

## The Living and the Dead / Jonas Arrabal

*"Those with memory are able to live in the fragile present.  
Those who don't have it, live nowhere."  
Patricio Guzmán*

An archeology capable of revolving the multiple layers of land, of memory, of historical time, beyond the search for origins or the proposition of prognoses, thus evidencing its condition of being, and which recognizes in its motor desire the different means of densifying the narrow temporality of the present: that is the purpose of this exhibition by Jonas Arrabal. With the displacement of a dead tree and other collected artifacts, initially located on the Island of Japonês, in Cabo Frio, to the Paço Imperial, in Rio de Janeiro, we realize from it both a question about the existence and the meanings we give to things and places, and also an emphasis on the processes of migration and the ways they produce encounters and conflicts, eligible fragments of memory and concrete erasures, either consciously or not.

Born out of an artificial process, Island of Japonês has little of its origins. Initially used to the outflow of fishing, it has become, over time, a paradisiacal place, with calm waters and lush scenery, visited by many tourists and residents of the region, seeking leisure and sports. There is a common sense that its name is due to the existence of an old resident of supposed Japanese heritage, who migrated and lived there until his death and whose history could also be associated with the presence of casuarinas: a tree species cultivated in the region since the 19th century and that became an emblematic element in the landscapes of the north coast of Rio de Janeiro' state. Although well adapted to the lands, its proliferation has generated numerous conflicts, as it is considered an invasive plant and that supposedly endanger native species. Indexes and metaphors of past and present, forced and desired displacement processes, these narratives reinforce the artist's gesture, which poetically transports elements from the island, alluding to various other migratory trajectories that cross the history of humanity.

The epigraph at the beginning of this text was taken from the documentary "Nostalgia for the light" (2010), by Chilean filmmaker Patricio Guzmán, who is one of the artist's most important references in this exhibition, and it makes us face the dilemma of memory, the game between reminiscences and forgetfulness, between what sometimes reveals itself and other times conceals itself, and the relation of these process to territories. Residues that constitute the framework of our stories, that connect places to people and that create their multiple experiences. Something of this atmosphere is present in the works gathered here by Jonas Arrabal, articulating layers of time and different sediments, artifacts of the past and also not too far away from us, clustered in various layers and now reorganized; narratives that reinforce the desire to look at something, above or below, ahead or behind, searching for meanings for life and death. What do we see when we look at something that is right in front of us? And what we do not see?

In front of us, a dead casuarina seems to contradict one of its most striking features: to be extremely resistant and tolerant to the wind and salinity of the sea. In front us, records of human existence and its intervention in nature, fragments that lose and gain value, become refuse or relic. In front of us, linguistic and language, speech and non-image, the storytelling of one and several existences. In front of us, a kind of "tombstone" whose inscription locates us in relation to a sense of historical community. What do these presences tell us about? What those who move on carry along? Which encounters (and mismatches) these displacements provide? Investigating these different layers, bringing to light something buried in the depths of the past, recollecting personal and collective memories, are

processes insinuated by Jonas Arrabal, without the intention of getting pragmatic answers or plausible results for this continuous digging (of lands, of memory and of historical time).

After all, no displacement is just geographical. Something of presence continually escapes thought.

Ivair Reinaldim  
Curator

## **Screenplay for a movie without images**

### **Part 1 - The initial scene**

The tree runs aground. Other men and women and children cross seas and rivers to arrive alive on the other shore. Boats sink, often. On the other side, they are welcomed with cannons, often. Men, women and children are enslaved daily. When, in fact, they are just looking for another future.

### **Part 2 - Making it disappear**

Brought from Australia and the West Pacific Islands in the 1940s to this town (fictional or not), the casuarinas were planted to function as windbreak. Today they constitute real forests along the sandbanks. Being an exotic species, it forces the native fauna to remoteness, competing for space and resources with the native vegetation of the region. Projects for evaluation, monitoring and control of casuarinas are being implemented. Some actions aim to eradicate the species in some areas. Some more radical actions propose the end of all casuarinas in the region. A process of cleaning, purification, removal.

The native species live along with the introduced ones. What if the trees crossed, if they became one? A single species. High enough to break wind, tasty enough to bear tropical fruits. Set free a thousand birds with native seeds in their beaks, flying towards another continent.

### **Part 3 - Of infinite memory and other possible stories**

When I was little, I used the casuarina' seeds as instruments of war. They were hard, pinecone-like, and they would hurt the opponent if I used just enough strength from my thin, rickety arms. It never hit anyone's eye - lucky me and my childhood in the 90s.

As a child, I watched the wind hit the fragile branches like thin, rickety arms. When the southwest wind came in hurting my grandparents' bones, when the sea air and the smell of salt came in through the windows of the house.

When I was little, I would pick up the exotic leaves from the ground or remove the green leaves from the fragile branches, plucking them into twigs.

When I was little, I used to walk over the green leaves... When they fell to the ground, they formed a rug upon the white sand, the landscape of that city, fictional or not.

