



Selected Press and Texts

Solange Pessoa

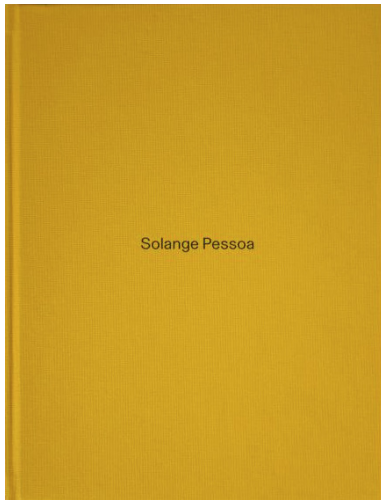
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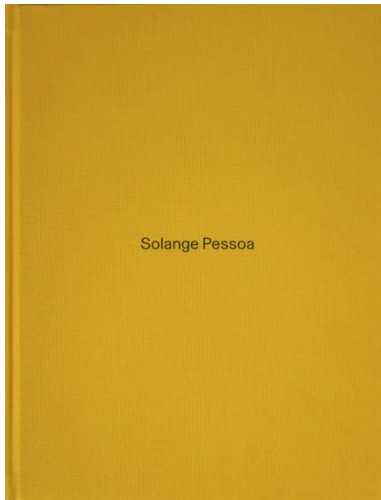


Solange Pessoa is an artist from Minas Gerais active since the late 1980s. Her art though in dialogue with key moments in the cultural history of Brazil; stands intensely alone, in its singular dialogical embodiment of dark and light, of the scatological and the sublime, of the ancient and the contemporary, of the feminine and the masculine. The unique existential and often visceral nature of Pessoa's art has generally been misunderstood in Brazil. Despite the impressive body of work, her constancy and powerful drive over the years in making art that resembles nothing we know, but refers to everything important, is only in recent years, that she has been getting a deserved recognition, mostly beyond the confines of Brazil. The reasons for this are complex. Agnaldo Farias in 2012 mentions that Pessoa's awkward relationship with the art market and her invisibility in Brazil's art world, "serves as proof of the radicalness of her experimentation."

Solange Pessoa is an erudite person. Since an early age her learning inclinations were critical and independent. Her approximation to culture: art, cinema³, literature, poetry⁴, social sciences, etc., has been a pursuit for freedom, a form of resistance, and a counterbalance to oppression. It is not surprising then that she always admired, plural, transgressive and free artists such as turn of the eighteenth century Aleijadinho (Antônio Francisco Lisboa) - she learned about his work at the age of nine- a mestizo of Portuguese and African descent, who was an idiosyncratic carver and architect of Ouro Preto; and is seen today as one of the most important Baroque artists of his time.

She has been interested in counter culture since very young when at the age of six she learned about Tropicalia, an anti traditionalist cultural movement influenced by Antropofagia in the late 1960s in Brazil, involving music, theatre and literature, which conflated the popular and the pop. Even though Pessoa's work is not overly political, she was interested in how Tropicalia was counter to the conservative and oppressive political dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985). She was also close to rock and roll and at the age of fourteen, in 1975 she produced a series of drawings of singers such as Mick Jagger, John Lennon and Paul MacCarthy. She learned about Lygia Clark and Helio Oiticica in the context of Tropicalia's Counter culture, and in 1993 co-curated the first Lygia Clark exhibition after her death. Antropofagia, the Baroque, Tropicalia, Land Art, Arte Povera, Popular Culture, Indigenous and Black culture, have all been important dialogical references in Pessoa's work.

The artist has been close to the art of female artists Tarsila do Amaral, Maria Martins -for their telluric relationship with the landscape, as well as for the enigmatic and



fantastical nature of their work- and Lygia Clark, as well as the ceramicists of the Vale do Jequitinhonha in Minas Gerais such as Noemisa Batista dos Santos and Maria Lira. Many more women artists⁵ have become references over the years, not necessary as influences, but as affinities discovered with works that she has realized. Key male artists for Pessoa have been: Aleijadinho, Mestre Valentim (Valentim da Fonseca e Silva, 1945-1813), Tunga –for his baroque exuberance, organicity, eroticism- Roberto Burle Marx, Celso Renato de Lima –for his references to African and indigenous culture-, Arthur Barrio –for the ephemeral and statological nature of his work-, and Joseph Beuys –for his incorporation of live animals, philosophy, and multidisciplinary⁶. The importance of mentioning these extensive and disparate references is to understand the broad cultural universe the artist has nurtured and how they may illuminate her work. A meaningful metaphor may be Antropofagia itself, as her work stands alone in its underivative and powerful singularity.

All of Solange Pessoa's work encompasses an intersectional situation with the landscape –the Minas Gerais landscape specifically- and the body. Nevertheless this relationship is indefinable and elusive. To understand it, the notion of 'estrangement' may be illuminating. This historical concept conceived by the Surrealists and articulated by André Breton in 1935⁷ introduces the marvelous in the common world, so the familiar is rendered strange. This defamiliarization is described by Frederic Jameson as "a way of restoring conscious experience, of breaking through deadening and mechanical habits of conduct, and allowing us to be reborn to the world in its existential freshness and horror."⁸ Pessoa not only introduces unexpected and out of place objects and situations in the landscape for example, but common elements in known situations to expand their familiarity to the realm of the extraordinary and strange. Central to this idea of estrangement is the artist's transmutation of key organic matter and bodily fluids such as blood and human hair, into profound meditations about the cycles of life in its endless flow of life and death. Pessoa calls attention to the imperceptible, highlighting simple elements such as feathers, stones, dead branches, moss and leaves in the landscape, as well as abject organic matter such as leather and bones. Whereas feathers may convey ascent and the ritualistic, human hair underlines something scatological and dark, nevertheless ultimately both are integral elements of a totality each containing the other.

1990s: Existential drive / Organic Matter

Between 1989 and 1998 Solange Pessoa was a member of the Group Galpão Embra,

a collective atelier in an old industrial warehouse, which functioned as an alternative space to organize exhibitions, conferences and events. In the nineties she co-curated several important exhibitions at the Galpão together with fellow artists. Importantly, in 1993, six years after the death of Lygia Clark, Solange Pessoa together with Júnia Penna and Ricardo Homen, curated the first Clark exhibition at the Museu de Arte de Belo Horizonte. The artist had access to Clark's personal diaries which she studied carefully. Clark's work and ideas became an influential reference in her work. For the exhibition catalogue, Pessoa collected a series of quotes by the artist which illustrate Pessoa's own interests and inclinations. Of great relevance for thinking about the artist's work is the following quote by Lygia Clark as it highlights Pessoa's own interest in the organic and bodily: 'Só sei que é a minha maneira de me amarrar ao mundo, se fecundada e ovular (...) é uma experiência tão biológica, celular, que só é comunicável também de uma maneira celular e orgânica. (...) e é uma comunicação extremamente intimista. De poro a poro, de pele a pele, de sour a sour'⁹.

In the 1990s Solange Pessoa participated in several seminal exhibitions in Belo Horizonte and two of the artist's most important exhibitions took place at the Palácio das Artes in Belo Horizonte - *Construção Selvagem*, 1990 and the solo show *Solange Pessoa*, 1995. The inception of many of her unique aesthetic and conceptual preoccupations is found in the works produced and exhibited during this period.

The exhibition *Construção Selvagem*, (Wild Construction), at the Grande Galeria do Palácio das Artes in the Fall of 1990, was curated by a group of artists, including Solange Pessoa¹¹, and conceived under the influence of texts by Hélio Oiticica published in the book *Aspiro ao grande labirinto* published in 1986¹²; *Magiciens de la Terre*, Paris, 1989 and the publication *Arte Povera*, 1967 by Germano Celant. This exhibition and many later works by Pessoa were influenced by *Antropofagia*, a cultural movement in Brazil in the 1920s, which was immortalized by Oswald de Andrade's *Antropofágic Manifesto*, 1928, and by Tarsila do Amaral's paintings such as *Abaporu* of 1928. This movement proposes to cannibalize and re-appropriate other cultures such as the European, while embracing the country's indigenous culture, to produce a new Modern Brazilian culture which was anti-colonial and primitivist. *Antropofagia's* anti colonialist stance is played in contrast between the celebration of a cannibal, savage Brazil against the colonizing Portuguese and European cultures. Pessoa learned about *Antropofagia* when she was 15 years old and was impressed by its savage and frightening implications. The artist considers *Antropofagia*, the Baroque and Surrealism as related because they are not fixed, instead they are metamorphic and resistant to temporality. Furthermore, Pessoa considers *Antropofagia* as a concept that is constantly renewing, and because of this is contemporary, and no longer modern. She describes an anthropofagist as a 'devourer of the old'¹³ and the title and concept of the show *Construção Selvagem*, conceived conceptually by Solange Pessoa and Cristiano Rennó, refers directly to *Antropofagia*, and is also as derision to the 1980s "*Figuração Selvagem*" (Savage figuration) current at the time. The artist exhibited two pieces at this exhibition. *Untitled*, 1990, is the first form of one of Pessoa's most important works, *Catedral* (Cathedral) which she continued to develop until 2015. This piece is made with leather, hair and fabric, configured in a vertical composition of 3.20 meters, that the artist related to Oscar Niemeyer's *Catedral* in Brasília. The building displays concave columns arranged in a circular structure. Pessoa's sculpture may be thought as referring to those columns, bringing together in its verticality both a relation to elevation, perhaps spirituality, while simultaneously, embodying the scatological and dark in the human hair and the leather. This duality permeates all of Solange's work. It is easy to perceive her work as simply dark, because her materials are often powerfully abject; nevertheless her works

seldom only embodies something dark or deadly. When analyzed, Pessoa's work embeds in the very materials -no matter how abject- and their conjugation, the possibility of light and life.

It is also important to stress the processual nature of Pessoa's work given the long period of gestation and production of singular works such as Cathedral, (1990-2015) or Lesmalongas, (1998-2002) produced over four years in five stages, or the series made with human hair and feathers the artist started to produce in the early 1990s and still continues to develop today. Pessoa's inception of her use of hair stems from childhood, as her mother kept hers, as well as her brothers and sisters infancy hair, and also from the stories of fear Pessoa's mother felt, from her seeing saints with human hair in Mariana, Minas Gerais, that seemed to come to life because of their hair. The heads of saints in the churches of Minas Gerais are often covered in human hair, which is promised by the faithful, a tradition was been inherited from Portugal and Spain going back long before the Baroque. Pessoa saw these saints for the first time as a teenager. In 1987, at the Sao Paulo Bienale the artist saw Tunga's copper hair piece, which gave Solange the courage to explore hair in her work, something she had been wanting to do for some time. Hair in Brazil has also a strong connection with dark magic as it is used for witchcraft.

Human hair is a material that the artist strongly relates in personal ways. It connects in dark ways to something spectral as well as profoundly human. It is the matter or nightmares as well as nature itself; is magical as well as eschatological; is intimate and personal, as well as collective; is specific as well as undetermined, Hair is the very real organic matter which may be at once abject and divine, fetishistic and common. Cathedral, as well as the Minas Gerais saints, embody a phantasmagorical spirit, of medieval hope and renunciation, of something spiritual and yet superstitious. Hair embodies in powerful ways the intelligible. Cathedral as it stands today, it measures monumentally, 8 mts height, 100 mts in length, and 1mts and six cms of width, and it may unravel in space invading it with its organicity, darkness and intensity. This cathedral embodies the spiritual, embracing the dark and uncontrollable, and yet trusting that it may encompass light too. In its title, Cathedral, and the very nature of this work, is highlighted Pessoa's penetrating capacity to materialize the strange, to embody the metaphysical in baseness, making it sublime.

Since the 1990s Pessoa has produced sculptures with feathers. Her first feather piece was made in 1990 and installed at the Galpão Embra for a long time until it was exhibited together with a second feather piece and an early totemic sculpture at the 22 Salão de Arte de Belo Horizonte at the Museu da Pampulha in 1990. This feather piece won the Prêmio "Museu de Arte" and is now in their collection. This work measures approximately 2.20cm x 600cm x 200cm, an ambitious size for experimenting for the first time with a new material. In this occasion she recycled a dress and glued feathers to it. Pessoa has always been interested in mestizaje, Indigenous and Black cultures, and it may seem that the feather series encompasses important references to Indigenous art of featherwork. In her library we find literature on the subject which is today an important reference for the artist though they were published many years after her first feather work. The artist was aware of the symbology of her materials, although she was not focused on them. Even if she was very interested in Indigenous culture, -which was not in fashion at the time - she does not consider that the indigenous was a conscious direct reference. Pessoa admired profoundly Renato Celso, an artist from Belo Horizonte whose painting encompassed indigenous characteristics and in this he was a standalone figure at the time. Pessoa acknowledges that her works at the time were strange in that they seem to carry open references to Indigenous culture, nevertheless her chief interest in feathers was an intuitive one, what she describes as 'intuitive darkness', for the material itself,

which was not the result of a rational conceptual or aesthetic analysis of the material or decision process, as this may have led her to self censorship. Only after the works were produced, over time, the symbology became evident.

The same as with the hair works, the inception of the feather pieces comes from a darker metaphysical lieu. It calls our attention that the artist exhibited the feather works together with her early metamorphic totemic sculptures, made with papier maché, which the artist had started in 1988. These presented corrugated surfaces and were colored with the dark tone of pó-xanez a mineral dye. These may be described as a crossing between a geological formation and a totemic structure. In many ways the feather pieces and the totemic sculptures share a primordial baseness and vitality.

There are many possible meanings associated with feathers: Christian association with virtues and angels as messengers of god; the idea of ascension and flight; migration and travel; freedom; communication with spirits for Native Americans; spiritual evolution to a higher plane; finally to the attributes of birds themselves. We may associate one or several of these meanings to Pessoa's use of feathers, nevertheless, these were not intentionally, at least not at the beginning, inscribed into the work. Importantly, the use of the feathers, as with the human hair, is close to the idea of Antropofagia. The artist mostly used the feathers of chicken and hen consumed at her family's farm. Pessoa explains that she always felt something anthropofagic in this as the feathers belong to animals that had been eaten. These feathers are in fact symbolizing the very cycle of death and life, and in their connotation of ascension and spirituality there is the baseness of their commonsensical origin.

