

Nº 5

Jacaranda

A Journal of Brazilian Art and beyond

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Editorial

* Isabel De Luca

The back of a painting appears on the cover of this fifth issue of **Jacaranda** magazine. In her most recent series, *Doubleface*, New York-based artist Valeska Soares restores and cuts old portraits, giving new meanings to lost canvases – as she does with the objects she has been turning into art since the late 1980s. An art work of this series was installed next to the oldest (*Preserve*, 1991) in the generous mid-career retrospective *Any Moment Now*, which Soares presents until the end of 2017 at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, as part of the Pacific Standard Time project. The trajectory of the artist, comprehending and also transcending the exhibition, is told by the journalist Suzana Velasco in this edition's profile.

Graduated in Architecture, Soares was born in the state of Minas Gerais and arose, as many Brazilian artists, in the School of Visual Arts of the Parque Lage, in Rio de Janeiro. There she created the group Visorama, a kind of academy within the academy: detached from the predominant production at that time, marked mainly by painting, the artists of the collective – consisting of names like Rosângela Rennó, Eduardo Coimbra, Ricardo Basbaum and João Modé – opened a space to think about conceptual art. It was not long before she moved to the United States. It's been 25 years; Soares never came back.

Another fixed section of **Jacaranda**, which in each issue also features an interview, talks about other ideals of displacement: pioneer of sound art in Brazil, Guilherme Vaz speaks to Franz Manata, Saulo Laudaes and Bruno Queiroz about his experience of more than two decades with indigenous peoples deep in Brazil. "I have been out in the jungle with an artist, where he have run away at the sight of a tiny spider, it's unbelievable. And they think they are trailblazing in the world of art. At the time, I asked, 'But you're not afraid of art?"

Art is also filled with spiders, with the unexpected. You may discover things that escape your control in art," provokes Guilherme in the conversation recorded for the Arte Sonora podcast in 2013, which is now transcribed in print for the first time.

"Displacements" is also, curiously enough, the title of the Historical Pages, the third and last recurrent segment of **Jacaranda**. This time the researcher and essayist Fred Coelho focuses on the legendary magazine *Malasartes*, founded in 1975 by artists, critics and poets like Cildo Meireles, Waltercio Caldas, Carlos Vergara, Bernardo Vilhena, Carlos Zílio, Ronaldo Brito, José Resende, Luiz Paulo Baravelli and Rubens Gerchman. Coelho – who selected documents and helped shape the exhibition concept of the room dedicated to New York in the recent exhibition of Hélio Oiticica at the Whitney Museum of American Art – chose to present here a number of *Malasartes* in which Cildo Meireles gathers a group of works of artists he considered "marginalized by the circuit." "It is an important document for presenting names that remained little known and works that would later become important for the history of contemporary Brazilian art," he writes.

The magazine presents another historical record: the robust essay written by art historian, curator and critic Aliza Edelman on the work of Judith Lauand. "Lauand and her work have remained curiously absent from recent transnational discourse on postwar abstraction, geometry, and feminism. She has not received the critical attention in major international exhibitions achieved by some of her female Brazilian contemporaries, particularly Lygia Clark (1920–1988), Lygia Pape (1929–2004), and Mira Schendel (1919–1988), all of whom have been recognized by successive generations of artists and critics outside Latin America," writes Edelman, who organized the artist's first

solo exhibition in the United States in 2014, at the Driscoll-Babcock Galleries in New York. Recognized as the “Lady of Concretism”, the 95-year-old continues to work daily in her studio in São Paulo.

One can say that the work of Felipe Cohen resembles that of Lauand in constructive terms. Born in São Paulo in 1976, the artist develops his oeuvre based on the tension caused by the conflict of a tradition of art with contemporary forms of disposing of the object. The poetic and full of references text written by artist Wagner Malta Tavares was born from a visit to Cohen’s studio, which at the time worked in the series *Broken Light*, and ended up being used at the occasion of his most recent show at the Gallery Millan, West, in São Paulo, November 2016.

