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Where are the blacks? Deletion, Racialization and Nonconformity in Brazilian²

Onde estão os negros? Apagamentos, racialização e insubmissões na arte brasileira.

Abstract

The presence of blacks in Brazilian art and the intentional deletion of their presence can be directly related to the processes that have determined their role in society. We are still immersed in a white-oriented art history; thus, our endeavor is to reconsider the words, images, displays and collection storage spaces that reverberate widespread ignorance when raising questions such as: Where are the blacks? We have to ponder over modernities and their reaffirmations, based on principles echoing *mestizaje*, myths and ghosts that still haunt possible stories that represent the definitive and vast majority of black people in Brazilian society.

Keywords

Brazilian Art History. Blacks. Racialization

Resumo

A presença de sujeitos negros na arte brasileira e seus apagamentos constituem paralelo direto aos mesmos processos de localização desses sujeitos na vida do país. Estamos imersos em uma história da arte branca e a empreitada passa por rever as palavras, imagens, displays e reservas técnicas que ecoam um profundo desconhecimento quando projetam perguntas como: Onde estão os negros? Cabe ainda a tarefa de pensar as modernidades e suas reafirmações baseadas em princípios que ecoam mestiçagens, mitos e fantasmas que ainda assombram a possibilidade de histórias que correspondam à definitiva e numericamente maioria de sujeitos negros na sociedade brasileira.

Palavras-chave

Histórias da Arte Brasileira. Negros. Racialização.

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2- Texto recebido em: 08/set/2019
Texto publicado em: 22/dez/2019

The Art Stories And Brazilian Stories

It is the year 1550. Men and women are forcibly removed from their places of origin. There is a tree called the "tree of oblivion". Men and women, before leaving their place of life, are forced to rotate around her. Those responsible for the degradation believe that in this way the memories, stories, knowledge of black men and women will be erased. Objectified bodies and orchestrated attempt at erasure. The stories, those particular ones, are the subject of a work that aims at forgetting. Ocean and death. Oceans and resistances, survivals. Not only do bodies survive, but memory, the memory that speaks of what is no longer accepted, continues to vibrate and produce the world they call again. Talking about the survival of memory in the land of arrival has, for those who take the history of art as work material, other meanings.

We are in the year 1550. Italy, Florence. A man writes a book. A man and a book. The book speaks of other men, all close to the same city. Florence is the view on the cover page. A view of the city where are the man, the book, and the other men now reborn to the continuing memory of that time. The lives of these men, called artists. The life of the artists (1550), Vasari, Court of the Medici. The man kisses the ring on the prince's hand in words of thanks. One of the lives and inventions of art history was made. Over the centuries, the book of man and the city would be referred to as the inaugural act par excellence. The history of art, very private. That of man, of men in the book, and of the prince, would become both the mark of European humanism and the mark of a purported history of universal art.

1550 and a dehumanizing machine appears as a contemporary of humanism. Speaking of history on this side of the tropics has always been, or should have been, not to forget the ship and the simultaneous birth of discipline.

There are still those men and memories who, on arrival, lose their names and inherit what is given by the other white with pretensions of pure European. They lose their names, they lose their names but they survive in memory.

This strikes me as an indispensable prologue when thinking or writing about art history from Brazil. However, the data, the stories, the historiographies, the exhibits, the collections, the institutions, for centuries have chosen to forget. Somehow, the history of Brazilian art seems to have forgotten the memory of the men in the tree and, still today, struggles without knowing exactly what to do in the face of the assumption of other stories, those that are of the order of the unsubmitive.

The art stories that, as a black and gay researcher, in a Latin American country, in a country like Brazil, are UNSUBMISSIVE STORIES. History of those who were submitted but did not submit. Parts of these stories are not housed in the publications that raise the historiography of local art. At most they occupy the appendix, the footnote. Something that is not dealt with or that will then be discussed at another time, in a time that comes and never comes.

From the outset I want to make it clear that the words my text raises are not to-do lists or categories of analysis, or propositions geared toward black men and women only. They are undoubtedly the task of any historian or art historian who thinks from another beach, the one on which the boat docked, where the reified arrived. This task imposes itself, and I defend here, as far as I can, as a place of thought, a necessary starting point for those who think art and its stories from Brazil.

From where I produce, it is necessary to constantly remind yourself and your peers that the history of Brazilian art is written from a local logic constituted by a social fabric that segregates, excludes, dehumanizes, separates. The discipline is not neutral and impassive because it is written from Brazil and its perversities.

