

TOUCHED

Liverpool Biennial International 10 Exhibition

Narratives of memory, displacement and transience are central to Laura Belém's context-responsive artworks. Her poetic and meditative interventions touch our emotions, and so cause us to shift our perspectives on the everyday. In her 2004–05 installation *Enamorados* (Enamoured), for example, two rowing boats animated by searchlights continuously signalled to one another across an expanse of water, as if they were lovers engaged in a romantic tryst.

The delicacy of her artistic gesture often contrasts with the gravitas of her subject matter. For instance, *Shipwreck*, a video that shows a drawing of a caravel gradually melting into an indistinct pool of colour, where loss, death and disillusionment are evoked as the image gradually becomes unrecognisable and then disappears. The work refers specifically through the caravel to the colonial occupation of South America, but also acts as a wider metaphor for migration, exile and nostalgia.

Similarly, the installation created for Liverpool focuses on the relations between past and present and introduces the viewer to a new realm of possibilities for the future. It is a free adaptation of an ancient legend, the story of an island temple whose most remarkable and distinctive feature was its endowment of a thousand bells. Allegedly, the sound of these bells could be heard by travellers crossing the sea even at a great distance from the island. Over the centuries, the island sank into the ocean, and so did the temple and its bells. But the island and its shrine are not completely forgotten, as shown by the unremitting attempts of a sailor to hear again the music of the sunken bells. Although their sound has long vanished into the depths of the ocean and his undertaking seems pointless, the man does not give up trying and obsessively pursues his search.

The artist cannot guarantee that the lost music of these bells (possibly symbolising our continuous and somehow frustrated quest for spirituality) will be heard during the exhibition period. But traces of their sound might find a resonance in the ears and hearts of those who are most able to open themselves to their surroundings and interpret silence.

Lorenzo Fusi.