LAURA BELÉM

[PORTFOLIO]

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Secret Garden or Passage of the Tropic, 2013-2017
Bias tape, gravel, sound equipment, electric light. Aprox. 42 m².
Espaço Cultural Porto Seguro, São Paulo.

Freely inspired by excerpts from Tristes Tropiques, a 1955 book by French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009), the installation proposes a sensory experience accompanied by a sound narrative, where identity and estrangement conflict from a lyrical perspective. The foreign and at the same time familiar gaze, evoked by the audio narration, raises metaphorical reflections about a route in a stony landscape or garden, creating a crossing experience that confronts expectations, reality, fantasy and time.
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A series of 11 photographs related to the decision of Belo Horizonte city council (Brazil) to cut down several hundred-year old trees along an important downtown avenue in 2014, claiming the trees were diseased. But this proved to be controversial and the local people, supported by environmentalists, created the “Fica Ficus” (“Save The Ficus”) project, which fought to preserve the trees. However, more than ten trees were cut in half, and their dead trunks left in the location. The trees no longer grow.

For the series “Reconstruction”, I photographed the decapitated trunks with black and white film and created a composition with crystals and semi-precious rocks over the printed images, which were then re-shot in color for the final series.
Reconstruction, 2017
Photography, 40 x 51 cm [each one], edition of 5 + 1 AP.
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Short Stories (Still Life), 2016

The work consists of a series of soapstone sculptures arranged by groups on trestle tables. I visited traditional soapstone workshops near the town of Ouro Preto (Minas Gerais, Brazil) and gathered utilitarian pieces that had been discarded by the local artisans because they were broken, unfinished or had some manufacturing defect. The gathering and selection of the pieces was followed by a procedure of covering and sticking the soapstone talc to them, as if to emphasize the activity of time. The discarded pieces interested me as they did not serve their functional purpose and thus revealed a unique sculptural potential.
Short Stories (Still Life), 2016
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An installation with modular sculptures in the form of uncovered market stalls built of steel angles. One half of an object acquired from antique street markets sits on the table top of each stall. Originally created for the "DentroFora: vol.2_Forma" ("InsideOut: vol.2_Form") exhibition at the Sancovsky Gallery (São Paulo), the work dialogues with the traditional Benedito Calixto Square antique market, which takes place in front of the gallery on Saturdays. The installation deals with issues related to the commercialization, exchange and circulation of vintage objects and works of art, and plays with notions of form, function and value.
Installation / Steel brackets, electrostatic painting, plywood and objects purchased from street markets and cut in half.
Variable dimensions. Each module: 140 x 80 x 180 cm.
Galeria Sancovsky and MUBE (Museu Brasileiro da Escultura) - São Paulo.
1/2, 2016
Installation / Steel brackets, electrostatic painting, plywood and objects purchased from street markets and cut in half. Variable dimensions. Each module: 140 x 80 x 180 cm.
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Installation / Steel brackets, electrostatic painting, plywood and objects purchased from street markets and cut in half. Variable dimensions. Each module: 140 x 80 x 180 cm. Galeria Sancovsky and MUBE (Museu Brasileiro da Escultura) - São Paulo.
Island Restaurant, 2015

An installation specially created for the Casa do Baile ("the Ballroom Building"), designed by the architect Oscar Niemeyer in the 1940s, in Belo Horizonte (Brazil). Part of the Pampulha architectural complex, the building was planned to house a restaurant and dance hall that would be accessible to everyone. But the Casa do Baile would serve its original purpose for only three years. When gambling became illegal in Brazil and the nearby Casino closed in 1946, the building went into a long period of neglect and uncertainty regarding its future, and for a number of years even closed its doors completely.

Island Restaurant relates to the elusive memory and uncertain identity of the Casa do Baile. It projects a new tapestry of fictional narratives upon the building, taking as its backdrop the dance and its absence, as well as the utopia of the Modernist ideal.

The work incorporates the architecture of the Casa do Baile, emphasizing the idea of circularity and movement of the building and creating a symbiosis with the same. Velvet theater curtains hang alongside others made of metallic tape or patterned with palm trees, draped from the coving to create semi-circles in space. These and other scattered elements – mirrors placed upon walls of masonry and glass, empty chairs, a spinning mirrorball, a wooden joist, broken pieces of wood, sheets of paper with printed phrases, and a neon moon – suggest concepts of temporality and absence, and conjure a poetic reverie. There are nuances of an emptiness and a ruin, at the same time creating space for the projection of new possibilities of perception and enchantment.

