Selected Press and Texts

Sonia Gomes

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Sonia Gomes' work is weaved in the duration of time. Each fabric, outfit and accessory that she accumulates has followed its own trajectory: it was worn, stored, exchanged, presented, and perhaps forgotten before finding a home in the artist's studio. Faced with the infinity of textile fragments and remnants that result from the sum of these trajectories, Sonia Gomes uses her tact and vision to choose her starting point. Choosing a fabric, at that moment, implies choosing a color, a texture, a fit, and an indefinable set of memories. The artist's hands then begin to knead, twist, stretch, tension or suspend the chosen fabric. They also use the material to wrap something – sometimes a found object, sometimes the volume created with the fabrics themselves, sometimes a rope or a metal bar. The sewing then happens as a drawing, a gesture that produces traces and at the same time fixes a stage of the tactile work with the weaving, linking, balancing and associating pieces in a body that, little by little, is formed.

Sonia Gomes touches, welcomes and recombines the epidermis of things, stating that the deepest part is the skin – an affirmation that updates in the context of the artist's life and work a maxim of Paul Valéry often recalled by Gilles Deleuze. Their creation process is a cycle of caressing and snuggling the materials and memories they carry. Perhaps the best thing would be to call it dengo, a Brazilian word with African roots (from Kikongo, one of the Bantu languages) that refers to sweetness. To make a dengo is to snuggle or ask for snuggle. It is to protect and suspend the abrasive of the flow of events. The two works from the Torções series featured in this show are exemplary of the way in which Sonia Gomes employs the tying of fabrics around iron wires and rebars to create a volume, an arrangement that balances itself in space. From a distance, what is perceived is the shape defined by the twisted lines; up close, different colors are revealed, followed by different textures, shines, transparencies, wefts, stains and marks of the many fabrics. Closer still, one can notice the irregular and often colored seams, the partial transparencies and overlaps that produce glazing and combinations of the properties of two or more fabrics, and the creases of the twists that give consistency to the silhouette that had been noticed. by far.

Three pieces begin the new series Entre Pérola e Vergalhão, in which Sonia Gomes' textile work folds in on itself, creating volumes that suggest cocoons, wombs, nests, or other forms of shelter for something growing (such as the shells in which pearls grow). Rebar supports support these volumes at the approximate height of an adult's pelvis. Looking at them, therefore, implies leaning over slightly, plunging one's gaze towards their interior. The relationship between height, scale and volume links these works to corporeality.

Another new series begins in this show with the work Nebula 1. The main volume resulting from the accumulation of fabrics wrapped one on top of the other is, in this case, fixed directly to the gallery ceiling. The weave spreads from the cocoon around a string, which holds a smaller volume at its tip. By reaching for the ceiling and launching a pendant volume, the work emphasizes its relationship with the surrounding space. It simultaneously supports and is supported by its context.

In her collages, Sonia Gomes uses a range of materials – from posca pen to watercolor – to create strokes, chromatic fields, arabesques, hatches, volutes and stains. These elements invented and created by the fluid movement of the hand coexist with others that the artist collects and recombines, such as papers of various shades, textures and thicknesses and clippings from works in process. Thus, each of his two-dimensional works converges risks and free strokes with accumulative processes of appropriation and montage.

In the canvas-body series, the artist takes the investigation she has been developing in her collages to a new level. She begins with a certain contention of graphic media, focusing on arrangements of volutes and curves on jute, from which she paints fields of color. Among the various intersections of the curves, she chooses one to cut, opening a hole that is, at the same time, a passage to a body of fabrics wrapped in twisted wires, which stretches towards three-dimensional space. It is an unclassifiable work, a kind of hybrid painting from which the spatialization of Sonia Gomes' gestures springs.

There is also space for another group of unpublished works. The Relíquia series is the result of the encounter between some of the roughest and some of the most precious materials gathered in Sonia Gomes' studio. Pendant jute pieces make evident the rustic character of its making and its out-of-square contour. Over each of them, the artist placed intricate knits, fringed towels woven with gold thread, antique beads, medals and ornaments that she treasured. The arrangement and support of these elements is done by thick, zigzag stitching lines, which create lines of force continued by some areas of painting. Delicate white crochet towels shelter the reverse of these pieces, and contrast with the raw character of the jute. It is a work of redoubled care and zeal with the memory of the materials – which emphasizes their gestuality to adhere a state of suspension and opacity to the set.

Finally, in the installation Constelação II, Sonia Gomes appropriates the shadows cast by the light source that integrates the work to multiply the overlaps of wefts and lines existing in a cage covered by her textiles. Thus, the open cage leaves behind its meaning as a symbol of deprivation of liberty to become a passage through which multiple possibilities pass. This is the work that most directly addresses narratives of the artist's life, with her desire to free herself from all the limits she knew from a very early age, her vocation as a caregiver (curator) of evils and fissures and with her ambition to recreate the world, starting with their own home (whether it is the house, or the habitat for the clothes and accessories that constitute the nomadic home of clothing).

No door opened easily for Sonia Gomes to pass. She, who grew up as a black girl in a house run by white people in the city of Caetanópolis, Minas Gerais, knew very early on the exclusions attributed to the structural racism of a country founded by the extractive project of the colonial empire. She had to cultivate the seeds of her creative sensibility grain by grain, accumulate the material of her work along the margins and, through the force of obstinacy, coin recognition, for others and for herself, that what she was doing was art. Its action takes place in the duration of time: it begins with the small, deposits its energy in it, adds other small things and continues in this way until it reaches its form of immensity.

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https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/28/arts/design/sonia-gomes-brazil-art.html

The New York Times

Fabrics With Powerful Stories to Tell

The Afro-Brazilian sculptor Sonia Gomes, in a debut U.S. show, gives materials new life — as they have given her life new balance.



By Jill Langlois
Aug. 28, 2020

SÃO PAULO, Brazil — Tucked away on a bottom shelf in Sonia Gomes's studio here is a small cardboard box. Inside, two scarves — one woven in mustard-colored cashmere and the other in a printed silk — are carefully folded. A handwritten letter sits on top.

"The thought that a small part of me could become a part of your work really inspires me and makes me smile," it reads.

The scarves, from an admirer of her work, were gifts, like the other secondhand textiles stretched across the metal screens on Ms. Gomes's studio walls and hanging from the hooks in its ceiling — an antique wedding dress in layers of cream lace and silk, a sky-blue tablecloth with white embroidered flowers that once belonged to a friend's grandmother, fragments of gold lamé that used to be parts of a Carnival costume — that she combines with everyday materials like furniture, driftwood and wire to create abstract sculptures. The materials were given to Ms. Gomes in the hope that she could twist, stuff or stitch them, giving each item a new significance as it becomes part of her work.

"Thank you for creating such honest work, which is part of you, but is also part of the world," wrote the woman who sent the scarves, souvenirs from trips to Pakistan and China.

I feel like people are saying to me, 'give this new life, don't let it die,'" Ms. Gomes said in an interview. "It's something so precious to that person that they want it to become something bigger."

For Ms. Gomes, 72, it's that act of giving those materials new life that has helped her heal her own.

It took Ms. Gomes most of her life to realize that she had always been an artist. As a young girl growing up in Caetanópolis, a small town once known as a manufacturing hub for textiles, she liked to deconstruct her clothes and turn them into something different, using leftover fabric and found materials to make her own jewelry.

"It's part of this rebelliousness that I've always had," she said. "I still don't like things that are predetermined, that say you have to do things or wear things a certain way."

She was 45 when she left behind a career as a lawyer to attend the Guignard School, an art school in her home state of Minas Gerais. There she discovered that "not everything is art, but art can be anything," she said, giving her the confidence to move forward with her work, which reclaims the Afro-Brazilian experience and culture, which continue to be diminished and appropriated in the last country in the Western world to abolish slavery.

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One of her assistants, Juliana dos Santos, also a Black artist, sees the pain and suffering in the twists in Ms. Gomes's sculptures, a representation of the racism she has faced throughout her life as a Black woman in Brazil. The way the materials come together or are taken apart shows the tension between ideas of conflict and peace, and what Ms. dos Santos interprets as the internal struggles Ms. Gomes dealt with because of the prejudice that followed her.

"Her work isn't about sewing; it's about bringing what's inside out," Ms. dos Santos said. "It's not immediate. It comes from within. She's like a researcher. Her work is more about process than product."

Ms. Gomes likes to let fabrics hang to better understand how they'll look over time. Her process is tactile and she looks to the world immediately around her to draw influence, particularly from marginalized artists and artisans who have remained anonymous.

Her debut exhibition at Pace Gallery, which opens Sept. 3 at the gallery's temporary space in East Hampton, N.Y., includes new works and sculptures from previous shows, like "Cordão dos Mentecaptos," in which she contorts, wraps, stuffs and sews multicolored fabrics into varying shapes, linking them together before hanging the finished piece from the ceiling. She has also collaborated on a new mixed-media piece with the painter Marina Perez Simão, who will be part of the September show. (Ms. Gomes's first solo exhibition with Pace Gallery in Manhattan will take place in 2022.)

"She is the kind of artist that, when you see the work, you're a believer rather than just an appreciator," said Marc Glimcher, Pace Gallery's chief executive. "She is like a conductor, and all of these objects and elements are the orchestra. It just resonates."

As a Black woman, Ms. Gomes says she is regularly expected to tell a certain story with her art and to follow what others think Black art should be. But she refuses to be pigeonholed as an activist artist or to have her work branded as handicrafts, a term often used to diminish art made by artists who belong to marginalized groups.

When she left the Guignard School, Gomes struggled to survive with what she made. Because she allows her materials to tell her what they want to be and moves comfortably among different media, her pieces occupied a space that fell between what galleries considered fine art and what the handicraft world thought would sell. But that didn't bother her.

"I don't want to be trapped in any boxes," she said. "It hinders my freedom."

She also knows that working across media wasn't the only hurdle that left her art outside any conventional categories. As a Black woman, she always knew the rules would be different for her. Ms. Gomes said more space is slowly starting to open up for Black artists in Brazil, and it is because of the efforts of the Black artist groups in the country. The young Black people she sees in São Paulo, where she now lives and works, give her hope that those spaces will continue to multiply.

"You can't talk about Brazilian art without talking about Black people," she said. "And we're the ones changing things, with our persistence and our resistance."

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Her art gained recognition outside the country well before it started making waves in Brazil. Gomes was invited to participate in the 2015 Venice Biennale, and in 2017, her work was displayed at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C., and the Turner Contemporary in Margate, England, among others. Her first solo shows at well-known Brazilian institutions would follow. In 2018, her work was featured at the Niterói Contemporary Art Museum and at the Museum of Art of São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP), where she was the first living Afro-Brazilian female artist to have a monographic show.

As her pieces began to reach a wider audience, they elicited a variety of interpretations, some that came as a surprise to Gomes. The moment she heard that her work felt like it was meant to heal, she realized that was exactly what it had done for her.

“While I was working, I was rethinking my entire life,” she said. “All the difficulties. I’ve never had any difficulties because I’m a woman. Because before being a woman, I’m Black.”

For Ms. Gomes, what speaks to her is the history behind the individual materials that make up her art. As they come together, she not only tells her own story, but also the stories of everyone who came before her.

“Art, for me, was born through this necessity for expression,” she said. “Now, I feel like I have a voice.”

