



Selected Press and Texts

Rosana Paulino

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While speaking to Rosana Paulino and hearing her talk about the works that would comprise *Atlântico Vermelho* [Red Atlantic], the 2017 exhibition presented at Padrão dos Descobrimentos, Lisbon, I got very excited. I had spoken to her a few times about *¿História natural? [¿Natural History?]* (2016, p. 125-133), the book she was working on. In this project that features drawings, collages, digital print, and sewing, Paulino intersects bits of natural history and pieces of information on the science of man, along with images of the fauna and flora and of the peoples that the aforementioned history and science have tried to make disappear.

Disappearance, according to the American feminist Peggy Phelan, is the very reason for performance, its ontological translation. For the poet and scholar Fred Moten, however, the very existence of performance is based on “the conjunction of reproduction and disappearance”. In his opinion, “disappearance is not absence”. That might be what attracts me the most about the works of *Atlântico Vermelho* – and all the works that precede and inform it: studies for the series *Assentamento* [Settlement] and *Adão e Eva no Paraíso Brasileiro* [Adam and Eve in the Brazilian Paradise], the book *¿História natural? —*, the tension between a well-done effort for “performance” of disappearance and the insisting presence of those who should have disappeared.

The traces of the violence and the pressure to disappearance are there, and this is precisely what the artist unveils and brings forth. But there also lies the proof of presence, indicated by bones and skulls, by measured, classified, glued, drawn, blurred, semi-erased black and indigenous bodies (or pieces of them), always linked to elements that show their context, images of Portuguese tiles, of the slave ship (or tomb ship), of Brazilian fauna and flora. This combination of signs generates a certain discomfort and raises suspicion on the nature of natural history and on the rationale of the science of man.

One of Paulino’s works that catch my attention is *Sem título* [Untitled], 2017, composed of three rectangles of digital print on fabric, connected by hand stitching. The central

picture of the work was found in a book by George Ermakoff. In it, a young black woman stands up, facing forward, half of her body revealed (head, back, and arms), eyes fixed straight ahead as if she is staring at the camera. This image is overlapped by one of a human heart, red and on a larger-than-life scale, starting from the left of the woman's chest and extended to her head and face. The overlapping enables the distinction between the two images. Therefore, the face of the young woman appears slightly stained in red through the large heart. On the sides, also with digital printing on fabric, there are two versions of the same image: in what seems to be a sugar cane field, a standing black woman and boy carry a load of sugar cane on their shoulders. To create the versions, Paulino digitally manipulated a black and white image from a book on Cuban slavery. The manipulation gives the image's left side an appearance similar to radiography, a technique repeated by the artist in her works *Paraíso Tropical* [Tropical Paradise] (2017) and *O Progresso das Nações* [The Progress of Nations] (2017), which gives the depicted figures a ghostly aspect. The sewing that joins the three parts of the work together is rough and exposed, in a gesture that recalls surgical suture or crude stitching.

The image of the woman and the child in the sugar cane field appears once more, now slightly altered, in one of *Atlântico Vermelho* (2017) works – a title that also lent its name to the exhibition at *Padrão dos Descobrimentos*. This work offers another ten images, sewn together, in a shape that resembles the placing (or installing, to use a term from the construction field) of tiles on a wall or floor. In Paulino's version, however, the chosen "tiles" have visibly incompatible sizes. In the center of the work, there are four digital prints on fabric, in a rectangular shape and similar size: the two top parts and the last part are digital prints that resemble a sort of mosaic in blue, formed by geometrical forms or curvy florals, usual in Portuguese tiles. In a rupture that attracts the gaze, the third print displays a black and white image of a bone that occupies the entire pictorial space. Printed in red paint, overlapping the "mosaic" of the second top piece, is the sentence "Atlântico Vermelho" [Red Atlantic] and, hanging from the bottom central "tile", red threads extend themselves way further than the work's lower margin. A subtle and exquisite detail, the hung threads evoke other pieces by Paulino, such as the installation *Assentamento* (2013).

The title *Atlântico Vermelho* comes from an approximation to sociologist Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. By employing the concept of a black Atlantic marked by art historian Robert Farris Thompson, Gilroy focused on "the constructive and even precursory role of the African diaspora within the formation of Western modernity". According to Gilroy's argument, people from the African diaspora are full participants in Western modernity, since they "experienced ruptures in time and space, the breaks from tradition, proto-industrialization, and transnationalism, and, crucially, as enslaved subjects, they truly and newly imagined the meaning of freedom, democracy, and autonomy, concepts that would come to characterized modern Western intellectual and political thought and the society". In *Atlântico Vermelho*, however, Paulino focuses on the blood that stained "the black Atlantic" and continues to tint its developments until today – the project presents some works blurred in red: a face, the bottom part of a tomb. Thus, what the artist translates through her work is closer to the "circum-Atlantic" concept, created by Joseph Roach, since it insists on red, on the blood blot, on "the centrality of diasporic and genocidal histories of Africa and the Americas, North and South, in the creation of a culture of modernity". Roach states that "while a great deal of the unspeakable violence instrumental to this creation may have been officially forgotten, circum-Atlantic memory retains its consequences, one of which is that the unspeakable cannot be rendered forever inexpressible". Paulino seems to connect, precisely, to this circum-Atlantic memory and the consequences it holds.

This ocean-red blot, that Paulino makes us navigate through in *Atlântico Vermelho*, dialogues with *Vermelho em Dilúvio* [Red in the Flood] (2016), a performance that the artist Michelle Mattiuzzi carries out on the streets of downtown Rio de Janeiro, around the Zumbi dos Palmares monument. By looking upon the possible dialogue between these two works, even if it has not been the artists' intentions, we might be able to expand our understanding of contemporary productions and that of the complex productions by black artists, still barely explored critically. This approximation also enables us to explore how artists from different generations and with disparate practices address similar issues. Thus, a relevant question to be asked is: how can we think the intersections, the approaching and distancing relations, and mutual impacts between Brazilian art history, African diaspora art history, and what we understand simply as art history?

Inspired by this historic seam and by this subtle and exquisite detail of the hanging threads in *Atlântico Vermelho*, it may be worth sewing up some issues inceptively present in *Parede da Memória* [Wall of Memory] (1994) Paulino's first great work, which completes 25 years in 2019. This event coincides with the 30th anniversary of the exhibition *A mão afro-brasileira: significado da contribuição artística e histórica* [The Afro-Brazilian Hand: Meaning of Its Artistic and Historical Contribution] (1988-2018). This breathing space to celebrate those occasions makes room for one to reflect upon their meaning and developments within Brazilian art history. Although produced at the beginning of Paulino's career, *Parede da Memória* allows us to put some characteristics of her work into perspective, as well as to trace some aspects of contemporary black artists' production. My first encounter with *Parede da Memória* was at the exhibition *Territórios: artistas afrodescendentes no acervo da Pinacoteca* [Territories: Afro-Descendant Artists from the Pinacoteca's Collection] (2016), curated by Tadeu Chiarelli. As I entered the exhibition room, I was doubly surprised: to my right was Emanuel Araújo's *Homenagem à Louise Nevelson* [Homage to Louise Nevelson] (1998-2015), a work of paint on wood that, measuring 245 × 670 × 26.5 cm, fulfilled a large part of the wall; and, to my left, *Parede da Memória*. That space, right at the elevator's exit, created one of these moments in which the curatorial and the expographic projects offer more than a smile, some productive reflection.

For example: what is the relevance of creating a dialogue between these two artists (and works) to the understanding of contemporary Brazilian art history? How does this dialogue expand our understanding of what researcher Krista Thompson calls African diaspora art history? After this happy moment, my teenage niece Heloá, who accompanied me to this visit, and I walked toward Paulino's piece attracted by its details.

Composed by small units described as "fabric, microfiber, digital print on paper, watercolor, cotton thread and cotton waste", *Parede da Memória*, which has had different versions in different sizes, currently measures 173.5 x 724 x 2 cm. The small pieces – a sort of small, square, irregular bundle made of cotton fabric and filled with cotton waste – are hand-sewn with a technique that leaves the thread exposed. The pieces are a reference to the *patuá*, a traditional amulet for protection from African-Brazilian religions, to which the artist was exposed to at home. During an interview, she said she "liked the shape, the protection and the magical character" of the object. In front of each small *patuá*, Paulino, who, as a child, used to play with her parent's box of photos, applied photographic reproductions of eleven members of her family. Those are portraits of children, women, father, and daughter, men wearing suits and ties. In some cases, the images were painted over with watercolor, thus becoming effectively colorized.

The current version of the work comprises 1,500 *patuás* organized in different combinations, disposed of in a grid style that is repeated many times, contrived so as to trigger our emotional memory related to family albums. As the concept of family in Brazilian

imaginary does not include black subjects or, in other words, since we live in a context in which the conjunction black subject and family is part of a blurred memory, what sort of intervention does the work propose or suggest? What kind of memory does it activate? Through the strategy of image reproduction and arrangement, what operation does it perform? What types of emotion may it evoke?

With its massive scale, *Parede da Memória* takes on the role of a monument and, through its aesthetic operations, ensures a place for the memory of black people. Paulino brings these individuals to an eternal present, in a gesture that raises the question: how does this permanent presence defy the impulses of erasing? According to the artist, we may ignore one of these people in the crowd, but not 1,300 (1,500 today) pairs of eyes upon us. We may conclude, observing *Parede da memória* apart, that the work evokes issues of a contemporary individual. However, seeing it in the light of other works produced by the artist over time, we realize that the understanding of this individual is built on a historic process that defines and affects him. What is the effect of this collective steady gaze upon the spectator? After all, who is looking at who? The scale of the work in the exhibition room reveals a relevant female intervention. If taking space is always a political action for a woman, in the case of a black woman taking space and marking it as hers means expanding this action to its maximum capacity.