In 1994, Solange Pessoa co-curated and participated in the exhibition *Chão e Parede* (Floor and Wall) at Galpão Embra. For the occasion a catalogue was published and a conference with three important critics -Lorenzo Mammi, Paulo Herkenhoff and Sônia Saltztein- organized. Pessoa exhibited the installation titled *Chão e Parede and Inferno*, 1994-1995. The installation possesses a certain Arte Povera sensibility, nevertheless, the artist has described how during this time she was pursuing a "sensorial intensity and certain amorphous fluidity".

Chão e Parede, with an Arte Povera sensibility, occupied an area of 60 square meters and free floated in space. Soil, dust, grease was spread around it, as well as bones, rags and sacks were scattered on the floor. A 'wall' of earth color canvas sacks that had been sewn together to create large pockets, contained diverse objects and matter that the public could take home: earth, minerals, bones, coal, flowers, roots, leather, human hair, grafite, pigments, dust, seed, feathers, stones, photographs, and texts. It's important to learn that in the pocket there were poetry, modern and contemporary, emblematic images of counter culture, photographs of Brazilian Cinema Novo, vinyl covers, poet's portraits. She considers this work as a large archive, open and endless. Since the time she made this piece, she thought that she could re-make it and she is considering producing it again. She explains that Antropofagia was powerfully present in the archive of the installation. She included Oswaldo de Andrade Manifesto Antropofágico, and the great pre-modern epic poem "O Guesa Errante" by Joaquim de Souza Andrade which combined several languages such as tupi-guarani, English, Portuguese, Spanish, Esperanto, and others. This work may be seen as a embodying a sort of unconventional encyclopedic nature, reuniting both culture -many of the cultural referents highlighted at the beginning of this text- and nature, decay and potentiality.

For her solo exhibition at the Palácio das Artes in Belo Horizonte in the Fall of 1995 she exhibited four installations in a 550 square meters space. The general aesthetic of

the exhibition was distinctly precarious. *Untitled*, 1995, was an installation made with fabric covered with mineral pigments floating luminous and airy in space. This piece contrasted with the darker nature of the other three installations: *Couros*, (Leathers) 1993, a large wall installation was made with fabric which on one side was treated with clay thinned with water, dried and then covered in burned car oil. The other side of the fabric was covered in animal blood. The rugged surface which was shaped by sewing pieces of fabric, resembled an amorphous dissected ancient creature; *Inferno*, 1994-1995, a floor installation made with fabric, leather, blood, hair, foam, dust, animal grease and earth, which formed an irregular, ruined, apocalyptic topology. Its full title was "*Inferno em Belo Horizonte*" referring to Souza Andrade's "*inferno de Wall Street*" an epic poem of 350 pages written in the 1870s by the Brazilian poet that portrayed a nightmarish vision of American Capitalism.

Jardim (Garden), 1993-1995 was a complex 50 square meters installation made with moss, roots, leaves, cotton, eggs, earth, tadpoles, fish, bovine eyes, meat, plastic and fabric, water, burned car oil, chemical formulas (such as the artist's own medicated skin cream), formaldehyde, wax and seeds –which sprouted into plants.

The production of works with blood such as *Jardim*, 1993-95 and *Inferno*, 1994, are the result of investigation, an intimate as well as expansive thought process over an extended period of time. The use of leather, hair, bones, and feathers, all organic, symbolically animated materials, expanded naturally into the use of blood, and eventually meat, bovine eyes, and decomposition of organic matter in *Jardim*. In her personal diaries of the 1990s, Pessoa meditates frequently about blood and the abject. Reflections on her own menstrual blood, become the gateway for exploring her body and connecting it with the outside world. It is a catalyst for creation, the fluid as the source of a bodily imaginary in sculpture and in space. The impulse for using blood and organs, on the one hand was powerful, fascinating, pleasurable, life affirming; and on the other she experienced a sense of rejection, discomfort, sadness and certain torment.

Experiments with menstrual blood are also found in her diaries, as in the case when the artist unfolded and glued sort of extended Rorschach blood stain on toilet paper onto pages. For Pessoa, blood is overflowing with unfiltered energy. In the 1990s Pessoa stored sperm and urine to make a work that was never realized, two fluids which are also base and vital.

The ambitious installative works with blood and live matter that ensued, required courage and persistence on the side of the artist. She had to do research on preservation of organs such as the bovine eyes, on how to maintain and highlight the bright red tonality of blood, and also to find liters of blood and the organs themselves in abattoirs. As mentioned earlier in the text, Solange's work is transversed by both the body and the landscape. In no work more than in *Jardim* this is palpable. The fluids and organic matter such as blood, meat and bovine eyes stand for the body; while the installation in the form of a garden with sprouting plants, seed, moss, roots, leaves, earth, and pools of water with tadpoles stands for the landscape. The eyes were sewn together by the artist with pieces of meat. It is crucial to point that Pessoa of all the bodily parts available to her, she chose the eyes. Although this choice may be intuitive or instinctive, the eyes have a powerful conceptual and symbolic meaning. In this particular case, the eyes represent vision, light, the gaze, the animation of the soul or the spirit, and a sort of the inner eye materialized in a visceral way into the world from the very interstices of death. Even if the eyes in plastic bags swimming in formaldehyde are to certain extent repulsive and abject, they relate about the cycles of life, and as such they are a confirmation of it and not of death. They stand for metamorphosis, for the confluence

of nature in both the human and the animal, and ultimately they are about the power of imagination and healing in art. The artist capability and courage to deal with darkness and invest it in a transformative and ultimately affirmative force, is at the very center of her undeniable relevance as artist.

It is nevertheless this very installation is the most misunderstood work by the artist as it became the center of a public scandal. Walter Sebastião an art critic writing for the newspaper Estado de Minas published a positive article on October 10th 1995 just as the show was opening. He explained that seldom before an artist deserved to exhibit at the Gran Galeria do Palácio das Artes more than Solange Pessoa, and affirmed that her work was the most radical produced in the visual arts in Minas Gerais, and to great extent of Brazil. He writes: “Em cena está o corte poético-conceitual que fez da linguagem tridimensional um lugar dos mais expressivos da arte da segunda metade do século XX.(...) Observar estas peças é adentrar em um mundo de sonhos dilacerados, de jardins selvagens, aeroplanos imaginarios e paisajes vertiginosos, cujo mote é a turbulência insurgente e alegórica das imagines.”

An anonymous letter published on April 21st in the same newspaper describes Pessoa's exhibition as absurd, questioned its validity in a public gallery, and complained of bad odor, decaying matter, detritus, and lack of care in how the artist arranged the installation, in particular the bovine eyes. Pessoa was interviewed and explained that “The meat is decomposing while the seeds are sprouting, I'm talking about the inevitable cycle of life. (...) These are strong works, but they were not made to scandalize.” She also had to explain that she had not killed the animals to display the bovine eyes.

The public may have forgotten that in 1970 at the same Pálacio das Artes, Fedrico Moraes curated the legendary exhibition “Do corpo à terra” where Artur Barrio presented Situações with bloodied clothes, and rotting bones and meat; and Cildo Meireles burned live chickens, “Tiradentes: Totem Monumento ao Preso Político.”

Some critics such as Maria Angelica Melendi and Marília Andrés Ribeiro came to the artist defense but many artists did not take her side. The debate drew a huge crowd and the book of visitors showed a divided public There are several reasons for describing this exhibition's reception. Firstly it evidences how conservative and peripheral Belo Horizonte was in relation to other art centers in Brazil such as Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Secondly it explains how this experience shaped a more reticent and withdrawn Solange Pessoa, and ultimately it marked a sort of beginning of a certain invisibility for the artist in the art milieu, despite of her being relentless in her intensity of art production, and participating in many important art exhibitions. The very moment when Pessoa was showing her most ambitious work to date, the art world closed its doors to its radicality, expansiveness and unconventional nature; while the book of visitors registered that 10.656 persons came to view the show, an absolute record at the time in Belo Horizonte. In retrospect, it is perhaps Agnaldo who has understood best Pessoa's work and in 2012 acknowledges the relevance of the artist's use of organic matter, and places her work in a larger context: “Solange Pessoa's surprising trajectory has been addressing this issue; from the beginning, her work deals with life, makes use of organic material, remains, rejects and waste that she, like Kounellis, Joseph Beuys and, here in Brazil, Arthut Barrio, Karin Lambrecht, José Resende, Tunga and Nelson Felix, perceive as living substance. Indeed, from the artist's work one draws the conclusion that nothing is dead, everything is related to a never-ending process”.

In 1996 Pessoa earned a Pollock-Krasner grant which gave her the opportunity to produce the bronze sculptures she wanted to make for a long time. Bronze would allow her, -in the artist words-, to “solidify the fluids.²⁴” An important work produced at this time was the installation Fonte, 1997, which continued her exploration started with Jardim and is also connected with her interest in stone holy water fonts in Minas Gerais

Baroque churches. The structure of the font, a floor piece, measuring more than a meter of diameter is organic and amorphous, resembling a rock with crevices, irregularities and orifices that contain water. The patina of the sculpture is mossy green, so that if placed in a natural environment, it would metamorphose with the landscape. One of the larger holes holds small circular organic shapes, resembling seeds. There is a close relation between the bag with bovine eyes in Jardim and the informity of the font with its pods. Water here, a leit motif in Pessoa's work, constitutes an element of purification, of cleanliness, a sort of sublimation of the viscosity of Jardim. Even though Fonte does not have the abject nature of Jardim, the artist maintained in its informity, a deep rooted baseness, though instead of related closely with the body as in Jardim, it relates more to nature –water and stone- while both are associated to the landscape.

Lesmalongas

Much of Pessoa's work explores existential themes; fundamental questions about life, spirit and matter. The series Lesmalongas - Destêrros 1998-2002 is one of Solange's most important works that illustrates this point in the way that in integrating body and landscape, explores in visceral ways the cycle of life and death.

The series Lesmalongas is structured in five situations which took place at different times at the family farm but for Situation No. 5. The title is a play of words, lesmas: moles (slugs) and longas: rastejantes (creeping/ crawling soft and long). The artist describes these five works as dealing with "birth, with being born; a sort of birth and death. Torture, sufferance and prison".

The five situations are site specific and several of them involve the human body, and in this they are performative, installative, and situational. The central element in the actions are organic flexible sculptures made with plastic and lard mixed with earth, which have a skin color and quality. For the artist these shapes are a sort of snake and umbilical cord. These expand from a small amorphous mound on the ground to monumentally expanded shapes which resemble giant octopus integrating the body. The artist describes them as "elongated things which are born of the cavities in the earth, and that crawl on the ground." It is important to understand how the artist develops in the five situations a never ending cycle encompassing a sort of prehuman state to the integration and destruction of the human. The sculptures and their situational nature, may be thought as the staging of performances, or ephemeral actions, though the artist describes them as live sculptures. Pessoa's work is born out of a complex interplay of unconscious impulses, an aesthetic will and a profound integrated knowledge about art and culture. Each work is a repository of a manifold array of layered tensions. It is fit to think aspects of her work in relation to the term 'pulsion', a deep psychic energy or unconscious drive which underlies all of her work.

In psychoanalysis (Freud and Lacan) the death drive –Thanatos- is one of the most powerful of human drives, standing in opposition to the life force or Eros, which is also a creative drive. Much of Solange's early work may seem mainly dark and eschatological, nevertheless its pulsion encompasses a dialectical interplay between both death and life impulses, between Eros and Thanatos. This is also one of the central reasons why the artist identifies herself so deeply with the concept of Antropofagia. On the one hand it embodies a counter culture movement which was profoundly rooted in Brazil's own cultural roots, embracing the 'primitive' and popular, but also because of its core premise being the symbolic act of cannibalism, from which stems something new. In Lesmalongas, Situation 1, 1998, the elongated snake life forms are born out of caves and the earth and drag in the soil, in Situation 2, 1999, the forms claim in trees and metamorphose continuously in space as they shrink and re-expand while traveling in the landscape. In Situation 3, 1999-2000, the elongated forms appear dragging, enveloping, devouring and ultimately fusing with the human body in an earthy dry landscape. In

Situation 4, 2001-2002, the organic shape returns to its original form, re expands, this time in a grassy environment and again it devours a human head and ultimately the full body to metamorphose again. In Situation 5, 2002, and the final, the shape reappears in an urban environment, -a room-, now captive and interconnected with culture. Here one more time the shape drags and devour a human body which appears wrapped and shapeless on a piece of furniture. For this last action, the bodies lay for four hours interlocked with the forms. Furthermore, to increase a sense of despair and discomfort, the artist introduced noises and cries of pigs. The artist has explained that she wanted to exacerbate the animality of the Lesmalongas, as well as creating an atmosphere of exile and disturbance. Situation 5 is different from the others, in that while maintaining the theme of the cycle of metamorphosis to an original state, it introduces the complexity of urban culture, highlighting the sense of 'estrangement' mentioned earlier. Antropofagia is an intrinsic quality of Lesmalongas as it is through the act of devouring where the eternal cycle of life and death is enacted. For these actions Pessoa collaborated with three dancers and with his nephew Bernardo who appears in all the Situations. An autobiographical event may also inform this work. One of Pessoa's sisters had problems giving birth, as her son was born with the umbilical cord coiled around his neck and nearly died. This caused a huge impact in Solange who thinks that unconsciously this event may be an impulse behind this work. Also Pessoa's mother had kept her umbilical cord which was eventually buried in the grandmother's garden. The Lesmalongas may be thought in this light as figuration of the primordial umbilical cord. Furthermore, this live sculptures may be seen as a combination of something unimaginable, as well as a sort of ancient unconscious memory, predating human life. The iconography that Pessoa creates is powerful and eschatological, both animalesque and human, belonging and alien.