The limit of the invisible: Black, Feminine, 2018
Text by Cecilia Fajardo-Hill published by MASP/MAC Rio
on Gomes's exhibition catalogue



Sonia Gomes has always been an artist, though for many years she did non conceived it as such, and also did not care about its label. Still today when she is an internationally recognized artist, it is only partially meaningful. This is relevant because it is at the root of what makes Gomes' work relevant and unique, and of her independence from the art system. She explains: "I am in a circle of privilege thanks to recognition, but my work is marginal, and remains thus, because what marginalizes it is beyond the walls of the museum, it can be at MoMA, but remains marginal. Because we are talking about the work as a body, not as a place." Sonia Gomes' gestural work stands for the body itself, as a way to decolonize a past and reclaim the present to reconstitute both the self and her black heritage. Her art overflows many
of the categories that define Art with capital A. In interview of 2015 she defined herself thus: "My work is black, is feminine, and is marginal. I'm a rebel." In 2018 she further expanded of what these terms may mean: "My work is black, I see my ancestrality there, manifest unconsciously, it's real. The fabric is feminine, because its energy is of change, it allows itself to reach possibilities, everything that permits itself to change is feminine, not only the self but the surroundings. It is marginal because it is an art that according to traditional canons is seen as craft, minor art, black art. I'm rebellious because I exist". Every one of the terms Gomes employs to define herself are transgressive of canonical ideas about art and culture. All these qualities have historically, and still today, meant exclusion, invisibility, and misunderstand- ing. This text will explore Gomes' work in the light of these concepts, in close dialogue with the artist whose voice populates this essay. Gomes' great rebelliousness –at the core of her art- is that she came to occupy a place in the world through her art that was denied to her because she was black. She created work from a young age where she could exist, inhabit herself and provide a sense of place. The artist lost his parents at a very early age, and was brought up by her paternal aunts whom by being white could not appreciate Gomes for who she was, the daughter of a black mother of humble origins. Instead, the sole most important affective and cultural ref- erence in the artist's life is her maternal grandmother Petrina, who was too poor to raise her. Because of her divided background, -culture versus nurture- she grew up within a radical separation and distinction between affection and culture, between freedom and constraint. Because of being black, she was not given the possibility of being simultaneously human and cultured. Gomes explains: "I grew up in a white family, in an aristocratic environment, and all I wanted most as a child was to run to my poor, black grandmother's house. I suffered separation from my family, I was educated, but never cared, it was deprived of me, because I was black, I always felt, and often it was explicit. My awareness of racism was at home in everyday life. I ran away from home when I was 5 years old, just in my clothes and tried to go to my grandmoth- er, I just wanted my grandmother. But she lived in a very poor house." This difficult precondition, created an existential void which was filled over the years by her creativity, allowing her through art, to create again and again situations of integration and healing.

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In order to understand the personal and intimate nature of Gomes' work, its feminine quality and its popular roots, is important to understand the centrality of her grandmother who was a midwife and a spiritual person.
Avó Petrina stands for the maternal, for an expansive and non hierarchical idea of culture, and a sense of place in the world. With her grandmother Gomes experienced the first sewing of her life as she observed her stitching Patuás and other things. The artist writes: "She did not teach me formally, I observed. It's all very sensitive, it's about reaching that fragile memory, it's about trying to materialize the feeling of absence. To penetrate emptiness, to listen to the silence and the absence. This is an inheritance of my grandmoth- er." The artist started using fabric and sewing –and still today-, without formal tuition, a sewing of visible stitches, imperfect, corporeal, emotional, direct, rough. Sonia Gomes has fought the false dichotomy assigned to any non white cultural subject, (as outsider), with every stitch and every twist of fabric. The artist's work may be described as 'textile politics' a term coined by Julia Bryan-Wilson to explain how: "textiles create a rupture around and through notions of amateur art, and craft, throwing

the words themselves into crisis –akin to identity crisis." With every strange union of disparate materials, such as bright acrylic cloth contrasted with a delicately embroided white silk, she has invoked, activated and deactivated the loneliness, and silence and built a place. Also she has erased the division between high and popular culture, between art and crafts. Gomes writes: "My work is very much my grandmother. She is a very strong memory, she is always present in the movement of my work, I remember the rodilha (ring of twisted cloth)she wore on her head to fetch buckets of water. I remember her holding a ball of thread, the patuás."

What is extraordinary of Gomes' vital personal drive key to her work, is how she has embraced throughout her life this central maternal figure of her grandmother, for what she stood for, as the centerpoint of her humanity and cultural values, despite that all around her negated the slightest relevance to it, and despite the fact that she was punished and marginalized because of it. This is Gomes powerful rebeliousness.
Gomes grew up in Caetanòpolis, in the Minas Gerais region, which has a very important textile industry, so fabric was an everyday thing. At her grandmother's Petrina, she saw often remnants of fabric. Initially Gomes produced handbags, necklaces, and accessories, she wore them and also tried to sell them without much success. She explains: "These bags and accesso- ries were always recognized as strange things, objects without practical use because aesthetics extrapolated their recognition as bags or things to wear. Everyone went on to say "Sonia you are an artist, you need to look for an art school" but I thought that because I could not draw I could not have the label of artist. But my works were going beyond any limits, they were becoming things that needed to be studied by me beyond my own obsession ..." Gomes intuitively knew that her objects were unconventional and existential, both because of the public's reaction, and also because they were original and extremely personal. The fact that Gomes wore her art from the start, is an indication of the role her work has played from its inception. They are an extension of her body, a sense of belonging, home, they are protective and provide her a sense of place, her own, independent lieu in the world, despite people not understanding it. As years passed her work became more assured, more complex, and broader, to embrace and appropriate space, covering the furniture of her house, ever expanding in affirmative gestures that were able to invent a protective and imaginative universe , also able to embrace 'others'.
In the mid 1990s Gomes began exhibiting both individually and in group shows, around the same time when, between 1996 and 1999 Gomes started to go to the Guignard Art School in Belo Horizonte. But she did not take regular classes, only isolated courses. She was allergic to oil paint and was not interested in formal training. She explains: "I decided to go try to codify what I did already. It was more to try to rationalize my obsessions (...) I did 2 years of creativity there, it's a course that basically explores non-limits, it forc- es us to imagine impossible possibilities." (...) "I learned to structure my ideas in a more perfect, more technical way. But I was already doing all that was vital in the work since before, which is in the details. I was very crazy about the details." Gomes did not have to unlearn to be herself, she was simply reaffirmed by the art school. Sarah Avila a professor at Guignard assured the artist that she did not need to graduate to be an artist because she was already one. Her vision is so singular and personal that she does not have a direct af- filiation with any artist. She identifies with the work of artists such as Bispo do Rosário and Tunga, but there is no direct or purposeful influence or con- nection. Perhaps one of the most crucial events in Gomes' life in regards to her work, is that in 2001 she went to the US for the first time in her life and during her three months stay, she met black people that were politicized and empowered. This was very different from Brazil where black people had a more submissive attitude and were more marginalized. Gomes wore her hand- bags and accessories and these were appreciated with excitement as wonderful and beautiful. This feedback affirmed Gomes in her decision to dedicate her life to make art upon her return to Brazil. Being a woman artist is hard, but also being black is doubly difficult, espe- cially in Brazil, (though things are slowly changing, and perhaps this exhibi- tion is proof of that).

Gomes explains: "About being difficult to be a woman, I can tell my reality, it's harder to be black." Despite of the difficulty, the artist defines her work as black, following something instinctive and intuitive related to her own ancestrality, The ancestral nature of her work is rooted in her own body, it is inseparable from it; it stands for the body, and for home. She writes: "My work does not raise a political flag, but it is extremely po- litical because the body is political, art is body. But racism is present in my life directly because of my body, which reflects in my work. You see? The color, the cloaks, the knots, all reflect Africa in Brazil, reflect the Black, is an aesthetic, but is the result of a subjectivity you know? I do not use aesthetics as a political tool, my body is political, the ancestral is reflected in the work, it is not an intention to make black art, I do it because I am black, because it reflects my body, my history." The stitch may be existential, gestural, impulsive, painful, vital, like sewing a wound that is stitched together to heal and to create a new body. This stitch standing for a body that was torn, for a body that may speak for other bodies, for a body that may join other bodies, which recuperates the symbolic and material integrity of Black culture, is an activist stitch, a political stitch. The strange material and structural harmony of Gomes sculptures emerges from her use of fabric, her formidable and fear less sense of color, volume, texture, but above all because each piece is urgent and real, each work is restorative of something which will never completely heal, of something that is being constructed every day, and this construction is the creation of being, of existence, what the artist describes as being born again and again, for herself and for others.

Gomes creates different bodies of works. Some are spatial and intervene and subjectivize space such as her series Fuga, serie Lugares, and Memoria; others are more objectual such as her series Patuá, Lugar para um corpo, or Casulo; some range from the intimate to the installative such as her series Torçoes. Untitled, from the series, Torção 2007 (torsion, twisting), made with stitch- ing, bindings, different fabrics and laces on wire, speaks about the political body that Gomes described. Its abstract title is open ended though it suggests something organic and in movement. This work is profoundly suggestive of entrails and organs and for this reason is visceral, a viscerality which is encompassing in materializing Gomes body, the black body. It is relevant to recall here how Rozsika Parker in 1984 explained in her seminal text 'The Subversive Stitch', 'the historical hierarchical division of the arts into fine arts and craft as a major force in the marginalization of women's work.' Embroi- dery and sewing before feminism, was mostly associated to something old fashioned, to femininity, obedience, triviality and domesticity. Parker writes regarding how Feminism took on embroidery as a form of political activism: 'Embroidering the personal as political was, above all, intended to challenge the subordination and oppression of women.' The artist's work defies the traditional marginalization associated to women and crafts, and also notions of race.

Parker's term 'subversive stitch' describe Gomes' non compliant, defiant, political, uneven, stitch. Gomes had access to a good library as a child, but it did not contain art books. Instead it focused on: "World and Brazilian literature for the most part, but I was delighted with drawings of internal organs of the human body that I found in science and biology books. The tissues of the body, the verte- brae, the cartilages and muscles, lost me for hours in the colors and textures, do you know that this reflects my work a lot and nobody has said it? It's a lot about my interior, about a hidden part of the body, the part that we do not see, my work has a lot of this, a lot of that image, I think my relationship with aesthetics also comes from this." This statement is hugely important to understand Gomes' work. Her interest for the texture, colours, density, forms and organicity of the body, is reflected in the twisting, turning, joining; in the precise but rough and visible stitches, in the unpredictable shapes and vol- umes she creates, in the tensions and distensions of the fabric. The misterious formlesness, and integrity of the inner body, become also a metaphor for the creation of a universe which is not ruled by racist and constraining ideas of identity, race and culture. Form in the artist's work becomes a potentiality, an exploration and reinvention of the body itself.

Gomes writes: "Guts. You have arrived where no one has come before, you have arrived in these entrails, in that inner part, which is also memories, is a limit of the invisible, of this relation of existing without being seen, as the parts of our body, as our memories." Untitled, can be seen as the entrails the artist describes, where twisted, stitched fabric becomes the lieu of metamorphosis, physical, mental and emotional; the inner passages of the mind, paths to explore, metabolize, transmute, the void and silence Gomes described earlier on, the place to im- agine the body.