The idea of an island – not only in the architectural sense, as the Casa do Baile was built as such and is separated from the road by a bridge – appears in the work in a symbolic manner, as an idealized space, satisfying an imaginary utopia and at the same time implying isolation and uncertainty.
Island Restaurant, 2015
Island Restaurant, 2015
Neon, suede and mesh curtains, metallic tape, wooden chairs, mirrorball, wooden poles, paper printed with newsprint, rock, audio recording, 5.1 audio equipment.
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Island Restaurant, 2015
There is Cinema Today, 2015
Neon signs. Various sizes. SESC Palladium, Belo Horizonte.

The work occupies the circulation spaces of the SESC Palladium building in Belo Horizonte, and recreates the history of the site, which housed one of the city’s most important movie theaters, the Cine Palladium. Seven neon signs have been made of the titles of films that marked important moments in the history of the cinema, among them the first and last films to play in the theater, from 1963 and 1999, and four Brazilian films from the second phase of the Cinema Novo [New Cinema movement], shown at the Belo Horizonte Film Festival in 1968. Some of these, such as “Jardim de Guerra” [“War Garden”], directed by Neville D’Almeida, were banned by the censors of Brazil’s military dictatorship government after these screenings and condemned to oblivion. The work dialogues with this lost memory and the passage of time, declaring the absence of the cinema while simultaneously paying tribute to it. The typology of the signs is based on the poster artwork for each film.
There is Cinema Today, 2015
Neon signs. Various sizes. SESC Palladium, Belo Horizonte.
An installation created for the Capela do Morumbi [Morumbi Chapel], a building designed by the modernist architect Gregori Warchavchik in the 1940s and built amidst rammed earth ruins. As a marketing ploy for the appreciation of the Morumbi area in Sao Paulo, Warchavchik had been invited to interpret the found ruins and redesign the site. But it is a little known fact that the current brick-walled building was not based on a recreation of the original chapel, as there is no documentary evidence to prove that the site was previously home to a church. According to the Museum of the City of Sao Paulo, the current owner of the building: "several historical explanations have been attributed to these ruins: that they were a chapel dedicated to Saint Sebastian of the Slaves, or a cemetery for farm owners. Other scholars believe they were simply the remains of a barn. The lack of more detailed evidence means the real story remains unknown."

Drawing on this lack of documentary evidence and spaces in time, the work creates a sense of entropy: in the interior of the chapel there is a full-scale reproduction of the front wall, placed on the ground, as if it has itself become a ruin. This structure crosses the central nave of the chapel and continues into the garden, which contains an unfinished reproduction of the chapel tower. The vegetation and grass, meanwhile, are brought inside the chapel, creating a contiguity between the interior and exterior spaces.

Morumbi is between 9 and 15 km (5.6 and 9.3 mi) away from Sao Paulo's downtown. Ranked first by many years in real estate launches, it was considered by the citizens of Sao Paulo as one of the wealthiest neighborhoods of the city. Nowadays, however, it faces problems related to a new real estate devaluation, housing some houses uninhabited where the vegetation takes hold.

An anecdote is characterized as an oral narrative, a story where there is no single point of view, conclusion, or certainty. The title Anekdota comes from the Greek word ἀνέκδοτον, which means “unpublished”. It can also connote a joke or a farce.
Anekdota, 2015
Capela do Morumbi, São Paulo.
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Capela do Morumbi, São Paulo.
Anekdota, 2015
Capela do Morumbi, São Paulo.
Wall clock, microphone, loudspeakers, furniture, objects from the museum collection and pencil rubbing [Sorocaba Railroad Museum], Sorocaba, São Paulo.