With *Parede da Memória*, because of its title and its explicit intention of creating a memorial space, Paulino offers us the possibility to explore issues related to history and memory, as well as their recurrence in works by contemporary artists. Hence we may think of, for example, *Transmutação da carne* (2015) by Ayrson Heráclito; the series *Arturos* (1993-1997) and the work *Valongo: cartas ao mar* (2015-16), by Eustáquio Neves; *Lembrança de Nhô Tim* (2016) by Tiago Gualberto; *Árvore do esquecimento* (2013) by Paulo Nazareth; *Estão sendo tecidos* (2013-2018) by Helô Sanvoy; and of aspects of the works by Rodrigo Bueno and Marcos Palhano. In Bueno's case, I understand I might be pushing it a little too far, but the series *Mobília tomada* (c. 2013) seems to me to explicitly evoke non-discernible memories – especially when observed at the Mata Adentro's studio –, and is in dialogue with the work of Marcos Palhano that documents and creates memories of space for offerings.

The concept of memory in the practice of black Brazilian artists requires careful investigation. The observation of this phenomenon within a more extensive context, which includes artists from the African diaspora in the Americas, also deserves attention. Is there a similar impulse among these productions? How are these issues mobilized? Those are some questions we may ask. Here, however, I only intend to raise the issue of memory as an attempt to cause some interventions: to expand the discourse on black Brazilian artists and to suggest the complexity and extension of their production. By pointing out issues concerning such production which require further research, I hope to offer a response to discourses that tend to reduce these artistic practices to a mere "resistance to racism", for example.

However, mentioning the recurrence of the topic of memory in the productions of black artists is not enough. Some questions that may help deepen this understanding are: how is memory activated? What are the different uses for the concept of 'memory' made by these artists? Is it possible to trace a relationship of proximity or distance, to trace an approximation, even if tangential, between these artists' researches? Investigating this recurrence may give us important clues to understand both historic and social contexts to which the productions of black artists belong, as well as the way in which the context informs them. In Paulino's case, it is worth noting the way she aligns with a network of artists whose works mobilize memory, sometimes in direct relation to the experience of slavery, and sometimes as a consequence of this experience.

Manual work as a formal strategy:

A trained engraver, with a bachelor's degree from the School of Arts and Communication at the University of São Paulo and an MFA from the London Print Studio, Paulino has been expanding her skills over her 25-year career. When describing her practice, the artist says "I digitally print on fabric, I overlap a drypoint – a more traditional form of engraving – on this fabric... Besides the printing, there is also sewing. I also do the cutting. I make collages, draw over them... My work has been taking space. I have no longer been presenting the print only as a print. It has become more like installation and begun to occupy space". Since *Parede da memória*, Paulino has been overlapping different media and interventions on her works: the installation comprises photographic reproductions, watercolor, collage, and sewing. In Kimberly Cleveland's opinion, Paulino's sewing technique represents an "opportunity to work with memory and to take a political position in relation to making art". For Cleveland, technique and material are part of the "political aspects" found in the artist's work. Although still timidly, in comparison to works produced later, the sewing technique in *Parede da memória* leaves clues on how Paulino uses (and transforms) "female" practices (or those traditionally seen as such) as a formal strategy to access content and to offer an expanded understanding of the social context to which she belongs. Through the appropriation of objects (and practices) "almost exclusively from the female domain", Paulino tries to understand "the position the black woman occupies in the Brazilian social fabric" and invites us to accompany her on this journey.

In the series *Bastidores* [Embroidery Hoops] (1997), an iconic work Paulino is acknowledged for, the artist manipulates six images of women from her family photo collection and chemically transfers them to pieces of fabric held on embroidering hoops – the frame used for supporting the piece of fabric that will be embroidered. Using black thread, she sews (or sutures) a mass of rough stitches that alter the eyes, mouth, or throat of the pictures. This work has originated from conversations between the artist and her sister, an expert on family relations and domestic violence, and the sewing technique employed on it is performed in a more dense and rustic way. Paulino distances the hoops and the embroidery from their usual attributions and takes them into a semantic territory of power and violence against women.

This gradual use of the sewing technique reappears in the works of *Assentamento*. In this project, the dimension of the works – of Humanscale prints – expands the meanings of their elements. Sewing takes on a more explicit status of surgical suture. And sutures reveal parts that, although attached, are not completely united. Their stitches create a trace of protuberance and excess on the object, evoking the image of a keloid. The suture in these works does not seem to aim to fix the problems created by colonial interventions and their consequences but to unveil them and indicate the processes in which these problems happened. According to Moten, certain suture invocations may suggest attachment, but only in an imprecise way, since "black art", says he, "neither sutures nor is sutured to trauma. There is no remembering, no healing. There is, rather, a perpetual cutting, a constancy of expansive and unfolding rupture and wound".

It's a black woman's thing:

Therefore, in Paulino's work, sewing is both a formal strategy and a feminist intervention. The gesture of sewing, already present in *Parede de memória*, gains an increasingly political and radical character in her later works. However, there is another aspect of this gesture that seems fruitful to me. Deepened throughout her career, sewing metaphorically activates a field that contemplates the perspective of black women and brings their issues to the fore of the debate, something that had not been explicitly explored yet. Trying

to establish philosophical parameters to emancipate the Category of Blackness from the chains imposed by "the scientific and historic ways of knowing that produced it" – the same ones addressed by Paulino in her work –, Denise Ferreira da Silva suggests a black feminist poetic that "would announce a whole range of possibilities for knowing, doing and existing". Paulino's gesture activates this poetic.

Her investigation, focused on the black female individual, has two important implications. On the one hand, it opens the way to the practice of artists committed to similar research, such as Charlene Bicalho, Priscila Rezende, Millena Lizia, Juliana dos Santos, Olyvia Bynum, and Natalia Marques. On the other, this "activation" by Paulino's work also allows us to map out artists who have, directly or indirectly, in a subtler or more radical way, activated a similar poetic. This cartography may include many artists, but I would like to name six whose practices establish contours inside which other practices may be thought of.

On one side we have Sonia Gomes, Eneida Sanches, and Lídia Lisboa. In Gomes, the gesture of sewing, embroidering, tearing and tying, in a work created through accumulation and that has already been described as a "mad man's thing, a black man's thing", reveals a centenary strategy to activate cultural archives, to access and share memory. For Eneida Sanches, a toolmaker – the first woman to draw and manufacture holy tools in Brazil –, whose engravings and drawings include pieces of lead and copper, female strategies (or feminist gestures?) also translate into hammering, sledgehammering and welding. In Lídia Lisboa, the limits between object and performance are blurred. Her practice enables us to envision, within the production of Brazilian black female artists, a possible transition between object and performance as a formal artistic strategy and a feminist tactic, the emergence of the body as the center of the debate.

And, on the other side, I align this cartographic drawing with artists Janaina Barros, Renata Felinto, and Michelle Mattiuzzi. Among other things, Barros explores, through objects and performances, the black femininity, and issues of affection, domesticity, and labor related to it. Felinto proposes, in some of her works, a more direct confrontation with the tensions created by the presence of the black female body in the public space, in addition to forging, with her own body, a renegotiation of this territory. And Mattiuzzi, in turn, maximizes the boundaries between public and private, as well as the associations of the black female body with ideas of objectification, violence, and abjection in Brazilian social fabric.

Developed over the years, Paulino's gesture offers a specific magnifier through which we can reorganize our understanding of these artists' productions. The black feminist poetic – this black (woman's) thing that opens a "range of possibilities to knowing, doing and existing" – (re)orients our gaze so we may take seriously gestures and practices that would, otherwise, go by unnoticed.

Artist of artists: The practice of sharing:

One last thread I wish to tie together concerns Paulino's experience as a master and mentor to other artists, and as a supporter of independent exhibition projects – two aspects that are crucial and need to be cherished among Brazilian black artists. I've left this reflection for last because it is only possible to understand the relevance of Paulino's engagement in these areas through the understanding of her artistic practice. In one of her interviews, Paulino affirmed: "I like this mix of techniques. I feel very comfortable working with many different media. Besides, I want the work to expand. The work has been expanding spatially".

This familiarity and experience with technical experimentation developed through the years, her ability to “listen” to the work and allow it to develop and follow its path, put her in a position of reference. In addition, she has such a passion for education that she dedicates some of her time giving courses and lectures both in informal spaces – Sesc, Unicamp, São Paulo Cultural Center, Oswald de Andrade Cultural Workshops, Colgate University, Duke University – and in independent projects such as Asiko, Dakar (2014), UFMG’s Winter Festival, Oço (in São Paulo), and Raiz Forte (in Espírito Santo).

During the numerous visits I paid to artists in 2014 and 2015, in São Paulo, the frequency the name of Rosana Paulino came up throughout the conversations caught my attention: in some cases, she was mentioned as an important reference, in others, as an occasional or regular mentor; as a single-meeting mentor or as one who is frequently in touch with their protégés; or moreover for hosting artists in residencies (there were occasions when Paulino literally welcomed artists into her home and studio for periods of time to advise them on a specific artistic project). Sidney Amaral, who called her master, Moises Patricio, Renata Felinto, Wagner Viana and Janaina Barros, Charlene Bicalho, Natalia Marques, Juliana dos Santos were some of the artists who mentioned Paulino during these encounters.