Untitled, also from the series, Torção 2013, does not hang vertically, as the first Torçao described, but is presents an irregular oval composition, resem- bling the shape of a heart transversed by veins and arteries of twisted fabrics and lace. It is important to stress the vivid colors of the disparate fabrics brought together in this and other works by the artist. David Batchelor in his book Chromophobia writes that "Since Aristotle's time, the discrimina- tion against colour has taken a number of forms, some technical, some moral, some racial, some sexual, some social." He reminds us also about Goethe's racist theories of color in his book Theory of Colours, published in 1810, -a time of great colonial and imperial expansion-, that coupled the predilection of vivid colors with savages, uneducated people and children. When Gomes indicates that her work is Black and she relates the blackness to its crafty nature and the richness of color, she stands culturally from the polar opposite place to Goethe and classical aesthetics which have cemented the foundations of 'Art', and still underlie many of the system's prejudices. Gomes creates her art from an affirmative lieu of intuitive dialogue with the ancestral culture of Brazil and Africa. In Chromophobia Batchelor defends the emancipatory pos- sibilities associated with color that may speak to Sonia Gomes's own use of color. He writes: "I want to preserve the strangeness of colour; its otherness is what counts, not the commodification of otherness. The interdisciplinarity is often the antidisciplinary made safe. Colour is antidsciplinary" Antidisciplinary is a good term for Gomes' unruly textures, twists, forms, stitches, con- trasting colors. Untitled is rebellious and independent. It stands intimate and eccentric against the void of the white wall. Pennina Barnett writes: "what if the poetics of cloth were composed of 'soft logics', modes of thought that twists and turns and stretch and fold? And in this movement new encounters were made, beyond the constraint of binaries? The binary offers two possibil- ities, 'either/or'; 'soft logics' offer multiple possibilities. They are the realm of the 'and/and', where anything can happen. Binaries exclude; 'soft logics' are 'to think without excluding -(...) for 'an object that give in is actually stronger than one that resists, because it also permits the opportunity to be oneself in a new way'. Barnett's text is at the heart of much of what Gomes' work does, it is inclusive, non binary, her use of fabric responds to a 'soft log- ic' which both resists and gives in. Gomes' materiality is centered on fabric, on used and discarded cloth and lace. Gomes writes: "The cloth is a material that talks and develops, it responds to my will to tear the impossibilities, car- ries more memory than anything else. It's like I said about my life, but also about a lot of things around. I am not in love with life, I am in love with the mysteries, the secrets of life, the fabric is mysterious, it is woven, it is a set of threads that we do not perceive if we do not get close, if we do not touch, if we do not reflect" Fabric stand for the fabric of the body, for the fabric of ancentral culture, the fabric of memory. Its flexibility, sensuality, its unruly constructive qualities are the very essence of something feminine and vital.

To these qualities, we need to add a new complexity, which is the memory of others. Most of Gomes's fabrics, and materiales have already had a history. They have been discarded or passed down to her to do something with them. The artist has affirned that she takes responsibility for these fabrics and their stories. Joining, stitching together these fabrics is like bringing together bodies and their lives, it is like unraveling the mysteries Gomes' describes, of the intricate nature of fabric itself and the stories it inscribes. These works become a sort of metaphorical family, a new community. Jessica Hemmings writes: 'Textiles remember. This is not something that we necessarily ask of them, nor it is something we can divert them from doing. They do it regardless.

And the memory of the textile is unremittingly democratic: moments of joy and tragedy are recorded on the surface and embedded into the structure of cloth, without permission and often without intention. Textiles remem- ber, in part, because they are hostage to their own fragility. Unlike that of metal or stone, the life span of the textile is not dissimilar to that of our own bodies: newness gradually replaced by wear and tear until worn out." Gomes is acutely aware of the memory of textiles, as described by Hemmings and observed in the work Memoria, 2004 (Memory) which is a sort of cloak which embraces the wall. The artist has explained that she gives a new life to materials that are dead, dead because they have been discarded and no longer have a function. We could say that her work is populated by lived lives, bodies, by ghosts, including the shadows of her own past, which is activated each time she heals something broken, abandoned, discarded. With each transformation, with each joining, turn, twist and stitch, there lies an act of metamorphosis of past trauma, an act of restoration and resistance.

Memoria is a large work, where lace predominates, as well as white color. Two forms of sewing coexist visibly and in dialogue: the delicate textures and intricacies of the original embroidery of the old lace, and Gomes' intense, rough, irregular stitching of the fragments of lace and colorful fabric. It very much seems that in this work, Gomes reconciles the sophistication of bourgeoise culture to which she had access at the price of being deprived of affection as a child, and the ancentral black culture which is inclusive of humanity, affection, expressiveness; and where her body has a place as well as the power of expression. The stitching needs to be unruly, as well as the process of putting together the fragments. These stitches are after all testimo- ny of trauma and resistance, both personal, and collective. Gomes' work is inserted in a long history of African and Afro Brazilian art and culture, and also Western art history. Her series Patuá, 2016, encompasses a multifarious idea of the fetish. It points to the memory of her grandmother who used to stitch Patuás; to Afro Brazilian culture, to psychoanalysis and Western art history. Sonia Gomes likes the term 'fetish' and has no problems in relating it to her work. The fetish may be understood in psychoanalytical terms as an object that stands emotionally and psychologically for something important which absent. In the early 20th century the Surrealists elaborated in important ways on the idea of Fetishism. And their exercises were not only influenced by Freud's psychoanalytical theories, but by their explorations of African 'Primitive' art, available to them in a privileged way as a direct result of French Colonialism. The inception of the colonial idea of the fetish was to describe West African objects invested with magic, used for religious rituals. Ironically this idea is symbiotic to the 'fetishistic' status of Christian iconography. Patuás are small cloth pouches which contain sacred objects for protection. Patuá is a small intimate sculpture, a sort of tight and mysterious bundle of stitched fabric and laces. It also contains small bundles of yarn, buttons, intense areas of crossed chaotic long stitches, and beads. This is an intensely powerful object, with folds of fleshy color fabric that give the organic amorphous shape the appearance of an amniotic sac, a form which can not only contain, but possesses the potentiality to incubate life. Could this fetish be a spiritual object? Gomes writes: "It is not my concern to spiritualize anything. Things spiritualize themselves. I am not religious, but it is about ancestry, about things I feel and cannot explain easily, it is spiritual but far from religious or ritualistic, it is about that invisible that I said." This lack of rational intentionality is at the center to all of Sonia Gomes'work. These work may be spiritual simply because they are about the body and this body beyond flesh and bones is imbued with subjectivity and ancestral references that are also of spiritual nature. Patuá, is not a fetish ascribed to a colonial past or definition, but it stands for the resiliance of culture, to the fact that it transgresses the canonically artistic. It is a rebellious, anapologetic object which is profoundly intimate and culturally and symbolically encom- passing. It's an active object.

Sonia Gomes has explained in interview with Julia Rebouças that she makes the work in an intuitive non rational manner, and that the analysis of the work may be at posteriori process.

The artist comments: ""First I do, then I think. I think the things that are in our unconscious are much more impor- tant than thought. each time I'm more sure that the thought is made by what we already know, that is on the surface, a very thin layer that includes reason. " Gomes' idea that real creative and intellectual freedom is not the result of a rational process may explain the visceral, instinctive nature of much of her work, and also its affective, meditative and nurturing qualities. Her Series Lugar para um corpo (Place for a body), 2014, made with stitching, moorings and different frabrics on wire, is a good example of this freedom. This work reminds us of a nest, perhaps even a uterus.

Gomes writes: "As I said, the material that is the fabric allows you a non-limitation of everything and it is totally that freedom that I understand as the feminine. Paradoxical since freedom is all that women did not have. I think non-limitation is feminine, a possibility. That freedom, and that's exactly what a woman struggles to have ... is all she does not have socially." The association of fabric with freedom and the feminine is important for thinking about this work and many others. Lugar para um corpo is the construction of the idea of home, uterus, belonging, place, intimacy, a symbolic space of protection, which is also a place of liberation. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari write in their seminal book A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia: "For among sedentaries, clothes-fabric and tapestry-fabric tend to annex the body and exterior space, respectively, to the immobile house: fabric integrates the body and the outside into a closed space. On the other hand, the weaving of the nomad indexes clothing and the house itself to the space of the outside, to the open smooth space in which the body moves." As Deleuze and Guattari describe in the quote, Gomes stitching and weaving of the body in fabric/ sculpture may be associated to the nomads' weaving. The fabric for both nomads and Gomes stand for the open space, the world outside/inside, not the comfort and limitation of the bourgeois home. Gomes was -perhaps still is- a nomad moving between the constraints of the paternal aunts and the sense of belonging of the grandmother. Fabric is both protection and the means to reach out into the world. She writes: "I even thought about uterus recently, another day, I thought "Wow, I wanted to be inside the womb, warm, safe. Without thinking I build these places with my work. My job is my space of protection."

A different sculpture from the Series Lugar para um corpo, 2014 resembles an internal organ, perhaps a uterus with red fallopian tubes to the left and to the right a rounded volume of skin color fabric, both sides united by con- necting vesseles of wire wounded with colored cloth. These works are open ended, and with all their associations with the body and the feminine, are abstract, and perhaps because of their abstractedness they are able paradoxi- cally to be so meaningful and liberating. Abstraction has a bad reputation in contemporary art, especially in a country such as Brazil with its long history of modernism. It is often thought as a historical language, nevertheless this is a prejudice. Abstraction has existed for thousands of years and it is not only a modern idea. Gomes writes: "My work is abstract. It is the physical existence of things that exist in the past, in memories, but it does not physi- cally copy those things that are in the mind. There is difference. They are the essence and not the things themselves. Part of my rebellion comes from that." Works from the series Transformación, Desconstrucción, Transmutación, point to the change of one state to another, from the recognizable, and util- itarian into something undefinable. Something common and daily, becomes a new reality which transcend at the same time that it gives meaning to the now and reality itself. Abstraction in Gomes' work is a form of rebelliousness, a form of resistance against constituted meanings and prescribed realities such as racism. Titles such as Lugar para um corpo, Patuá, Memoria, and others, point to recognizable concepts, but they are visceral abstractedness.

Nevertheless, the artist describes that the titles do not determine the work she will produce. She comments that the process of making art is "completely irrational, the title comes later because themes and titles limit."

This points to the earlier artist statement that thought is the result of what we already know, and importantly the established reality Sonia Gomes had to learn as a child, is what she is reimagining through her art. It may be said that even the most abstract line in a picture plane is an autobiographical ges- ture, one that distills, abstracts, and expands narration. It is perhaps for this reason that Sonia Gomes' work is abstract. Her abstraction both blurs and highlights its relation to reality, to the story of the object or the cloth worn by a body, to the pattern and texture of fabric with its echoes of domesticity and daily existence.

The amorphous gestural nature of Gomes' work, is associated to her own entrails and to the complex silence and intimacy of memory; is the expanded field of black culture and the black body. It's bodily and of this recognizable world, and yet abstract, mysterious and unpredictable. It is a work that em- bodies the now, the presence, existence.

Introduction to Sonia Gomes, 2018
Text by Germano Dusha
Comissioned by Mendes Wood DM



Sonia Gomes works with sculpture and installations made with different materials from varied backgrounds – such as clothes and furniture – playing with potential spiritual combinations between them. Her compositions stem from a spontaneous and casual practice of deconstruction and re-assemblage of the everyday objects that cross her path. The artworks are created in a process conducted with a rare intuition, giving life and proposing a new sense to things in the world.

These amalgams carry vestiges of previous existences and each part is added to the whole in a double process: both in their physical nature and their historical weight. Expressionist-like organic forms emerge from the decomposition of affective objects, which invariably lead to the vision of a pulsating life, made from the combination of different experiences and memories.

The artist designs multiple and meticulous contortions with fabric – strictly using handcraft techniques. Each seam or fold comes from vernacular procedures aimed at transcending the notion of the popular, combining the naive (as the result of an informal and self-taught background) and the erudite (in line with a rigorous gaze and gesture); the traditional and the inventive; the readymade and the authorial, in order to forge an affective, aesthetic and political redistribution of art's complexities, raw materials and outcomes. In the entanglement of memories and intuitive materialisations, many biographies find escape routes in a tactile and organic way, experimenting with new and vibrant ways of existing.

