses. Gourmet, life, park; foreign words suggesting a sophisticated and tranquil lifestyle that can only be achieved behind closed doors, protected by at least a set of two gates. The taggings that cover thousands of buildings across the city form a landscape beyond the seclusion of private space, they belong to that space one doesn't want to see or wants to deny. A kind of cry from the young kids from the periphery against the brutality of their invisibility in a segregational society, they certainly contain an element of visual violence. The street invades the white cube of the gallery and the aesthetics of the tagging is appropriated as a mocking cry against the brutality of private interests that tears the urban fabric into pieces as it pleases, exacerbating circulation and traffic problems and pushing the prices up in formerly accessible neighbourhoods in a city which is already in an advanced state of degradation.

*A series of more celebratory works is installed on the tagged walls. In *Transgeométricas*, avaf uses once more the image of the transvestite/ transsexual, widely present since the beginning of their artistic trajectory. The idea of a permanent state of transformation is encapsulated by these figures, whose sexuality cannot be defined according to traditional gender categories. Curiously, they are also one of the main protagonists (along with prostitutes, rent boys and other 'undesirable' characters) of the movement of cleansing in the region of Baixo Augusta. In these wall pieces, their impossible body parts seem to be hanging or sprouting from rigorously geometric compositions that allude to the São Paulo Concrete Art legacy. The underworld meets high culture, but the result is less a contrast between disparate universes than the encounter of manifestations which - each in its own way - offer more auspicious possibilities of transformation for the city's future than the ones that have been promoted by recent real estate speculation. There is, in the core of both manifestations, an element of collective life or at least a will or necessity to inhabit and creatively transform public space.*

The large-scale installation occupying the centre of the gallery's ground floor was developed in collaboration with Berlin-based Turkish artist Yusuf Etiman. An enthusiast of the city of São Paulo, Etiman documented sections of the pavement where the traditional black and white tiles - composed by a series of different designs which when put together orderly form an stylised image of the map of the São Paulo state - was spontaneously laid, creating new geometric compositions. Photographs of these new patterns served as the basis for the sculptural installation composed by overlapped metal tables whose tops are covered with tiles reproducing sections of these random arrangements. The juxtaposition of these sections created even more further spontaneous compositions and what was originally created to organise public space is presented here as completely fragmented, coordinated only by the subjective logic of each of the authors of the arrangements documented by Etiman.

alisabel viril apagão fenomenal proposes a very clear focus and deals with the urgent need to find productive solutions for a better life in São Paulo. Praise and hate coexist here; there is the exaltation of positive forces of resistance and of a valuable cultural legacy, but there is also inconformity in relation to the disregard from the government and society and the incapacity to solve fundamental problems. Certainly, this is an exhibition with a more sombre tone, one which presents the conflicting aspects of a city plagued by decades of negligence and public life abandonment. Ultimately, it raises the following question: what will the future conceived by the desires of this society look like? what will be the future as determined by the desiring forces of this society?

Kiki Mazzucchelli April 2013