During an interview in 2016, Dalton Paula commented on how a residency with Paulino as a mentor provided “new directions” to his work. In a similar account, Charlene Bicalho, who also participated in a residency with Paulino, speaks of how the mentor’s systematic orientation helped her develop her work *Adaptações/Margens de ti* [Adaptations/Your margins] in a visual arts project, which was exhibited at Museu de Arte do Espírito Santo (MAES). Paulino is also cited by artists who want to follow paths different from hers in their processes. In any case, be it by approximation or by contrast, as a model to be followed or not, she is a reference present on the imaginary and on the intellectual meditations of many artists. Also during an interview, curator Claudinei Roberto da Silva commented on the importance of Paulino’s support to studio Oço – an experimental exhibition space created and directed by him from 2006 to 2015, a place mentioned countless times by black artists in São Paulo.²⁵ In the project *Diálogos ausentes* [Absent dialogues] (Itaú Cultural 2016-17),²⁶ Paulino acted as a consultant for a series of conversations with visual artists and participated as a co-curator, along with Diane Lima, in the exhibition with the same name. More recently, the artist-curated painter No Martins’ exhibition at Senac Lapa/Scipião gallery.

Therefore, the “spatial expansion” in Paulino’s production has important literal applications, once her work has been growing physically to the point that projects that started as prints have developed into installations. But the growth has also a metaphorical meaning. The artist’s practice has been paving the way for new generations. Paulino fills a gap since many artists who seek her out fail to find in their universities the environment to test and develop their ideas, which are often centered on non-recognized (or even rejected) cultural traditions within the academic context. Respected as a professor – Paulino is the first black person to hold a PhD in visual arts in Brazil – and mentor, the artist assumes as well the role of a master, in the recognized and historically transmitted concept of cultural traditions of African roots in Brazil, such as a capoeira master, a samba master. In this sense, Rosana Paulino preserves this way of knowing, producing, and existing validated by the time of making and the practice of sharing.

The year is 1994. Eleven photographs from the private archive of Rosana Paulino are printed on a series of cotton cushions. Originally in black and white, some images are retouched with watercolour, providing new shades to the artist's relatives. Fixed one by one on the wall, the little cushions confront us with duplicated anonymous characters who insist on telling us a story. *Parede de memória* [Wall of Memory] – the first work produced by Paulino, while she was still as a student – introduces concerns, which the artist would continue to unfold over the next 25 years of her career.

The items resemble *patuás* – amulets used by devotees of the Afro-Brazilian religion *Camdomblé*. Usually made in a colour that corresponds to an individual *orisha* deity, the *patuás* are little bundles containing herbs and other substances aimed at providing protection to their owners. Here, however, the amulet's primary function is displaced. Protection is not conferred by a natural material or element, but by the reconfiguration of the images, in a quest to create a collective memory.

With the photos occupying a large panel, something that seemed restricted to the artist's personal history becomes a broader exercise of interpretation. Here, Paulino is not only interested in narrating the history of her family, but also the history of several black women and men who were represented and objectified by someone else. For the artist, it is about giving these bodies the right to dignity by examining other forms of self-representation and subjectivation.

A little more than 10 years earlier, in 1982, philosopher Lélia Gonzalez stated that it was time to take on the risk of “talking with no fear of repercussion” against black people being infantilised. Gonzalez explained that “infants are those who do not have their own voice, the child in third person, who only speaks through an adult”. As a remarkable militant of the Brazilian black and feminist movements of the 1970s and 1980s, Gonzalez brought into question the myth of racial democracy in Brazil, which has permeated our national artistic production.

The notorious racial democracy proclaimed by Gilberto Freyre and applied by official powers, both in Salazar's Portugal and the Brazilian military dictatorship, contributed to a lack of complexity around the racial debate in our cultural milieu. We see the iconic modernist images of black women in Di Cavalcanti and Tarsila do Amaral and Lasar Segall's emblematic black figures, all of which are highly allegorical, their identities removed. Despite introducing a positive approach to the debate on identity, Freyre's mixed race concept has reiterated the project of whitening Brazilian culture, sweeping all sorts of violence under the carpet. Rather than democracy, these artistic practices retained a degree of racial discrimination, portraying black people as an exotic element of interest, surrounded by fetish and distance.

The representation of black men and women was even more violent in the field of science. The 19th and 20th centuries witnessed close links between race and eugenics, in a scientific pursuit for a standard of physical and moral normality that would suit the ideals of national progress. There are numerous ethnographic and scientific records,

anthropological exhibitions and anthropometric studies that place black people as a subordinate and inferior race.

This is the background to Rosana Paulino's work. The artist seeks to unveil – in light of Brazilian history – scientific racism, modernist exoticism, selective memory and the stigmatization of black women in Brazil. Within her practice, we gradually understand that image production is a major tool in the struggle for power.

The sewing in *Parede da memória* is expanded to other works, reaching a wider dimension. In the series *Bastidores* [Embroidery Hoops] (1997), Paulino transforms images of bodies by perforating historical portraits, activating items that were previously seen simply as records. Several women appear with their throats, mouths and eyes stitched together, sealed off from the right of expression. Even though the title refers to the round structures that support the fabric being embroidered, the word *bastidores*, in Portuguese, can also mean backstage, suggesting the lack of Black women in the role of protagonist, instead usually relegated to domestic functions. In addition, thread and needle, traditionally linked to female activities and representing modesty and delicateness, play a violent role here, as they maculate and subvert the original meaning of the images, which are also taken from the artist's personal archive.

Alongside her personal archive, Paulino has also shown a constant interest in scientific records. Whilst studying Printmaking at ECA/Universidade de São Paulo, the artist investigated animal species such as fish, bats and lizards. The beginning of the 2000s is marked by a series of drawings that evoke the realm of biology, with cells, eggs, cocoons and metamorphoses. During this time, sewing also appears as a drawing element producing lines and traces. This is the case in *Tecelãs* [Weavers] (2003), in which a profusion of lines ties the mouths, genitals and feet of women in conflict, on the verge of a transformation.

Years later, in *Assentamento* [Settlement] (2013), Paulino manipulates the photograph of a naked woman portrayed for scientific purposes. The original photo was taken by Auguste Stahl, a French-Swiss photographer who recorded black women and men on behalf of European scientists in the 19th century. The artist fragments and reassembles the woman's body parts using dressmaking techniques, and adds roots stemming from her feet, making us reflect on the resistance and legacy of these ancestors. In the artist's words, these are "sutures", surgical interventions in the historical archive. Curator Fabiana Lopes, a researcher of Paulino's work, says it is about the "insistent presence of those who should have disappeared". Paulino unveils something that insists on surviving despite the violence. And science, with its supposed neutrality, begins to expose its racism.

In *Atlântico vermelho* [Red Atlantic] (2017), several fabric pieces are sewn together. The procedure of manipulating historical images is preserved by concealing the black faces and turning the body into an organism with no identity. We can also see a fragment of a traditional Portuguese tile, a vestige and witness of colonisation. The title of

the work is a reference to the concept of the Black Atlantic, created by historian Robert Farris Thompson and later developed by sociologist Paul Gilroy. For Gilroy, the Black Atlantic is about an African diaspora that is not circumscribed to ethnic or local frontiers but constitutes a trans-national network of cultural flows, exchanges and resistance. In Paulino's version, however, the red that replaces the black reinforces the violence behind these exchanges, taking us closer to the experience of the body, the blood and the brutality. Once again, the image becomes body.

If photography is a sign of something that remains in the past, the memento mori par excellence (Susan Sontag, for instance, said that photographing someone takes part of their mortality, thus capturing an image is a game of power), Paulino instead subjects images to a process of transformation, activating them through sewing, cutting, pasting and drawing.

By bringing closer that which is considered intimate and emotional – such as her personal records – to that which is allegedly impartial and technical – such as scientific records – her work asserts the construction of a collective perception and memory through real experience, rather than reiterating so-called official images, constructed within projects of power.

March 2020. Sidney, Australia*. The most prominent public museum in the Australian capital – the Art Gallery of New South Wales – hosts a section of the latest edition of the Biennale of Sidney, which every two years is exhibited across several local cultural sites. There, in a reddish and sumptuous room, ten new drawings by Rosana Paulino share the space with classic paintings produced in previous centuries. The surrounding works display, here and there, icons of Greek-Roman mythology, recurrent in the history of Western art. In turn, Paulino's drawing introduces figures inspired by the African orisha Oyá or Iansã, an animal-woman.

There are two series, *Búfalas* [Female Buffalos] and *Jatobás* [Stinking Toes], which expand on *Senhora das plantas* [Lady of Plants] and present the attributes of black women that the Western archetype has failed to contemplate. Whilst the *Búfalas* are younger, independent women warriors, who have ownership of their own sexuality, the *Jatobás*, whose title refers to a centennial Brazilian tree, are older women, whose wisdom has accumulated with experience over time.

In a WhatsApp audio message, Paulino tells me that these drawings are a step forward in her production. If, in her early works, racial complexities emerged in a more urgent manner, reflecting on the representation of the black body and the violence endured by it, the artist believes that her most recent drawings are more archetypal and subjective, opening up space for other mythologies and fictions. "I'm interested in thinking about an archetype that dialogues with Brazilian women from the perspective of an African background. I'm the daughter of Ogum and Iansã, I don't conform with any

Western archetype, I don't fit that mould", she explains.

Despite not conforming to Western standards, Paulino has been paving the way for a new generation of Afro-diasporic artists who are increasingly securing a larger space in institutions in Brazil and worldwide. Throughout this journey, we have seen the multiplication of demands for a more diverse field of art. After all, being an artist has traditionally been a symbol of social distinction, a confirmation of certain class, race and gender privileges.

In line with this context, in December 2018, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo hosted a large retrospective of the artist's career, curated by Valéria Piccoli and Pedro Nery. The exhibition displayed more than 130 works produced between 1993 and 2018, encompassing a multiplicity of languages. After the initial success, the exhibition travelled to Museu de Arte do Rio in the following year, attracting a wider audience. In the opening night, a large group of young people effusively applauded the artist's speech, seeing in her attitude and trajectory a new cultural benchmark. Now and then, when Paulino was interrupted, someone shouted: "We want to hear her speak!"