My world is today, 2018
Text by Rafael Fonseca published by MASP/MAC Rio on Gomes's exhibition catalogue



Leafing through the catalog for Sonia Gomes's first exhibition in Belo Hori- zonte - Objetos [Objects], held at the Sandra & Márcio gallery in 2004 - what grabs your attention is the sequence of photographs. The first image is of a door, with the edges of its latches and locks standing out in relief we also see a set of keys, connected to these different elements by a blue thread, and pre- sented as an abstract composition. The second photograph features a curious angle in which a human body is present: by the position of the artist's feet, shown in close-up, we see that she is sitting with one leg crossed over the other. She's wearing red sneakers on the parquet floor, From a ball of yarn, a strand extends upward, over her leg, and we note her hand resting on her thigh. On the wall in the background we see part of an artwork, Pano [Rag] (2004), a mix of colorful patches with asymmetrical stitching. As we progress through the publication, we note a discrete, cohesive editorial narrative in which the artist's works are inserted beside photo- graphs of their place in the household; photos of the works are flanked by close-ups of these domestic spaces: we see embroidered lace on a bed and a bathroom mirror with its edges overlaid in fabric; a computer monitor with a cover made from the joining of various patches; a wooden seat covered by threads and fabrics in the kitchen. Among the final images there is a necklace displayed on a mannequin and, in the last photograph, a pendant in the shape of a cross, which is worn by the artist.

We begin this tour with the door, something that divides the environments of a house and differentiates private from public space; we see the artist's body; we continue on, passing by the rooms, and end our tour once again with an image of Gomes's body. The sequence of photographs points to essential aspects of her work: a fusion between residential space and art studio, the relationship between the scale of the human body and the size of her works, the mundane nature of the materials used, which are joined together on utili- tarian objects in contrast to their exhibition in white-cube spaces. Thirteen years separate that publication from the one published by Cobogó last year both with images of the artist's studio. Today, it is no longer the same space that Gomes also inhabited in 2004, but rather a commercial space in downtown Belo Horizonte, rented exclusively for her art practice. In the more recent book, the photographs show this new space-in wider angles; gone are the close-ups of parts of different rooms, and we now receive an in- teresting take on the proportional relationship between architecture and ob- ject, one photograph, in particular, stands out. Gomes's art studio is framed in perspective, on a table near the camera, there are books and notebooks whose covers have been embroidered by the artist; on the walls, we see metal screens that serve as displays, on which recently completed works are tested out. Sewing machines inhabit the space and, further back near the ceiling, various boxes and plastic bags announce the possibility of materials waiting in storage, close at hand to be integrated into her work at any moment.

Upon observing this image, the reader perceives that Gomes's work moves organically from the tables to the walls and from there to the ceiling: the range of artistic possibilities is huge, and the pieces are easily manipulated. As José Alberto Nemer, an artist from Minas Gerais who wrote the first text about the artist in the 2004 catalog, said, [..] the vigor with which Sonia Gomes spreads her restless creativity wherever she lives brings to mind the lessons of the masters of abstract plasticism, such as Piet Mondrian, who said that art would only find its plenitude when it invaded life. If the comparison with Mondrian (1872-1944) sounds like an exaggeration, it is worth noting that Nemer perceived the importance of the home art studio to Gomes's investigation - something latent in the apartment where she now lives in São Paulo, a city that had "called out" to her for some time. As at the beginning of her career, domestic and work spaces fused to ether into a single place. One need only look to the center of her room to give both an elegant absence of empty space on the walls - never a Literal horror vacui and the use, again, of elements such as stools, a bed and even an ironing board. The steel screens remain, but these are strange objects, in metamor- phosis, placed on furniture or affixed prominently to the white walls, and teach us about a certain fantastic afterlife of the things that surround us.
Visiting her places of dwelling and work-whether physically or through photographs leads us to look at Gomes's work in a different way. Thee is a perceptible difference between the way her work can be observed in white- cube spaces created for visual art exhibitions and those spaces that retain architectural elements from their previous use. in this manner evinced the artist's fondness for notions of comfort o inti- macy. By designing the exhibition in the modern tradition of the cube," the formal, sculptural and architectural aspects of the objects highlighted in relation to the space. This impression was reinforced not only by the way the pieces were displayed, but by a certain of the entire exhibition, given by whiteness of the walls, surrounding the works, by the natural light streaming in through the windows, and by the gallery's wooden floor. In the images of exhibitions in which Gomes participated, we can see that most of her work's spatialization is done similarly, leading our gaze to enjoy her creations as abstract pieces that seem to have formal interests what is physical work and concentration can be interpreted as exclusive invitation to pursue artistic beauty. That which inside her home could be viewed as site specific, in this transition between spaces, is trans- formed into an art object. This manner of showing her work is certainly not a problem, especially with regard to exhibitions in art galleries-but it appears to retain something of the procedural, fragile, mundane and experimental nature of her research. Thus the times in which her work is installed in spaces pervaded by con- trasting visual and architectural information stand out. This is when the artist's relationship with the reinvention of form, of material and of herself is maximized, in the same way that Gomes appropriates fabrics, clothes and patches purchased in secondhand shops or which was donated to her in these exhibitions she also appears to appropriate the temporal weight of the places occupied. Showing her work, therefore, becomes an experiment, neither right nor wrong, in which images are temporarily displayed in space. This ephemerality is the driving force, a power presenting itself in non-aseptic spaces.

A good example is a work presented by the artist at the Hauser & Wirth gallery in Los Angeles, in the group exhibition Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947-2016, Between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the building operated as a flour mill, its interior permeated by architectural and chromatic elements from different points in history. The encounter between such an architecture and Gomes's work is a dialogue of temporalities that of the building, and that of the fabrics sewn together by the artist. It is not by chance that the installation suggests a relationship between the works and the human body, in an occupation that is spread over the ceiling, floor and walls. Similar plastic solutions were visible in her participation at the Venice Biennale, in 2015. Occupying part of the Arsenal the city's old shipyard and arsenal works twisted by Gomes climbed its columns and, again, invited the body of the viewer to actively move in relation to their own spatiality.

For the installation she presented at Videobrasil in 2015, the artist conducted experiments based on the joining of dozens of her twisted creations, which were affixed to a tall, wide panel at SESC Pompeia, The monumentality of the installation was undone by the empty spaces between the pieces, remind- ing us of its fragility.
These montages provide, to use Gomes's expression, an encounter between the "patinas of time." The fruits of her home meet a place that differs from the white cube's tendencies toward neutrality and domestication; it is in slightly ruined spaces that the silent drama of her work whispers to us and we perceive the organicity between the architectural occupation and her pieces-as the photographs of her home art studios indicate. It is, therefore, necessary to delve into the secularity of her images.

Upon reading the titles of her works, we often find language reminiscent of a world of intimacy, of shelter and the home: Casulo [Cocoon] (2006), and Colmeia [Hive] (2004) are works that feature this semantic field. Ob- serving the trajectory of Gomes's career chronologically, from her early work we can note the presence of an intersection between the home and the body. Some of Gomes's initial plastic experiences involved the creation of rings, necklaces, and pendants. The methods she used to make these items are similar to the ones she uses today for the objects of her exhibitions: there is no preexisting plan and, as she likes to say, one has to "listen" to the materials and patiently understand what they want. Once a dialogue with the fabrics has been established, the manner in which she will join the pieces together comes to her, and the body must then act to join them together. Far from the refined, clean visual look produced by a fashion seamstress Gomes conducts small surgical interventions, combining textures, sizes and chromat- ic fields. Her stitches differ in size and become a structural element allowing the works to take shape.

In Belo Horizonte, the public was puzzled by Gomes's pieces made for the hands and neck. Subsequently, she came to focus on creating bags. There is something intriguing about the bag beyond its external decoration, as an article made to carry things; in other words, it has an interior architec- ture that is related to both receiving and transferring. In conjunction with the bags, Gomes conducted her first experiments with the appropriation of objects. She was intrigued by birdcages, leading her to create Depurar [Purify] (1999). Just as the bags evoke notions of receiving and transporting, the birdcages point to something drastically different-the cur- tailment of liberty. Like Aracne in her mythological destiny, Gomes weaves a type of cluster into the lower part of this wall piece, which supports a bag of buttons and other small items. Its door ajar, the upper part of the birdcage is sewn with different textures of thread and fabric. In this piece, there is already a formal element to the artist's production: our inabil- ity to account for all of the details presented. Gomes's work appears to have no beginning or end, front or back; no symmetry or relations of weight and color, which bear in themselves a rule for their appreciation.

We begin in one spot, wander over one area of the piece, which leads us to another, and so on. It is certainly not a formalist study that is based on prede- fined formulas. Even if it is possible to note lines of force in her investigation, each piece presents a singular experience in which parts are uniquely com- bined, not to be replicated again. When we place her cage works besides others that refer to notions of shelter, like Colmeia, Casulo, Banco and Cadeira, another formal and existential as- pect of Gomes's work becomes palpable: the assemblage of differences. There is no hierarchy of materials in her poetics; any fabric, from the most to the least expensive, in the best or very worst state of conservation, will be consid- ered according to a chain of relationships place her cage works besides others that refer to that support it. Within her hive, every bee is important. There is no leading role for the queen bee, but rather a dispersion of visual elements that denote work created day after day, detail by detail. The equation between the home and the body is also present, in another way, in Maria dos Anjos (2017-18), one of her most recent works. The piece was commissioned by in her exhibition at the Museu de Arte

Contemporânea de Niterói (MAC) The process of creating the installation began with a wedding dress donated to the artist by a woman Gomes discovered was named Maria dos Anjos. In its monochromatism, this piece contrasts with Gomes's previ- ous work. Here she opened the dress; its chromatic presence comes primarily from the block stitches outlining its organic form.

The fact that it is a dress used in the ritual of marriage brings us again to the sphere of private domestic space. The ceremony, however, is not celebrated, created; it is dissected and transformed into something else. As often with Gomes's work, we are witnessing a process of inception.
Her most recent series, to be presented for the first time at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP), is entitled Raiz Roof 2018) with pieces of wood placed directly on the floor, these works are a continuation of her interest in the appropriation of objects. Tree trunks and branches are presented in a raw manner with no changes to their natural state, and, in this way, the material be comes the base upon which threads and fabrics woven together by the artist are transformed into a fictitious eco- system. Its is not only addresses the tree material, but also poses an existential question about humanity related day after day, detail by detail the 11th Bienal do Mercosul and included in the image what are our origins. What do we consider roots and what do we consider weeds? Are these divisions relevant to the development of an individual a Each visitor has a different answer. With regard to Gomes's own roots, different authors have already explored the relationship between her work and her background." Instead of trying to squeeze an interpretation of her work through the prism of her life, or running the risk of exoticizing her unique trajectory within the white, patriarchal, male and elitist system of the visual arts in Brazil, I will restrict myself to the images. I believe that the roots of Gomes's poetics are based on the equation between her body and the art studio in a physical and symbolic exchange with the body of the viewer and the spaces that shelter her cocoons, hives, bird cages and furniture.

I delight in comparing her work and career with the laid-back song lyrics by Paulinho da Viola in "Meu mundo é hoje" [My World Is Today] (from the 1972 album Dança da solidão), composed by José Batista and Wilson Batista. Only when one is fully in the present is it possible to coordinate the patches of different pasts in so many ways, as Gomes suggests. Her deserved and unexpected recognition has finally arrived, but this, like everything else, is ephemeral; it is just another reason for her to continue to produce at her the humble pace-the way in which Paulinho da Viola decided to use his voice, accompanied only by a guitar, a matchbox, and a flute. We, as an audience, await new folds, cuts, and stitches on materials and narratives crafted by her hands. We, as researchers, curators, and art historians continue in the challenge of thinking through different poetics between the home of Sonia Gomes and those of other artists active in different temporalities and places in the world.

New Shamans, 2017
Text by Fabiana Lopes published by Rubell Family Collection on their catalogue New Shamans/Brazilian Artists



For the past 20 years, Sônia Gomes has been developing an artistic practice taking raw material, textiles and clothes, as a point of departure and articulating them with wire, rope or applied to objects such as bird cages, to create three dimensional objects through the process of stitching, sewing, embroidering, tearing, layering, and wrapping. The resulting objects at times resemble compressed, uneven bundles of colorful fabrics - Made in America, (2015), or in Works from the series Torção and Patuá (1996-ongoing) at times they resemble large asymmetrical fabric assemblages such as the case of Tantas Estórias (2015).