From the same generation and from the same city comes André Komatsu, whose work brings the experience of the man who walks the city and transforms architectures, bricks and debris into works – whether installations, objects or drawings on concrete – which are, above all, “invitations to social resistance”. The quotes are from the Italian curator Jacopo Crivelli Visconti, in an essay originally published in the book that bears the name of the artist and was released by Automatica in 2014.

From the hardness of the city to the intimacy of the small narratives – the domestic environments, the everyday objects –, we come to the work of Rochelle Costi. The banal gains new contours in the aim of the *gaúcha* of Caxias do Sul that lives and works in São Paulo and uses photography as primordial support. Curator of the individual exhibition that the artist presented at the Anita Schwartz Gallery in Rio de Janeiro, in 2016, Bernardo Mosqueira returns to the notes he produced at the time to compose a new look about her production: “Rochelle Costi’s work points us to alternative ways of perceiving reality. Her work activates transfor-

mations in our capacity for paying attention and for interpretation through an irrefutable affirmation: banality does not exist within itself,” he reiterates.

Henrique Oliveira, in turn, deconstructs everything that is understood as sculpture, painting and installation. The works of the artist born in the city of Ourinhos, São Paulo, in 1976 usually gather all these supports, as art critic and curator Felipe Scovino describes in a text originally written in 2013 to accompany the *Baitogogo* exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris: “We find ourselves in the presence of organisms, living structures, expanding forms that invade the white cube, take up residence there, and, in the case of his largest sculptures, change the function and the architecture of their surroundings.”

Angelo Venosa’s “living structures” are otherwise. The seminal sculptures of the artist that emerged with the so-called Generation 80 – especially associated with painting, as already mentioned at the beginning of this editorial – bring organic forms that resemble marine creatures. In a text written especially for this edition, based on an interview promoted by *Caju* magazine and the Juca Group of Art Studies, journalist, art critic and curator Daniela Name points out affinities between the work of Venosa and her contemporaries (“The biggest of them lies in the appreciation of the image,” she states) and sheds light on his latest production, which “seems to reverse the logic of his initial pieces.”

The diversity – of generations, means and inspirations – continues to guide **Jacaranda**. Good reading.

Profile: Poetic Images

* Suazana Velasco

Valeska Soares



Stainless-steel plaques polished like mirrors mark both sides of the fence between Tijuana Beach in Mexico and the Border Field State Park in San Diego, in the United States. When drawing closer, the impression one has is that the border has some unmonitored passage holes. However, on closer inspection, the illusion of “escape points” vanishes. The paradise that supposedly awaits on the other side is nothing but a mirage. It is impossible to pass. Spectators are faced with the image of themselves and the city where they are reflected in the mirror, while they can also see the other side, because the fence can be seen through.

On the American side of the border, a stretch of text from Italo Calvino’s book *Invisible Cities* is printed in English, clearly legible on the metal surface, and then inverted in Spanish, as though it were reflected in the mirror. On the Mexican side, it is the Spanish version that is legible, and the English cannot be made out. Calvino speaks of Valdrada, an imaginary city that, on account of being located by a lake, ends up creating a twin but asymmetric city, because it is born from an image, from a reflection:

“Even when lovers twist their naked bodies, skin against skin, seeking the position that will give one the most pleasure in the other, even when murderers plunge the knife into the black veins of the neck and more clotted blood pours out the more they press the blade that slips between the tendons, it is not so much their copulating or murdering that matters as the copulating or murdering of the images, limpid and cold in the mirror.”

In *Picturing Paradise*, exhibited at the inSITE 2000 project, Valeska Soares presents a piece about the folklore which each city (with its inhabitants) instills upon other; cities that, like Calvino’s Valdrada, unavoidably reflect each other. It’s not (just) about Mexicans being on a quest to find their paradise in the United States. Mexico also has a place in United States folklore, interrupted by a physical barrier which, from afar, might appear to be a passage doorway.