Landscape

Pessoa installs large green stones and boulders in the Pampulha Museum garden designed by Roberto Burle Marx and arranges them in a intuitive way in space, restoring both the imaginary memory of an ancient landscape, while at the same time staging an installative situation which is highly sophisticated. These stones, are not stones after all but bronze sculptures with a green patina which converse both about the passing of time, and the coexistence with the surrounding. Often public sculptures impose themselves in public spaces and parks, in stark contradistinction with the natural and urban landscape. Solange articulates form, content and context in subtle ways, with shapes that are familiar and subtle, that upon discovering them, they expand out notion of its familiarity into al realm of the strange. This strangeness is connected to something fundamental, both reaching out to the ancient and unconscious, to a sense of origin and wonder. These sophisticated and ambitious sculptures, large, immensely heavy, treated with a special patina, are in their unassuming way monumental, powerful, and true vessels creating a complex dialogue between the modernist museum designed by Oscar Niemeyer, and the garden designed by Roberto Burle Marx. The relationship between landscape and the sacred is perhaps felt the most in her permanent sculpture installation at the XVIIIth Century Capela de Nosso Senhor do Nobfim in Santa Barbara, Minas Gerais. On the loan surrounding the chapel, Pessoa has scattered bronze sculptures with organic shapes, which function as sort of stones in the landscapes. These sculptures as well as the sculptures in the garden of the Museu de Pampulha, have a green patina and rounded irregular shapes and they sit in the grass both as innate to the landscape, while simultaneously being estranged from it.

Pessoa has explained her passion for the spiritual and peaceful architectonic spaces of Baroque churches, and also her love for gardens, particularly when integrated to old architecture. A good example of the fusion of these two components is her installation

at Jardim Casa do Pilar, Anexo 3 Museum da Inconfidência in Ouro Preto, of sixty organic terracota sculptures and concave pieces containing water. Pessoa learned to make ceramic sculpture in Inhaúma, a city 94 km outside Belo Horizonte with D. Lourdes, at the end of the nineties. She used the technique of the “Rolinho,” used by indigenous people all over the Brazilian territory, and worked in the open air under the trees. The terracotta pieces were scattered in the loan, and along the stone walls she installed vertical sculptures, some of them containing live native plants. Pessoa's interest in the eternal cycle of life is present in her garden, also touches on the issue of multiple temporalities coexisting between the ephemerality and renewing biological potential of plants versus the historical building. The artist in effect built an environment which functions as a gestating ruin within the landscape. This aspect is also related to the artist's interest research in geology, topology and archeology, and particularly with ruins in landscape, as explored in her work *Alhures*, started in 2000 with the preparatory drawings and the models destroyed in 2010. This work was conceived for a park or farm and it was conceived by the construction of several geometric cement structures in the form of tanks filled with water and plants, frogs and tadpoles, and rooms in the open air, spaces for research, reflection and silence. This project which was never realized and would have covered a construction area of 568 square meters.

In Fazenda Indaia in Minas Gerais, ceramic sculptures are integrated as a sort of protuberance on the palm trees, half way between fruit, bird nest, geological formation, as if an element of the tectonic landscape has been brought to coexist on the palm stem, both speaking of the potentiality of earth in its infinite fertility and bearer of life, and also lifting the mud/earth to experiencing the weightlessness and power of air and sun when embodied by the vertical impulse of the palm tree. These pieces embody a sort of cycle of life when incorporated to the palm tree, they manifest the coexistence of nature in its various cycles, while also incorporating the coexistence of vital impulses of natural life and human creativity. Often single works are conceived as integrations in nature, even when the landscape is not physically present, in the way that bronze, stone or ceramic, is accompanied by natural elements such as dry leaves, moss, grass, or it embodies the green colors of the natural environment. Works such as *Bronze and Moss*, 2008, bring together these materials, to stand for stone and landscape, or *Metaflor*, 2005, a bronze stone with a green patina is suspended on the wall on a bed of large leaves which slowly decays and disintegrate. For example, bronze sculptures integrated to a tree in *Sítio Águas Claras – Nova Lima* in Minas Gerais, with its green patina and its organic and irregular forms which capture water, also converse with the cycle of nature and the essential role that water has in nature, and it merges with the landscape. Pessoa has always been interested in the Baroque fountains in the many churches that we encounter in the State of Minas Gerais, which are carved in stone and are often ornate with volutes and elaborate vegetable motifs. Pieces such as this is in direct dialogue with both the visual richness of the Minas Gerais landscape and the Baroque tradition, infusing these fountains with both the natural and the sacred.

The soapstones sculpture series (*pedra sabão*) are also related to the landscape, but of different nature, ancient and primitive, light in spirit. The spiral shapes carved in these stone sculptures are not simply abstract motifs, but they offer multiple associations. Importantly they relate to spiral and snake symbols found in rupestrian art in areas such as Minas Gerais, Bahia, Santa Catarina, Pernambuco, Paraíba, Rio grande do Sul, Piauí, which is a symbol of creation, of the universe, and of the eternal return. Furthermore, they may also recall spiral galaxies, shells, petroglyphs of Native americans, Celtic, Ancient Americas, Maori. In the artist's notebook we find spiral galaxies and other research materials such as Robert Smithson's work and Northumbeland Bronze age rock carvings.

The soapstones are installative in nature, embodying the very landscape where they have been carved. These works are produced in Mata dos Palmitos, a sub district of Ouro Preto, a small village with a soapstone carving tradition. Solange had been thinking of carving the soapstones sculptures for decades, and finally became close friend with the head of the village Dionísia José Gomes and periodically spends time with her. She takes models of the sculptures made in clay and the men in the village carve them. It is important to understand that Pessoa's work is not formalist, she started working with soap stones at the age of fifty, with great material maturity. She considers these stones both poor and noble at the same time, and they have the metamorphic, organic quality of much of her work, simultaneously anthropological, metaphysical and down to earth.

Drawings

Pessoa's drawing practice is important, broad and diverse. Regretfully, her drawing from the 1990s related to the body, hair, and the organic, were lost in a fire at the Galpao Lembra so it is not possible to connect her earlier drawings with her more recent production. The materiality of her drawings is very important and specific. Sometimes the drawings function as paintings. Some drawings are more lyrical, and others are more mental –particularly studies for projects-. Drawings allow the artist to think about sculpture, to process it, though they are not sketches, but a parallel language. Drawing is a fast, independent, liberating exercise, which does not require a long process compared to the consuming works with feathers, leather, hair, carved soap stones; or video and film that require a large production, a team of people, and are complex and expensive to make. It's an inexpensive and simple art practice which is complementary to her other works. Pessoa works in groups of drawings with an iconography of vegetation, animals, insects and primitive abstracted forms. This vocabulary, according to the artist should not be seen as themes, but as ideas and images. For example, insects emerge from her mind, and are not necessarily entomologically corrects. When seen in groups, the drawings have an accumulative, quasi obsessive quality that she desires to explore further by creating large mural drawing installations; all enveloping environments covered floor to ceiling, to create a strong relationship with both the architecture and the body of the spectator. In the iconography of Solange Pessoa's drawings and paintings permeate many cultural referents. There is a radical lack of prejudice in the way the artist combines high art and popular culture. As discussed earlier in the text, more than direct influences, it is the case of shared sensibilities and aesthetics, of parallels, as these happen in art and culture throughout history and across continents. Key references in her paintings and drawings are Noemisa Batista dos Santos' delicate and ornamental iconographies and arrangements of birds, floral and vegetal motifs; or the schematic designs of birds made with natural pigments by Maria Lira.

As with the rest of her work, her drawings also explore conceptions of body and landscape, and as drawings are free and direct, they tend to be experimental though in specific ways.

Pessoa has produced a series of erotic drawings, which highlight the vital force related to sexuality. In this drawing the concentric energy is manifest on the black circle in the center of the drawing where the feminine and the masculine join, as well in the blackness of the testicles. These series of erotic drawings made with pastel on cardboard have a ritualistic quality, which may be described as the subtle nature of the erotic; which the artist describes as a sense of magic and desire. A corporeal, sensual quality has always been present in Pessoa's work. She explains that as her art is organic, it is natural that the work be also sensual and instinctive, and on this she affirms that "She likes lack of shame (modesty?), the lack of limits that art has, and of its perturbing power.²⁸" Also related to sexuality, are her series of drawings TPM, 2009 (PMS) which are made with

red pigment on paper, representing the fallopian tubes. As these drawing deal with pre menstrual tension, they are bodily both in their non narrative figuration, but in the way they were made, gesturally directly with her hands. Some of her drawings are intimate, raw, perhaps even private, exploring an iconography of sexual beings, phallic, sometimes androgenous, half female, half male.

Solange learned the recipe for jenipapo from Maria Flor, in 2013 an indigenous student of pedagogy at the Federal University of Minas Gerais. At first she used it pure, then started adding linseed oil which produces a yellow halo around the motif that has been painted. The artist is interested in the mutation of materials, as is the case of the oxidation of the white area surrounding the vegetation motifs, anthropomorphic symbols, fish, frogs, animals, etc., painted with jenipapo, creating a yellow halo; a fluid intermediate states, a sort of liminal residual space. The artist has neither control over this process nor over the level of oxidization over time and she likes this aspect of the production. This yellowy white area produced by the linseed seen in a backlight, looks like urine, and this inadvertent scatological tension in the drawing is of great interest to the artist, bringing her association with fluids and the body into the fore.

The vegetable, animal and anthropomorphic motifs are all elements of a landscape, and when they populate the walls in a grid such as in *Planta Series*, 2005, made with oil on fabric, they not only dissolve the rationality of the grid, but they make the space organic and enveloping, they create a rhythm which is sort of hypnotic, in the way that nature may take over and manifest itself, and in the way imagination may envision nature. The larger drawings, as well as the small vegetation and animal motifs present a special rhythm in their graphic nature which is synthetic, both in realistic and imaginary ways.

Clay drawings are made with red earth mixed with water. In order to produce the large earth drawing, the artist has to be in the right state of mind and feel physically strong. These are obsessive, visceral drawings that she produces by entering inside the drawings wearing a bikini and white socks, and uses a brush, her hands, and her whole body, to enact the gestural freedom needed to paint. These drawings have a performative quality, as they are corporeal and intense. In contrast, the black and white drawing are more rational and controlled, more mental, and is not possible for the artist to make mistakes.

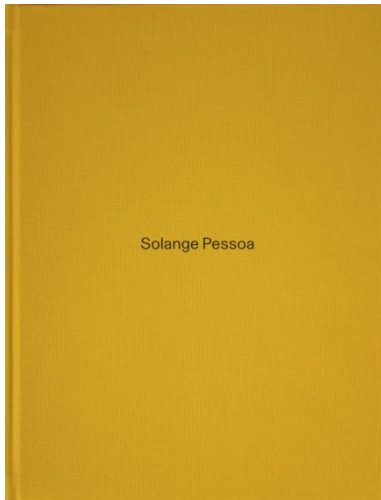
Integration

As Solange Pessoa's work has matured over the years, the intersectional character of her work involving body/nature; culture/landscape has continued to expand and integrate further. The video *Cornelius*, 2002-2011 stems from a dream the artist had of the apparition of a figure covered in hair in the churchyard of Congonhas do Campo. For this video, the artist produced a sort of wearable human hair pouch to cover the body, which stands, sits and slowly moves in powerful tension and contrast with the twelve stones Prophets carved by Aleijadinho, the Baroque architecture of the church, and the landscape. The figure is phantasmagorical and medieval connecting the spiritual, the unconscious, the past and the present, nature and culture. Relating with the primordial and scatological nature of *Lesmalongas* and the hair works, is the video *Meninos-Capuzes, Date?* (Children-Hoods). In a surreal sight, children appear to being born in the landscape out of human hairsacks. They emerge from and at the same time are integrated into the landscape. Estrangement is the leit motif of this work, with its dream like quality as these live sculptures enact a ritual, of fusion and separation between human and nature. Pessoa wanted for many years to place human hair on the head of horses. For the artist the horse's mane is very close to human hair. In the video *Cavalos*, 2003, we see horses with their heads covered with the human hair sacks while they walk and

stand in the landscape. In this video intersect the human, the animal, and the landscape.

In recent exhibitions such as *Metaflor-Metaflora*, 2005-2012 shown during Art Basel Switzerland in 2012, we find a radical synthesis of Pessoa's meditations on landscape. Organic amorphous ceramic sculptures populate the space and the wall with subtlety. The range of colors is warm brown tones, including the light brown of feathers, hide, dry grass and leaves, and the orange and pink terracotta. Again the metaphor of the body is present, this time in the scattered organic fragments of skin color which remind us remotely of body parts, incipient life forms, and simultaneously of geological formations, of metamorphosis. In the bronze, feathers and human hair sculptures from 2017 we observe the extraordinary symbiosis between these three constitutive elements, the bronze is very dark and is mounted on the wall on a bed of dark human hair. The bronze which is hollow, a sort of vagina, is filled with a large feather pouch, these pouches are in different tonalities; some feathers are predominantly red, or gray, or black, and their surface is intricate and lush, reminding us of an ancient Amerindian woven feather cape. These sculptures are extraordinarily strange and mysterious; they are sensual and scatological, phallic and yet feminine. These are dark, existential works, nevertheless Eros is vital energy that embodies them.

Eros, is also the affirmative force in the monumental 7 mts high sculpture *Penas*, 2004 (*Feathers*) all made with poultry feathers. In the study for the installation we see clearly the phallic shape of this work, but strangely, this is a phallus to be penetrated, both feminine and masculine; a phallus and a vagina that the spectator is invited to enter. The artist describes the verticality of this work as ritualistic, projecting a cosmological spatiality. This is a work that alludes to a medieval spirit, it is a cathedral this time made with feathers, masculine in scale, feminine in its expansiveness, and proposing an ascension which is erotic and vital. It is the counterpart to the solemnity, spirituality and darkness of the other, the hair cathedral. The Dark and light, the scatological and the sublime, the ancient and the contemporary, the feminine and the masculine, are all conjugated and integrated here. It is the eternal cycle of life and death.