Gomes' engagement with fabrics can be traced to a combination of facts, including the history of Caetanópolis, the artist's hometown. A smaltown sixty-two miles away from the capital Belo Horizonte, Caetanópolis hosted the first textile factory in Minas Gerais in the late 19th century, having women and slaves as the predominant part of its workforce. Partly streaming form the Afro Brazilian textile tradition and from a tradition rooted in working with found objects, Gomes' work can also be mapped in relation to such artists as Artur Bispo do Rosário (1909-1989) (Araújo Bispo, 2016).1 Weaving another critical approach, we have Rosana Paulino (b. 1967). In Paulino's work the process of sewing is extended into suturing-we can think of the work Parede da Memória (1994) in which Paulino produced, through sewing, a panel of twelve hundreds small patuás (amulets), themselves objects from an Afro-Brazilian religion economy also present in Gomes imaginary (series Torções and Patuás); We have also Janaina Barros (b. 1979) whose strategy of sewing and embroidering results in objects (oven gloves, apron, nightgown) that evoke domesticity and affection, and Lidia Lisboa (b. 1971) whose practice of dealing with discarded textiles through crocheting, tying and wrapping, though blurring the boundaries between performance and object making, engages in an intriguingly close dialogue with Gomes. In Gomes' work, the process itself of stitching, uturing. embroidering, and binding reveals a century-long strategy to create and activate archives, to accèss and share memory: memory of previous lives and uses imprinted on the fabrics, clothes and ropes, memory of African traditions inscribed in gestures, of collective knowledge preserved and faded, of unattended hopes and desires. That is what Tantas Estórias (Many Stories) (2015) evokes, as it hangs on the wall with its majestic presence and uneven format. With this archive of memory, Gomes warps ideas of abstraction and fguration, while blending concerns of structure and meaning, of matter and form.

Weaving The Morning, 2016
Text by Ricardo Sardenberg published by Cobogó on Gomes' first monograph



1. One rooster does not weave a morning, he will always need the other roosters, one to pick up the shout that he and toss it to another, another rooster to pick up the shout that a rooster before him and toss it to another, and other roosters with many other roosters to crisscross the sun-threads of their rooster-shouts so that the morning, starting from a frail cobweb, may go on being woven, among all the roosters.

2. And growing larger, becoming a cloth, pitching itself a tent where they all may enter, inter-unfurling itself for them all, in the tent (the morning) which soars free of ties and ropes — the morning, tent of a weave so light that, wo- ven, it lifts itself through itself: balloon light.

"The dress was dead, exhausted, before it got here." based on this idea, Sonia Gomes infuses life to that which had been "dead", whether a dress, a night- gown, wedding invitations, a volume of fables or a decades-old book of pat- terns for sewing clothes. Found or donated materials and their like had life spans of their own before being forgotten or put away in a closet. they were abandoned by time, stripped of their utilitarian meaning. Yet even so, in the artist's hands, the objects continued to be imbued with memory — personal, secret histories; they were occasionally donated by owners who possessed intimate emotional connections with those objects and hoped that the artist might help them to find new meanings in them.

That is the situation of the objects when they enter the artist's studio: they carry their own lives within themselves, a past that must be treated with dig- nity and respect, but that no longer needs to be revealed, for it is not a matter of resuscitation, but of infusing new life, new history, or new symbolic value through sewing, through junctions, through the torsions and formal configu- rations of the various materials.

This situation is imposed upon Sonia Gomes, bringing about a need for her to respect not only the object itself, but its memory as well; thus, the artist is moved. During the entire process she pauses, reflects and, groping in search for a way to interfere in that which has been donated to her or which she had the luck to stumble upon in her path, she sustains herself upon the aesthetic beauty of things, upon the material characteristics of the fabrics themselves, and upon her intuition. This triad makes up a personal ethic that is the trig- ger for the artist to breathe life into such objects. The life of this camisole or that book will now be art.

The ethical question permeates the whole of Sonia Gomes's creative process. But ethical question that it may be, it is an intimate matter rather than a necessarily social, political or economic one that upholds the artist's work. It is being in the world that matters to Sonia Gomes — something that appears to possess a great affinity with Duchamp's

definition of the artist as one who breathes. For this reason, the point of encounter between these materials lies within the cocoon of the studio, of the exterior world in which they lived over time, and of the artist, who also lives anonymously in this exterior world and turns within herself, into her studio. It is in this mesh of [hi] stories, inside this cosmic web, that Gomes slowly elaborates the various parts that crisscross, weaving lived experience and a new life that gains autonomy with regard to the past in its new, present form.

To be in the present is to be in the world. In this sense, Sonia Gomes's work may be likened to the work of Mira Schendel. At first sight, the colors and scale of the works force an antagonism between the two. Nothing could pro- vide a greater contrast than Schendel's tonal subtleties, the frangibility of the objects she made and their small scale in comparison with Gomes's mantles and structures. Yet, we shall see a correlation between them if we turn to other formal traits, such as the graphism or the drawings of lines implicit in the sculpture of both. They are lines that denote a "reflexivity of gesture, a childlike carefreeness".2 Both share a sense of simplicity before form, without necessarily pre-defining their designs. Beyond matters of form, what most likens the two artists is being in the world, in this present world. Mira Schen- del once wrote, "To be loyally of this world. And not to be of this world."2 — a proposition that Gomes applies throughout her process until arriving at a work. It is the simplicity in her creative stance, her detachment from the future and a rendering present of the past so as to be in the world now — and yet not be. Yet for Mira Schendel, to be in this world is to be faithful to the materiality of things, delegating final resolution of the work to its physical properties. For instance, a sheet of paper makes use of its relationship to gravity or its own transparency in order to find a new state of permanence in the present. For Sonia Gomes, things are no longer "loyally" of this world, for the world today is cluttered with ready-made things, pre-fabricated and oftentimes already "used". Hence the need to structure and (re) construct them. To be in the present and act upon it is what Schendel and Gomes share before objects, the same ethical dilemma with regard to what may be found in the studio, the central point of this silent struggle between the artist and her things. And yet their worlds are very different ones.

For Sonia Gomes, if we read the technical specifications of her works, the ethical dilemma of acting upon things by means of a structural intervention may be interpreted as something beyond formal problems. The point is labor itself. Not the "work" of art, but the daily toil, the act, the gesture of making, of producing something, "useless" object though it may be. In these technical specifications we find nouns such as fabric, wire, various types of lace, fiber- board, paper and so on. We find elements we can see and touch. Also listed in the specifications are revealing words such as "sewing" and "tying" that refer to gesture, to the making of the work. And for Gomes, the act of making in the studio is something concrete, palpable and visible as well as a poetic act that results in descriptions of who she is and where she comes from. It is in sewing and tying that we find a link between past and present, between the things of the world and the artist. For these are techniques that imply the artist's correlation with the artisan that is part of Gomes's trajectory; a symbiotic relationship. It is the Greek technites, understood as making by weaver and artist, one who uses a technique, who produces things. it is with the idea of the technites that Gomes reaffirms that the sewing and tying are not mere gesture. In Portuguese, the words for sewing and tying (respectively, costuras e amarrações) are also feminine nouns in which we are able to locate the artist's expression as artisan as well as that of the artisan as artist. It is the manual labor that transfers itself for artist and artisan alike from gesture to work as something palpable equivalent to material, wire, fabric, fiberboard or paper that once belonged to or was crafted by another person. By means of the noun incorporated to the materials list, the time invested in producing the work becomes a constituent part of it. For Gomes, sewing, tying, lace and baubles possess identical status, for the work and the things are united by the artist's gesture.

However, it is not only the objectification of manual labor that is in question here. A poetic action is also at stake. In a sense that is much used in Brazilian Portuguese slang, tying is also an amorous entanglement, a powerful bond of affection. Gomes once remarked to me that the aunts in her father's home provided her with access to education and a well-being of sorts; that they gave her everything but affection. And so we return to that cocoon-like sense of the studio to which I alluded previously. In an etymological sense, an artisan is one who produces her work in a domestic and traditional manner. Yet in her home studio, Sonia Gomes's stitches and ties are quite non-traditional, concentrating on aesthetic quality and on the temporal context of the parts that she collects, in a kind of lived experience of the things inside her home studio. And therein lies the paradox in the greek artist/artisan who trans- ferred his existence to the work and became anonymous with regard to it. Sonia Gomes transfers her labor and time to the work, thus becoming a part of it just as the work becomes part of her, albeit without following received tradition to the letter. For the artist, the home studio is a point of projection of "affection un-received", a space in which she coexists with objects in the course of gestating a new life. It is a domestic studio because it exists inside a house (or, rather, a home — a place in which affection may be retrieved).

As in her work, the artist emphasizes sewing, and identifies the physical sense of her tying points, an assessment of the encounter between hand, needle, thread or torsion can be a good way to feel one's way around her work. This second point of encounter can also be related to the technites, or to the encounter between artisan and artist within a studio environment. Whereas the studio is a space for the artist's encounter with things, hand, needle and thread undoubtedly conform a second crossroad. The studio is a point of convergences, of being in the world. Hand, needle and thread make up a point of encounter for acting in the world. The artist's very history casts light upon this matter. She spent her childhood in Caetanópolis — a city that is still home to the second oldest textile factory in Brazil — where she lived for 28 years before moving to Belo Horizonte. She was raised by her maternal grandmother, a black midwife and faith healer who taught her the rudiments of sewing in early childhood with endearment and affection and, later on, by aunts who "gave [her] everything but affection", living in a city in which weaving was the principal source of employment. It is precisely in making with her own hands that we locate the artist's ethical stance. The act of creating with one's hands is akin (albeit not restricted) to the notion of tradition. Gomes's work does not contain a "cultural will" to reproduction of a technique, of a model or even of a way of making to be followed. But her tradition reflects an affective intimacy with techniques and gesture that de- rive from her childhood education by her grandmother. Therefore, sewing is a learned — albeit never formally studied — technique used to allow the artist contact with her sensibility and her making as an individual.

The point of encounter between the artist's hand and her tools takes on a broader meaning. It is not the reproduction of a pre-established model, learned in school or transmitted by a "master"; it is precisely the act of manu- facture that begins with the artist's aesthetic and affective experimentation. And it is with her hands that the artist expresses her affection like a caress.

Thus, the stitch, the act of endlessly reproducing the gesture of joining things — fabric, wires, threads, lace —, is where the artist condenses her own lived experiences and the experience of things, in this studio encounter, expressing her affection for the world and the things that clutter it. In a way, this is an act of healing. Sewing as a narrative exercise, one that standardizes the things that are spread throughout the world or in our unconscious. An effort to bring a new order, a new meaning, a way of explaining things for herself: a way of being in this world without being of this world.

Sewn Words, 2015
Text by Solange Farkas published by Cobogó on Gomes' first monograph



The art of Sonia Gomes binds cultural movements and traditions that are somehow related to the affirmation of memory, identity and the transform- ative power of creation in situations of vulnerability and invisibility. By its very nature, it alludes to the feminine art of sewing that produced an immeas- urable — and, notwithstanding, anonymous — legacy of meshes, weaves and designs, wearable works of art that dressed and continue to dress the bodies and homes of entire civilizations. Guaranteeing a new kind of frequently critical extended life to something which already did not fit in the world, the re-signification of textile art, the idea of building with what has been discard- ed and the conceptual path upon which she embarked instinctively drew her closer to the contemporary work of artists from the African continent. This trend emerges in a setting under construction, still quite lacking in material resources, institutional structures and, above all, visibility on the global cir- cuit.