Notes On Black And The Nineteenth Century Brazilian Art History And Criticism.

We all know that art history is not the narrative of all artistic work, but the selection of some cases. In Brazil, we have to take into account that this narrative told by a few about a few other things is never neutral and cannot be read as a 16th century invention. However, even the milestones that cross these writings carry scars that precede them. As we will see here, it is possible to locate in different periods of Brazilian art historiography the continuous erasure of the feats of racialized subjects as black. Even if we take the writings of Manuel de Araújo Porto-Alegre (1806-1879) as a starting point and may be amazed at his mention and the place that gives black craftsmen, this reference has no continuity relationship. Over the centuries and until recent days, the history of Brazilian art seems to make little ears to the subject. Between presumptions of disability, essentialism and reinforcement of keys of analysis based on colonial inheritance, there is much to do in a discipline that understands itself as the daughter of a European mother, even if it affirms its position as peripheral.

In 1834, under the influence of the Frenchman Jean Baptiste Debret (1768-1848), the future director of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts, Manoel de Araújo Porto-Alegre travels to France and eventually joins the Historical Institute of Paris. From there, together with the poet Domingos José Gonçalves (1811-1882) and Francisco Salles Torres Homem, he will write the *Résumé de l'histoire de littérature, des sciences et des brésil pour trois brésiliens*, members of l'Institut Historique, published in the newspaper of that institute in the same year. This text may appear as a kind of starting point for a search for the history of Brazilian art, along with the author's later writings on the Fluminense School of Painting.

There is a genuine desire here to historicize local art production. In Porto-Alegre's text, the figure of the black stands as a sign of a local artistic matrix and a kind of understanding of the form that would allow establishing a chronology for Brazilian art and its history. Slavery sometimes appears problematized, and the relationship between the role of the black craftsman and other social figures is highlighted as shown in the excerpt below:

Os conventos também tiveram os seus escravos artistas; e a posteridade livre que se aglomera hoje sob os seus peristilos não imagina sequer que foram erguidos por mãos acorrentadas [...]. O artista mais inspirado não passava a seus olhos de uma máquina mais bem organizada que as outras máquinas; usavam-nas com desprezo, enquanto o mais ignóbil traficante recebia todas as homenagens; [...] Era honroso receber o resultado do vil comércio, mas o valor do trabalho mais sublime se colocava abaixo de uma esmola (PORTO-ALEGRE, 1834, s/p).

There is still room to mention in a laudatory character the artistic production of Mestre Valentim, who in Porto-Alegre's pen is read as "nothing mediocre", revealing in everything the artist's hand and being a manifestation of the national genius.

However, it is in the same century as Porto-Alegre, the never-ending nineteenth century, that we will see the work of what is considered the main art critic of that century in the country. In the writings of Luiz Gonzaga Duque-Estrada, the search for Brazilian art would continue and what was at stake were the mishaps that would prevent its rise. In the text of the critic *Brazilian Art* (1888), black and his position will be one of the signs of the historical problems of the formation of national art. The art critic, in constructing perennial notions of what would be, in his perception, the possibilities and difficulties of constituting a Brazilian art, is categorical in stating that:

sendo as profissões letradas as que maior interesse despertam no brasileiro, é claro que a arte, considerada até há pouco tempo um desprezível ofício de negros e mulatos, medrada em país onde não estão desenvolvidos o luxo e o bom gosto, ficasse destinada às classes pobres, aquelas que não podiam educar convenientemente seus filhos para fazê-los entrar na academia (DUQUE-ESTRADA, 1995, p.26).

The same Gonzaga Duque-Estrada, in 1929, referring to the production of the academic black artist Estevão Silva (1845-1891), will reinforce in his painting a series of characteristics that would find support before in the artist's conformation to a black racial invention than its aesthetic elaborations. In situating the artist's production, the so-cited text describes the formal options in direct harmony with a kind of ancestral essence that would inhabit a subject who, having emerged from Africa, carries within himself the warm and gut of that continent. A continent that dispenses with rational elaboration in the name of pure expression. Thus, Estevão

Silva is “Black without lightness and without transitions [...] always sees blood, always desperately yellow” (Duque, 2011 p. 197)

