

Daniel Jorge

Cantaria

Mendes Wood DM São Paulo

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The breadth of Daniel Jorge's sculptural idiom speaks to a sensibility not only for form but also for forms of life. From freestanding objects and totems to suspensions and hangings, wall and floor bound forms, the artist's dexterity in drawing from materials and finding their place in the exhibition is gleaned from this range. This idiom keenly plays out the artist's interest in materiality, which here opens from the nature of materials to how the materials create and cultivate conversations around time, labor, culture, history – life. Elements of the works allude to “cartographies of methods” – the vaster contexts of practice where materials become indices and incorporations of life, both embodied and existential. This is a practice based on, in Jorge's words, “the intelligence of those who sustain life on uneven ground.”

In *Cantaria*, this uneven ground might allude to the hills and valleys, the railways, and rivers of the artist's geographic affinities: Recreio, in the rural countryside of Minas Gerais, where Jorge was born; Curumau, in the West Zone of Rio de Janeiro, where he was raised; Salvador, in Bahia, where he lives and keeps a studio. It might pertain to the grand narratives of coloniality and modernity that shaped his subjectivity. Or, in a more ludic light: how the artist disperses his works in the exhibition space across vertical and horizontal orientations – hanging from the ceiling, attached to a wall, placed on the floor.

Cantaria is the stonecutter's craft: the technical knowledge of hewn stone. It is also song, *canto*, of ritual and labor. This is a formative practice: poetic and pragmatic at once. Jorge's materials are “subjected to the same principle, to test how far the material can go, and to let it answer.” The pounded charcoal comes from wood discarded in the city's garbage, burned until it becomes usable charcoal. On contact with soapstone it oxidizes the surface and releases the quartzite within, so that pieces given blue and charcoal turn lustrous, “an uncontrolled shine, a poetic accident the artist has learned to await.” The blue is graphic residue, exchanged with the city's print shops. The pitch is asphalt emulsion, the same that paves roads and waterproofs the rooftop slabs of houses in the periphery, entering the work as “organic smoke of petroleum” and a shade of diamond black.

Inasmuch as the sculptural forms take shape through formal

intentionality, the artist's poetic gestures embrace lifeworlds of making – from sources and transformations of material, material and philosophical cultural inheritances, the kinds of labor and care that go into the crafting of these forms. Two materials recur, soapstone and oxidized metal. In Jorge's hands they annotate a vaster ecology – relationships with various human and nonhuman agencies, economies of exchange, histories of circulation, and even the lifetime of the material itself.

Soapstone is a dense but soft metamorphic rock found in Minas Gerais, the material of choice for the Brazilian Baroque of the 18th century. Jorge obtains it through barter, whether in the Minas countryside or the historic center of Salvador. Again, in Jorge's words: “Twenty liters of asphalt emulsion for cases of beer with pavers on one of the streets, a stone negotiated with a small community in Cachoeira do Campo, paid for by the extraction and by the labor. Each stone carries a chain of bodies inside the work.”

Fragments of iron appear across the works in various stages of oxidization. “They are sourced from scraps. In some it is oxidized with salt, water, and vinegar, a technique that enslaved people in flight used to darken tools and camouflage them with the forest during the crossings to the quilombos.” Embedded in carved soapstone, sharp iron tips read as towers, spears, nails piercing wood. For the artist, the use of iron is not as ornament but as “camouflaged weapons that survived into the work,” an active memory of escape and an organizing force Jorge calls “symbolic vengeance,” enacted “in gesture, in word, and in laughter, as Dona Sete das Encruzilhadas does.”

The carving of soapstone alludes to an extensive tropology: scarification. The scarring of soapstone in *Cantaria*, speaks to a number of aesthetic and cultural cognates. It is at once cultural inscription, “the Mursi, Iorubá, Nuba gesture that turns skin into a surface of communal inscription”; botanical gesture, breaking “the seed's shell to germinate”; and medical incision, “that allows the vaccine, that cleans the wound, that heals by cutting.” Its effect is the keloid, “the skin that insists on returning itself to its original plane.”

This scarring recurs as a motif across the surfaces – from blankets of dimpled perforations, as in *Incidência* to orderly

patterns of shallow grooves, as in *Bússola leste*. In some works, slick lumps peek through, playing out keloidal phenomena, prominently in *Untitled*, from *Era do escambo series*, where we see it present in what is the form's base, or in another work from the same series, as part of the figure. An art historical gambit plays out across the exhibition. Continuously displaced throughout the myriad modalities of installation is the distinction of figure and ground, long central to Western discourses of sculptural form. While in this framework, sculptural form becomes a question of being continuous with or separate from landscape and existing as discrete form, Jorge's installative gestures recast the sculptural form instead as an encompassing ground that mediates materiality, culture, and history.

Consider this displacement across several modular works where elements repeat, such as the solid tubular form with rounded ends. It appears in single layer forms like *Untitled*, from *Bandeiras e assentamentos series* and, in totemic works such as *Untitled*, from *Era do escambo series*, as both base and body.

In *Balanced Manumission*, stone spheres become, in one part of the work, a base-like appendage that seems to fasten an oxidized iron chain to the floor and, in another, a wall attachment from which a similar chain dangles. The semblances convince, yet the works are actually posed – balanced so that stone and chain hold their weights in check.

In *Boiar é entregar o peso à correnteza*, a length of chain encircles the perimeter of a soapstone chunk riddled with holes. Set directly on the floor, it seems to surface from underground, the chain as ripples of shifting sand, parting, as the stone emerges. In *Elo Pêndulo*, the conceit finds its exceptional form: the very logic of the base is frustrated by the titular pendulum suspended from the ceiling. Another compelling articulation comes in *Orifício*, a gray, scarred soapstone, its titular orifice at the center, embedded in a wall. Seen among the wall bound works of scarred and pigmented soapstone, *Orifício* transfigures the wall – a correlative to the sculptural base elsewhere, into its supplement: the ground that completes and replaces the figure. Such supplementarity renders the idiom an ever-receptive matrix, capable of incorporating and fleshing out material and formal contexts and the vaster ecology of making.

Form and materiality offer an ethical horizon in Jorge's practice as a Black Brazilian artist. Here the sculptural form is a matrix through which the ecological presents itself, mediating both the life of the forms we encounter and the forms of life carried through the making of such forms. Ecological in the sense that it assembles a vaster world of

relations, lifeworlds. As the artist prospects: "The right to subjectivity, to displacement, to abstraction, to ambiguity – rights systematically co-opted from certain bodies in Brazil – are claimed here as the material infrastructure of the work, not as an agenda. The line that renders invisible is the same one that makes possible." It is through these displacements – of the sculptural and the installative – that we glean a practice that shores up and is shored up by an ecology of elders, laborers, community leaders, and revolutionaries; friendships and villages; scarred objects and scraps. It is an ecology that thrives on uneven ground.

– Carlos Quijon, Jr.

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