Beyond this, the fragility of her chosen materials, base for the twists, stitches and embroidery with which she constructs her pieces — fabric, patchwork, castoff clothing — inscribes her within a remarkably Brazilian context. "the world of this artist from [the Brazilian state of] Minas Gerais remits us to a powerful Brazilian tradition of transforming unstable, difficult materials into stable, permanent and true art", writes artist and curator Emanuel Araújo in the exhibition catalog for A Nova Mão Afro-Brasileira (2013), which took stock, at São Paulo's Museu Afro-Brasil, of the contribution of Afro-descend- ant artists in the making of Brazilian culture. Sonia Gomes was among the 15 contemporary artists who dialogued with works from the museum's collec- tion in that exhibition, alongside Ayrson Heráclito, Eustáquio Neves, Moisés Patrício, and others.

Discovered in the 2010s by the Brazilian and international market and institutional circuit, the work of Sonia Gomes approaches these traditions naturally and is, itself, the product of an intuited form of resistance — to a sense of inadequacy, to class discrimination, to racial prejudice, to loneliness. Her work stems from a restlessness that developes into manual crafting, instinctively overcoming the limitations imposed upon that which pertains to the register of handcraft through use, form, and function. In so doing, it gains formal density and broader conceptual horizons; simultaneously, it becomes something assimilated slowly within the context of the rarefied art scene of 1990s Brazil, when the prevalence of the market's logic limited the perspec- tive that defines what is and what is not art even more than it does today.
Much later, upon being nominated for the Pipa prize in 2012 (which hap- pened again in 2016), the artist said: "I began to experiment with giving my things a personal touch. Perhaps even in search of visibility, so that people would see me. I think we are born artists. Then, at some point in life, [the] art surfaces, otherwise you go crazy. I didn't know it was art; I found out later." During a trip to the United States, several not necessarily erudite interlocutors pointed out the nature of her work; up to that point, she felt like

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The years she spent in her simple, floorless home are of capital importance. Wise in the

ways of African-based folk traditions, a midwife, and a faith healer, her grandmother initiated her in binding and braiding, as well as in the making of bundles, yoyo rosettes, gris gris, and rodilhas — pieces of cloth twisted and rolled into a sort of round cushion that serves to hold boxes, cans, or trays upon one's head. Later on, living with her father's family in a well- to-do environment, she came to know the European face of textile craftsman- ship in the Madeira Island embroidery and Richelieu cutwork, beyond the appeal of a large library. When she speaks, she often polarizes erudite culture and affection, the former as belonging to her father's home, the latter to her grandmother's. As the artist herself puts it: "My story is this union of the popular and the erudite. The popular came from my grandmother, my moth- er's mother, who raised me until I turned five. She was a very simple but very wise woman, a traditional healer, and a midwife. She was a powerful figure.

I was still a girl when I moved to my father's family's house, where I came into contact with an environment that really was more erudite. There was a large library in the house and, inevitably, I came into contact with European culture. My father's father was English and his mother was Portuguese. But my grandmother's small house never lost itself in me. She lived in a simple place, with no floor. When I went to live with my father, in a house with flooring, I didn't even like it. I tried to run away several times. My truth was in simplicity. At least that's where the affection was. This coming together of different worlds is a very Brazilian thing, isn't it?."2 Rumination materializes in combined mixtures, stitches, cutting, mending, folds and applications — a private language of re-signification. "this con- nection with fabric has to do with the culture of the city, but also with my own way of relating to things. Samples would arrive at my father's house; I enjoyed looking at them; they stimulated me. I soon began twisting, tying and toying with color." Thus was woven the foundation of that which Sonia ultimately recognized as art work; of what she showed for the first time in 1994, in Belo Horizonte, alongside collages and object-books; of what made a powerful arrival on the market in the 2010s; and of what were described in 2015 by an English newspaper as "spectacularly colored organic forms", of her appearance at the 56th edition of the Venice Biennale. Sonia was the only Brazilian artist invited by general curator Okwui Enwezor to participate in the All the World's Futures Show,3 his personal curatorial statement.

Having studied law, Sonia Gomes is a self-taught artist. Her education took place in the practice of the workspace she maintains in a commercial building in Belo Horizonte, something hybrid, chaotic — part studio, part sewing workshop and part used clothing deposit. She attended free art courses at the Escola Guignard, UEMG, and at the UFMG, and that only after she had had her first public show. Her casual, free and intuitive strategy, as well as the practice that moves in tandem with the threshold of handcrafting and, above all else, the conceptual articulation that simultaneously separates and brings together art and handcraft are some of the many commonalities shared by her practice and the work of contemporary African artists. It is something she could see for herself when she participated in the exhibition of work by afro-descendant Afro-Brazilian artists that I organized for Dak'Art (2016)4 in Senegal, with Moisés Patrício, Daniel Lima, Thiago Martins de Melo and Paulo Nazareth.

This affinity is not limited to conceptual content, but extends, for instance, to the textile matter and to a relationship with traditions into which it is inserted. Taken up anew and reinvented within a contemporary context, the many variants of African textile art currently make up a territory explored by various artists in addition to being a particularly appropriate vehicle for deal- ing with connections between the present and the past, with the possibilities of expressive transcendence contained within a vast cultural heritage. It also extends to a practice that unfolds into myriad languages in the work of artists such as the Ghanese El Anatsui, the South African Mbongeni Buthelezi and the Ethiopian Elias Sime, who make use of industrial and urban discard such as plastic, scrap metal, buttons, and threads. Not by chance are these materials often reborn in shapes that

refer us to the textile world such as capes and tapestries, or through sewing techniques. Frequently dedicated to the discussion of consumerism, the work of these artists recalls, in turn, the form how, in the discourse of Sonia Gomes, the use of used materials is imbued with an almost magical aspect. As if — by means of what she does — it were the artist's lot to give life to dead things and new meaning to the stories they bear. Of donations she receives — of fabric, but not only –, Sonia states: "the material arrives here asking for help, don't let me die, let me live in another body. The point of the work is the movement of life that I seek to impart to everything I do." Or: "It's as if I had some great responsibility for these things. I feel that they arrive with a request of sorts. Each thing carries with it the history of its donor. My action begins with these pieces that come to me, from the history that comes with the memory of the material.

"5 Finally, it is curious to remember how, in the West, for a very long time, the textile arts and/or those related to the use of techniques that belonged tradi- tionally to the feminine domain, such as sewing, embroidery and patchwork, were regarded as a minor art, seen as "decorative". Not by chance did preju- dice against forms of expression asso- ciated with the worlds of the domestic and the feminine become part of the agenda for 1960s and 1970s feminist art, which saw in it a tacit principle for the devaluation of the feminine itself. By selecting the domestic world and matters of gender as a theme, artists of the day chose to rescue traditional languages and textile supports so that they might challenge and undo the classical hierarchizing that denies craftsman- ship handcraft the status of art. The most renowned of them, the Canadian Miriam Schapiro, co-founder with Judy Chicago do Feminist Arts Program at CalArts, created collages out of textile patches donated at her request by women who attended her lectures throughout the country. Schapiro called those works "femmages", a concept used to designate "activities as they were practiced by women using traditional women's techniques to achieve their art." "i wanted to validate the traditional activities of women, to connect myself to those unknown women artists who had made quilts, who had done the invisible 'women's work' of civilization. I wanted to acknowledge them, to honor them", Schapiro wrote in 1977.

One of the invited artists at the 19th edition of the Festival de arte Contem- porânea Sesc_Videobrasil (São Paulo, 2015), Sonia Gomes represented, within that context, a point in a constellation of artists who emerged from the symbolic territory we call the global or geopolitical South. Although nothing in her work deals directly with this South, the solitary way in which she found a private path of her own, a language so imbued with meanings — the feminine, the artisanal, the textile — made it a paradigm of the art produced in this territory.

In the catalog for the exhibition Panoramas Do Sul | Artistas Convidados, in a lengthy interview she granted curator Júlia Rebouças, who was part of the festival's curatorial team and was responsible for the artist's curatorial supervision, Sonia declares: "of course my work carries that South. My work is black, it is feminine, and it is marginal. I am a rebel. I never worried about masking or stifling anything that might or might not fit standards of what is called art. I always sought nonconformity with things that are established. I had to overcome a lot of obstacles because I'm a woman, because I'm black, because I was too old enough to be considered one of Brazilian art's young talents. Even here, people found it difficult to understand my work. People reject our roots, they feel more comfortable with what comes from abroad. We're prejudiced against ourselves. My work is Brazilian."

The Reverse of Rigid, a refutation of geometry, 2018
Text by Rodrigo Moura published by MASP/MAC Rio on Gomes's exhibition catalogue



1.
In the catalog for her first solo sculpture exhibition, in 2004, Sonia Gomes published a series of images of her art studio home. Color photographs show a shared space of living and working, of intimacy and production. The images are also testament to the tenuous borders between seeing and doing. The works mix into the space, enter into it, as if it were their special place, without the traumatic rupture the object experiences when transported to the exhibition space.

In one of the images, we see what appears to be a bed covered b a small laced blanket and a cushion. Actually, these are two works - one delicately laid out over the bed, with occupied and empty areas connected by threads; the other, a sculpture resting where a head would normally lie, made into a bundle, with its stuffed parts stitched and covered in diaphanous fabrics. Beside it, bags dangle from a coat rack. One of them features the artist's unmistakable color palette and her trademark topstitching in black thread is this also a work of art In another image, the artist's body itself is covered by garments that overlap other planes, hanging from the wall, in a continuity between body, space and work. The seats of stools were enveloped in fabric and threads; the frame of a bathroom mirror was entirely covered in differently patterned patches.
The images recall a 20th-century tradition, in which artists would build their workplaces as an extension of their artistic practice (and vice-versa) a lineage that spans from the studio of Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) in Paris to the celebrated sculpture Merzbau (1937) by the German artist Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948), and, in the Brazilian context, continues with Ninhos [Nests], by Hélio Oiticica (1937-1980), structures that are living spaces for the artist and his guests, suitable for public interaction when moved to an exhibition space Because of its intimate nature and the physical properties of her sculpting, Gomes's art studio, which appears in these photographs, is like a sewing room. Except, as an artist, Gomes has never sewn or woven professionally. How ever, the collection of objects in her art studio and their placement differs from the type of organization found in other studios, in which order obeys distinct methods of separation, placement and fixation, suitable for rigid objects. Here, the fundamentally flexible nature of fabric shapes it is: adhesion to space. How it falls, as they say. The image of a spider web, woven with threads produced by its inhabitant, is also not so different from that of this studio.

2.
Gomes began to produce three-dimensional art objects with the practice of transforming her clothing. In altering them, she also created new and accessories for herself and friends, by joining together pieces of fabric that came to her in many ways, though primarily by donation. In a recent text about the artist, curator Solange Farkas affirms that the choice of practices associated with sewing and weaving are at the center of gender-based a tistic practice in which the lack of prestige associated with traditional knowledge and housework is questioned and transformed into artistic value.

This position opposes a mechanistic and phallocentric vision, according to which industry, progress and "cold" materials hold greater importance. Weaving, sewing and embroidery are forms of countering this notion. extile work traces Gomes back to her roots in Minas Gerais. The artist garments was born in the municipality of Caetanópolis, a town previously known as Cedro, the name of the stream along which one of the country's first textile companies, Companhia de Fiação e Tecidos Cedro e Cachoeira, was founded in 1872. The artist remembers growing up amidst fabric samples from the factory that dominated the city's economy. Another important characteristic of her origin is her biracial family background, in which she experienced two realities-that of her mother's family, poor and black, which possessed traditional kind of knowledge; and her father's family, white and well-off, which passed down a formal culture. From these two visions emerged the need to in terpret her work based on personal memories and art history.