This work takes the form of an intervention at the Sorocabana Railroad Museum (Sorocaba, São Paulo). One of fifteen broken clocks from the museum collection, all of which were previously used in railway stations, has been repaired and installed in an exhibition space from which all other furniture and objects have been removed. The marks left by the objects that were on display in the room for long periods are visible on the walls. A microphone captures the ticking of the clock in real time and broadcasts it to the other rooms of the museum, bringing new life to the collection and marking the passage of time. In a second room, various items of furniture and other objects have been brought together in a non-museum setting. A pencil rubbing of the words OBRAS PUBLICAS [PUBLIC WORKS], on paper and made from the old sign for the museum entrance covers one entire wall of the room. 1971 was the year when the EFS (the Sorocabana Railroad) was shut down, and the beginning of the scrapping of railroads all over Brazil.
1, 9, 7, 1, 2014
Wall clock, microphone, loudspeakers, furniture, objects from the museum collection and pencil rubbing [Sorocaba Railroad Museum], Sorocaba, São Paulo.
1971, 2014
Wall clock, microphone, loudspeakers, furniture, objects from the museum collection and pencil rubbing [Sorocaba Railroad Museum], Sorocaba, São Paulo.
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Wall clock, microphone, loudspeakers, furniture, objects from the museum collection and pencil rubbing [Sorocaba Railroad Museum], Sorocaba, São Paulo.
**The Unknown House, 2012**
Wooden window frames and metal supports; 24 m². CNI SESI Marcantonio Vilaça Award for the Visual Arts, Maceio Trade Association, Alagoas, Brazil.

Five window frames propped on metal frameworks are set up at a public plaza in the historical downtown district of Maceio (Brazil). The resulting spatial layout resembles that of a house. Today the area where this work was installed has turned into a run-down spot, an area neglected by the local city council with problems of housing and drugs, and situated behind the stately building of the Maceio Trade Association.
The Unknown House, 2012
Wooden window frames and metal supports; 24 m². CNI SESI Marcantonio Vilaça Award for the Visual Arts, Maceio Trade Association, Alagoas, Brazil.
Sky Notes, 2011
Installation / Music stands, photographic print on cotton paper, blue carbon paper; 120 m². Art Tower Mito Contemporary Art Gallery, Mito-Shi, Japan.

During a flight from Brazil to Japan, icebergs melting in the ocean were photographed. Music scores were written by hand with blue carbon paper, over a selection of these images. The resulting compositions arranged on 24 music stands were placed in front of the pipe organ in the institution’s entrance hall.
Sky Notes, 2011
Installation / Music stands, photographic print on cotton paper, blue carbon paper; 120 m². Art Tower Mito Contemporary Art Gallery, Mito-Shi, Japan.
The Temple of a Thousand Bells, 2010
Installation / One thousand glass bells, nylon strings, 120 m²; 5.1 surround sound and lighting; duration: 8’02”. Liverpool International Biennial 10 Exhibition, Liverpool, UK.

The work consisted of an installation with a thousand silent, clapper-less glass bells, and a multi-channel audio track, in the building known as The Oratory. Formerly the chapel of St. James Cemetery, in Liverpool, this venue currently features a collection of 19th-century memorial sculptures. The soundtrack especially composed by Fernando Rocha tells the legend of a thousand temple bells that sank into the ocean and continued ringing underwater.
The Temple of a Thousand Bells, 2010
Installation / One thousand glass bells, nylon strings, 120 m²; 5.1 surround sound and lighting; duration: 8’02”. Liverpool International Biennial 10 Exhibition, Liverpool, UK.
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Pocket Garden, 2008
Loudspeakers, CD player and CD de audio, 8’15” (track I) and 6’ (track II); Toyota Municipal Museum of Art, Japan.

Sound installation for the exhibition Blooming. The work consisted of two soundtracks: one played on the museum’s main stairs in direct dialogue with Joseph Kosuth’s permanent work Taxonomy (Applied) # 3, bearing names of Eastern and Western religious leaders and thinkers. Pocket Garden brings quotes on Nature of some of the people mentioned by Kosuth. The other soundtrack was made for the teahouse at the museum garden. Seated on the machiai (a waiting bench placed outside the tea ceremony room) viewers listened to haiku recitations – a traditional Japanese poem form, also alluding to Nature.
Pocket Garden, 2008
Loudspeakers, CD player e CD de audio, 8’15” (track ii) and 6’ (track iii);
Toyota Municipal Museum of Art, Japan.
Venice of Brazil, 2007
Wood, water, styrofoam, metal, acrylic paint, portable fans; 4x 3 x 1.65 m.
Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio [2013-14]; Galeria Luisa Strina, São Paulo [2008]; MAMAM no Pátio (Museu de Arte Alosio Magalhães), Recife, Brazil [2007].