By talking "with no fear of repercussion", as Lélia Gonzalez wanted, the work of Rosana Paulino carries forward the legacy of thousands of black women who have day-by-day and anonymously built the history of Brazil. Her practice is a powerful reminder that every subject must have ownership of their own narrative. The journey is long and ongoing, and there is no way back.

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* The 22nd Biennale of Sidney NIRIN was inaugurated on 14th March 2020 and was due to stay open to the public until 8th June; however, it was closed 10 days later due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is available for online visitation here: <https://www.biennaleofsydney.art/>.



A cornerstone of nationhood, positioned at the crossroads of race, gender and sexuality, the black female body became at once a symbol of desire and repulse; a manifestation of social, cultural, and sexual anxieties; an icon on display for public consumption. To satisfy the parameters of colonial ambivalence and domination strategies, the exoticized, folklorized black female body was used as a sign of deviance, animalization, hyper-sexualization. Hortense Spillers' famous essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (1987) starts with the author's acknowledgement of the iconographies her own black female body has been subjected to, as she navigates the racial landscape of the U.S.:

Let's face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. "Peaches" and "Brown Sugar", "Sapphire" and "Earth Mother", "Aunty", "Granny", God's "Holy Fool," a "Miss Ebony First," or "Black Woman at the Podium": I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented (1987, 65). Spillers' quote highlights the meanings attributed to her body – the body of a black woman – all of which are based on somebody else's definitions. They illuminate a spectator's ways of seeing her/that body. As she builds on her argument of how black women's bodies have been central to foundational discourses about the national identity of the U.S. (and the country's notions of sexuality), Spillers highlights how these images have been constructed historically, socially and culturally by an "othering" gaze. Her rendering "My country needs me" indicates that these images have been associated with her black female body, regardless of her ability to consent to any of them. The invention of iconographies of the black body (more specifically, those gendered as female) is rooted on discourses of national belonging and national identities. Such discourses – manipulated by elites in power – have been developed at the expense of silences and erasures of certain bodies – the ones that serve the purpose of otherness. Historically, those iconographies have become hegemonic qualities attached to the ways the black female body is viewed, represented, and consumed in culture, social dynamics, and institutional spaces. But what

can one learn when the black female body breaks those imposed silences? What are the stories those bodies are telling us about themselves? And what are those stories revealing about national paradigms?

My study of contemporary art by black women in the diaspora across the Americas – particularly in the U.S. and Brazil – explores instances of counter-narrative discourses and problematization of some of those long-standing representations of the black female body in the geo-political contexts where they are created. As a larger project (from which this essay is generated) my study bridges contemporary literature and visual culture in works by Audre Lorde and Miriam Alves (focusing on their poetry); and Carrie Mae Weems and Rosana Paulino (and their work of visual assemblage).

2 Whether it is on the page or on canvas; in the craft of language or the composition of objects and materials; I approach the multi-media production of such artists as what Bakhtin called “units of meaning”, created in “dialogic interaction” with contexts outside of themselves (Bakhtin 1992, 279).

In their visuality (on the page or other media), these artistic texts also demand an engagement from the audience (the reader or the viewer) in the meaning-making processes: they confront us with the historical and cultural legacies of dehumanizing representations of the black body, while offering ways to appreciate the view against and beyond those narratives. I am interested in investigating, as a broader project, the artistic capacities for liberatory discourses; the imagined worlds created on the premise that black female subjects are simultaneously complex, nuanced, multi-layered, and whole. Central to my exploration is the notion of plurality of discourses and the multiple visions of liberation: when one listens to the black female body, one is prompted to multivocality (Henderson 1989, 1922).

3 This exploration of plurality, multivocality, and cultural representations leads me to the following questions: How do black women artists re-invent new iconographies of the black body? How do their re-inventions at the same time revisit historical legacies and archives and restore agency to the black bodies? How does this artistic production communicate desire and eroticism that complicates pre-defined notions of black women’s sexualities? In my analysis of the transatlantic creative projects by black women artists, I argue that the black female body is not only a sign, a visible display of meaning. More than that, its materiality – as Houston Baker highlights, its “tactile, essentialist, historical dimensions”

– becomes conceptual (Baker 1988, 351). In that sense, contemporary black women artists use the black female body as a (re)conceptualized icon that defies the principle of arbitrariness of meanings attached to signs. This (re)conceptualization becomes, at once, an

artistic method and methodology integrally involved in the (re)writing of that body. By exploring these contemporary iconographies in black women’s art, I consider the black female body as both signifier and signified; metaphor and historical text. In this sense, my discussion draws from what Patricia Hill Collins has offered in her study of the intersections between black women’s sexuality and the colonizing project in the Americas: “Civilized nation-states required uncivilized and backward colonies for their national identity to have meaning, and the status of women in both places was central to this entire endeavor” (Collins 2005, 30-31).

Within such historical legacies, contemporary black women artists negotiate with inherited social structures that, on one hand, profit from the hypersexualization and commodification of their bodies; and on the other hand fosters mechanisms of silence. Visual artists such as Carrie Mae Weems and Rosana Paulino,⁴ for instance, offer opportunities to critically revisit the past that inform stereotypes of black women’s bodies, asking the audience “to consider what stereotypes mean, how they come to mean what they do”, and whether or not their invocation in their artistic production “can work toward an antiracist agenda” (Burrell 2010, 125). Within that context, I am also invested in interrogating the historical and cultural processes of racial formation and ideologies in

the geopolitical spaces where the works of art are produced. In this interrogation, I discuss how these artistic manifestations unveil the complexities of national discourses and racial ideologies.

In this essay, I focus on a discussion of Rosana Paulino's visual art project *Assentamento(s)* (2012-2013). A native of São Paulo, Brazil, Paulino uses the photographs by Swiss zoologist and Harvard professor, Louis Agassiz, taken in the second half of the nineteenth century in Brazil. I argue that Paulino's series in *Assentamento(s)* (in English, "settlement") reinscribes the black female body into the historical narrative of Brazil, complicating foundational ideas of what may have been considered markers of a national identity – markers of "Brazilianness" (Costa 2011; Oliveira, 2014).

5 The ideological shifts determined by the post-abolition period imposed a redefinition of Brazil as a "mestiça" nation (Abdias 1978, 69 - 75). As Lilia M. Schwarcz explains, after the official dismantling of slavery as a system, the beginnings of the twentieth century in Brazil is marked by a leaning towards a positivist-evolutionist ideology, with an emphasis on the ideals of individual freedom and the citizenship (1993, 14-15). However, the Brazilian intelligentsia was still deeply committed to a deterministic model that understood the performance of entire groups of people as a result of biological predispositions. "An interesting paradox", concludes Schwarcz, "this combination of liberalism and racism establishes a local success that was fundamentally contradictory" (Schwarz 1993, 14, translation is mine). In that context, the national dilemma for the elites in power is posed: if, on one hand, the characterization of the nation as "mestiça" was said to be "interesting" and "unique", on another hand, it highlighted the degenerative fate of a population contaminated by the mixture of incompatible racial groups (Schwarz 1993, 240). Such paradoxes allowed for a national discourse that sold itself as liberal and progressive (free from the rigid racist structures in other modern nations such as the U.S.); while exploiting the labor, sexual and cultural capacities of the black body.

6 By using art techniques and materials that combine lithography, digital printing, drawing, sewing, video, and sculpting, Paulino develops a multi-layered artistic assembly that deconstructs such paradoxes. Paulino's project explores the limitations of the historical archives, highlighting both the struggles and agency of black women within Brazilian society. By allowing the black female subject to tell her own story, I argue that Paulino's artistic project engages with what African-American cultural theorist Saidiya Hartman defines as "critical fabulation": a method that requires the re-assembly and representation of the "authorized accounts" established by the archives (Hartman 2008, 11). Leaning on the conceptualization and method of inquiry established by a practice of critical fabulation, my essay discusses how Paulino's *Assentamento(s)* follows Hartman's proposition to explore the "capacities of the subjunctive" in narratives legitimized by historical archives. In other words, Hartman invites us to ask: "what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done", beyond the confining possibilities of the archives – an invitation for a critical reading of the archives, one that repositions an "impossible story" as central to how we might understand history (Hartman 2008, 10-11). In that same vein, Paulino's *Assentamento(s)* invites us to contemplate the black female body beyond the silences and commodifying language imposed by legacies of colonialism; beyond the long-standing cultural iconographies that often condition black female subjectivities to a patriarchal and racist gaze. As a contemporary artist working directly with archival materials produced in the 19th century, Paulino defines her project as a process of *refazimento*, a remaking of the black female body – its material and subjective conditions, and its significance for new understandings of its historical legacies. As the meaning of the term *refazimento* indicates, Paulino, as the creator of *Assentamento(s)* – this multi-layered installation (in material, medium, and meaning) – rebuilds a narrative that allows for a critical inquiry on colonialism, as Silvia Cunsicanqui has described in her *Sociología de la Imagen* (2015, 30). In many ways, Hartman's concept of "critical fabulation" (and her re-reading of the historical archives) and Cunsicanqui's

reflections upon a decolonial reading of visual works by Waman Poma (Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala), for instance, are helpful in offering a methodological framework for my own reading of art – which is, itself, a decolonial reading practice. Following Cunsicanqui’s methodological footsteps, this essay explores Paulino’s “autonomous discourse” as an artist/creator/meaning-maker of an art piece built upon a “juxtaposition of stigmas” whose origins are rooted in centuries of colonialism and colonial mentality (Cunsicanqui 2015, 30 – translation is mine). My engagement with Paulino’s work becomes, then, an exercise to privilege the search for those decolonial markers of knowledge, more specifically those supported by an understanding of Afro-Brazilian cosmologies and epistemologies (Gonzalez 1988, 69-82)⁷. This exercise invites a shift in interpretations of the gaze (of the viewer; that of the subject depicted in the artwork, and that of the artist); as well as our relationship with space (the space within ourselves – our subjectivities – and the physical space around us, for example the one of the art gallery). This practice also involves a consideration of emotionality as a source of knowledge, a site of inquiry, and a method of discovery and interpretative practice – an approach Audre Lorde explored in her iconic essay “The Uses of the Erotic” (2007, 53-59). In this sense, I am interested in examining how Rosana Paulino deploys, in her visual representations of the black female body, iconographies that (re)define hegemonic historical narratives and liberate the black body to become a sign of plurality and agent of meaningproduction. Thus, at the same time as I pay attention to the artistic meanings in the artwork, I also want to explore the methods of art-making forged by Paulino as conceptual and methodological tools that allow her to reposition the black female subject-self as storyteller.

