

Miguel Rio Branco

Maldicidade

solo show, accompanied by the launch of the eponymous book

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Sala 01

Press Release

“As a constellation of blatant urbanity entropy in cities distributed on varied latitudes and longitudes, even though the eye-consciousness does not resist looking for clues to which cities and countries the portrayed spaces were produced in, it is important that, in the face of *Maldicidade*, the moment in which the eye-skin assumes the impossibility of the task and realizes that the city is only one, after all: about what great cities, if its recent history and territorial extension are taken into consideration, could it be said that it does not know these images?

(...) ‘Murió El Cuerpo’, says the headline on the newspaper held by a boy leaning against the side of a precarious settlement. It is difficult to understand who the original headline was referring to, but in this context, it is the body of the so-called Western civilization which, having achieved unprecedented scale and power in the planet’s history, caves in crushed under the very weight of the ideals it has nurtured”, curator Paulo Miyada writes in an unpublished essay, on the occasion of Miguel Rio Branco’s solo show in Oi Futuro, Rio de Janeiro, in 2017.

Maldicidade, a work in progress by Miguel Rio Branco, only existed until now in photobook format, published by CosacNaify in 2014, and as stand-alone works or sets of photographs in narrative (polyptych) made during the artist’s stay in different cities where his international career took him to. Firstly, as a diplomat’s child, beginning with painting, until the end of the 1960s, later as a photography director in Brazilian film documentaries and then as a correspondent of the Magnum agency in the 1980s. Finally, as a multidisciplinary artist, he exhibited in institutions such as The Art Institute of Boston; Photo Forum, Frankfurt; Aperture’s Burden Gallery, NY; Maison Européenne de La Photographie, Paris; Rencontres d’Arles; Museum of Contemporary Art of Tokyo; Casa América, Madrid; Kulturhuset, Stockholm; and MASP; besides being one of the artists honored with a pavilion at the Inhotim Institute. In June 2019, Luisa Strina Gallery is pleased to present *Maldicidade*, a solo exhibition, showing about 20 works. At the opening, the artist launches a so titled book, in a new edition, by the German publisher Taschen.

Although there are new developments in the *Maldicidade* series, the text by Miyada continues to be current and precise. The city is one. All the works selected by Rio Branco for the solo show in the gallery picture the pulsating metropolis, between exuberance and misery, vibrant colors and nocturnal vapors, poetic abstractions and honest denouncements. About what big city could it be said that these contrasts are not known? Merging photos published in 2014 with new ones, which

will only be revealed in the Taschen's book and in the exhibition, the artist does not consider it relevant to think the image on these terms – “new”, “unpublished” etc. – because, according to him, “what the unprecedented amounts to is the construction and the intention”, that is, the edition of a book or a group of photographs to be enlarged, the sequence in which the images are presented, the context in which each snapshot is placed in relation to others – by approach or repulsion –, formal, narrative, color and so on, it always creates an unprecedented experience.

“The Taschen version has a new dynamic, possibly a little less melancholy, but placing importance, in addition to the construction, to the complete reading of each image. We see the details otherwise not perceivable in the small format. It ends up becoming a different book. A bit like some jazzy musical performances. As my work was being shown at the Magnum gallery in Paris (1985), it was critically defined by the photographer Denis Stock as if I had tried to create music with photographs: perhaps the greatest praise they have ever been given”, says Miguel Rio Branco about the book.

Since 1977, with “Strangler in a strangled land” and also the exhibition *Negativo Sujo* (1978), coming from painting and cinema, the artist has begun to create poetic narratives with assemblages made with groups of photographs; already then at that moment, the idea of a single photo, “a decisive moment”, has not been enough for him; the field of the image, according to him, needed a visual narrative context. “A set of pieces can reach a final format in the dialogue among them, just as others, by individual force, do not need or cannot be in sets, they are fully complete individually. The cement that unites them in different constructions is what creates the rhythm and the concepts that complete the works, even provisionally”, he explains.

Following this logic, at the exhibition *Maldicidade*, the visitor is faced, for example, with the *Black and Rose with Flag* diptych, a nearly perfect meeting between geometric patterns – one in an inside environment, another one caught on the street – where both depict an element in a state of suspension, the “punctum” of both, to connect with Roland Barthes, that unites them, or that cements, although provisionally, the construction of the diptych. Near this set of pictures, however, the spectator can contemplate *Blue and Red Shoes*, shown as a single piece in all its narrative force, without the need of another image to complement it, even though, in the most recent edition of the São Paulo Biennial, the same work was seen in a polyptych, entitled *Geometry of Desire*.

“My work is like a tide of images that can take different directions, as in a sea of images that create poetic discourses that often unravel their documentary capacity, generating more meaning. They create rhythms and meaning that obliterate a simple proposal of reality.”

After *Negativo Sujo*, Rio Branco showed, at the 1983 São Paulo Biennial, an audiovisual piece called *Dialogues with Amaú*, composed of five translucent screens on which a sequence of images of a deaf-mute kayapó boy was projected in connection to other images of his life and images of the white civilization that surrounded his village. “The connections had a rhythm of their own, but they generated random, but significant relationships in the images choice; the work falls in the area defined by Hélio Oiticica as *Almost Cinema*”, tells us the artist. This work is permanently exhibited

in the pavilion dedicated to the work of Rio Branco in Inhotim, and is considered one of the most iconic works of expanded photography by a Brazilian artist.

Still on the subject of the book and its relation with great cities, Rio Branco alleges that “the changes were provoked specially by issues related to the new size and by the city that attracts me, clearly not all, even less by ours that become more and more precarious structurally, but MALDICIDADE came from a mixture of the French expression. ‘mal d’amour’, love pain, and a damned city: sometimes I feel revulsion and, sometimes, attraction. But, I still think cities are on an irreversible path to terror after they reach a certain size, after an exaggeration made of millions of people. I do not think large concentrations of people are healthy; today, they seem to me a great attraction to disaster”.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in 1946, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, Miguel Rio Branco lives and works in Araras, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Graduated in the New York Institute of Photography and at the Superior School of Industrial Design, Rio de Janeiro, he began to show photographs and films in 1972, developing a documentary work with a strong poetic load. In the 1980s, he was acclaimed internationally for his films and photographs in the form of prizes, publications and exhibitions, such as the Grand Prize of the First Triennial of Photography of the Museum of Modern Art, São Paulo, and the prize Kodak de la Critique Photographique, 1982, in France.

Recent solo shows include: Nada levarei quando morrer, MASP – Museu de Arte de São Paulo (2017); Wishful Thinking, Oi Futuro, Rio de Janeiro (2017); From Tokyo to Out of Nowhere, Galeria Filomena Soares, Portugal (2016); New York Sketches, Magnum Photo Gallery, Paris (2016); and Color Theory, Pinacoteca de São Paulo (2014).

Recent group shows include: Southern Geometries, from Mexico to Patagonia, Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain, Paris (2018); 33th São Paulo Biennial (2018); Door into Darkness, Galerija Kula, Institute Haru – Milešić Palace and The Institute for Scientific and Artistic Work, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Split, Croatia (2018); 11th Mercosur Biennial, Porto Alegre (2018).

The artist has works in the collection of important institutions such as Museum of Modern Art Rio de Janeiro; Museum of Modern Art São Paulo; MASP – Museum of Art of São Paulo; George Pompidou Center, Paris; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Museum of Photographic Arts of San Diego; and Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Link

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