On both sides, an im/possibility of transgression is insinuated, a “space for potential”, as Tobias

Ostrander puts it: “The border establishes a series of dichotomies, but the person who encounters these polarities within the border-mirror inevitably seeks to unify them. This desire is played out within the additional space, the gap, that the mirror constructs”.¹

Executed almost a decade after Soares having moved to the United States, the piece carries an extensive repertoire drawn from her 30 years’ experience in artistic production, such as the mirror, the spectator’s reflection, the text, nature tamed by human beings. More than that, it synthesizes an idea that is recurrent in her work, the establishment of frontiers that at once separate and unite, they bewilder and yet they open up opportunities for each one to follow their own subjective path. They are at the same time rigid and fragile, limits and links. They establish enigmas, labyrinths, and it’s up to each person to find their way out. How to sit together in four chairs whose seats are joined by lattice forming a cross (*Lugar comum*, or “*Commonplace*”, 2016)? Where to go when the spiraling staircases don’t lead anywhere (*Spiralling*, 2014)? It is possible to have a conversation in two seat-less glass chairs (*Conversation Piece*, 2010)?

Valeska Soares is from Belo Horizonte, in Minas Gerais, and she moved to Rio de Janeiro in the 80s after living in London for a number of years. After graduating in Architecture at the Universidade Santa Úrsula in 1987, she started a specialization course in art and architecture at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica, the Christian Pontificate University (PUC) in 1988, and started to frequent the School of Visual Arts at Parque Lage. Founded in 1975 by artist Rubens Gerchman, the space became a point of reference in terms of creation and artistic gatherings in Rio de Janeiro, an island of freedom of sorts in the midst of the repression brought about by the military dictatorship. In the 80s, a decade that was marked by the return of painting, the school produced artists such as Luiz Zerbini, Daniel Senise and Beatriz Milhazes, who partook of the emblematic exhibition *Como vai você, geração 80?*, or “How are you doing, generation 80s?”, which was curated by Marcus Lontra and Paulo Roberto Leal in 1984.



Soares speaks of how she felt isolated at the time, not on account of being detached from painting, but because art in Brazil was still highly linked to phenomenology, while her calling was to make art “about life”. At the end of the 80s, at the School of Visual Arts, a group that strayed from the production that prevailed at the time started to recuperate conceptual art influences from decades past, while creating more subjective, intimate work. In this way, in 1988, together with fellow artists Rosângela Rennó, Eduardo Coimbra, Ricardo Basbaum and João Modé, Soares created the Visorama group, the idea being to facilitate a space for thought between Brazilian artists whose creation differed from what was acknowledged as art by the country’s critics.

“At the master’s degree at PUC, Art History would always end in all things pop and Richard Serra. Because of this, at the time there was a certain desire by the younger generations to discuss other types of artistic strategies that were taking place outside Brazil, by artists like Barbara Kruger or Sherrie Levine. That was not discussed in Brazil”, says the artist, who also mentions Antonio Dias and Ivens Machado’s oeuvre as important references of that time. “I remember a lecture by (art critic) Ronaldo Brito in which he claimed cinema was not art, and that if you placed an Amílcar de Castro next to a Hélio Oiticica, Amílcar’s plastic qualities were superior. One of the reasons behind creating Visorama

was to allow ourselves a language with which to debate as equals. I have heard critics say that I did not know what my work was, that they knew it better than I did.”²²

Valeska Soares’ work already represented poetic images.

A poetic image: dozens of red roses laid out in circles, upright, forming spirals with layers of cotton. With the passing of time, they wither. The pleasant scent becomes unpleasant. *Preserve*, 1991.

A poetic image: white roses vertically joined by two planks of iron on the corner of two walls, like a casket bottom. *Gathering*, 1991.

A poetic image: perfumed oil runs down the wall, stemming from a hexagonally-shaped skin, like a vagina, a black hole, a passage to the other side. *Intimates*, 1993.