Rosana Paulino: Refazimento as Method and Methodology

In order to analyze the multi-layered meanings of Paulino’s visuality, I first want to briefly discuss the historical and ideological significance of Louis Agassiz’ collection of *d’guerreotypes*. It is also important to understand the role Agassiz played as an intellectual in a context when elites of the New World, profiting from slavery, desperately needed a fresh theory to sustain the old fallacy of racial hierarchies. Funded by Harvard University and under the patronage of the Portuguese colonial power ruling Brazil, Agassiz assembled a small crew of scientists and students to go on a scientific expedition in 1865, a little more than two decades before the official declaration that abolished slavery in Brazil. As an empiricist, Agassiz was determined to challenge Darwin’s theory by arguing that evolution was not plausible according to geologic records. The trip to Brazil was an attempt to disprove Darwin’s theory, particularly because Agassiz saw in the unique biodiversity of Brazil a perfect laboratory to test his counter-theories of phylogenetic embryology and glacial catastrophe in the tropics. However, the expedition to Brazil was more than a scientific thrill for Agassiz. As a polygenist, Agassiz applied his methods of classification to the documentation of “racial types”, sketching and describing the mixed-race Brazilians whose photographed bodies became part of his specimen collection. He saw the Brazilian phenomenon of *mestiçagem* (racial miscegenation) as “mongrelization” of pure racial types, which would ultimately lead to sterility. Agassiz wanted to prove how miscegenation promoted the deterioration of what he called “the higher race”: a phenomenon he described as presenting “the singular spectacle of a higher race receiving the impress of a lower one, of an educated class adopting the habits and sinking to the level of the savage” (Agassiz 1868, 285). Agassiz’ insistence in disputing Darwinism was also deeply personal: his career and prestige as an intellectual was at stake with the growing popularity of Darwin’s evolutionary theory. Despite losing his battle against Darwinism at the end, Agassiz’ expedition and views left an enduring mark on Brazilian racial thought by reinforcing classification methods that explained the inherent inferiority of non-white racial types – a way of thinking that found great resonance within Brazilian elites for centuries to come. In 2012, when echoes of polygenic thinking still dictate the ways Brazil structures its institutions and social spaces, artist Rosana Paulino decides to explore issues related to the connections between (pseudo)scientific intellectual production and slavery in Brazil

reflections upon a decolonial reading of visual works by Waman Poma (Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala), for instance, are helpful in offering a methodological framework for my own reading of art – which is, itself, a decolonial reading practice. Following Cunsicanqui's methodological footsteps, this essay explores Paulino's "autonomous discourse" as an artist/creator/meaning-maker of an art piece built upon a "juxtaposition of stigmas" whose origins are rooted in centuries of colonialism and colonial mentality (Cunsicanqui 2015, 30 – translation is mine). My engagement with Paulino's work becomes, then, an exercise to privilege the search for those decolonial markers of knowledge, more specifically those supported by an understanding of Afro-Brazilian cosmologies and epistemologies (Gonzalez 1988, 69-82)⁷. This exercise invites a shift in interpretations of the gaze (of the viewer; that of the subject depicted in the artwork, and that of the artist); as well as our relationship with space (the space within ourselves – our subjectivities – and the physical space around us, for example the one of the art gallery). This practice also involves a consideration of emotionality as a source of knowledge, a site of inquiry, and a method of discovery and interpretative practice – an approach Audre Lorde explored in her iconic essay "The Uses of the Erotic" (2007, 53-59). In this sense, I am interested in examining how Rosana Paulino deploys, in her visual representations of the black female body, iconographies that (re)define hegemonic historical narratives and liberate the black body to become a sign of plurality and agent of meaningproduction. Thus, at the same time as I pay attention to the artistic meanings in the artwork, I also want to explore the methods of art-making forged by Paulino as conceptual and methodological tools that allow her to reposition the black female subject-self as storyteller.

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(Hillesheim and Silva, 2018, 415 – 16)8. During her research, Paulino comes across a reproduction of Agassiz's daguerreotype in George Ermakoff's book *O Negro na Fotografia Brasileira do Século XIX* (2004). Paulino's process of re-assembly of Agassiz's photograph included a combination of techniques, juxtaposing different materials and media, and creating, thus, a multi-layered visual text. In the photographic archives left by Agassiz, the black body is frozen and mute; it has no history, no name. In Agassiz' photography, the black body remains as an image subjected to the control and appropriation by those in power. Agassiz' collection denies the photographed black bodies any act of agency, speech, or individual history. There is an objectified body whose identity we do not know; there is a body with no name, no life of its own.

In contrast, *Assentamento(s)* promotes a re-reading of that black body as a depository of individual and communal history. For that reason, Paulino's art-making process represents a significant aspect for my discussion of black women artists' role in elaborating frameworks and methods that allow for revisions, reinterpretations, and expansions for what the historical record is limited to offer as a full narrative. First, Paulino takes the small picture of Agassiz's photograph, included in Ermakoff's book, enlarging it to natural size.

Then, the artist transposes the enlarged picture to a piece of fabric, cutting it into large sections. One by one, Paulino puts the fragmented sections back together applying sutures.

The sutures in the fabric remain visibly rough in the final composition, and the sections are purposefully misaligned. The artist repeats that procedure for all the three images of the black woman – frontal, rear and profile, as the typical practice dictated at the time. In this circular movement of assemblage, disassemblage, and reassemblage of the black female subject in the photograph, Paulino engages with what she calls “um processo de refazimento” (a process of remaking) of the black subject. In a video produced by Célia Antonacci, Paulino explains this process further: Imagine someone who is captured, as was the case of enslaved black women and men; then, thrown on a ship's hold and suddenly arriving at a completely different land, at a completely different space. These people had to rebuild themselves, it's truly a remaking.

Not only they remade themselves, but they also remade a culture. They brought in values, they brought in ideas (Antonacci 2014). Here, the artist herself performs Hartman's method of “critical fabulation” by (re)creating the narrative established by Agassiz' archives. The exposed rough sutures that rebuild the nameless black female body in Paulino's work functions as a reminder that black people have never been integrally incorporated into society as full, dignified individuals: they continue to be treated as second-class citizens, subjected to cycles of oppression. The sutured black body reveals that the social and political integration for black Brazilians – promised since the abolition of slavery in 1888 – remains incomplete, carelessly and poorly performed (Antonacci 2017, 285-286; Aulicino and Oliveira 2015, 89-91). Moreover, Paulino's process of refazimento extrapolates the boundaries of artmaking. In fact, part of Paulino's process of transposing the small photograph into the natural-sized one involved the development of an intimacy with the subject in the photography through which memory and subjectivity is reclaimed and recovered. In an informal interview with the artist, Paulino recalled the moment at which she unraveled the large roll of paper on which the image had been reprinted. As she recalled that moment, she was also reminded of the intensity of her connection with that black woman, as if participating in “a ritualistic preparation for an encounter with an ancestor” (Paulino

Personal Interview, 2018).

Paulino also recalled that, lying on her studio floor, the image of the black woman started to communicate things never revealed before. The artist noticed the black woman figure was wearing a rustic bracelet on her left wrist and that she had a small pattern of scarification stripes on her face, below her eyes. Following the lead of those observations, Paulino's research concluded that both the bracelet and the skin marks were possible signs of complex messages about the woman's ethnic identity and social status. The marks on the figure's face could have been scarification performed by her ethnic group in the African continent, years before her captivity. Studies show that facial scarification, for instance, has been a common practice to mark a person's lineage identification among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria and other parts of the diaspora (Orie 2011, 15). Therefore, it is absolutely plausible that the woman in Agassiz' photograph represented an example of a "pure type" (according to his views): a woman kidnapped in West Africa and enslaved in the Portuguese colony. As Paulino recalled the development of those discoveries, the artist shared a powerful statement: "I realized I was in the presence of someone who had a history; someone who had a community. That woman was somebody's daughter, sister, friend. That woman had a full life" (Paulino "Personal Interview" 2018). This statement by the artist shows the quality of an investment that it is not limited to the artistic endeavor; it is also embedded in the recuperation of historical memory. Therefore, Paulino's process of refazimento should be understood as both a method of inquiry and an aesthetic project of radical, transformative creation. It involves a practice of trespassing the boundaries of historical narratives; of questioning long-established truths. Besides, it is a methodology that accounts for ontological and epistemological knowledge that has been for too long dismissed as illegitimate within the Anglo/Eurocentric canons of intellectual production. Paulino's practice of listening to the ancestral knowledge coming from the black female body in Assentamento(s) can also be understood as a practice that centers marginality and allows for a sensorial learning experience. As pointed out by Célia Maria Antonacci, Paulino's artistic production engages with a reclamation of an 'invisibilized' memory as an ontological experience by black women in every aspect of social life – including the one experienced by the artist herself as a black woman in Brazilian society (Antonacci 2017, 278-279).