When I was little, I would spend the weekends on the island called "do Japonês". I thought that the Japanese owner of the island had been brought in just like a casuarina tree and became part of the landscape, staying inseparable of that bath of light and salt. Would it be

necessary to remove all immigrants because they remove the native people from the region, competing for space and resources?

#### **Part 4 - Official history**

The island is artificial and was created to facilitate the outflow of fishing. They landed an area in the middle of the canal, planted the now-cursed trees as a base for the fishing boats. A man lived on this island and he had oriental features. Was he the Japanese who, aboard the Kasato Maru, arrived there? He was a wrinkled man, punished by the sun and that could not even open his eyes because of the light that dazzled him. There are no images of this man. On the island there are ruins, suggesting an ancient civilization. To translate a dead language. Dead like this fictional city, or not.

The island is in the middle of the sea. At the low tide, the island almost touches the other shore, almost is no island.

#### **Part 5 - Screenplay for an unfinished movie without images**

In the initial scene the tree is removed from the island. A thousand men hoist the tree with their own arms. A rope is tied to the tree and another rope is tied to a boat. The tree goes floating on the water. On top of the tree, there is an indigenous man. He came here across the Bering Strait and lived on the island even before the old Japanese. The tree crosses the turbulent sea. A thousand days later, the tree arrives in Australia or some western Pacific island.

#### **Part 6 - Project for a graveyard**

From when I was little, I remember about a big dune with dark sunburnt sand on the seashore. All the children used to climb it with pieces of cardboard to surf down the dune. Along with the slip, ancient shells sprang from the sand. Years later, they discovered that this was an indigenous cemetery. They surrounded the dune and no one else could climb there. But it was too late, or almost too late. The dune was less than half of its original size.

The indigenous put everything they use in a hole, discarding garbage. Recycling was not invented. Something was reused, surely. In the hole, the indigenous would place a layer of shells, followed by a layer of discard materials, and so on. A graveyard mountain of shells and trash. For centuries and centuries, the colonizing white man destroyed the mountains, turned the shells into limestone and built palaces, sugar mills and other modern things for the time. The white man has been doing this constantly. Destroying, deforesting, filling our body with pesticides. The white man is in power, and he corrupts everything in the name of a God. The white man has weapons to kill the most vulnerable, as they did with the indigenous, the first men and women.

#### **Part 7 - Moving the house, the water, the island**

On weekends the island is populated. Each family arrives when the tide is still low, in small boats, or even walking with water just above the waist. Speakers provide the soundtrack for the sun, the salt and the wind. A fashionable schizophrenia. This happens since the 80's, when I was born. Probably, even before. No, for sure. Because I've found pictures of my young mother tanning on that island. There are remnants of our past, this civilization. Something that is human and inhuman. The smoke comes out of the grills, the beers come out cold from the coolers, the children swim, the mothers talk to each other, the mosquitoes devour everyone walking in the woods. The wind hits the trees above. The tide is rising,

rising. There are times when there is almost no island. The small wooden boats keep transporting people. Big boats pass by fast forming waves.

### **Part 8 - The living and the dead**

Mediation is avoided. You can touch everything and contaminate yourself with everything. To live is to communicate with the dead. To the great-grandma's cake recipe is added a new ingredient. On Caravaggio's painting, the shadows are redone with the lighting of an electric spotlight.

To ancestors still alive, to ancestors already dead. To peers still alive, to the artists of the past who are at this mediumistic table (At this point, someone pulls the white cloth, as in one of those magic tricks. Nothing moves on the table, just as in one of those magic tricks).

### **Part 9 - The Earth should be flat for some and still go around**

For centuries, men have been dominating the planet by sea, the extension of land. Draining their desires in never navigated directions, discovering new angles and destroying civilizations, building cities, founding new countries. If the Earth was flat indeed, as they started to advocate once again, those ships would be doomed to fall into an abyss and be devoured by monsters overseas.

Ships bring black people from their countries to work in this country, enslaved. When slavery ended, they remained enslaved. Ports were open for cheap foreign labor. The desire was to make the colonized country white again, which has always been red in its name and black in its structure. The colonizers are still alive today, but there are white, yellow, black, indigenous and other people who go along making history fairer.

### **Part 10 - Leaks**

These messages are not encrypted. They will leak, like water coming out of the sink, like water coming out of the boat's engine. Technology has shortened our distance. The two of us in totally opposite places, even when it's night there and day here. We live in a time when messages change the course of history. These messages are not those ones put inside of a bottle and thrown in the sea. Actually, they are iceberg tips. Often, you cannot see the whole, just a piece, but they damage the ship's hulls. It's twenty past midnight here. It's noon there. Messages are all the hours anywhere in the world. Messages can be heard in every corner and invite for a revolution.

### **Part 11 - To became empty**

To empty the immensity of salt. To create new spaces, an opening for the future. Emptying the sea is an abyss, a bottomless time, the memory of the totality of the Earth, whose strength surpasses History and other stories. Possibility of self-transformation, nomadic bodies that circulate the land / sea. To empty the sea. The character enters the water and removes a small amount with a bucket, until one day the sea is completely empty. To walk on solid ground. To erase the borders, even though the white colonizer builds walls. Tear down walls, erase borders, destroy passports, learn all languages.