A wooden structure holds a water tank, with miniature houses casually circling on the surface. The work was created during an art residency program in Recife, a coastal town in northeastern Brazil. Surrounded by two major rivers that meet the sea, Recife has many bridges and canals built by the Dutch in the 17th century and is called “the Venice of Brazil” by the local inhabitants.
Venice of Brazil, 2007
Wood, water, styrofoam, metal, acrylic paint, portable fans; 4 x 3 x 1.65 m. Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio [2013-14]; Galeria Luisa Strina, São Paulo [2008]; MAMAM no Pátio (Museu de Arte Alosio Magalhães), Recife, Brazil [2007].
The Flying Dutchman, 2007
Miniature wooden ship, electric lights, chapbook edition; variable dimensions; MAMAM no Pátio (Museu de Arte Alosio Magalhães), Recife.

A lighted miniature vessel installed in an abandoned house at Pátio de São Pedro (a local Recife square), and a chapbook edition of literatura de cordel (a popular type of Brazilian northeastern literature) recreating the traditional "Flying Dutchman" ghost-ship legend. The text by local poet Cassemiro Santhiago freely mingled reality with fiction, combining facts from the Dutch occupation of Recife in the 17th century with everyday life in the city. The intervention could be viewed from the public space of Pátio de São Pedro and from the 2nd floor of the museum, where chapbooks hanging from a string at the gallery space were available for exhibition visitors to take home.
The Flying Dutchman, 2007
Miniature wooden ship, electric lights, chapbook edition; variable dimensions; MAMAM no Pátio (Museu de Arte Alosio Magalhães), Recife.
Shipwreck, 2006

Water drips onto a blue ink drawing of a caravel, slowly but steadily, until the image is blurred.
Enamored, 2004-05
Rowboats, searchlights on timer device, steel support; 8.10 x 1.10 x 0.70 m; Museu de Arte da Pampulha, Belo Horizonte,[2004]; Arsenale Galleries, 51st Venice Biennale, Italy [2005].

Two rowboats equipped with searchlights signal to one another on the water. The work was conceived for twilight and night. There is an automatically repeated cycle with the lights on and off alternately for 20 seconds, coinciding with each other for 20 seconds, and then going off.
**Enamored,** 2004-05
Rowboats, searchlights on timer device, steel support; 8.10 x 1.10 x 0.70 m.
Museu de Arte da Pampulha, Belo Horizonte,[2004]; Arsenale Galleries, 51st Venice Biennale, Italy [2005].
Pampulha, 2002
Red tulle and red satin, telescope, roulettes, audio CD, CD player, loudspeakers, billiard table, balls, stickers, wooden cues; variable dimensions; audio duration: 70'; Museu de Arte da Pampulha, Belo Horizonte.

Installation occupying the art museum (former casino) and Casa do Baile (Ballroom House) at the Pampulha architectural complex in Belo Horizonte, designed by Oscar Niemeyer in the 1940s. The work consists of three pieces: The Gambler, The Ladies, and Acrostic.

The Gambler: six roulette wheels from the old casino were set up in a sonorous field of statements by former patrons and period music. The audio aspect highlights the memories of the people involved.
The Ladies: six long skirts made from red tulle and red satin. Three were attached to inner pillars of the art museum and three to outer pillars of the Ballroom House – a building situated on the other side of the Pampulha Lake. The latter skirts were to be viewed from the museum through a telescope pointed at the Ballroom House.
Acrostic: a billiard table with red, black and white balls. Individual letter digits that spell the names of Belém’s grandparents’ were printed on the red and black balls, together with a second letter added with no particular allusion. On interacting with the work, the viewer’s task was to recompose the unrevealed names.
Pampulha, 2002
Red tulle and red satin, telescope, roulettes, audio cd, cd player, loudspeakers, billiard table, balls, stickers, wooden cues; variable dimensions; audio duration: 70'; Museu de Arte da Pampulha, Belo Horizonte.
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Red tulle and red satin, telescope, roulettes, audio CD, CD player, loudspeakers, billiard table, balls, stickers, wooden cues; variable dimensions; audio duration: 70’;
Museu de Arte da Pampulha, Belo Horizonte.
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