

The Sky is Falling
O Céu Vem Abaixo

José Diniz was born in times of peace, on the seashore of Niterói, nine years after the end of World War II. Nevertheless, his imagination about naval battles and the latent presence of submarines in the sea, which was his natural backyard, was constantly reinforced by movies on TV and by stories about the war, retold in Brazilian homes for decades.

After all, nearly a decade before, a complex history had transpired. Enemy submarines attacked 71 ships on the Brazilian coast, with the loss of 1,500 lives. Over the span of just three days in August 1942, the German submarine *U-507* sank six ships, killing 627 people. This culminated in Brazil's declaration of war against the Axis powers (Germany, Italy and Japan). In counterpart, 11 enemy submarines were attacked and sunk by North American and Brazilian aircraft. Among them, the dreadful *U-507*.

These stimuli, coupled with the curiosity of childhood, led the young Diniz to create a series of drawings of submarines. Since then, his desire to recall and to create fantastic, dark and unpredictable scenarios involving these military watercrafts has become a creative obsession for the artist. In *O Céu Vem Abaixo* [The Sky Is Falling], Diniz joins a contemporary line of narrative photographers who, through refined experimentation with language, have produced the photographic genre known as the imaginary documentary. Thus, if in some of the images the submarine resembles the shape of a shark, this should be attributed to the imagination of his childhood, which continues to be one of the main currents in the photographer/inventor's sea of creations.

The periscope, an optical instrument for spying, is also a metaphor of the photographic camera, as the artist explains: *The periscope, with its power to watch unnoticed, becomes the ideal fantasy for a visual artist, an alter ego, whose powerful lens can capture everything, without interfering in anything, simply spying freely, without restrictions.*

At other powerful moments, the artist plunges into the darkness of the few surviving images uncovered by his researches to gather fragments of this history, using them to imaginatively reconstitute a bygone landscape – which

could hardly have been documented by photography, since most of the actions occurred in the darkness of the ocean.

Therefore, to create the images of *O céu vem abaixo*, Diniz needed to fulfill various roles, ranging from researcher, photographer, draftsman and designer to screenplay writer, editor, narrator and actor. Childhood drawings, images from films captured on TV, historical documents, facsimiles and maps, along with direct and manipulated photographs, are the multiple graphic works and images that are shuffled on the pages of this book to recreate the atmosphere of a traumatic time of war.

The poetic power of Diniz's images opens a channel on which we are swept along sensorially to a memory about history. Facts and reports about a sociopolitical episode are elevated to another plane as we are invited to enter a zone of combat, bathed in dazzling red hues or projected in gloomy dark tones, making us oscillate between breathing and being suffocated by a landscape that is at times sinister, at times familiar.

Just as it was the darkness of the sea that fueled the fantasies of the young drawer from Niterói, leading him to become a powerful artist with a knack for articulating images and imaginations to create artworks about a vast private world, it was perhaps the darkness of the official history that gave the same artist the wish to dive into its depths. Like an observer of the sea, in search of its treasures, Diniz probes the official reports, stirs the leftovers of histories and adds brushstrokes of imagination, flashes of light and reds, to make us aware that it is always possible to poetically encounter other beginnings.

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