Memória [Memoryl (2004) is a monumental occasion for such interpretation. As the title suggests, the work is entirely made from pieces of clothing belonging to a recently deceased person, material that came to the artist through personal ties, though Gomes does not mention the name of the woman whose garment she used. The fragments of textile material threads, lace, fabrics, trim-appear cut, sewn, twisted, stuffed, intertwined and re-created into a kind of collective body that revolves around itself; with planes peeling away and proposing subtle chromatic dynamics, transparent fabric suggesting glazing, threads unraveling stories that lead to other stories. A kind of refutation of the rectilinear limits of geometry sets the tone of the composition: warps that transform and deform under their own weight and from the artist's stitches, with endings tied in knots, like small amulets. Opposing actions occur in conjunction: cutting and sewing, covering and revealing, emptying (of use) and padding. The narratives are not linear, but rather interlaced, entangled and woven In the end, there is only the lingering memory of an object that could be worn. Nevertheless, it is impossible to abandon our memories of the tactile connection with fabric, and, therefore, with personal and emotional meaning that each person attributes to a piece of clothing throughout their life. Memória [Memoryl (2004) is a monumental occasion for such interpretation. As the title suggests, the work is entirely made from pieces of clothing belonging to a recently deceased person, material that came to the artist through personal ties, though Gomes does not mention the name of the woman whose garment she used. The fragments of textile material threads, lace, fabrics, trim-appear cut, sewn, twisted, stuffed, intertwined and re-created into a kind of collective body that revolves around itself; with planes peeling away and proposing subtle chromatic dynamics, transparent fabric suggesting glazing, threads unraveling stories that lead to other stories. A kind of refutation of the rectilinear limits of geometry sets the tone of the composition: warps that transform and deform under their own weight and from the artist's stitches, with endings tied in knots, like small amulets. Opposing actions occur in conjunction: cutting and sewing, covering and revealing, emptying (of use) and padding. The narratives are not linear, but rather interlaced, entangled and woven In the end, there is only the lingering memory of an object that could be worn. Nevertheless, it is impossible to abandon our memories of the tactile connection with fabric, and, therefore, with personal and emotional meaning that each person attributes to a piece of clothing throughout their life.

The viewer is invited to a sensorial, memorial and affectionate awareness is precisely the piece that appears in Gomes's 2004 catalog, as if it were a continuation of her clothing and her skin limg. 20], Something similar is offered, as a possibility, in our interpretation of this object, at once fragmented and re-composed The series Convites de casamento [Wedding Invitations] (2016-18) is another example of work that functions as memory and recalls cultural habits and biographic milestones, although, as with Memória, it does not reveal the names of the individuals on their titles, not even in the visible parts of the original invites. One of the works from this series (Untitled II, 2016 9: 32) presents a pattern of arabesques created in ink on paper, using the embossing found in the original graphics. They are intertwined elements, occupying the surface with greater or lesser

density, without forming a dominant pattern or motif. The use of space is in tenuous equilibrium, and the threads open possibilities for denser areas of the material in an encounter between the planes of the envelope. Small fissures filled with items of rich symbolic connotation: threads, veils, artificial petals, small pearls result in arrangements resembling small monuments. There is a subtle melancholy, a sweet delusion in the artistic appropriation of these matrimonial souvenirs that operate in an idealized social imaginary, in which loss is the imminent opposite of a beneficial union.

3.
A challenge is posed when it comes to tracing a genealogy of Afro-mineiro images for Gomes's work [Mineiro refers to someone or something from the state of Minas Gerais]. A brief study of iconography is not enough to re-construct the precariousness imposed by the whitening of the visual culture of Minas Gerais, a process initiated by 19th-century art and perpetuated a narcissistic, constructivist, Europeanized, male, hegemonic self-image, though always in search of an Other-whether in the corporal neoconcretism of Lygia Clark (1920-1988), or in the idea of "savage construction" in Celso Renato de Lima (1919-1992). A possible beginning of the Afro-mineiro legacy can be found in the manifestations of devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary, a form of resistance by those whose African roots were torn from them during the Middle Age and transatlantic slave trade and who reinvented the world through Afro-Catholic worship, with their flapping clothing covering black bodies like regal banners of cultural affirmation. Or even in the draping of the sculptures of the Aleijadinho (1730-1814), one among hundreds of black artisans of the 18th-century Minas Gerais baroque. Present in Aleijadinho's work are ritualistic and memorial components, just as in Gomes's oeuvre. We can also place at the beginning of this lineage the work of Alberto da Veiga Guignard (1896-1962), founder and patron of the school where Gomes received part of her formal art education.Two of Guignard's portraits of black women, painted in the city of Ouro Preto, offer us a costellation of interesting signs for reexamining the sculptor's work.

Moreover, Guignard's Matissean decorativism could be evoked as a precedent for Gomes's arabesques. But in these two late-period paintings, it had already transmuted into a colorism of watery materials. In the portrait Rainha do Congo [Queen of the Congo] (1961), the manifestation of Afro-mineiro cultural identity is unmistakable. The I features of the woman portrayed-the printed fabric of her blouse, the beads of her necklace, her hoop earrings, a royal crown, the lines of her nose and almond-shaped eyes, her red lips-unfold in the Congado procession [a syncretic Afro-Brazilian religious ritual and the black figures in white garments, punctuating the baroque landscape in the background. In Casamento da Preta Zerlinda [Wedding of Preta Zerlinda] (1960), the white veil diluted in turpentine enablesa rect visual connection with Gomes's Convites de casamento series, both in search of exposing the strategies of exclusion and vilification of the Afro-Brazilian woman, as well as in the context of affective relationships and the artistic milieu. It is in her face, in the determined, serene gaze, without any trace of self-pity, that we find the fulcrum of this representation. Guignard's magnificent rendering of her features, with ethen uildups, brushstrokes and lines, orchestrates an indecipherable pathos as if it were a patchwork. His black portraits allow an interpretation based on the identification of the portrait painter with the figures who, like himself, were marginalized: Guignard was celibate, alcoholic, and infantilized by the art world of his time.

4.
Just as the French-American artist Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010) grew up in her parents' tapestry restoration workshop, Gomes was raised amidst the factory textile items of her hometown and the cultural use of these fabrics the decorative force of a small cloth in the context of the home or its functional use in household tasks. This biographical fact demonstrates her interest in transforming clothing and fabric; initially as an affirmation of her personality, later to compose her artwork. The basis of these operations, her sewing, is not a transmissible or systematizable technique, but is rather a means of personal

expression. In this manner, what she produces is obviously art, although its practice is in constant exchange with the fields of the applied arts and handicrafts, allowing for a redefining of the boundaries between these categories. As customary, her procedures eschew planning and refute geometry, always avoiding forms that could fit into an a priori category Sewing can be understood as repairing, rebuilding. To create asymmetric bodies, for example: ways of uniting things that exist in a fragmented manner and that, in Gomes's work, find themselves re-composed. This reflection is evoked to refer to the joining of the two worlds familiar to the artist, the one linked to an African ancestry and the other to her father's family, which was in charge for her upbringing after the death of her mother when she was young. But it may also be useful to approximate the celebration of life to that of death, achievement to loss, the artist's experience while she works to the experience of the viewer, and so on. The notion of diametric opposites or the metaphor of the two sides of the same coin are not useful for thinking about her work, in which we encounter more complex topological figures that cannot be reduced to binaries. A brief survey of her series is sufficient to illustrate this complexity.
Casulos [Cocoons] limg.83] are like chaotic sewing baskets, in whiclh the materials take the shape of their own abundance, repeated in being condensed, countless. These works can be compared to the textile collages Vestigii (1978) by the Romanian artist Geta Brătescu (1926-2018]. Both Bratescu and Gomes share the transgressor's sense of abstractionist language. In Bratescu's collages, pictorial compositions are based on rags The fabrics are arranged on paper in chromatic rhymes and lay bare their worn condition, whereas the Casulos hold an unfathomable, cumulative thickness. They are excessive and denounce their own frustrated functionality some feature small rag dolls, an allusion to childhood and a playful representation of the human figure. The works from the Trouxas Bundles] series repudiate Euclidean geometry and its desire to reduce things to basic forms. They are forms collapsed in on themselves, small deformed shapes that appear to try to stand up. They reference piles of dirty laundry and the domestic world, leading us to the abject.

Gomes's Panos [Rags] are deformed, peeling, fragmented rectangles These flat, three dimensional works hang against the wall, in which the creation of worlds takes on monumental proportions. In a fictional story, they would provide great romances. They also remind us of the long tradition of draped fabrics in the history of Western painting. These pieces of clothing help us relate to the history of their use, in art and in life Gomes's Torções Twistings] are composed of deviating, less-than-straight lines, in which the force of the hand appears to speak. To twist also means to squeeze, in pursuit of the essence or something that detaches from the material. As Louise Bourgeois writes: Twisting to remove water-spinning-rotating the idiot inside of us/twisting your arm to force you to do or say something, or to give in." The Torções approximate Mira Schendel's (1919-1988) Droguinhas, but without the repetitive-obsessive drive and their monochromatic whiteness that time has wisely oxidized. They also recall the hairstyles of Nigerian women documented by the photographer J.D. Okai OJeikere (1930-2014); like them, so identifiable they became iconic.

Gomes's Pendentes [Pendents] are the clearest manifestation in her work of the act of hanging, celebrating an aversion to resting and the floor. Their display from every angle invokes to a certain aggression and leads to the comparison of bodies in suspention. Bourgeois once again comes to mind My initial work is the fear of falling. Later it becomes the art of falling. How to fall without getting hurt. Later on, it is the art of remaining in the air."

5.
Taken together, the verbs to cocoon, to bundle up, to drape, to twist, and to hang compose the grammar of Gomes's body of work. They evoke works destined for the exhibition space, where, because it is impossible to restore their organic existence in the art studio, they seek support in space.

They sometimes climb columns, as in the installation at the 56th Venice Biennale; in others, they fall from the ceiling and re-create relations of figure and back- ground. Their strategies are multifaceted. Perhaps one day they will generate their own architecture, in which the visitor can be surrounded from all sides by sculpture and become the center of the space, thus trading places with the object. When asked about the influence of fabric on her work, Gomes casually replied that, during her childhood, there was always a "little cloth" on the table. It is dizzying to think that this element may be able to give rise to an organism that devours everything existing around it.

Cultured Magazine, online, July 2018
By Sarah Rufino
https://www.culturedmag.com/sonia-gomes/

BRAZILIAN SCULPTOR SONIA GOMES TAKES OVER RIO AND SÃO PAULO

SARA ROFFINO

For decades, sculptor Sonia Gomes worked in relative isolation in the northern Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte. Now, she is among the first Afro-Brazilian women to have solo exhibitions at the Oscar Niemeyer-designed Niterói Contemporary Art Museum in Rio de Janeiro, on view through November 25, and the Lina Bo Bardi-designed Museu de Arte de São Paulo opening in November. A luminary among her peers, Gomes was included in the 2015 Venice Biennial and Hauser and Wirth's massive show of women sculptors which inaugurated the gallery's LA venue in 2016. Earlier this year, Gomes welcomed Sara Roffino to her apartment and studio in São Paulo. The two spoke about the evolution of her practice, her early visual memories and how she knew she was an artist.

The first time I saw your work was two years ago at Mendes Wood in São Paulo. Yes, that was when it was in glass room at the gallery. It was the work made of clothing. I always work with materials that I appropriate—things that exists before I make the work.

Where do you find these materials? Everyone asks this. The material comes to me. Many of the works I've made only exist because the material came to me. The piece I made for the Mercosul Biennial came to be because when I was in the Venice Biennial someone who lives in the interior of Rio who I didn't know told me they had a 50-year-old wedding dress and asked if they could give it to me. It was an enormous dress. When these materials come they bring the history of the people that they belonged to and I give a new significance to them. This person had held onto this dress for 50 years and then they gave it to me. Her name was Maria dos Anjos. I would never plan to make a work and then go out to the store to buy a wedding dress to transform into a sculpture. From the moment the material arrives in my life, I feel a responsibility for it and to the person who it came from.