In this sense, refazimento also becomes a methodology of artistic creation guided by sensorial principles of investigation that humanizes the black female body and brings her closer to the artist's personal memory. Aulicino and Oliveira highlight this dimension of Paulino's work when they discuss how Assentamento(s) revisits a history of barbarity and complex relationships imposed by the system of slavery; yet, the repositioning of the image, with its fragments imperfectly aligned, also reclaims the flux of life, recreated within a context of impossibilities, brutality, and contradictions (Aulicino and Oliveira 2015, 91 – 92). This aspect of memory becomes particularly relevant today as contemporary black female artists have turned to their own bodies as aesthetic motifs in re-signifying the histories of objectification of black bodies. That is the case of the photographic work by U.S. African American Nona Faustine in the series

“My Country”; and the one by Jamaican-American Renee Valerie Cox in “Venus Hottentot 2000”. In the public sphere, historical institutions worldwide have taken action to recognize (and, in some cases, apologize for) their former participation in perpetrating the legacy of exploitation of black bodies. In some instances, such institutions are confronted by local communities and the descendants of those directly affected by such violence.

As I write this essay, the world is witnessing the development of a lawsuit brought against Harvard University by Tamara Lanier, one of the direct descendants of an enslaved man pictured in Agassiz’ daguerreotypes. Besides his expeditions across South America as a Harvard professor, Agassiz also collected photographs of enslaved people in the U.S., including a plantation field in South Carolina. Differently from the black woman photographed by Agassiz in Brazil, whose identity remains unknown, some of his subjects in the U.S. had a record of identification. Such was the case of Papa Renty and his daughter, Delia, whose images were commissioned by Agassiz in 1850 and, then, returned to Harvard.

These images eventually ended up in a storage cabinet, forgotten, until they were (re)discovered in 1976. Since then, Harvard has kept tight control over access to the collection, charging licensing fees to anyone seeking to use them. Now, Tamara Lanier, one of Renty’s direct descendants, is suing Harvard, demanding that the daguerreotypes of her ancestors be returned to the family (Hartocollis 2019, n.p.). Lanier’s lawsuit has raised important conversations about the role of prestigious institutions, such as Harvard, in the history of slavery across the diaspora. These are the institutions that have promoted, funded, and legitimized knowledge production in the name of scientific and academic rigor. Their direct participation in the perpetuation of racist ideas, the lies, and practices throughout history place them (and the very knowledge they produce) on suspicious terms to whether their current values and pedagogies can affect real change. Besides this, the case has raised debates around issues of memory ownership and personhood. As enslaved people, blacks were considered property by a system that disowned them from their own selfhood. Lanier’s case is built on the argument that Renty’s and Delia’s images are part of the family memory, stolen in the past – and now it should be returned to where it belongs, as a gesture of reparation, restitution, and reintegration of family property, violated by the system of slavery.

However, the enslaved black woman in the daguerreotypes used in Assentamento(s) was never identified. Besides the fact that Agassiz took her photograph in the city of Rio de Janeiro in mid-nineteenth century, nothing else is in the record about who that woman was. Therefore, the impossibility of tracing any lineage that connects that woman to her descendants could lead her to virtually any AfroBrazilian, including Rosana Paulino herself. If that theory is considered, Paulino’s refazimento process of art-making can also be understood as a process of memory restitution, because her work redresses the violations perpetrated over the black female body by re-signifying and reinstating the figure’s humanity and personhood.

In many of the several pieces that compose *Assentamento(s)*, Paulino stitches elements to the fabric on which the image of the black woman's body was transposed. By using this technique, Paulino adds a layer to the original iconography, demanding from the viewer an acknowledgement of that woman's bleeding heart; the unborn life she carries in her uterus; and the roots coming out of her legs, deep into the ground. By re-creating this iconography, without denying its pernicious and enduring historical legacy, Paulino's process of *refazimento* echoes Saidiya Hartman's method of "critical fabulation", which the author explains as follows:

The intention here isn't anything as miraculous as recovering the lives of the enslaved or redeeming the dead, but rather laboring to paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible. This double gesture can be described as straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration (Hartman 2008, 11, emphasis is mine).

By laboring to re-create a full picture of that enslaved nameless captive, Paulino defies the limits of the archives left by Agassiz and his crew. Agassiz' photograph no longer retains its original visual impact; even its purpose is now intercepted by a representation of a different narrative. As a product of *refazimento*, Paulino's piece revisits the historical archives to unveil what would have been; how it would have felt; the untold narratives of the captive. In this sense, Paulino's work illustrates Hartman's method by exploring the "capacities of the subjunctive" (a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and possibilities)" (2008, 11). Following Hartman's framework, Paulino's *Assentamento(s)* becomes, as a re-assembled visual text, "a critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history", by both expanding and displacing the authorized account, once established by Agassiz' gaze (Hartman 2008, 11). Paulino's work is not limited to a reconsideration of history in this process of *refazimento*. Its polyphonic capacity also invites the viewer to explore the ancestral and spiritual dimensions of black women's subjectivity. Let's consider the title of this series: *Assentamento(s)*. In Portuguese, the term comes from *assentar* – to settle, to root, to ground.

The translation into English as "Settlement(s)" proves to be precarious, if not impossible. The word in English does not capture the multiple nuances of its linguistic and cultural meanings in Portuguese, neither their associations with Paulino's work itself. On one hand, the noun *assentamento* evokes ideas of migratory movement, displacement, uprootedness.

On another hand, it may also evoke the un-becoming processes imposed on masses of enslaved bodies, as Paulino describes it in her video statement. As an installation, the three pieces in natural size are settled on bare walls, creating a semi-open shape. In between each piece, placed on the ground of each corner, Paulino also adds what looks like, at first glance, a bundle of wood logs. Placed on the ground in-between the bundles of wood logs, one can notice small-sized screens projecting a repetitive clip of ocean waves hitting the shore. The ocean sound fills the space where the artwork is installed.

The setting created for *Assentamento(s)* demands a slow, attentive, and fully sensorial engagement from the viewer with the art and the space. As one approaches each one

of the pieces, assentadas (settled) on each corner of the room, one starts to notice the details Paulino carefully designs for the installation. Like a narrative, the elements of the story begin to unfold: the bundle of wood logs are mixed with body parts (human limbs made of clay); each bundle, tied by a cord, rests on a bed of straw. Those fragmented body parts, bundled up and deposited next to each one of the natural sized pieces on the walls, connect the individual black woman to a collective of other enslaved black bodies – violated, brutalized, and dismembered in the Middle Passage. On one hand, the sound of the ocean waves becomes a haunting auditory reminder of the traumatic legacies of slavery: the lost lives in the depths of the ocean, the horror, the pain. On another hand, the movement of the sea is also a reminder of the human capacity to survive, to thrive, and to recreate oneself and community. In the Afro-Brazilian cosmological framework of Candomblé, the ocean is one of the main icons representing life energy. Within that context, the term assentamento carries a much more nuanced meaning: it refers to the designated place in a ritual where practitioners (or “filhos/as de santo”) deposit the strength and energy of the temple (the Igbá) through the invocation of Axé – the life force found everywhere around us. Therefore, in Candomblé, “assentar o Axé” (to deposit the Igbá) represents one of the most important elements in a ritual to recognize the inseparable connection between the spiritual and the earthly worlds – and their continuity within each other (Kileuy and Oxaguiã 2009, n. p.). Paulino’s work reconfigures the space of the art gallery, offering the possibility for audiences to re-think their relationship with the space and with art itself; her work brings into the room a sense of sacredness; the gallery becomes a space where the ancestral energy and sacred life force are deposited. As Kimberly Cleveland has highlighted, Paulino appropriates what have been historically “white spaces of control” in Brazil (such as art galleries and museums) by creating, through her art, alternative readings of historical narratives about black subjects (Cleveland 2010, 302). This resignification of visual and spatial meanings in Paulino’s work is particularly important when one considers the black female body at the center of the installation. In Paulino’s work, the black female body becomes the repository of Axé; the conduit of African ancestral connections; and, ultimately, the depository of cultural foundations and wealth.

Furthermore, Assentamento(s) re-designs the ways in which to look at the black body. The sutures that stitch the fragmented body parts function as an oxymoron because their visibility demands the viewer to look at that woman’s wholeness and profound humanity. In its stillness and quiet opulence, the black woman emanates sensuality and desire: she invites us to see her, through her, and beyond her. The pulsing, bleeding heart; her gaze directed at us; her roots reaching out from her legs; the life she quietly generates in her womb – all of this is part of Paulino’s investment in expanding the multi-dimensions of a black female self. In Assentamento(s), this black woman is no longer mute and powerless, as the one in Agassiz’ photograph. In Paulino’s work, this black woman is telling us something: she knows, she sees, she feels, she wants, she reaches out, she grounds herself, she receives, and delivers Axé.

Refazimento as a Counter-Narrative to the Mestiçagem Ideology

In her discussion of Paulino’s work, Cleveland mentions how the artist “does not feel

that an association with Africa is an innate part of her but, rather, something that she can put on and take off, like a game” (2010, 316-317). Cleveland explains further that Paulino chooses “not to take on a superficial ‘African’ identity, because it does not benefit her”, and instead prefers to simply identify as a Brazilian (2010, 316). Cleveland’s understanding of the dynamics of self-identification and representation of blackness in Brazilian art seems to oversimplify the complexities Paulino attempts to engage with. In a country where racial thought has been historically dominated by eugenicist views at first, and a façade of racial democracy in the modern era, black artists have strategically used Afrocentric approaches to convey their positionality and creative stance. Artists such as Abdias do Nascimento, among others, explicitly appropriate a variety of African motifs and symbolism to resist cultural, epistemological, and historical “rejection of Africa on the part of the dominant classes” (Nascimento 1980, 142).