Despite little by little having found her peers, and the Brazilian critics opening up to the art of the turn of the 90s, Valeska Soares did not want to have to do any parallel work in order to survive. The Brazilian art market was still incipient, and there were few important galleries, such as Thomas Cohn and Luisa Strina. In 1992, Brazil was undergoing a process of hyperinflation and public financing cuts for culture, so Valeska Soares decided to move to New York to do a master’s degree and a PHD, but chiefly to live in an international hub of contemporary art, to “see what I had seen in magazines, only live and in full color”.



Conversation Piece, 2010
Tempered glass chair
33" x 31.5" x 17.25"

On the very same year she left the country, Marcantonio Vilaça – who would become one of the most important representatives responsible for the popularization of Brazilian art abroad in the 90s – opened a gallery. Camargo Vilaça started representing artists who had shone during the previous decade, such as Angelo Venosa and Leda Catunda, in addition to others who were starting to make a name for themselves in the art circles, like Ernesto Neto and Valeska Soares – who remains linked to the gallery to this day; it has since changed hands, and is now called Fortes D'Aloia e Gabriel. In 1994, she partook of the 22nd São Paulo Biennial, curated by Nelson Aguilar, presenting *Untitled (Fall)*: red roses covering the floor, and a niche made from bee's wax on the wall, with nothing inside it.

Her work was being recognized in Brazil, but Valeska Soares never did come back. In 2003, she started to create larger, more complex artworks, and she held her first exhibition in a North American institution, namely the Bronx Museum of the Arts. Since then, she has exhibited her work in two São Paulo biennials, the Venice Biennial and dozens of museums and galleries throughout the world. Her work has been shown at New York's Guggenheim's collections, the Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, the Tate Modern in London, the Inhotim Institute

in Brumadinho, Minas Gerais, and the museums of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

In her 25 years living in the United States, the artist has managed to escape the labels that would have her fit into the categories of being a woman/Latin American/Brazilian. She continued to create her poetic images, in equal measure sensual and conceptual. She beckons the spectator to experience sensations, without them being merely about a physical interaction. Her work moves between the (apparent) solidity of the outside world and each person's experience, made up of memory and yearning, ephemeral and fleeting. In a dance between the recognizable and the personal, Valeska Soares operates in a space between concrete stories and abstractions, between what is marked by time and what may be re-determined. As the artist herself puts it, "any material possesses an inherent meaning. In the case of antique objects, they have gone from hand to hand, they have lived through stories unknown to us. I am interested in bringing these objects back into circulation and creating new stories through them, with a different set of characters who would be the spectators".

A bed, for instance, that object we spend a large portion of our lives in, where we sleep, dream and love, each of us in a different way. It may be found back in

Valeska Soares



Duet II (from After), 2008
White marble
Pillow I: 7.5" x 25" x 17.5"
Pillow II: 7.5" x 23" x 20"

one of Soares' first productions, *Doll's Bed* (1989), where beans germinate on cotton in an untreated wood bed with the springs exposed. In the *Duet (from After)* series, of 2007, 2008 and 2011, pillows sculpted in marble appear sunken, as though people who had been lying there had just got up. Beds are a recurrent theme, be this in marble, wood or metal, in headboards or bed frames.

A bed in another poetic image: holes in a polished metal divan, so impersonal, let through a floral scent that can be pleasant, but which may also be unpleasant if excessive. If the smell starts making the spectator nauseous, perhaps they might faint on the hard divan, which has a pillow made of fabric. And they will be even more affected by the scent. Each one must create their own way out of the labyrinth. *Fainting Couch*, 2002.

Perfume is another of the elements in Soares' repertoire, oftentimes drawing a faint line between the attraction and repulsion it provokes, seducing while also intoxicating. In *Vanishing Point* (1998), the smell blends with another image that is recurrent throughout her oeuvre – that of a garden. On arranging a space of polished stainless-steel tanks filled with perfumed water – once again, reflective surfaces – the artist reminisces of renaissance gardens, only using minimalist elements. During the assembly of the piece at the Camargo Vilaça gallery, bees were attracted by the smell and fell in the water.