LM:

You were born and currently live in Minas Gerais in the center of Brazil. This mineral-rich area of the country became a hub for gold diggers in the 18th century, when it also developed its own style of Baroque architecture and design: barroco mineiro. How does this specific cultural and ecological context inform your work?

SP:

It informs my work in multiple ways. There are residues from a variety of geological, geographic, historical and cultural events and phenomena that translate a unique way of being in the world and its singularities. There have been seas, mega-faunas, Arcadias, and emeralds around here. It is a remarkable place. The experience of colonial and modern architecture is fundamental, as well as their constant presence in the coexistence with the space and the feeling of it. This robust and familiar architecture creates demands on visual thought. And the landscape and things that originate from them; all the mineral, fossil, maritime, and sculptural memories. The acute verticality of mountains and the reality of these volumes, the expanded fields and savannas, the abundant microcosms, the faraway archaeologies, claim complex materialities and spatialities, translating their perception into installations, sculptures, drawings, videos, etc.

The presence of high art and culture in the past centuries and the exuberance and affirmation of a modernity that was originated here, amongst other things, generate reflections on the 'contemporary' and the 'extemporary', and a better understanding of what it is to live and work outside major hubs and being connected to the issues of sensibility around contemporary visual thought, with an unsettled concentration.

LM:

Your sculptures and installations utilize mostly natural materials such as clay, soapstone, moss, feathers, leather, and horsehair. Even your bronze sculptures appear at first to be stones when stumbled upon in the landscape. Looking at your work, one might feel that you are returning materials to their most organic state. What is your relationship to the natural world as a person? How did you originally choose your materials? What do you think is the relationship between your sculptures and the natural world?

SP:

The materials exist in connection with thoughts and intuitions. They call us, and choose us, they attract our perception and curiosity, and they require research and clever observations on their un-transferable nature and mysteries. They belong to the world and ex-

ist to be explored. The proximity to nature, experiencing large spaces, a farm childhood, and the observation of hills and valleys interiorize and codify the spatial, conceptual, material and physical relations that the artworks present. The experience within the natural environment of gardens and the sculptures inserted in these spaces began to bring me affirmations, understandings and reflections. I like to observe the development of moss on stone; the transformation of patina on bronze; the interweaving of plants on ceramics. A number of my works are inserted in nature; they belong to nature, they rest in and co-inhabit these spaces. It is a sort of vital drive and a primary need to move away from walls, streets, and museums. Since Antiquity, sculpture has had close links to natural materials, either in terms of their lasting conditions, symbolic relations, continuities, and temporalities.

LM:

Your forms feel very much “of the earth” even while they are mostly abstract and may not exist in nature. How do you source the cave drawing-like forms for your two-dimensional works? What inspires or drives the forms of and in your sculpture?

SP:

Many of them come from the impact some images, visions, events, findings, poems, films, dreams and other foresights have on me. Something active, which transforms forces, and is in constant movement. Many works depart from very simple things that gradually become more complex; winding processes that solidify thoughts. My stuff is not tied to concepts, themes or ‘poetics’. They do not follow an agenda or goal, they are unpredictable and are subject to transformations. They also come from nothing, a void that must be potentiated, returned to the most essential and profound things. They happen, they gain body and autonomy, they require reflection and space. If there are overflows and delirium, there is also construction. They seek to express the perplexity of life, the unspeakable, the awe, the numbing. The sculptures and installations are live entities, they have their own light and shadows. Sometimes, they invoke telluric powers, comebacks, survivals.

The age and quantity of fossils often found in the Brazilian mega-fauna is impressive. I have always been very interested in archeology. It is believed that the oldest female skull in the Americas, Luzia's skull, was found at the beginning of the 1970s in the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte, in the Lapa Vermelha Cave, in the municipality of Pedro Leopoldo in the state of Minas Gerais. Fossils, archeological sites, cave paintings are all a constant. Perhaps the shadow-figures that appear in the drawings are part of this imaginary. The animals and plants, the powerful biodiversity of cerrado. The fascination of stones, the enigmatic and fantastic nature of the hinterlands of sertão.

LM:

For the spectator, your work gives off an aura of having appeared in our contemporary reality as an unexplained incursion from the ancient past, almost as if it always existed. Is your process as an artist key to understanding your work? Or do you feel that your work was somehow predetermined by nature or civilizations of a long-time passed—perhaps even before you as an artist encounter the material yourself?

SP:

I can see that in my work there is a sort of return to the amorphous, the gravity of oneiric material elements, a primitive imaginary nature, approaches do animism, cosmogonies, temporal textures and psychic energy links. It reveals dynamics of discontinued movements and unease. They come from metamorphosis, movements and re-flowing fluxes. I have no control over this dynamics and I admit I am fond of unknown regions and depths. Nothing is predetermined in relation to nature, past civilisations of

atemporal memories.

LM:

Can you walk us through how you made Cathedral, 1990-2003, which took over a decade to complete, and was originally displayed in the Bienal Mercosul in 2003? To make it, you wove together hundreds of miles of individual hair strands....

(Could be a separate question, or related to the Cathedral question:) How are the physically laborious, durational aspects of your process felt in the work? Is this durational process related at all to your past work in performance?

SP:

Catedral was one of these works that started in a simple way then became gradually more complex. I had no idea of what it was going to become. Originally it was a piece that was nicknamed trança (braid, in Portuguese), as a reference to Tunga, where I placed hair taken from myself, my siblings and close friends. Simultaneous to this work, I was working on another one that somehow recalled the structure of Brasília Cathedral, designed by Oscar Niemeyer, and its verticality that curved in contact with the floor, hence the name Cathedral. The structure was a sort of penetrable structure, where bodies could go in. In both pieces, the verticality was already very accentuated. The material, albeit weird, was natural. I never thought it was going to be something too absurd or transgressive. Here, there is a lot of human hair in saints and ex-votos (religious offerings). Building these structures was a natural process, even though the context was conservative and resistant to these experiences. When they were exhibited publicly, people told me they had dreamt about it, and things like that. The experience with psychoanalysis in the 1990s helped me understand pulsations and processes. The most difficult element for me was not the hair, but the horses. They were pulling everything in perpetual movement. These animals were hidden in the sculptures, the leather pieces, the framework, are things taken from riding harnesses. I introduced other materials related to hair, such as skin, blood, etc.; but before working with hair, I had worked with chicken and bird feathers, another epidermal material, in my first sculptures (1990). Some of these materials reappeared many years after that. At the end of the 1990s, there was an unexpected accident in the collective studio where I worked and stored my artworks. All my production from the 1990s was lost. They were already ephemeral. From then on, I started to think again and again about those sculptures and had the urge to rebuild them. Everything became maximised: verticality, matter, transcendence, scale. There was a large degree of uneasiness and a gush of facts and images that just flowed. The materialisation of these flows was not easy at all. It took me many years to be able to materialise these movements in drawings, videos and installations. There are many things around Cathedral: animals, magical apparitions, buried memories, temporalities. The 'live sculptures' recorded in video and attached to the installation (I like to call them that rather than 'performances') activate the imaginary by expanding it.

LM:

How do you see your work in relation to the inevitable and sometimes violent processes of nature and time? When, for you, is a given work of yours complete, (if ever)? Put another way: What time do you think your work most pertains to (past, present, future, and/or eternity?) For example, with the stone works that acquire their blue copper tone by mixing with time: Are they finished when you physically stop working on them, or when you place them in the land or exhibition space? Or are they completed some time after they are sited in the land and acquire their continually morphing hue? Is change and deterioration, the chemical and physical instability of the works, something you consider from the beginning?

SP:

I don't think about 'times' when I am creating the works. They belong to the present. They seem to update and redimension the past, they connect with the future. They reencounter eternity. The sculptures continue in time, which acts upon them. The stones are alive, they have existed for millennia, and they will continue to exist perhaps for many more... Since the beginning, I have been inclined to observe the action of time on things, on matter, either in my experience with ephemeral and non-artistic materials or with perennial, noble, and traditional materials. In some works, the material instability is clearer. I like things that happen and are transformed, over which I have no control. It is important to be open to transformation and unknown areas. I believe that most of my 1990s' production that is linked to experimental art movements from the 1960s and 1970s could not have been made at that time. They expand and unfold issues that were introduced.

LM:

Can you walk us through some of your past production in performance and video? When and why did you seemingly move away from these mediums and into the physicality of your materials?

SP:

For many different reasons, I ended up with a lot of material, archives, to be edited. The lack of multiple resources, difficulties working with other people in order to translate what you want, technological difficulties, not being able to navigate public grants and incentive laws, time, amongst other things, have made these projects difficult. I have lately been focusing on installations, drawings, and paintings, and other experiences that just happened. I still have videos and processes that I have to finish, feelings and cinematic desires that haunt me, projects and visual scripts to complete, archival material to work with, digitalising projects to finalise. The edition and organisation of all these records and videos have been challenging. I have only just digitalised *lesmaslongas*. I shelf ideas, I work on them bit by bit.

The video works – connected or not to the installations – happen spontaneously. They are more marginal within my production. I also don't have any 'commitments' to them. Many images-ideas became more complex and harder to fulfil, but they are on-going. I need more time to organise these thoughts and revisit this research. They are asleep. My drawing practice in the last few years (building images and visiting my imaginary) has comforted me. It's different to think of video or cinema as a support. Drawing – this powerful expressive tool – is more independent and able to handle the speed of image flows that sometimes emerge. It is closer to me. Shootings, productions, editions, no matter how alternative and independent they are, require much more structure in terms of outcomes, time and people. For this and other reasons, drawing has been calling me.

LM:

How do senses, beyond the visual, factor into the experience of your work? What about smell and tactility? Could you provide an example or two?

SP:

The diversity of materials I use in my artworks and their intrinsic nature often require touch, or a touching gaze. It is with touch that we feel the world's thickness. The expansion of sense is more energetic in some installations. For instance, the artworks shaped with leather, from the 1990s, in which the smell became a part of it, and the experience of working with clay, when you need the tactile awareness of volume, an interaction with the outside world.

LM:

Much like far too many artists who happen to be women, your relationship with arts institutions and the art market has been less than fluid. When did you begin to make work, and why? How long had you been making work before you felt you achieved public recognition to one degree or another? What would you describe as some of the most efflorescent moments of your career to date? What have been some of the more trying or solitary times? What role do you feel that gender plays in your work or in your career, if any?

SP:

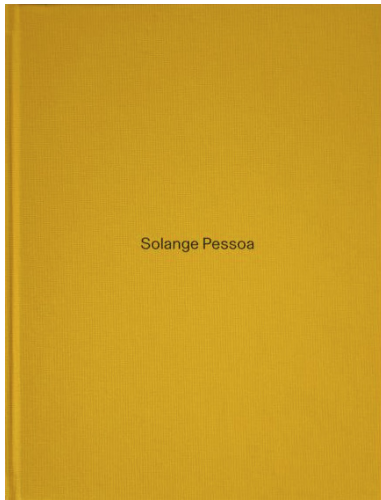
I started to make visual experimentations when I was a teenager, with a strong relationship with drawing, which brought me independence and opened me up to the world. Public recognition began with the prizes granted by the Salão Nacional de Arte da Pampulha in 1988 and 1990, with non-conventional proposals and materials. Of course being a woman often means being marginalised but this was not the reason the work had its difficulties with institutions and markets. It was because of its nature, its weirdness; because it is not easy and digestible; it doesn't belong to trends or fashionable groups; it is produced outside major centres; I don't try to please critics, curators, dealers, I keep it to myself. In Brazil, the presence of women in art is extraordinary. They played a protagonist role in modernism (Tarsila do Amaral, Anita Malfatti, Maria Martins, Pagu) and have had a marked presence in contemporary art (Lygia Clark, Mira Schendel, Ligia Pape, Lina Bo Bardi, amongst others). They have paved a fertile way. Tarsila do Amaral is so close to us that we normally just call her by her first name 'Tarsila'. In my trajectory, the most difficult moments were when there was a lack of perspective, structure, dialogue, and a hostile context. This makes us stronger and more determined. You must believe in your work beyond its difficulties. The most thriving moments are those that give us good fruits, joy, growth. I have been harvesting them.

LM:

You have been a teacher and a researcher for several years (how long?) How does teaching inform your work as an artist? And how does research inform your work as an artist?

SP:

I taught my whole life. Drawing, sculpture, installation and a bit of history of art. First, at small experimental art schools, then secondary schools, open courses and at the Escola Guignard/Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais, where I taught the subject of Sculpture for 22 years, and retired last year. I have supervised my students in the development of several projects, research, trips, exhibitions, and a multitude of experiences. I have helped form many generations of artists. However, recently, this has changed, and art courses at universities in general became very academic, moving away from art and the artistic practice. Inflated reflections, intellectualisms, over-the-top bureaucracy, and career drives, have turned them into uninteresting and boring places.



Would we listen to an oak tree or a rock if they told the truth?
– Phaedrus, Plato, quoted by Maria Filomena Molder.

In all its rough and irregular beauty, the Baroque has steadily pulsed in Brazilian art and its forms, as — according to Frederico Moraes — it is inseparable from Constructivism.¹ This remark is not intended to turn the Baroque into an artistic, social and cultural system that Brazilian artists can use to shape themselves. Since Heinrich Wölfflin, the Baroque has been associated with a loosening or a dissolution of forms through a colossal tectonic force. As Wölfflin himself has taught us, the style acquired lightness and joy until it found a later form: the Rococo. Moving away from Wölfflin and without stepping into the history of styles, the Baroque found different singularities in Latin America. Cuban writer Severo Sarduy, for instance, always emphasized — in an intellectual and sensual way — a type of Baroque in which matter adopts a contorted movement that points to a cosmic origin. Therefore, before the colonial Baroque reached a more Brazilian particularity, which is still seen in the Minas Gerais Baroque, we must consider that the Baroque — as viewed by Sarduy — is still capable of producing spontaneous clashes when in contact with certain artworks. One of these clashes takes place in Solange Pessoa's work. By looking attentively to the details and composition of matter, the artist pays attention to the organic remains of the cosmos: materials such as hair and leather that once belonged to the animal body. By adding these materials to fabric she gives it a skin, body and movement. In order to return part of the cosmos to these remains, she has spent more than one decade building a cathedral.