The limitations of that strategic essentialism reside in the idea that Africa is used as an over-generalized mythical trope rather than a complex fabric of multiple historical, cultural, political, and social threads. The fact that Paulino, as a self-declared black woman artist, seems to reject an unequivocal, simplistic, and “superficial” association with any African identity, as Cleveland reports, highlights the artist’s commitment to address the contradictions, ambiguities, and complexities of black subjectivities that were ruptured and rebuilt throughout Brazilian history. In her analysis of contemporary art by Paulino and Argentinian Claudia Contreras, Luana Saturnino Tvardovskas reminds us that art, in its many forms, can be interpreted as a practice of self-definition, in which the artist’s craft is shaped by autobiographical contours, and its platform becomes a space where the artist expresses herself aesthetically, politically, affectively, and ethically (Tvardovskas 2013, 2).

Paulino’s work reflects the artist’s continuous engagement with her own social existence as a black woman in Brazilian society – one that explores the nuances in the interlocking relationships of race, gender, sexuality, and national identity. Paulino’s choice to avoid using an uncomplicated and potentially simplistic association with Africa (as a trope for artistic or personal identification) also indicates a position of inquiry of the conditions (historical, social, cultural, and psychological) under which black diasporic subjectivities have been configured and transformed. That position resonates with Tvardovskas’ understanding of Paulino’s work as subversive and feminist. Paulino revisits her personal memory and history as a black woman in Brazilian society, contextualizing her experiences within a larger national context in which black women’s subjectivities are in flux. Her art approaches, with honesty, “the relationship between a personal history and the Brazilian imaginary”, revealing a narrative of pain and cruelty, and, at the same time, pointing out a pathway constituted by “liberating and transformative relations” (Tvardovskas 2013, 5, translation is mine).

As Tatiana L. Marques and Rafael S. Myczkowski explain further, Rosana Paulino seeks to expose the raw sutures and wounds of domestication of the black female body and their profound fissures in the social, political, and historical fabric, from which art

history cannot escape (2017, 102). By addressing these ruptures (its violent and traumatic effects, physical and symbolic), Paulino questions the pillars that sustain the fallacious claims of racial democracy in Brazil and the maintenance of a social hierarchy that keeps black women in positions of subordination, servitude, or objectification. *Assentamento(s)* illustrates how the artist is engaged in this inquiry by revisiting Brazil's historical past and racial discourse. At the same time, Paulino refrains from making simplistic claims for an uncomplicated "African" identity that could reduce it to a shallow understanding of what "African" means in the African continent and the diaspora. Instead, Paulino chooses to mark her positionality as a black woman who creates art from a particular socio-cultural position, interrogating foundational ideas that characterized the specificity of Brazilian racial formation.

Images of mestiço bodies have been heavily emphasized in Brazilian modern art, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s artistic production. *Mestiçagem* becomes, then, part of the figuration of the tropics in an exaltation of a unique Brazilianness. What Agassiz deemed as a national degradation in mid-nineteenth century becomes a mark of national identity in the modern era of the late twentieth century. Besides Gilberto Freyre in his iconic 1933 *Casa Grande & Senzala*, a myriad of artists and intellectuals are key figures in crafting the contours of that understanding, such as Mário de Andrade, Oswaldo de Andrade, Raul Bopp, and Luís da Câmara Cascudo. In the visual arts, the work of Anita Malfatti, Tarsila do Amaral, and Emiliano Di Cavalcanti exemplify how *mestiçagem* is used as a trope for national identity in combination with other aspects of the natural world of the tropics. As motifs, the visibility of black and mestiço bodies – as it is the case of Amaral's 1923 "A Negra" ("The Black Woman"), for instance – reinforces, on one hand, the folklorization of the Afro-Brazilian cultural element as part of a national emblem. On another hand, this same context promotes the disguise of processes of black identification as a political instrument, promoting the erasure of Afro-Brazilian historical protagonism and subjectivities (Simioni 2013, 6-8). I agree with Aulicino and Oliveira when they remark that Paulino's work represents a clear break from that modernist trend because, instead of reinforcing the idea of cultural mixture, her work visually exposes the sutures in that process of cooptation and assimilation (2015, 91). The use of sutures is, in fact, one of Paulino's artistic signature techniques. Several of her works – such as "Bastidores" (1997), "Tecido Social" (2010), and "Atlântico Vermelho" (2016) – display the use of sutures to symbolize, among other things, the deep wounds imprinted on black bodies (Jaremtchuk 2007, 87-95). Besides this, the sutures imply the ways by which Brazil, as a nation, has an "unresolved past" when it comes to slavery: the Brazilian contemporary mentality and social dynamics insist on treating the black population as inferior (Simioni 2010, 13). The legacies of colonialism and slavery can be easily noticed in contemporary structures of the domestic space where, for instance, the great majority of domestic workers are black women from the outskirts of society and whose work conditions simulate those of late nineteenth century (Rara 2019, 2). As old tropes that permeate the Brazilian imaginary, the monolithic images of the black female body seem to always find their way back to the surface of popular culture and public commentary as forms of commodification of otherness. bell hooks explains that, in order to justify the exploitation and sexual violence imposed on enslaved black women, the dominant culture created

“an iconography of Black female bodies” as hypersexual: “the perfect embodiment of primitive, unbridled eroticism” (hooks 1991, 153). In Brazil, the black female body incorporates a series of stereotypes which I call, inspired by hooks, the iconography of *mestiçagem*. The discourses of *mestiçagem* and the ideology of racial democracy, two fundamental forces that have informed Brazilian racial order for more than three centuries, gave rise to the Brazilian color spectrum and racial hierarchy, predicated on the objectification and sexual exploitation of Afro-Brazilian women (Gonzalez, 1981; Carneiro 1994 and 1999; Gilliam & Gilliam, 1999). Within a set of categories and imageries, shaped by the discourses of *mestiçagem*, “it is possible to perceive that Brazilian women of different color categories other than white are placed in unalterable or un-exchangeable social roles” (Araújo 2016, 154). In the so-called paradise of racial democracy, Brazilian black women’s sexuality gains different contours within the discourses of *mestiçagem* and the establishment of its whitening ideology. In the absence of legal racial segregation, black women’s bodies are manipulated and controlled by a patriarchal and racist ideology that also creates sexualized signifiers according to the laws of pigmentocracy. Those sexualized signifiers reinforce and perpetuate the idea that black women’s sexuality and eroticism do not belong to their own bodies, but to a system that regulates the use of their bodies. As Elisa Larkin Nascimento points out:

Miscegenation as the fruit of the sexual abuse of subjugated females reveals little about mutual understanding among human beings, but does speak eloquently of male colonizers’ violent control over women. The genius of the Brazilian ideology was to make this violence the core of a self-serving discourse in which the white elite purges itself of any responsibility or guilt in the violence inherent to racism and patriarchy (Nascimento 2007, 59).

As an emblem of national unity, Brazilian *mestiçagem* is born out of the historical violation of women’s bodies – black and indigenous. Acknowledging this historical fact should not be used, however, to deny that some interracial relationships in colonial Brazil developed consensually. There is significant historical research that examines the complexities of social structures during the colonial times and the first republic in Brazil, providing data for the consensual, strategic, and emotional ties of interracial and inter-class (official and unofficial) relationships (Hordge-Freeman, 2015; Lavrin, 1989). Yet, the ways in which Brazilian elites manipulated the discourses of *mestiçagem* have create the illusion of a racially democratic society, very popularized in the modern era when the country engaged in building an internationally attractive identity for itself.

In an apparent diversity, the iconography of *mestiçagem* produces the images of *mulatas*, *morenas*, *pardas*, *cafuzas* based on what Osmundo de Araújo Pinho calls “uma miscigenação predatorial” [“a predatory miscegenation”]: it is a sexual practice inscribed within a context of inequalities and asymmetries (2004, 100). It is crucial to notice how quickly and efficiently certain iconographies of *mestiçagem* have become popular and iconic of a gendered-Brazilianness, such as the one of the sensually unbrid-

idled morena or the devil creatures embodied by mulatas. Such iconographies infuse a significant portion of the Brazilian literary canon that reached the status of highly visible expressions of popular culture. This is the case of well-known modernist writer Jorge Amado, whose novels have been translated in more than forty-nine languages and popularized in film and TV shows.

The morenas and mulatas in Amado's novels are often depicted with remarkable sexual agency, but only in service of the development of the male characters they are involved with. Despite their sexual desire, Amado's morena and mulata characters are monolithic figures that support the deceptive ideology of racial cordiality (Araújo 2016, 155-56). What seems to be central in deconstructing this ideological framework is to understand what principles, values and realities it serves. A critical examination of the ideology of *mestiçagem* in Brazil (as in other Latin American countries) should not be based on the denial of *mestiçagem* as a historical phenomenon, given the fact that Brazil reflects the expression of many influences and confluences in its culture, social dynamism, and phenotypical makeup.

To re-think the ideology of *mestiçagem* demands, however, a critical inquiry of a system that has historically privileged those closer to how whiteness is perceived, while disadvantaging, obstructing, and oppressing those who are more visibly perceived as far away from whiteness.

In her 2005 research, Regina Dalcastagnè collects data from over two hundred contemporary Brazilian novels and traced the profile of the characters depicted in those texts. It is shocking to be confronted with the results of Dalcastagnè's study: 92% of all characters in contemporary Brazilian novel (from 1990 to 2004) are white; only 28,9% of protagonists are women. In that scenario, Dalcastagnè highlights, women characters in any significant role for the narrative are mainly confined to the domestic sphere, while black women and *mestiça* characters are largely depicted as domestic or sex workers and criminals (2005, 53-55). Even within that latter group, the stratification follows the logic of whitening in Brazil, according to which *mestiças* tend to be portrayed in higher positions in the social hierarchy, such as housewives and students (2005, 55).