Duet I (from After), 2007
White marble
12" x 6.3" x 16.9"

Three years after *Picturing Paradise*, the artist created another site-specific display in Mexico. In *Puro teatro*, or Pure Theatre in English (2003), in the outside area of the Rufino Tamayo Museum, spectators were beckoned to take off their shoes and walk around in a “lagoon” whose circumference was almost 40 meters, made from reflective acrylic, looking at their own image reflected and that of the trees in the park. In the center, a glass pavilion surrounds a bed, creating a romantic space for contemplating nature and for dreaming. The bed, however, is made of cake – the largest cake created to date by the century-old patisserie Pasteleria Ideal, in Mexico City. With the passing of time, it dries out, breaks up and collapses.

On tumbling down into ruins – remains of food, withered roses, bee suicides – Soares’ creations do not cease to be beautiful, but they break away from the idea of idealized spaces. “Nature is yet another fictional construction that we have been idealizing since the idea of paradise. Paradise – what is it? It is a contained, organized section of nature in its origins, and there are rules, one mustn’t eat the apple. In our original idea of nature’s ideal space, the ideal is already organized, it is an excerpt, with rules and control, in an uncontrollable universe”³, she has stated.

Fiction was very important from early on in the artist’s life. The house where she lived in with her mother, artist Teresinha Soares, and her father, journalist and lawyer Britaldo Silveira Soares, was a “beehive of people coming and going”⁴. But when she was a teenager, she would spend her afternoons alone watching old black and white Hollywood movies, and she soon formed a tragic vision of the world. When she was about 12, the young girl that felt “a prisoner in the world of Belo Horizonte” would use literature as an escape route, whether it was Monteiro Lobato, Agatha Christie or a book on archaeology her mother had given her. “The written word, in stories and music lyrics, which for me were the closest thing to poetry, were important during my development process”, says Soares, who, at the beginning of her career, created many artworks inspired by the poems of Brazilian poet Ana Cristina Cesar.

Even when words make their way into her work, Soares suggests; she does not state. Like poetry, they are an elicitation – of senses, memories, desires and personal fictions. Literature and wordplay are recurrent throughout her 30 years of artistic production, be this through the content that inspires her conceptually – like Calvino’s *Invisible cities* – or materially, by the use of phrases, titles and pages from books.

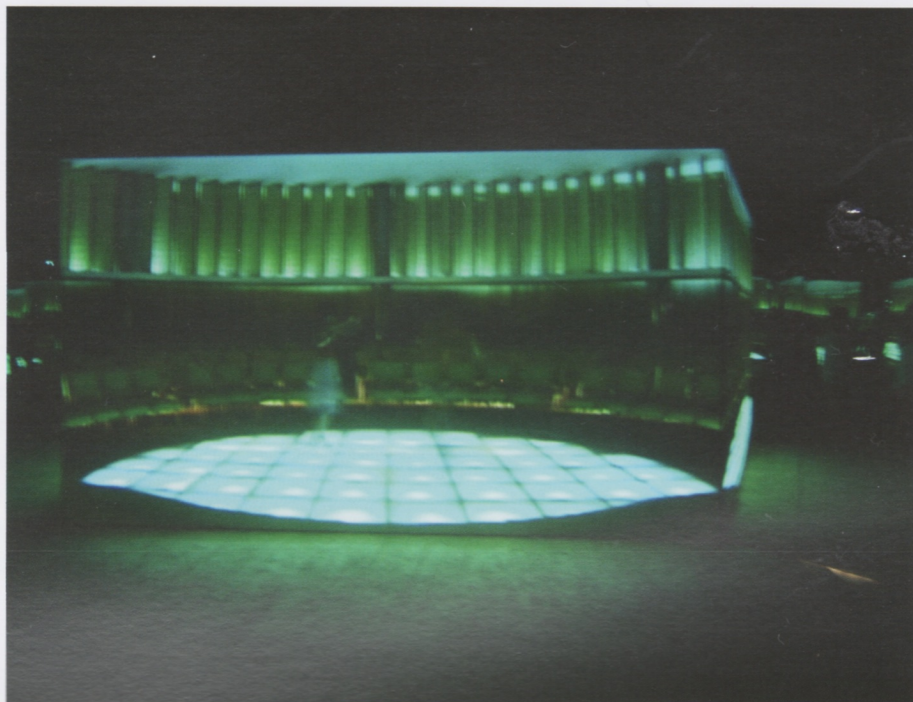
With each use of the word, the artist reveals something of the original text, and leaves the rest to the spectator. In the *Love stories* series (2008), the book spines on the shelves have titles related to love in different languages, but inside there are only blank pages. In *For to* (2008), the only pages on show are the dedications, but the book is unknown. In the *Edit* series (2012 and 2013), pages from the English translation of Roland Barthes’ *A Lover’s Discourse – Fragments* are reproduced featuring sections painted in black, covering entire paragraphs. The stretches that are “left over” gain a renewed prominence, as the reader-spectator imagines who that editor is, highlighting and marking pages, creating new meanings. The same text by Barthes is transformed into pure matter when 4480 of its characters are sculpted in ceramic and piled up on the floor, in *Fragments*, or “Fragments” in English (2007).