Using a straightforward title, Cathedral [Cathedral], she extracts truth from hair, leather and fabric displayed in space. The piece — 8m x 100m x 1.6cm in size — has a malleable, yet rigid architecture. By aligning contrary forces, the artist reorders matter. This reordering is the power of Pessoa's cathedral, which, in turn, resonates in the bodies of its visitors. This is because she has not discarded the terrestrial principle of matter: Cathedral is in permanent contact with the ground. Even with two suspended parts, supported by leather horse-riding accessories, the cathedral belongs to the soil, to the ground. It has an animal side, as the riding pieces match the anatomy of a horse: its face, belly and tail. This phantom, which evokes the horse's medieval temporality and its endurance as the colonizer's war machine, allows the space to become animalized, at least in a ghostly way. On the one hand, the artist produces a dialogue with the animistic cultures, by imprinting a vital force on the objects or on the natural elements, like stones. Part of

this energy has a material dimension of other historical times, such as Middle Ages in Europe. On the other hand, Pessoa's cathedral does not hide the dead, as the presence of leather itself divulges that horses were also used to torture and even execute, by dismembering people that were persecuted for political and religious reasons, particularly in an era where religious austerity held power over life and death. Death — a product of religions and negotiations with the sacred — could not be absent in Pessoa's work. The artist is aware that the sacred is central in instigating relationships with the universe, meaning that it is too important to be left only to religion. In contrast, religare is a root word that exposes the artist's ethos, returning the material elements of the cosmos to common use: something that can only happen through an exercise in profanity, which takes place when the cathedral's material is transposed into artistic vocabulary. In this sense, profanity can be understood in the context of Giorgio Agamben's definition of religion: "religion can be defined as that which removes things, places, animals or people from common use and transfers them to a separate sphere. Not only is there no religion without separation, but every separation also contains or preserves within it a genuinely religious core."² The historical Baroque shows an abundance of the sacred and the profane, and is able to expand itself through the necessary contrast between light and dark. Pessoa also bends her forms in this direction. In this way, the artist proposes that the work belongs to the desire of common use, or the conveyance of a memory.

Therefore, with fragile materials that drive memories, the artist recovers the physical density of silence typical of large gothic architectural monuments: aligning the nocturnal or Dionysian dimension of Aleijadinho with the solar or Apollonian expression of an Oscar Niemeyer. One of Pessoa's artworks, from the 1990s, which serves as a basis for her cathedral, stems from an association with Niemeyer's cathedral in Brasília. In the works by Aleijadinho, we have a metaphor of night time. The sculptor incarnates the myth of the genius struck by a degenerative disease, whereby he had to work throughout the night. Even if Aleijadinho was physically handicapped, he was able to produce a group of sculptures in the seventeenth century that literally mimicked the physical pain and contortions one could observe in the Baroque style.³ In Niemeyer's works we have the rationality of "round buildings" in open spaces, as we can see in the city of Brasília, and in other Brazilian cities, like Rio de Janeiro and Belo Horizonte. A certain style of Brazilian architecture claims to be Apollonian, with a utopian structure composed of lightness, curves and transparency, reflecting what Brazil could have been, politically speaking. This contradiction is an essential part of the narrative of Brazilian modernity. Using hair, leather and fabric, Solange Pessoa transposed an icon of Brazilian modernist architecture through a "sensorial intensiveness" and "amorphous fluidity."⁴ Differently from Niemeyer's curves, Pessoa aims to "eternalize (...) pulsating flows."⁵ In fact, Cathedral exposes a more modest and necessary task, expanding, rather than fixing, pulsating flows. She does this by making sure they are supported by the fragility of the materials, which includes the videos she has produced.

How can we not think that her videos follow the structure of stained glass that filters light from outside and controls it with different colors? Pessoa's videos are stained glass by contingency. The process by which she develops her cathedral is also as a space of thought: she suggests a direction even if the spectator is no longer before the artwork. Here, the contact with matter means that every person that crosses the artist's cathedral is also crossed by it. By summoning a point of contact between light and matter, the work incorporates the phenomenological reversibility of light, of touch and of the space covered. Therefore, her videos can be seen, not from a technological point of view in terms of cinematographic or experimental language, but from the perspective of the epiphany-like character of the moving images. This is a type of epiphany that comes from matter. This is the path in which the artist manages to eternalize the pulsating

flows she desires, which justifies, at least within a sensitive and intuitive project, the use of this technique for the construction of her cathedral. Her videos show horses with hoods: evoking a medieval space in the colonial imaginary, as in *Cavalos* [Horses] from 2003. Here the artist returns to the horse as a mythological character — an animal traction or combat animal. Here the idea of a monument is undone with the use of large masks and tails made of hair and fabric. *Cornelius* (2001) is also symbolically part of the 'stained glass' concept. It is a way of revisiting Aleijadinho's prophets in Matosinhos using a solar monstrosity that comprises the body, strangeness and landscape. The monstrous body was also a medieval paradigm used to condemn those who did not live within an ideology aligned with the Church. Once the monster was identified, the body produced demonic imagery. The artist transforms this religious imagery. The polarity is neutralized whilst matter contrasts with the landscape.

More interested in mythologies arising from matter, videos such as *Meninos-Capuzes* [Boys-Hoods] and *Oblongas* [Oblong], both from 2003, expand the hybrid, medieval, colonial and Baroque imagery. Pessoa is one of the few artists who can produce images with the psychic flow of the unconscious: it is projected into social space through the assimilation of surrealism and anthropophagy, as did the writer Oswald de Andrade in 1928 with his "Anthropophagic Manifesto".⁶ Anthropophagy is a well-known term in Brazilian culture, usually understood by the act of devouring elements from foreign cultures and bring them into Brazilian culture. In general, this is a metaphorical way to take a ritual practice from Amerindian culture⁷, but the term was widespread in many different cultural manifestations around the twenty and the early twenty-first century in Brazilian and Latin American cultures. The artist's cathedral devours and transforms the multiplicity of these practices, surrealism and anthropophagy, within its installation. An example is her cathedral at the Rubell Family Collection in Miami, Florida, where the 'body' is inside a large room, and at Casa do Conde de Santa Marinha, in Belo Horizonte, where the cathedral is expanded to encompass the whole mansion. These installations have a reptilian structure that is serpentine and has a modular presence in the exhibition space. Here the cathedral's body, populated with the animal mythologies of horses and serpents, does not deny the fantastical condition of a bestiary from where it might have originated.

Catedral is fantastical in the sense that the medieval imagery, upon arriving in Latin America, was conditioned to occupy a space that was practically merged to the ground and covered in mud and clay, until it acquired a lascivious aspect so it could materialize as undead. After all, in the Americas, the European imaginary was comprised of flesh and matter, as well as being dangerous and capable of killing. Cultural clashes produced new mythologies, and this is in fact where the anthropophagic figuration was constituted. In this light, the lascivious use of mythology brings Pessoa closer to another Brazilian artist: Tunga, whom she knew. This association is expanded in the artists' forms, both of which show an affinity between the plasticity of what remains from myths in the collective Brazilian unconscious. This evokes another implication of the Baroque in this context: its ignition of the psychic structures of the unconscious so that each one of the forms is not an accident, but a strangely familiar order: something that accurately translates what Sigmund Freud called *Unheimlich*. Pessoa's images set off the biological uncertainty and anatomical destiny of the human body. This makes us doubt the anthropomorphic forms of gods, which are dispersed in archetypes, only cautiously becoming matter. Pessoa's work is different from Tunga's. The archetypes take the stage in Cathedral in a spiritual condition that is an essential part of its architecture.

At no point does the work refrain from imposing a solid architecture rooted in telluric forces. In fact, it answers a central question: how to give form to these forces without surrendering to the symbol activated by the artwork's title? This is a symbolic field that remains under the status of allegory in the history of art and often in colonial Baroque: or in colonialism's remains. Rather than participating harmonically in that which is

understood as Baroque, the role of the artist is to disorganize or, at least show others, including historians and critics, that the order of what has been written before is provisional and that artworks generate a disjunction between the manifestations of history and the production of a singularity. The appearance of this disorder shows that Pessoa has forged a space for her cathedral. In this sense, her cathedral is effective because it displaces votive objects — such as the “hair of hundreds of anonymous people” — and moves them to the cathedral: proposing a path that once again makes sacred all this vital energy.⁸ Pessoa's cathedral moves. It has an animal movement, providing vitality to the artwork.

In Cathedral there is a Christian and pagan fusion.⁹ Through the culture of ex-votos the artist reinstates the heterogeneous time of the sacred, “the sensorial, the cosmogonic, the mutant spirit” that belongs to the artist's childhood: “my mom kept our hair from childhood and the umbilical cord of my two youngest brothers in a drawer. These were customs from long ago that were seen as natural. Every once in a while I touched them, with curiosity and strangeness. I was in contact with this from a very early age.”¹⁰ The current cathedral reinstates the tradition of immemorial knowledge: previous to the Baroque and, from a different point of view, transported by the Baroque, which is more a ‘state of mind’ — affirming an awareness of the connections between matter and symbols triggered by the artist — rather than a style per se. We can identify the primary power of matter in Pessoa's work, as she maintains that this matter has weight and supports the ascension of our gaze to the mental category of symbol. Pessoa asks us to be patient so we can look at the matter until we understand the truth contained in its weight. And weight is one of its truths. In this train of thought, Cathedral's lightness contrasts to soapstone or bronze: materials frequently used by the artist in sculptures and installations. If we are able to ascend, symbolically, to Pessoa's cathedral, this is firstly because we had to confront the weight of matter with the weight of our own body. It is when matter touches matter that it can recall different ways of representing the sacred: poetics or fiction, theatre or architecture, childhood memory or the contemporary challenges of art.

On one hand, Pessoa reinstates the semantics of architectural silence through her use of votive and theatrical objects, such as fabric and leather.¹¹ On the other hand, the work mobilizes the word in its title — “cathedral” — so that it can function as a sort of sermon. Can there be a sermon made up of only one word? A word displaced from the history of art, from the gothic, but also from its “dictionary state”: to use an expression coined by poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade, in the sense that the artist recovers through the hair the narrative of her ancestors. Pessoa's cathedral is more intimate than Cildo Meireles's. At the end of the 1980s, Meireles took part in the Jean-Hubert Martin's exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* [Magicians of the World] in 1989, in Paris, with *Missão/Missões: Como construir catedrais* [Mission/Missions: How to Build Cathedrals]. If, on one hand, Meireles elaborated an artistic process — showing “how” to build cathedrals by designing a 36m² installation with bones, altar bread, coins and black fabric — then, on the other hand, Pessoa builds her cathedral silently. This intimacy comes from her materials — hair, leather, fabric — and the way in which she occupies space, crawling across it.

Cathedral is a work that merges acoustic image to symbology. It resonates with matter to the extent that it contributes to its own organization until it is also contaminated by it. Childhood — and here we leave the artist's biography behind — emerges as a condition of language used to interrogate objects through their own existence. Removing from them, and not from the authors, the narratives that rested — and that definitely still rest — in the structure made of fabric, leather and hair. By bringing the place of the ca-

thedral to the contemporary, Pessoa materializes the connected existence of two aspects: silence and memory.

With a sensitive adeptness, the artist helps us understand that the cathedral can no longer simulate a monument. This can also be seen in *Bâtissons une cathédrale* [Let's Build a Cathedral] a book that features a conversation with four artists in the spring of 1986 at the Kunsthalle Basel in Switzerland. The publication, which includes Joseph Beuys, Enzo Cucchi, Anselm Kiefer and Jannis Kounellis, institutes the act of building a cathedral as a delimitation of boundaries for the place of the artist. Kounellis, for instance, is assertive: "we can no longer build a cathedral like the one in Cologne and put it next to it. It must be different. It must be credible. We cannot repeat anything; it would give us no credibility."