As a genre, the fictional novel is, according to Toni Morrison, an "act of imagination" through which the artist access "the interior life of others" (1995, 92). In resonance with Morrison's idea of fictional writing, Dalcastagnè adds that a reader who approaches a novel, besides the desire for similitude, they want to understand what it means to be an "other"; what it means to inhabit a distant land, to speak a different language, to experience the world in a different manner (2005, 14). In conclusion of her analysis of the data collected, Dalcastagnè reminds us that literature, like any other artistic form, cannot escape a human practice connected to a complex network of interests and power structures. These structures determine what gets to be represented and, therefore, legitimized as the representation of the "other". To deny those connections between art production and structures of power means "to insist on the perpetuation of a form of

oppression that eliminates from literature everything that marks social differences” (Dalcastagnè 2005, 53, translation is mine). Art, therefore, reflects those socio-historical conditions; and, more importantly, the means of art production are controlled, as Dalcastagnè discusses, by systems of legitimization that allow for the visibility of certain representations, while erasing others. In that sense, Paulino’s method of refazimento also promotes the re-ordering of those structures of power and legitimization because her work disrupts the mechanisms of silence these structures impose. Assentamento(s) dismantles the racial codification imagined by Agassiz and perpetuated by the mestiçagem ideology; it restitutes dignity, humanity, history, subjectivity, and complexity to a black female body seen before as mere commodity.

Rosana Paulino and the Contemporary Visual Art Scene in Brazil

Rosana Paulino’s art marks the contemporary moment in the production of visual arts in Brazil. More specifically, Paulino’s work is situated at a contemporary scenario in which black Brazilian artists are increasingly occupying more spaces, including the ones designed to be inaccessible to them. This shift is not happening in a vacuum. It is part of a historical continuum of black Brazilian activism that has consistently included artists of all genres. In its contemporary rendering, the black artistic visibility follows the resurgence of social movements in Brazil in the aftermath of the military regime of the 1960s and 1970s. It is only in the early 1980s that a self-identified black feminist intellectual and creative production begins to conquer some kind of visibility. Black Brazilian feminists have built a trajectory of profound engagement in theorizing about gender, race, class, and liberation, even though they are still kept outside of the broader black feminist canon, which is mostly focused on the U.S. and English-speaking Caribbean. The work of Luiza Bairros, Beatriz Nascimento, Lélia Gonzalez, and Sueli Carneiro remains relatively unknown, even inside of their own home country¹⁰.

Alongside this intellectual trajectory, black Brazilian women artists have developed a multi-faceted and prolific production that questions the limits of genre, aesthetic form, gender, and nationality. In contemporary visual arts, Sonia Gomes, Janaína Barros, Renata Felinto, Musa Michelle Mattiuzzi, and Rosana Paulino are part of a generation of artists that develop an aesthetic exploration centered on issues related to the position and role of black women in Brazilian society. As Alecssandra M. de Oliveira points out, these artists (many of whom are also researchers and curators) are “dangerous” because they address historical issues that have been kept away from the national scene in visual arts: “They took it for themselves the themes and language that express their own lives, and those of their grandmothers, mothers, and sisters – they became the voices that have been silenced” (2017, n.p. translation is mine). Oliveira’s description of such artists as “dangerous” echoes what Audre Lorde had said about self-empowered women in a context where their bodies are controlled: Of course, women so empowered are dangerous... For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of

our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives (Lorde 2007, 55 - 57). In her iconic essay “Uses of the Erotic: the Erotic as Power”, delivered at a 1978 conference, Lorde offered a re-conceptualization of the erotic as “an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered”, available from within (Lorde 2017, 55). For Lorde (a self-identified black, lesbian, warrior, poet), recognizing and using the erotic as a source of empowerment and self-knowledge allows for a refined capacity to reject the terms of long-standing systems of oppression that deny women (and women of color in particular) that source of transformative power. Artists, such as Rosana Paulino, whose commitment is to confront those systems and their historical legacies, pose a threat to the continuity of forms of oppression that marginalize, exploit, and objectify black bodies.

In Brazil, those systems are the ones that have kept black bodies at the bottom of social hierarchies, outside of educational, political and cultural spaces. And such systemic structures are still alive, insisting on setting barriers. The increasing presence of black women artists in the contemporary scenario of visual arts (in Brazil and beyond) proves that the structures of power that attempt to keep them as outsiders have already been shaken.

Inaugurated by the piece “Parede da Memória” in 1994 (“Wall of Memory”), Paulino’s aesthetics questions the conventions and values attributed to the so-called universal themes, by drawing attention to the personal as an entryway to the universal. As an intricate multimedia assemblage, Paulino’s work combines objects typically used in the domestic sphere to highlight the trivialization of violence against women in private life. Such as the case of her series “Bastidores” (1997, “Frames”) in which Paulino sutures the mouths of black women’s faces, printed on fabric and installed on embroidery frames. In 2005, Paulino expanded her art by dialoguing more explicitly with a larger historical background with a focus on race and racial relations in Brazil. Her series “Amas de Leite” (“Wet Nurses”) uses fractured, faceless sculptures to represent how black women’s bodies have been historically objectified since slavery: theirs were the breasts that fed the white babies of the “Big House”, a practice that was fully incorporated in the Brazilian slaveholding society in the nineteenth century. These aspects of Paulino’s artistic production create a poetics of intimacy, marked by an articulation of “notions of domesticated bodies, deterritorialization, violence, and the body as archive” (Marques and Myczkowski 2016, 102). Paulino’s art resonates with a contemporary perspective over the notion of intersectionality by representing, thematically and aesthetically, issues in the crossroads of gender, race, class, nationality, science, and history.

Compared to other contemporary black women artists, Paulino’s work has earned unparalleled national and international visibility. Her art has been exhibited in several art galleries and museums in the U.S., particularly those housed and supported by institutions of higher education. In 2012, Paulino participated in the project “AFRO: Black Identity in America and Brazil” at the Tamarind Institute, a division of the College of Fine Arts at the University of New Mexico, where she produced four lithographs

using Agassiz' photographs – those lithographs initiated the project Assentamento(s). More recently, in 2018, Assentamento(s) was exhibited at Clifford Gallery, at Colgate University, in Hamilton, NY. In 2014, the Espace Culturelle Fort Griffon, in Besançon, Southern France, hosted Paulino's "Mulheres Negras: Obscure Beauté du Brésil"; and, again, in 2017 along with the collective exhibitions for "South-South: Let me Begin Again" at Goodman Gallery, in Cape Town, South Africa.

Despite this international recognition, Paulino's work is still positioned at the margins of what is often selected to occupy international spaces interested in displaying Brazilian visual arts. In 2017, Paulino was invited for a solo exhibition titled "Atlântico Vermelho" ("Red Atlantic") at the Padrão dos Descobrimentos in Lisbon, Portugal. That exhibition was a product of Paulino's extensive research on the history and legacies of the European colonial project in Brazil, particularly the genocide of the indigenous communities and the transatlantic slave traffic it supported and from which it profited. The critic, Antonio Ribeiro, explains further details about the Lisbon exhibit: The set of works exhibited here, as a result of the themes addressed and the materials used – watercolour, sketches, textiles, clay, threads –, their liquidity – the occupation of the space is fluid and spilling – and the sculpted figures – women bound, amputated, caught on hooks –, serve another of the artist's concerns: to make visible the vulnerability to which black people have always been subjected, and, particularly black women. The lines are fine and delicate, the sculptures superbly crafted, but the expressions reflect great suffering, the pain of people at the mercy of those who dominate them (Ribeiro, "Atlântico Vermelho", n.d. n.p.). These elements highlight Paulino's critical inquiry about the issues related to an unresolved past and the consequences of that into the contemporary conditions of marginalized populations in Brazil. In that same year of 2018, the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP), in collaboration with the Tomie Ohtake Institute, hosted an unprecedented largescale exhibition titled "Histórias Afro-Atlânticas" ("Afro-Atlantic Histories"), presenting a selection of four-hundred and fifty works by two-hundred and fourteen artists ranging from the sixteenth to the twenty-first centuries.

The MASP brochure stated that the exhibition was "motivated by a desire and need to draw parallels, frictions and dialogues around the visual cultures of Afro-Atlantic territories – their experiences, creations, worshiping and philosophy" ("Afro-Atlantic Histories" 2018, n.p.). Paulino's work "Bastidores" and "Atlântico Vermelho" were featured among those hundreds of pieces in the exhibition. But it was later that year that Paulino earned a prestigious and significant national recognition for the entire body her work, becoming the first black woman artist to be featured solo in a retrospective exhibition staged in a museum in Brazil.

The event hosted at São Paulo's Pinacoteca, titled "Rosana Paulino: A Costura da Memória" ("The Sewing of Memory") – the artist's largest solo exhibition – celebrated Paulino's trajectory creating installations, engravings, drawings, sculptures and collages. A host of one-hundred-and-forty thoughtprovoking artworks produced from 1993 to 2018 coherently presented a body of work by an artist who navigates the intersec-

tions of poetics, politics, history, and memory. As an artistic project of self-recreation, Paulino's work offers a platform for us to consider the structures of power that regulate the cultural spaces where self-representation comes alive. Such consideration invites further inquiry and exploration of black women's creative processes. What does it mean for black women artists to create methods that allow them to use a language of liberation? What is at stake when black women artists forge spaces to display the artistic language they create? In addition, Paulino's artistic project also promotes a reflection about who gets included in (and exclude from) hegemonic cultural spaces – museums, art galleries, art collections, canons, class syllabi, anthologized bodies of work, and translation projects, just to name a few. In other words, one could ask: how is cultural capital generated and distributed so that black women's artistic production can reach wider audiences? How are resources being used so that marginalized narratives of history and culture can be incorporated into knowledge production? From margin to center, contemporary black women artists, like Rosana Paulino, have crafted trajectories that allow them to occupy multiple subject positions within their artistic, intellectual and political work – a project that highlights pathways in the poetics and politics of self and communal (re)imaginings.