All these pieces deal with the idea of juxtaposition, a build-up which, though excessive on first inspection, does not manage to reflect the sense, as there is something missing. Like in *Tabled* (2017), where she gathered 31 tables belonging to the collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum – the oldest public art museum in the United States, in Hartford – around a fountain dating back to 1600. In spite of the tables being from the 17th to the 20th centuries, they were made equals in age by being covered in red, black, white and grey felt. The artist hides the story that inhabits behind each one of them by transforming the tables into pictorial abstractions. For the same show at the museum, *Unfold*, Soares bought 20 headboards, painted them partially and screwed them together, creating links of objects that are alike in terms of function and form, but that stray from each other by the aesthetics of different eras, creating *Unhinged*.



Love Stories 1, 2007

125 acid free paper and linen bound unique books
10.5" x 157.5" x 7" (overall)
9.45" x 6.3" each (book)





In *Doubleface* (2017), the most recent series of the exhibition she is preparing in Santa Barbara while this very text is produced, Valeska Soares seeks to rescue forgotten people, instead of objects. The reverses of oil portraits are painted in a single color, also in oil, and they become the front of the painting. A cut-out in the canvas makes a part of the face painted on the original picture on the reverse project forward, revealing a gaze. The artist explains that the idea for the series came when she wanted a portrait of herself aged 14 or 15, made by a painter, and she found out her mother had lost it.

“I started to think that, much like myself, many women must be lost throughout the world; family portraits that end up in a basement when the relatives die, and which nobody knows what to do with. So I thought to myself, ‘how could these people be rescued?’ How do we give a new lease of life to people who no longer have any affective relationships? It is more or less what I do with objects, giving them a new meaning. All while thinking about the idea of making portraits, of *portraiture*. In this way, bringing together abstraction and figuration, you manage to live with these images, because in spite of being specific people, they are mysterious, unresolved.”

Looking at those fragments of faces that look back at us is like seeing the other side of the frontier, it is like lying on a bed someone else has just got up from, leaving behind their smell, or a hollow in the pillow, it’s like reading the dedication to Jane without knowing her face, or just knowing a book from its spine, it’s like walking

on a lake without sinking, going up spiral staircases that don’t lead anywhere, sitting in backless chairs or on a divan made from sugar and yeast, gradually tumbling.