What is the credibility that Pessoa develops in her cathedral? The first would be to maintain the heterochrony of the sacred. The elements that bear witness the morphologic violence of the expansion of life exist in overlapping times, because form itself is violent, it means life is always in movement. What we call "form" within this cathedral, is the indistinct moment between violence and rest: a type of violence inscribed outside the social space — something that bears a wild condition, which provides the artwork with the possibility of a permanent movement. The mineral, animal and vegetable kingdoms, and their movement, are also part of the artist's allegorical fable. Another example of the artist's use of fable is the installation *Sono* [Sleep]. Created in 2008 and occupying a 216m² area, the work is on permanent display at the garden of the Museu de Arte da Pampulha. Imagining the sleep of stones is a visual condition that interferes with the genesis of Brazilian modernity and with the Pampulha complex itself — which was a laboratory for the experimentation of Niemeyer's architecture. The sleep of the stones evokes the image of João Cabral de Melo Neto — the poet from Pernambuco who launched his practice with a peculiar surrealism in his book *Pedra do Sono* [Stone of Sleep] in 1942. At the beginning of the 1940s, João Cabral de Melo Neto dedicated one of the book's poems to one of the most lubricious artists of French surrealism: André Masson. In this sense, a poem written by Cabral can be a sort of prayer to Pessoa's cathedral:

To André Masson

*With sleep-walking fishes and horses
you paint the obscure metaphysics
of limbo.*

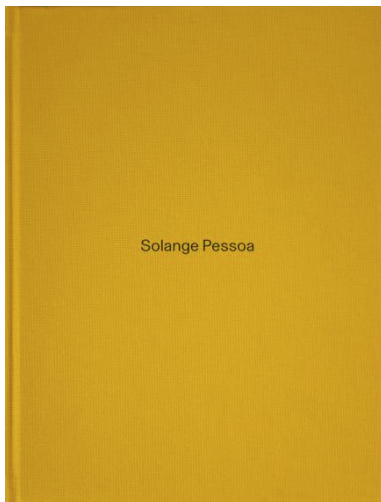
*Warrior horses and fishes
fauna in the ground beneath our feet
dead children that follow us
from dreams.*

*Primitive forms close their eyes
scubas hide cold lights;
invisible on the surface eyelids
do not shut.*

*Cold we run to the icy sun
of your country of mining where you keep
the food the chemical the Sulphur
of the night.*

Cabral subverts mining. Pessoa subverts mining. Both evoke sleepless imagery: animals from the unconscious, spirituality ready for sacrifice. There is also another lesson in phenomenological reversibility: in each artwork, it is the hand that shapes the writing and also matter. In this sense, Pessoa feeds the credibility of sleep, of the unconscious, of a materiality that expands between sleep and vigil. Delicately, she lets us see what sleeps, at the same time that she invites us to sleep and expand the cathedral — and her work — also under our sleep. This credibility, that is, the fact that she 'lets us see', positions Pessoa's work as a necessary interval between very wide temporalities, as it is here that matter encounters symbol. Aeon is a Greek expression that denotes that which we know as eternity, that is, the morphological violence of matter. Chronos is the details of everyday life that compose and weave the ethos of our existence. Between both temporalities, Pessoa's cathedral can be seen as an interval between symbol and matter. A great level of sensibility is needed to make a cut in time, that is, turn the artwork itself into a timely time: *kairos*, the precise moment between day-to-day and eternity, something that aptly sums up the nature of the work of art, the spirit of the cathedral.

If Cathedral is a cut in time, our access to the work is made possible by an epiphany of an immemorial time, *in illo tempore*. A time that is very close to us and not in a distant future. Emerging through stains, rust, bodies covered in dust, this is, in fact, the ordinary time in which we currently live. Therefore, if there is a Baroque dimension in Pessoa's work, it must be seen only as a passage that we should not hold on to, as the artwork invites us to leave history through cosmology and small events. Perhaps this is why Pessoa's practice is permeated by a silence in which the artist is herself submerged. Silence does not mean immobility. This time matches the artist's nature. It is the type of longer breadth necessary to understand that there are many stories that need more time to be told, and to be cut. A number of artists use their work to engineer a space in which fables that do not belong to them can echo in space, acting like a visual form of transmission and a permanent invention of traditions. The work is part of an invitation — an often generous invitation — for us to listen to truths that go beyond the most immediate temporalities of everyday life and the manifestations of a time that the body is unable to reach. In this sense, Solange Pessoa has created fables of matter. With all its symbolic and material energy, her cathedral remains open to this unavoidable truth.



Solange Pessoa's work self-consciously vacillates between beauty and abjection, twin poles of attraction and repulsion that the artist also perceives in her own psyche and impulses. While both qualities have always been present, it is especially since the bronze sculpture that she began in the late 1990s, and the soapstone works started in 2014, that the artist has foregrounded a work's formal attributes. Yet, even with the aesthetic interests explored in these works, Pessoa never sacrifices an overriding insistence on self-evidently linking the work to its environment, both physically and imaginatively, as well as revealing the means by which it was made. To paraphrase the curator Catherine de Zegher speaking about Agnes Martin, as well as pioneering abstractionists Hilma af Klint and Emma Kunz, Pessoa is drawn to elements of abstraction not as formalism—to be distinguished from having formal interests, which all artists have—"but as a means of structuring philosophical, scientific, and spiritual ideas." In Pessoa's case we can add to this list of concerns the existential and psychological: a complex, layered chaos and flurry of emotions and forces that almost demand the imposition of structuring forms of some kind to give them meaning and legibility.

This vacillation between the formal and the experiential in Pessoa's work can perhaps to some degree be traced to the time and place in which she came of age: Belo Horizonte in the period immediately after the end, in 1985, of the US-backed authoritarian rule of the Brazilian Military Government. This was an epoch marked by controversy over the history of abstract art in Brazil, and its role for contemporary art. This may account for Pessoa's interest in it, as well as her ambivalence about what it might mean for her own work.

By the late 1980s the once vibrant tradition of abstraction in Brazil had become tainted by its association with the dictatorship, despite the fact that it had originally emerged out of a period of democratic optimism, both politically and aesthetically. For example, Oscar Niemeyer's modernist architectural masterpiece, the city of Brasilia, which was intended as a utopian expression of abolished hierarchies and new beginnings, instead became a symbol of the dictatorship, which took it over in 1964, only four years after it was inaugurated. These associations stuck despite the fact that Brasilia had been erected in a preceding era, and that Niemeyer's leftist political views led the dictatorship to essentially exile him. Because they took Brasilia as their official seat of power the city, like Constructivist art, became wrapped up in the repressive nationalism espoused by the military regime. This course of events was far from unique to Brazil as, in the 1950s and '60s, branches of abstraction in Latin American countries from Cuba to Venezuela were

similarly maligned.

In 1988—the year of Pessoa's first institutional exhibition—a new era was decisively ushered in in Brazil with a revised, more democratic constitution. In this moment of hope and optimism, Pessoa began work on a series of sculptures and installations based in organic materials, ranging from clay to human and animal hair. These works, in their brush with the abject, went against the region's dominant tradition of abstract art, which was the context in which Pessoa had been educated, broadly speaking, as she studied at a school largely staffed with faculty from Constructivist and School of Paris backgrounds.

Pessoa comes from an educated background, and Belo Horizonte, where she has lived her whole life, is dense with Niemeyer's architecture and influence. Pessoa is thus well acquainted with Brazilian art and architectural history. But the timing of her entry onto the artistic scene in Belo Horizonte meant that she was also searching for different precedents out of which to establish her own artistic contribution. She found this alternate history in many of the inclinations that she established from a young age, including an interest in Brazilian countercultural movements, like Tropicalia and antropofagia, and also in the artistically-rich, colonial-era city of Ouro Preto, which contains a renowned collection of Brazilian Baroque sculpture and architecture from the 18th Century. Growing up Pessoa's mother told her about the sculptures of saints made with human hair that populate the churches there, which is an image that has captivated her ever since.

In a way this involved Pessoa revisiting the origins of Brazilian modernism itself, as it was these buildings and objects that Niemeyer drew on in his early work, and which his mentor, Lucio Costa—who was one of Brazil's first modernist architects—preserved and maintained as head of the National Service for Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN). Not to mention the cannibalizing, multicultural impulses channeled in the poet Oswald de Andrade's founding manifesto of Brazilian modernism, *Manifesto Antropófago* (1928). Arguably, by the late 1980s time had blunted the Baroque and intersectional aspects of Brazilian modernism, and thus it was necessary for Pessoa to rediscover them for herself. This rediscovery, and its integration into a radically new kind of art, has been significant for subsequent generations of Brazilian artists, some of whom studied under Pessoa, in her influential role as a professor at the Escola Guignard in Belo Horizonte.

Alongside the Baroque, Pessoa was also interested in the cultural production of indigenous peoples, and especially their craft traditions involving organic materials like ceramics, feathers, hair, and leather. Since the late 1980s all of these have featured in Pessoa's work and this aspect of her influences is radical considering that dominant trends in Brazil have long favored colonial Portuguese traditions over those of native peoples.⁴ Of these the Baroque is the most revered, even as it also presents another side that subverts any attempt to see it as simply a Portuguese import. For example, the mythical sculptor Aleijadinho, the best known protagonist of the Brazilian Baroque, is reputed to have been the son of a Portuguese immigrant and an African slave. The indigenous is thus simultaneously irrevocably embedded in, just as it is partially erased in the very act of being folded into, the Brazilian Baroque.

After more than a decade of primarily exploring this darker side of Brazilian art history and its diverse panoply of under-recognized aesthetic languages, at the end of the 1990s Pessoa began work on a series of bronze sculptures. While bronze casting is an old technique redolent of European fine art tradition, the vagaries inherent in the casting process presented Pessoa with a way of working that balances control in the forming of the clay object to be cast with the inevitable occurrence of idiosyncrasies in surface effects that exceed it. Evoking a legacy of sculpture since Rodin, Pessoa embraces these side-effects of

the bronze casting process as ways to link the work to her hand, and thus to the personal, even psychological, aspects of making, which are then extended to how the viewer approaches and experiences the finished sculptures. This evidently man-made aspect of the work is juxtaposed with their morphology, which is often natural in derivation. Rocks, eggs, trees, snakes, and fruits are just a few of the shapes that Pessoa's bronze sculptures suggest.

Pessoa underscores this element of the work, which is born out most explicitly in the green patina that the bronze acquires, and which signals its mutability over time in relation to its environment: a quality that Pessoa enjoys. She does so when she places the bronze sculptures outdoors, as is the case, for example, with her 2008 installation *Sono*, which is permanently installed outside the Niemeyer-designed art museum in the Pampulha lake complex in the suburbs of Belo Horizonte. There the works blend with their surroundings to such a degree that at first they could be mistaken for ambiguous growths emerging from the lake. This is a humorous as well as sinister take on the work, considering that the lake is man-made and not a naturally-occurring feature of the landscape. One can also consider a recent snake-like form along these lines, given how it sits coiled, extending itself upwards out from the pond in which it is installed.

It has long been important to Pessoa that the work interact directly with nature, and she even establishes situations where it is encouraged to take over the work she has placed in it. For example, in an important installation of 2000, Pessoa placed her ceramic vessels in a courtyard of the Casa do Pilar at the famed Museu da Inconfidência in the historic city of Ouro Preto. There the artist allowed the plants and vines in and around the works to follow their course uninhibited, ultimately overtaking her sculpture and integrating it into the landscape, such that it is hard to tell what is art and what is nature, a confusion Pessoa relishes.

The opposite situation exists when these works are placed in the white cube of a conventional contemporary art gallery, as Pessoa regularly does. In this case the vital organicism of the work, among other things, draws attention to the sterility of its surroundings. It is as if an element of nature found itself in an alien atmosphere it was never supposed to occupy, and has managed—against all odds—to eek out an existence in the harshest conditions, which is also one way to interpret the way in which Pessoa's bronze sculptures seem simultaneously soft and hard. The rigidity of the bronze is subtended by sinuous curves and modeled surfaces that suggest the generous pliability of the original clay material that has been cast, not to mention the natural associations already mentioned. These many layers to how we read Pessoa's bronze sculptures when we encounter them means that we approach them with curiosity, and one with intellectual ramifications, as well as, and stemming from, phenomenological ones. This is true whether the work is installed inside or outdoors.

The works's organic resonances are emphasized when Pessoa includes pieces of foliage in the sculpture, which sets it off, and all the more dramatically in a white cube context. For example, there is a work, *Untitled* (2016), which seems to have grown a covering of moss, while the depressions in another, *Fonte* (1997), contain pools of water and a grouping of small spherical forms that look like some sort of nuts. Such moments in Pessoa's work, like the positioning of forms at Pampulha, suggests that she is not without humor, despite often tackling large psychological, and even metaphysical, issues.

One such sculpture comes readily to mind: a small bronze blob that in 2004 Pessoa placed on the steps outside of a small chapel, *Capela de Nosso Senhor do Bonfim* in Santa Barbara, as if the sculpture were crawling out of it. A provocative photograph

captures the Archbishop Dom Luciano Mendes de Almeida, at the time Brazil's most prominent religious figure, pouring water over the bronze figure. One could interpret the scene as one where Mendes de Almeida is either bestowing a blessing on this intrepid being, or else casting it out. This is a relatively lighthearted take on a serious line of questioning, present in some of her other work, about the value of certain materials and rituals and the notion of the transcendence of the earthly, material realm. This is most explicitly and monumentally engaged with by her ongoing, more than decade long project, *Cathedral* (1990-2003, 2012)⁵, which is an expansive work made in part out of human hair, pieced together and mounted with leather into an elegant, serpentine form suspended from the ceiling.⁶ It reaches upwards in an evocation of that most sacred building type, and specifically the minimal, attenuated vertical extension of Niemeyer's famous cathedral in Brasilia.

Pessoa's soapstone sculptures represent perhaps the apogee of her more formalist aesthetic inclinations. Embracing a mestizo craft technique, Pessoa works with local stone masons at Pedreira Dionísia, outside of Ouro Preto, to make them.⁷ She instructs these craftspeople on her specifications and they execute to order. The forms of these works to some degree riff off of those of her preceding bronze sculptures. But, while they share a morphology drawn from nature, the soapstone works are vessels, where the bronzes are growths. They are complimentary in this way as well, the soapstone works being concave and receptive, the bronzes convex and presences within space.

As with the bronzes, Pessoa also likes to install the soapstone sculptures outdoors and enjoys when they fill up with water after a rainfall, or else when small plants or organisms grow in the soft stone. This gives seemingly stolid works a sense of life that her works with more obviously organic materials, like hair and leather self-evidently evoke. Like the bronzes, the surfaces of the soapstone sculptures self-consciously bears the marks of the work's making. This element is important in drawing the viewer in to an intimate experience of, and relationship to, the work. Pessoa underscores this when she describes a "touching gaze," which is evocative of the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's writings on Cézanne, in which he describes the painter as seeking to reach out and "touch" his favored subject, Mont Sainte-Victoire with his eyes, and by extension his paintbrush.

The worn, variegated surfaces of her bronze and soapstone sculptures invite the viewer to as if caress them with his or her eyes, connecting them to the act of making. Given that the artist does not fashion these surfaces herself, she is—in this limited sense—in the same position as the viewer: an intimate observer of an object that has been brought into being for aesthetic delectation. This sense of intimacy takes on an added level of meaning in the soapstone works, whose excavated contents evoke a bodily interiority, whose carved forms can be read as elegant and abstract suggestions of guts and bones, for example. It is as if a specimen had been pared open on the surgeon's table and we are invited to take a privileged look inside the workings and structure of the entity before us. Yet this living form has also ossified, fossilized into the stark gray of the soapstone.