How long have you been working this way? I've always had this need. I started by making things for myself, taking clothing apart and making it into something else to use. I never said, "I'm going to be an artist." It just happened.

When did you realize you were an artist? I'm from the interior of Brazil and I didn't have a lot of contact with the art world. Brazil is a little closed off, especially the interior. I never consider myself an artist because I didn't know how to make figurative drawings. I always made things with my hands and people said I was an artist, but I would say, no, I'm not, I don't know how to draw. This was how I thought until I took the first art class at the Guignard School in Belo Horizonte and my teacher explained that I was making contemporary art. That was where I understood the possibility of what I could do and I started to make without fear.

Do you have visual memories from your childhood that have stayed with you or that you that you think have influenced your practice? My grandmother was black, she was a sorceress and would bless people with a branch of a plant called Arruda. It was a ritual she would perform and the memory of it is really strong for me. Since then I've always been interested in craft—in things made by hand and folk art and festivals and the rituals and churches and processions.

Did you participate in these events? I participated when I was a child and a teenager. It was a little complicated for me because I was raised in a white family, in white culture and the Catholic church. My mother died when I was three years old and my parents weren't married. My mom's family was very poor so my grandfather took me to my father's family and that was where I was raised, but I was always drawn to the African aesthetic and to witchcraft. I thought it was all very beautiful. I was fascinated by it and it's a strong reference in my work now.

Were there other artists in Brazil or elsewhere with whom you were in conversation? Nobody. I was aware of popular art and I saw African magazines, but again, I really never thought of myself as an artist. My interest has always been in material. My work is very Brazilian because it's a mix of high art and popular art. I'm from Belo Horizonte, but I'm not known there as an artist. There were just a few people who believed in my work. Two of them were antiquarians, Sandra and Marcio, who have a space in the city that deals a lot in Brazilian baroque works. For 15 years they invested in my work and supported me because they see a link between my work and the baroque art that was made in Brazil.

What are you presenting at Niterói and MASP? Can you tell me a bit about these exhibitions? In Niteroi it's a retrospective of my career. The exhibition unites works from all of my periods. I am very happy to see all those moments together, woven like in a fabric. For MASP, I'm doing something different and new. I've been working a lot with wood lately. I'm obsessed with life in all its forms. I've embroidered in tree trunks and thought a lot about the rhythm of the installations.

Arsty, online, April 2018
https://www.artsy.net/series/artsy-vanguard/artsy-editors-getting-their-due

ARTSY

In the past few years, the art world has begun to more graciously reward artists who have honed their practice over previous decades, while remaining inexplicably under-the-radar. Artists like these 10 members of The Artsy Vanguard—a new, annual list of the 50 most influential talents shaping the future of contemporary art practice—are finally getting their due, with museum retrospectives, representation by major international galleries, and surging collector interest.

Sônia Gomes

Follow

B. 1948, Caetanópolis, Brazil. Lives and works in São Paulo.



Sônia Gomes makes sculptures in cloth. Some hang from the ceiling, dangling and soft like laundry put out to dry; others form stiff loops with armatures of wire, or take the shape of books with fabric pages. Her practice is grounded in assemblage, the reimagining and remaking of reclaimed materials once used in furniture or clothing, suggesting the memories and biographies of their original owners.

Although she did not begin showing work until well into her forties, in recent years Gomes has become increasingly visible in Brazil, as well as in North America and Europe. The artist was included in the main exhibition of the 56th Venice Biennale, and participated in group shows at the Rubell Family Collection, Hauser Wirth & Schimmel, and the monumental "No Man's Land" at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. This attention comes at a moment when U.S. institutions have begun to more fervently embrace Latin American women artists, and Brazilians in particular, as demonstrated by the monographic exhibitions of Lygia Pape at the Met and Lygia Clark and Tarsila do Amaral at MoMA.

Gomes has been represented by the São Paulo, Brussels, and New York gallery Mendes Wood DM since 2011, and she's shown widely in Brazil. The artist has been also been a fixture on the global fair circuit, where collectors have been snapping up her works. But 2018 is the first year she will receive large institutional surveys of her practice—at the Museu de Arte in São Paulo and the Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Niterói in Rio de Janeiro—presenting works that span her entire career.

artnet news

Art World

Is Brazil's Most Famous Art Movement Built on Racial Inequality? A New Generation Argues 'Yes'

MoMA's "Tarsila do Amaral" show puts a fresh spotlight on how Afro-Brazilians have been sidelined in the country's art history.

Sara Roffino, March 13, 2018

A Changing Cultural Landscape

Historically, Afro-Brazilians have been neglected by both museums and galleries. Few institutions dedicated to these artists exist in the country. In 2004, artist and curator Emanoel Araújo founded the Museu Afro Brasil. Since then, the institution has become an important center for research on and presentation of works by black artists in Brazil.

Recently, more projects related to the work of Afro-Brazilian artists have begun to emerge. The nonprofit organization Social Service of Commerce (SESC), which operates public galleries throughout the country, has hosted exhibitions such as "Afro Como Ascendência, Arte como procedência" ("Afro as Ancestry, Art as Origin"), curated by Alexandre Bispo in 2013, and "PretAtitude: Insurgências, Emergências e Afirmações na Arte Contemporânea Afro-Brasileira" ("BlackAtitute: Insurgencies, Emergencies and Affirmations in Afro-Brazilian Contemporary Art"), curated by Claudinei Roberto da Silva and on view through May.

Yet Brazil didn't select an Afro-Brazilian artist to represent the country at the Venice Biennial until 2015, when Paulo Nazareth received the invitation. This is particularly notable considering that, according to the most recent census in 2010, Brazil was home to the most people of African descent outside of Africa. And to date, the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP), widely considered to be the most important museum in Brazil, has not hosted a solo exhibition by any Afro-Brazilian female artist. That will change in November of this year when the museum presents an exhibition of the work of Sonia Gomes.

Both Nazareth and Gomes are represented by Mendes Wood DM, which has galleries in São Paulo, Brussels, and New York, and stands out as having the most diverse roster of any contemporary Brazilian gallery.

The evolution within the art world reflects larger developments in Brazilian culture that have taken place since the early 2000s, spurred by the progressive policies of former Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who held office from 2003 until 2010. Known as Lula, the former factory worker was the first Brazilian president to implement policies that explicitly address racial inequality, including the establishment of affirmative action within higher education and compulsory classes on the history of Africa.

The New York Times, printed/online, April 2016
https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/03/arts/design/the-resurgence-of-women-only-art-shows.html

The New York Times

Female Artists Are (Finally) Getting Their Turn



By Hilarie M. Sheets

March 29, 2016

At the peak of her career in 1976, Georgia O'Keeffe refused to lend her work to a pivotal exhibition in Los Angeles, "Women Artists: 1550 to 1950." It was one of a wave of all-female shows — some 150 — that decade to spotlight artists largely ignored by major museums and galleries. But O'Keeffe, the most famous female artist of her day, saw herself in a different category — "one of the best painters," period.

The feminist art historian Linda Nochlin borrowed an O'Keeffe painting elsewhere and put her in the show anyway. Yet despite these exhibitions, neither O'Keeffe nor any other woman would break into "Janson's History of Art," the leading textbook, until 1987, and equality remained elusive.

While some artists are ambivalent about being viewed through the lens of gender, the all-women's group show, which fell out of favor in the '80s and '90s, is flourishing again. At least a dozen galleries and museums are featuring women-themed surveys, a surge curators and gallerists say is shining a light on neglected artists, resuscitating some careers and raising the commercial potential of others.

The most prominent spring show is "Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women" at Hauser Wirth & Schimmel, the inaugural exhibition of the gallery's new Los Angeles branch. It joins an all-women lineup at the Saatchi Gallery in London and at the Rubell Family Collection in Miami, where Mera Rubell, its co-founder, has seen a 20 percent spike in attendance over last year and enthusiasm from families bringing their daughters to see the show, "No Man's Land."

On the horizon are women-only group shows at the Minneapolis Institute of Art and Denver Art Museum, and corporate sponsors are starting to get into the act: The New Museum in New York was approached by the DKNY fashion house to underwrite its spring season, devoted to five solo exhibitions by women artists.

The historical exhibitions have revived careers, helping women artists take their place within the context of larger movements. To counter the "male-centric view of what Abstract Expressionism is," Gwen Chanzit, the curator of modern art at the Denver Art Museum, said she discovered a cache of women artists who had exhibited in major shows during the 1950s. Starting on June 12, "Women of Abstract Expressionism" will spotlight virtual unknowns like Judith Godwin and Perle Fine, alongside the handful who broke through, including Joan Mitchell and Helen Frankenthaler. Ms. Chanzit's research convinced the museum to acquire seven canvases in the show.

Ms. Godwin, 85, one of three living artists in the exhibition, said of the attention, "I never thought it was going to happen," adding she had no qualms about being included in a "women's show."

"I had so many guys tell me in the '50s that women just could not paint," she said.

Ms. Godwin's auction record is $26,000, set in 2006. The auction high for her friend Franz Kline topped $40 million in 2012.

"I am a woman and I've always struggled in that capacity. I don't want to deny it," she said. "I'm honored to be in any show — especially a show of women."

Mousse Magazine, online, August 2019
http://moussemagazine.it/sonia-gomes-the-silence-of-color-at-mendes-wood-dm-brussels-2019/

Mousse Magazine

Sonia Gomes "The Silence of Color" at Mendes Wood DM, Brussels



Mendes Wood DM has the pleasure to announce *The Silence of Color,* Sonia Gomes' first solo exhibition outside of Brazil. Gomes' work binds together cultural movements and traditions that are intrinsically linked to the affirmation of memory, identity and the transformative power of creation in situations of vulnerability and invisibility. Through the use of fabric, thread, found and gifted objects, her multi-dimensional, sometimes biomorphic sculptures and structures stand as insistent placeholders for the absent or unseen body. These gestural inquiries refer to the body itself, as a way to decolonize the past and reclaim the present to reconstitute and celebrate both the self and her black heritage.

In part, Gomes' connection to the world of fabric stems back to her birthplace, Caetanópolis – a city located near the capital of Minas Gerais, which was once an important center for textile manufacturing in Brazil. With her father's family working in a textile factory and the strong presence of her maternal grandmother, a midwife and faith healer who initiated her in binding and braiding, Gomes' upbringing was heavily marked by the craft of needlework. Since childhood, Gomes has collected pieces of cloth; marrying them with different materials from various environments, including clothes and furniture. Playing with the potential spiritual combinations that may arise between these elements, her compositions spring to life though a spontaneous and casual practice of deconstructing and re-assembling objects that together evoke the idea of the visceral and the sacred. Through this intuitive process, Gomes honors the previous history and agency of the objects, creating eclectic compositions that are imbued with the rich history of Brazil, as well as the personal history of the artist, her family and her community.

The Silence of Color traces the trajectory of Gomes' recent practice, showcasing colorful works from her latest institutional exhibitions in Brazil, *Still I Rise* at MASP (São Paulo, 2018) and *Casa de Vidro* (São Paulo, 2018), as well as a body of new works, from which this exhibition derives its title. Inspired by her work *Maria dos Anjos* (2017-2018), which Gomes made from pieces of a wedding dress that were sewn together with seams, moorings and various other fabrics, this new series of work marks the first in which white fabric is predominately incorporated. Despite using a wide and varied palette across her practice, the color white posed a challenge for Gomes – namely in that she viewed it as synonymous with silence. After bringing *Maria dos Anjos* to completion, Gomes decided on a hiatus from working with color in order to explore her aversion to using white fabric.

The result of the artist's first exploration into work devoid of color, an experience she describes as particularly useful, are four new works. Continuing to employ a similar medium and form, Gomes honors the previous existence and historical legacy that is imbued in the fabric, whilst simultaneously exposing new and vibrant forms of existence in their (re)configuration.