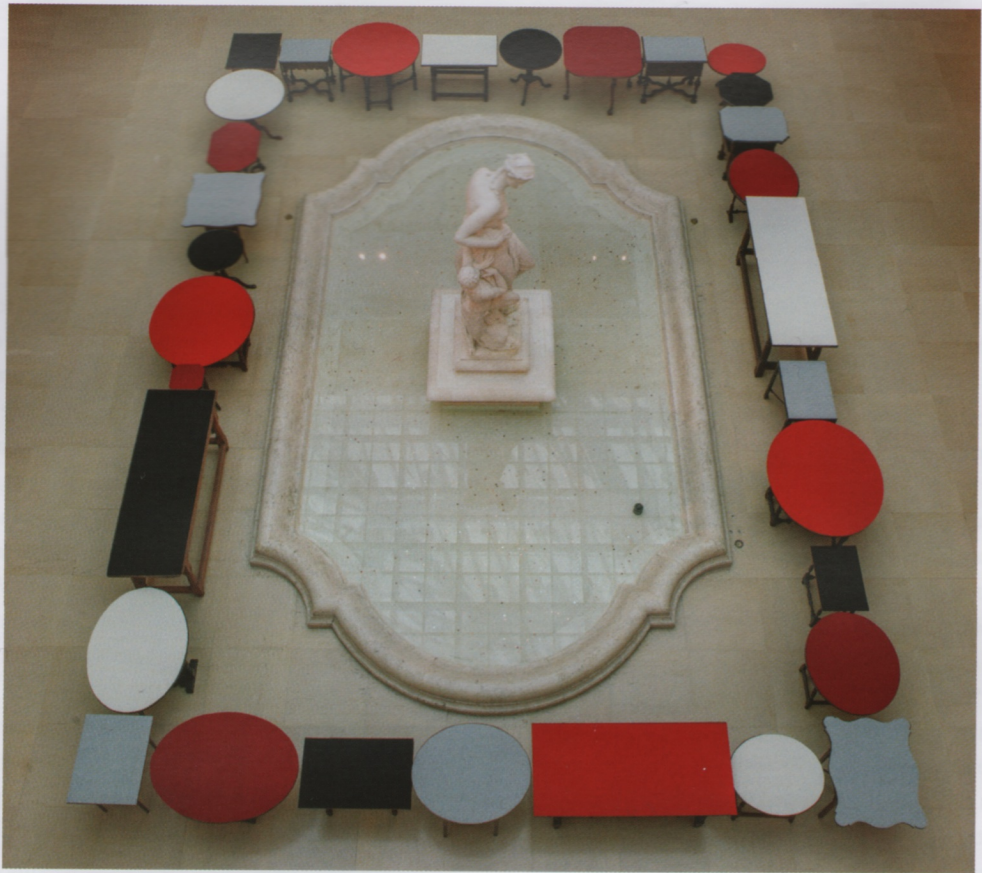
Looking at those fragments of faces is like mixing with the dancers of the video *Tonight*, shown at *Folly*, a pavilion that is mirrored both inside and out, where the spectator, whose image is reflected, becomes part of the dance filmed at the Cassino Pampulha, in Minas Gerais. *Folly* was shown at the 51st Biennial in Venice, in 2005, and four years later became a permanent pavilion at the Inhotim Institute in Brumadinho, Minas Gerais.

At the time when she used to frequent the School of Visual Arts, at the end of the 90s, Valeska Soares created a project consisting of a copper tower that was to be set up at the Parque Lage, on occasion of the Open-Air Sculpture Biennial, curated by critic Frederico Moraes. The exhibition never did take place, but being selected brought about financing to kickstart the career of an artist who did not boast a single exhibition on her resumé at the time. The piece was not executed, but it could be in a garden, somewhere in the world, 30 years on. In the artist’s project, the copper would have changed colors, blending in with the park’s vegetation, but a light would always point at the fact that the tower was there.

(Endnotes)

1. OSTRANDER, Tobias. *Picturing Paradise*. In: SOARES, Valeska. *Follies/Capricho*. New York: The Bronx Museum of the Arts; Monterrey: Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Monterrey; Ontario: Art Gallery of Hamilton, 2006
2. This and the following statements are from Valeska’s Soares interview with Suzana Velaco, 2017
3. Valeska Soares interviewed by Hans-Michael Herzog, in SOARES, Valeska; MEIRELES, Cildo; NETO, Ernesto Neto. *Seduções*. Zürich: Hatje Cantz, 2006
4. This and the following statements are from Valeska’s Soares interview with Suzana Velaco, 2017

Valeska Soares



Tabled, 2017
(31) 17th to 20th C tables from Wadsworth Atheneum Collection
covered with red, white and black felt
Variable dimensions