Pessoa produces drawings related to her sculptures, in addition to stand alone works on paper and canvas. These comprise everything from plans for installations to aesthetic responses to these, executed after the fact. One example would be the oil on paper works Pessoa made after her Pampulha installation. In these Pessoa riffs off of the organic, biomorphic shapes of her cast bronze sculptures. Seen on site these convey a sort of animism, whereby one has the sense that they could have arrived there millennia before, having crawled out of a primal ooze and settled on this bank, perhaps even fossilizing there. Yet, if this is the case, one gets the impression that they could spring back to life

at any moment.

This potentiality is conveyed in an imaginative way in two works on paper after this installation, wherein it is as if Pessoa has diagrammed a proliferation of life on the banks of the Pampulha lake. The halo around a lozenge-like shape, reminiscent of that of the sculptures, suggests a sensorial quiver, as if the sculpture has just awakened and is preparing to explore its environment, a sense of animation that is extended to trees and other foliage indicated by Pessoa's brush, and especially to the birds she has included in one of the drawings.

These works on paper are provocative and can be seen as reflecting back on the sculptures to which they relate. For they allow us to differently interpret Pessoa's three-dimensional work. For example, the sculptures where ceramic forms operate as either containers for, or else perhaps are conjoined with, organic efflorescences, whether of foliage or feathers matted together like a wing or flipper. The sense of life that is so clearly conveyed in the drawings can be read by extension in the sculptures to which they are sometimes adjacent. The same kind of potentiality in the drawings is in these sculptures as well. The introduction of organic materials is specific in how it suggests movement and change. This is true both in the patinas the bronze and stone takes on with time, and also in the potential—easy to imagine—of the feathers or foliage rustling if the wind was to pick up, or if we were to reach out and touch it, as we are tempted to do by the seductive (if also slightly repellent) nature of Pessoa's organic materials.

This aspect of animism is not limited to works with natural elements, either. For example Pessoa's installation, *Alhures* (Projeto para parques, fazendas, grandes espaços) (2000-2010) resembles a miniature scaled complex of minimal dwellings. This is emphasized in drawings made by Pessoa on top of photographs of the site, which include schematic renderings of figures walking amongst them. When the works were installed Pessoa included live tadpoles, fish, frogs, and water plants, rendering the installation a functioning ecosystem.

Animism is the notion that all material phenomena have agency, and is considered an essential belief of many ancient and indigenous cultures, as well as one that still persists today. Pessoa's evocation of animism is just one way in which her work suggests the temporal collapse of the present with the distant past. Such a collapse is integral to modernism, having first appeared in the guise of the desire of an artist like Cézanne or Seurat to extend the classical traditions of Ancient Greece, then in the manifest primitivism by which artists from Gauguin to Nolde to Kandinsky sought to imbue their work with the vibrancy of the "essential" and "pure" motivations that were seen as having been eradicated from European culture, and which now only remained in non-Western ones.

Pessoa's sculpture does not trade in primitivism—as it does not work out of a style that can be directly associated with any particular culture—but rather evokes, in a general way, a primal (as in primary) state. One characterized by this animism, and which might thus be aligned with any number of ancient or indigenous traditions, without relying on, drawing from, or exploiting any of them. In this her work is also related to the temporal collapse of the distant past with an apocalyptic future proposed by American artists of the 1960s, like Robert Smithson and Michael Heizer, who sought to create totems for a nuclear age, and which, by implication, could survive and outlast it. This led to their attraction to geometry as it was expressed by ancient cultures, such as the Nazca Lines in Peru.

The animism in Pessoa's work, despite not being clearly attributable to any specific

reference, nonetheless has a sense of being related to some kind of vital life force. This is a major factor in encouraging us to circulate around her sculptures, which we do in an attempt to apprehend the mysterious sense of life that they convey as an effect of their presence: of how they project and hold attention in the room in which they are installed. This presence is in part a coefficient of the cycles of energy expenditure and gain involved in the making of the work, as well as in its viewing. For example, with the ceramic, bronze, and stone works, while produced differently, each involves the physical exertions of molding, casting, and carving. The traces of this labor is then registered on the variegated surfaces of the resulting works, in their undulating, modeled exteriors.

As such, one way to consider Pessoa's sculpture—and this extends as well to older work, like the formed hair of Cathedral—is as a condensation of physical labor exerted, which is embedded into works on whose surfaces they are self-evidently reflected. This is another way in which we can understand how the works have a sense of animism, of vitality, that extends beyond simply their morphology. Though morphology often has something to do with it as well, as in Pessoa's recurring motif of the snake, which conveys a coiled potentiality for movement, which is to say another way in which energy is exerted, just as, if in a subtle, small-scale way, the viewer's perambulations of the sculpture in our inevitable attempt to understand it by ascertaining it from numerous vantages.

Pessoa's drawings, in their vacillation between works with clear, defined contours and others that are more frantically executed, echo a similar range of personalities as the sculptures and, indeed, Pessoa's practice as a whole which ranges between works evoking clarity and structure and those evoking chaos and a hedonistic unleashing of primal energies. In a way capture and release of those energies can be said to characterize her work as a whole. With some works serving to harness and contain them, while others release and disperse them.

Contemporary Art Daily



Minas is no more – Carlos Drummond de Andrade
Minas Gerais has frauds, has chimeras – Paulo Mendes Campos

Solange Pessoa's work carries a strong catastrophic feeling in relation to time and its impact. The memory that overarches her production is above all linked to Minas Gerais, the Brazilian state where she was born and currently lives. Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Milton Nascimento, Pedro Nava, Paulo Mendes Campos, Cornélio Pena, Lúcio Cardoso and many other mineiros whom the artist admires have also, in their own unique ways, revealed a mixture of love and disillusion for their home state.

In this exhibition at Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, which is one of the best the artist has ever had in the country, almost every piece establishes an ambiguous relationship with memory and the impact of time on things and people. Her Caveiras (Skulls), in soapstone, resemble large pebbles that were washed up by the sea, whose round edges were patiently sculpted by the waves.

In her remarkable drawings on canvas, forms that look like real or imaginary animals, Pessoa revisits primitive inscriptions that she is very familiar with. By adhering to the irregularities of the cave walls, these drawings and paintings are led – in their transition to the artist's drawings – to graphic solutions that preserve a formal relatedness to her Caveiras by rejecting regular forms and by their somewhat organic aspect.

Despite their flat surface (the canvas), the style of the animals maintains the twisting, schematic and irregular aspect of primitive inscriptions. Geometry has no place in these archaic traces. Something similar happens to her Fontes (Fountains) and her bronze sculptures, which are all driven by a constructive process in which an act carried out by a hesitant hand has a decisive role in the constitution of forms, with a strong organic resonance. None of the artworks in this exhibition bear resemblance to the industrial production of objects. The docility of the soapstone, a soft rock that instantly reminds us of the work of the noted mineiro Antônio Francisco Lisboa, known as Aleijadinho, plays a decisive role both in linking the objects to Minas Gerais and materialising the background meanings intended by the artist.

Despite her insistence on reactivating the traditions of her homeland, Pessoa's works

are far from reinforcing the stereotypes surrounding the idea of being a mineiro, a vague notion, like any mythical formulation, that refers to an allegedly collective nature that the population of Minas Gerais should be proud of: a moody and reserved temperament, a fondness of local traditions, a marked discretion, and a good level of common sense, moderation and balance; all characteristics of a people that for a long time led a life of relative isolation from the rest of the country, with the resulting affirmation of self-sufficiency.

The way in which São Paulo modernists were attracted to Minas Gerais' historical towns is linked to the wish – mainly by Mario de Andrade – to contribute to the construction of a national identity that seemed to be already configured in Minas Gerais.

The soapstone sculptures *Fontes* and *Mimmesmas* help to explain this apparent paradox between affection and sadness, bringing closer together memories from Minas Gerais and, at the same time, conferring them with a reserved nature. In these sculptures, we simultaneously have the chimera of full self-sufficiency (the quintessence of the mineiro character) – inasmuch as the pieces fold onto themselves – and a hollow space that houses the coil-like forms. Putting your hand inside these bowls can cost your life.

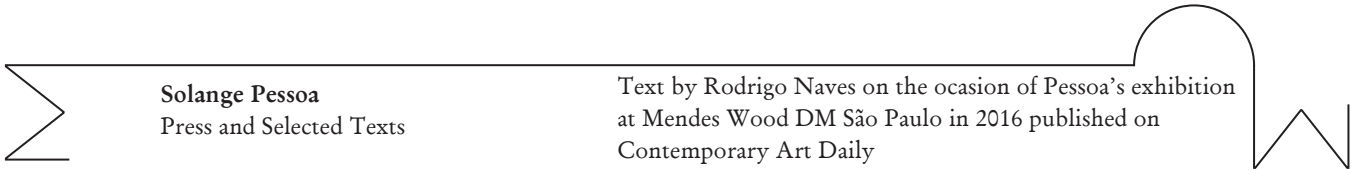
This text – which is already longer than it should have been – aims to emphasise a pendular movement, which is perhaps the only possible reaction to something that is at the same time fascinating and painful. It is not a coincidence that this movement has influenced the greatest minds of this unique Brazilian state. However, I ask myself if something in this prudish and quiet society is not strongly linked to everything that Pessoa is opposed to.

I don't believe this is to do with cultural masochism; however, it is also practically impossible to adhere to the idea of a single Brazil, a country that, according to foreigners, has a hospitable and friendly population, even though at least 50 thousand people are killed and approximately 50 thousand women are raped in the country every year. In contrast, at present, the Syrian civil war has killed a total of 300 thousand children, women and men.

Here we momentarily leave Minas Gerais to determine that Pessoa's production understands Minas Gerais in terms of the cycle of gold, at the start of Brazil's integration and the moment of creation of an internal market that the businesses of sugar cane and coffee hadn't managed to generate, functioning almost as the matrix of Brazil's misfortunes and virtues.

Due to the uniqueness of our ethnic background, composed by black slaves, European and Asian immigrants and the autochthonous indigenous populations, this truly multiracial society that – despite being unjust – has no significant ethnic and religious conflicts, has often been understood as the parent cell of a new socialism: less authoritarian and more fraternal and friendly. The *Dialectic of Malandroism* by Antonio Candido, one of our greatest thinkers of all times, is perhaps the most brilliant formulation of this project.

Roberto Schwarz – another remarkable academic, who was greatly influenced by Antonio Candido –, despite acknowledging his former teacher's astute interpretation of



Solange Pessoa
Press and Selected Texts

Text by Rodrigo Naves on the occasion of Pessoa's exhibition at Mendes Wood DM São Paulo in 2016 published on Contemporary Art Daily
<http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2017/02/solange-pessoa-at-mendes-wood-dm/>

Manuel Antônio de Almeida's book *Memórias de um sargento de milícia*, also criticises Candido. If being a malandro relies on an ambiguous relationship with the law, morals and good manners, wouldn't it be plausible to see traces of this practice in a despotic government that equally despises them?

This discussion is prolific and one of the most productive in the country and Minas Gerais is not exempt from this process. However, the backwardness of many of its regions tend to make the existence of these traces even more inclined to cruelty rather than the welcoming nature engendered by the traditional horseback travellers of Minas Gerais known as tropeiros.



*One night I found a stone
Oh stone stone!
Green or blue, on its side, as if it were dead.
Herberto Helder - Lugar [Place]*

It had been a long time since I had last seen Solange Pessoa, years without even speaking to her, hearing very little about her work, which always interested me. This was due in part to my inability of catching up to the accelerating pace of exhibitions, in part to the absurdity of a country that does not offer visibility to its best artists, that does not honor their extraordinary findings. Especially in a case such as Solange's, who is responsible for a unique body of work, an exceptionality that is visible in her awkward relationship to the art market. A mutual indigestion, to be fair, which serves as proof of the radicalness of her experimentation, the scarcely assimilable character of her research until now.

Curiously, the encounter with the artist took place after my encounter with a work of hers, a sculpture, more precisely a group of sculptures or an installation, as she herself designates the piece, and which took me some time to identify as her work. Actually, it took me some time to notice it as a work of art, not a spontaneous grouping of stones spread out on a portion of the slope which surrounds the Pampulha lake, to one's right upon arriving at the building of the Museum of Modern Art. Detached from the group of people I was a part of, which kept close to the museum entrance waiting for the arranged encounter with the artist, I went towards the lake, stepping down the slope's lawn, precisely where the stones were located, which perhaps indicate that their placement was well chosen. They were stones, they could be stones, only that, but after some time contemplating the surface of the lake, running my eyes over its margin, surveying the multiple trees which make up the peculiar landscape designed by Burle Marx, a true inventor in the art of creating beautiful, almost natural landscapes, making a turn and delineating the museum's side façade, interrupted by the sequence of tree trunks and

green tree crowns of varying sizes, I became aware of two facts: the stones were not, they could not be, originally from that place, they were, therefore, stones which had been placed, an ornament previously planned in the landscape design. After this realization, I noticed, slightly and pleasantly stunned by the surprise, that they were and were not stones, after all, they were too green and it was impossible for them to be covered in slime, since there was no humidity and they lay on dry ground. Whether they were or were not stones, there was a strange naturalness to them, as if their beauty was in their prosaic character, similar to the famous stones of the Ryōan-ji Temple in Kyoto, just stones, although exceptionally beautiful. Anyway, they were not stones, but stone sculptures cast in bronze. It was, as I found out later, the installation Sono [sleep], a work by Solange Pessoa recently incorporated to the museum's collection and which accompanied the artist's solo exhibition on display at that time.

Five bronze stones spread out over the slope, five round pebbles, smooth and robust, but large, out of scale, some of them as if thrown about, fallen down, while others lay semi-buried, like ripe fruit under the sun, or sheltered by the vegetation that grows on the slope which holds the waters of the Pampulha lake, living peacefully alongside the birds, the water birds and the capybaras which move about as if that habitat was natural to them. In the beginning, I was attracted to the flattest one, shaped like a section of a sphere of which the most protruding portion seemed to have wilted, collapsed under its own weight, lingering lazily and heavily on the floor, executed by immobility. Then it was its neighbor, rising up proudly, as if contesting the gravity that limits its movement. Each of them in its particular shape, evoking different impressions, and, because of their placement on a slope, generating the assumption that one could not rule out the possibility of movement.

The sculpture of a stone, molded from a stone, is necessarily deprived of mass, a hollow volume, like an introverted, silent bell. It will never vibrate. There is something reminiscent of death or an announcement of death in a product such as this. There is something of death, of a death mask, in any molding obtained from a body, as it is always a direct allusion to an absence. At the same time, one has to recognize that the force of a death mask, like the ones made by Solange Pessoa, its very *raison d'être*, lies within a magical principle: that of being able to make present something that is already gone; as in a distant echo, which, in the case of each one of these sculptures, has turned into a solid shell, which, if someone knocks on them with their knuckles or with another stone, can produce sound. Well, any stone, with its more or less dense mass, results from a process of cooling and finds in sleep its final stage. On the other hand, a hollow stone, like the ones presented by the artist, has some amount of potency, a volume of air that pulses, through the mere variation in temperature. A being which, in contact with natural substances, might come back to life. It is what her other works, similar to this piece, make apparent. I refer to the other stones, some of them with pits and recesses from which small flows or patches of water spring, others nestled within dry leaves, like fruit that manages to escape its inevitable rotting, and there are also those that act as parasites stuck onto tree trunks, looking like improper blooms, like those fungi that sprout from humid walls, an adequate place for the proliferation of snails and centipedes, proving the existence of a secret and sleeping life form, which only awaited the ideal condition that would unleash it.

If a stone, whichever stone it is, having overcome its liquid, incandescent stage, reaches its destination point, its eternal sleep, transposed to the state of a sculpture, it can recommence in the condition of a linguistic sign, and no longer as a thing of nature. And isn't the Pampulha lake just the same? Being a result of dammed streams, carefully designed in its natural, curvilinear solutions — one might say erroneously —, with a lack of spon-

taneity in its distance to nature, which does not take away from its fertility, so much so that it has inspired the Niemeyer architecture that ornaments its margins, namely the group of parabolic vaults of the Church of São Francisco de Assis.

What will be left of nature after the infinite and aggressive transformations we subject it to? From the beginning, or, at least, since the first time I came in contact with her work, in the end of the 80's, in an exhibition set in a warehouse, Solange Pessoa's surprising trajectory has been addressing this issue; from the beginning, her work deals with life, makes use of organic material, remains, rejects and waste that she, like Jannis Kounellis, Joseph Beuys and, here in Brazil, Artur Barrio, Karin Lambrecht, José Resende, Tunga and Nelson Felix, perceives as living substance. Indeed, from the artist's work one draws the conclusion that nothing is dead, everything is related to a never-ending process.

Hair, dry leaves, leather, oil, fat, wax, animal blood, minerals, powder, pigment, plants, roots, moss, seeds, eggs, tadpoles, all of this is alive. The artist makes sure to articulate these materials, transforms them, molds them, interweaves them, soaks them until they escape from their lethargy and irrupt as plethoric, pulsating bodies, made from remains. And she achieves this in pieces that barely resemble sculptures, given that she always rejects forms based on crystalline solutions, privileging instead the organic, the shapeless, acting within an indoor environment or occupying the space of a garden, a roofless terrain which, under the logic of her interventions, finds itself facing its own past, as if the ground opened up and its trajectories and desires returned from its interior, the various forms of construction which lay buried until that moment.

This book is precious like the natural substances that the artist makes use of. The images contained within it, intertwined with her revealing testimonial about her life and values, a definite demonstration of a knowledge just as deep as it is humble, prove the worth of a persistent and silent work, carried out not on the margin, as one might carelessly conclude from the absurd lack of knowledge about her great research, which now starts to be noticed, but in great depths, much deeper than one can usually see.



Solange Pessoa work allows us to perceive how the baroque and rococó are shown in today's contemporary art research. I had the opportunity to work twice with the artist from Minas Gerais: the first one in 2001, at the exhibition *Cotê à Cotê Art Contemporain du Brésil*, organized for the Centre des Arts Plastiques Contemporain (Cape), Bordeaux and the second one in 2003, at the IV Bienal de Artes do Mercosul, Porto Alegre.

In Bordeaux, Solange presented an installation where she exhibits four artworks. Bronze pieces that sprout from the enclosure like lichens of a rock. Little by little, comes the historicity of the implantations:

Tomb, gravestone, baptismal sink, pulpit. Different registers of a diffused religion. Although, at first moment, a biological horizon stands out, a field where wildflowers bloom. A *déjà-vu* feeling. It's hard to lose your memory in Minas Gerais. Even in the roughest iron pieces, made by sculptor Amílcar de Castro. When I was at his atelier at Rua Goiás to consult him regarding the pieces to be sent to the modulus of contemporary art of *Mostra do Redescobrimento*, he asked me to look through the diagonal cut in one of his pieces and notice the landscape that could be seen through that cut.

Solange takes knowledge of a daily life in baroque times, above all in walks in the fields, observing ruined walls, starrng the intimacy between the world and the stars, observatory to the stars, an attribution center to a celestial phenomenon. A landscape is born out of a free gesture to which is attributed the Petrarca that climbs Mount Ventoux in Provence, to see the enthrall from up high, receiving spiritual illumination. Solange is certain that in those benches the past no longer exists in favor of one only era determined by artistic sensibility. It concerns an active memory, not nostalgic. If it was translated in a historical process, it wouldn't be far from the perception of those who discovered the confessions of the English industrial revolution flagrant

at the mines, in a still primitive moment. Solange is more interested at the ethos of the extinct society that re-borns by the active feel of the artist. Not as exclusive catalyst of the world but as like mentions Joseph Beuys: every man is an artist.

In Bordeaux, the bronze passes through colorful mutations, from green to ochre and it's treated in such way to be able to receive a form close to a primary stage, almost raw, far from the final figurative. The following step was experienced by Lucio Fontana while working with ceramic in late 40's, aiming irreducible forms to any ability. The Italian artist considers baroque the most exigent stage of art and he doesn't underestimate light as a powerful conductor in the context.

The static piece shows in its cavity, bronze eggs and in some other parts, a viscous liquid. Diving the motricity between the fertility of the embryo and the fugacity of the shining liquid. Completely asymmetric, the nest navigates in space making the other interventions cardinals points. When André Breton names Marcel Duchamp in charge of the spatial concept of the surrealist exhibition in New York (1942), his first action was to weave through strings the invisible relations raised from the presented objects. The visitors crossed the labyrinth passing through the resistance flux that one piece leads to another. A curious insertion from Duchamp in the surreal movement, since he always saw it with a physicality that defies its existence, as in a familiar treatment to what the sardines autonomists reserved to the integrationists through the motto: to the continentals, the sea.

Solange builds a tempo similar to Stonehenge. The room offers to the visitor an existential variation, the lower posture of the niche following the inclined vultures, reaches to the arms of the "baptismal sink" to reach the elevated posture of the "pulp". The artist propitiates Armazém Lainé, old entrepot of colonials products from french ports, actually converted in artist center: instead of spices, the baroque and rococó mineiros metamorphosed in topology. The disposed pieces break the format of white box where they are presented. The reclusion, the interiorization, interpenetration that the walls offer moves to where the bronze is. The area becomes inhabited. An object laying on the floor gives the impression of a terrestrial behavior to the public, familiar to the point of view of a cricket in of some of the Hokusai stamps. The artwork, however, is seen in plongée, dominated by the verticality of the spectator's point of view. Causing a sense of obscurity and tension. In the following wall, the bronze comes in the height of the arms, in a form similar to a baptismal sink. The height brings a feeling of tranquility, democratic, accessible, in a very protective atmosphere. The dead nature can be easily reached by the hand, in this moment the installation establishes immediate commerce with the excursion.

At the installation presented at the IV Bienal do Mercosul (2003), Solange shows meters of hair through one of the vast warehouses that constituted the pier of Guaíba river. Previously exhibited in Belo Horizonte, the mill occupies an entire house, its rooms and stairs, just like Richard Long did in the english pavilion at the Venice Bienal in 1976, building a whole constellation of rocks into a spacious edification. The time is registered in two parts: the many meters of hair creates an endless coiffure, meaning the hagiography. Santo Onofre has as basic vestment the capillary mass accumulated during the seventy years of reclusion in the devotion of the Lord. In another scale, the artwork deals with a stronger characteristic of conceptual art: the eye represents a fragile side in the art. Reason deconstructs the fragmented spaces while the view can only receive residuous of an immense turbulence.

At the IV Bienal do Mercosul, Solange participates in a poetical proposal around

the contemporary archeology, a theme that superimposes one of the issues of the latin-american continent: the construction of an identity. The DNA by many visitors were collected at the Bienal, making possible to trace the identity of haplogroups, such as africans, europeans, asians, indians, and with the material collected, it was possible to constitute a genetic photography, through codes. The result was shown in a similar form as the Fallopian tubes, where the fecundation of the egg happens. The way that work artworks cross paths with Solange's work enrich its poetical proposal, demonstrating vitality of the installation that shown at first time at the residence of the Count of Santa Marinha, in Belo Horizonte, acquired an inquiring air, intimist, mixing the "Casa Tomada" by Julio Cortazar à "Crônica da Casa Assassinada" by Lúcio Cardoso. In Porto Alegre, it flows in an epic tone where new ways are propitious to visitors interpret its poetical origins.

At the old Senhor do Bonfim Chapel, situated in the historical town of Santa Bárbara (2004), that has recently celebrated its 300th birthday, Solange makes her third installation. Inside the temple, a spherical object is suspended and immediately grabs attention and makes us think of the famous pala at Pinacoteca di Brera, made by Piero della Francesca. Professor Luciana Migliaccio reminds us that Argan observes the that the formal shape would be the image of the proportional law that follows nature. In Santa Barbara, the sky comes inside the sacred construction, the silver sphere shines as if were stars and it brings along the etymology of the baroque word, irregular pearl. Instead of the articulation of Bordéus, Solange stars from the zenithal point that makes the rest of the interferences a dew made of bronze that is distributed through the atrium and through the chapel's garden. Always faithful to a biological and symbolical program. The artist alouds the piece situated in the passage of stairs degrees, caracole shaped, synthesis-sensation of the movement, maximum voltage, steps of the cross in an invertebrate world. The piece in form of a sphere contraposes to the piece in form of a well, working in the maximum contrast between high and low.

The piece in form of well alludes to the encounter of Christ with a samaritan lady, at the beginning of Jacó's well, when God's son offers to the woman the possibility of obtaining water of the fount of eternal life. All the interpolations made by the artist creates a passage of menhirs, in a single time, physical and spiritual.



There is a certain material excess in Solange Pessoa's works. Their forms can barely contain and organize the elements that bring them into being. Leather, fabric and hairs show themselves excessively and escape from any determined control. Furthermore, the organic nature of the works brings them into another domain, corrosive and surreptitious, which slowly takes them to a primitive and unstructured state. Partially subjected to a dynamic of their own, the materials reveal an affirmative and even somewhat aggressive character.

Their relative triumph over form accentuates the lack of meaning of raw things, and the artworks' general appearance has indeed this frightening aspect of victories with no determined significance. However, this predominance of matter contains a paradox. Its affirmation depends on the action of time over things.

Materials that are immune to the passage of time maintain a stability that gives them a durable and pacifying physiognomy, which greatly diminishes the intensity of their presence. It is through the process of disaggregation and decomposition that they actually gain this ostensive presence of something that escapes from the intents of production and use and which, therefore, tends to affirm itself more blatantly, since it does not have the instrumental function of deflecting our attention from its disquieting muteness. In Solange Pessoa's works, things indeed seem to sediment slowly. They tend towards the ground and to a growing undifferentiation.

The used up, worn down aspect of these pieces hints at a remote time of greater integrity. The short distance between nature and culture, witnessed by the fragility of

the forms, speaks of a more harmonious and compassionate existence, in which work required less mediation and therefore called for a simpler social order, averse to specialization and commands. These works presuppose a generous collective experience. And their aged appearance certainly claims a certain relationship to our time — they are, after all, things that have caught up to us — perhaps in the hope of finding traces from that sociability today. However, the coming apart of the materials and the works' restless and torn appearance rather indicate a radical discontinuity of that experience, a growing fracture in those modes of life.

The sadness and torment that weigh over these works point to the impossibility of bringing to the present an existence which one can glimpse, but not restore. Even the most airy and light piece in this exhibition — the strips of fabric which overlap each other — have a smell of death, of the cadavers that are transported in hammocks in some regions of the country. Solange Pessoa's dubious volumes therefore emphasize the interruption of a process and not its continuity. These indecisive bodies, with their absurd and untenable intensity, await the unfolding of an action that has been lost and now wanders around like a ghost. As in Fernando Pessoa's verse, an interrogation prowls this exhibition: "What things unable to look are looking at me?"

To Solange Pessoa, the work of art is the privileged locus for the reestablishment of those violently interrupted processes. This pact with the past accentuates the sadness of the works even further. And the remorse which runs all the way through comes from the possibility of having let something escape, something which will therefore fall forever into oblivion. These gardens of pain, these tortuous topographies, chart a precise geography of something that has maybe ceased to exist. This exhibition deals with the past like someone who negotiates with past feelings of blame.

These old, worn down materials carry in their guts the memory of incomplete occurrences, which now move only in a slow decomposition, encompassing everything in their lingering greed. The uncertain volumes speak of a diffuse time, which cannot gain consistency and become history. There is an excessive duration in all of these pieces. They are gestures, destinies and realities that have not been fulfilled and that return compulsively, in a painful and unwavering insistence. Here, the past is blind and fears being swallowed up by a firm and flat ground.