Cameroonian Achille Mbembe, in his Critique of Black Reason, helps us understand the maintenance of this kind of approach in colonial societies, pointing out that these understandings recur even in contexts of anticolonial criticism, since in these cases there is no distance enough of the idea that:

o sangue negro desempenharia um papel central no despertar da imaginação e do gênio artístico. Sob várias formas a temática do esgotamento das civilizações ou da oposição entre o vigor dos selvagens e o sangue exausto dos civilizados atravessa as concepções de arte entre 1890 e 1945. Qualidades nativas estariam inscritas no sangue de cada raça. À raça negra caberia o instinto, as pulsões irracionais, a sensualidade primária. Um poder universal de imaginação estaria vinculado ao princípio melanínico, o que explicaria que estivesse oculta no sangue dos negros a fonte de onde jorraram as artes (MBEMBE, 2018, p. 86).

This kind of direct association between the black-belonging character essentially affiliated with his race will also usher in writing about an Afro-Brazilian art with Nina Rodrigues. On the page of the Kosmos Magazine, in 1904, the article by physician Augusto Nina Rodrigues (1862-1906) - The Fine Arts of the Black Settlers of Brazil -, takes as its element of analysis a set of objects consisting mainly of sculptures and objects of devotion. Within one of its paradoxes, the text opens with the following statement: “The natural contempt cast by the enslaved, the ruling classes, always and everywhere perennial threatens to be distorted for the most decided purposes of an unbiased estimation of the qualities and virtues of the submitted peoples (RODRIGUES, 1904, p. 7).

The science of the time, which sought to build theories based on racial principles, of which the Maranhão physician is heir, appears strongly in its descriptions. In analyzing pieces attributed by him to the cult of OChum, he states that:

[...] em algumas foram bem figurados os caracteres étnicos dos negros. O nariz chato do etíope, os olhos, a flor da cara, os lábios grossos e pendentes [...] a desproporção entre o comprimento dos braços e das pernas, peculiar à raça negra, é levada, pela imperícia do artista, quase ao extremo da caricatura (RODRIGUES, 1904, p. 9).

The quote is practically a checkmate. While attributing to the black body the malformation, it locates the objects from this body-mind as insufficiently capable.

However, this writing also presents submissions, and these gain note when we bring to the debate the work of Manoel Raymundo Querino. Querino, black, born of the law of the free womb, was a collector, observer, critic, ethnologist, historian and activist of popular causes that especially involved working people's interests (LEAL, 2019). It was the undisputed name of the Bahia and Brazilian artistic environment at the turn of the century. He will be responsible, among other works, for publishing a manual of geometric design, the result of his work as a teacher and strongly based on the European canon of drawing as the basis for artistic creation.

In texts such as *The Black Settler as a factor of Brazilian civilization*, an epistemological turn was given. The black was no longer the subjected and reified savage. It was, first and foremost, an active force in the consolidation of an authentic Brazil. For Querino:

Quem quer que compulse a nossa história certificar-se-á do valor e da contribuição do negro na defesa do território nacional, na agricultura, na mineração, como bandeirante, no movimento da independência, com as armas na mão, como elemento apreciável na família, e como o herói do trabalho em todas as aplicações úteis e proveitosas (QUERINO, 1918, p. 156).

It is not surprising, therefore, that when thinking about historicizing art from Bahia, the black Querino adopts perspectives that are proper to established knowledge. Art History was, for him, the inventory of proper names and procedures for creation. In this way, Querino's words helped to build up an inventory of Bahian artists who, coming from different popular classes, brought blacks into their scope as creators.

But these approaches would not be exhausted, and we would arrive at modernity forged between the constant negotiation of miscegenation in the character of healing and evil for a society just emerging from centuries of enslavement and wondering who was Brazil and who by right would be Brazilian.

Modernism, Perversions And Racialization

The words of Gilberto Freyre, in the classic *Casa-Grande & Senzala* at the opening of the chapter that deals with the presence of the "black slave in the Brazilian's sexual and family life" (FREIRE, 1933 p.367) is, since its title, an invitation. An invitation to think about the forms of invention that the winds of modernity produced by representing the black people of Brazil.

Todo o brasileiro, mesmo o alvo, de cabelo louro, traz na alma e no corpo – há muita gente de jenipapo ou mancha mongólica pelo Brasil – a sombra ou pelo menos a pinta do indígena ou do negro [...]. Na ternura, na mímica excessiva, no catolicismo, em que se deliciam nossos sentidos, na música, no andar, na fala, no canto de ninar menino pequeno, em tudo que é expressão sincera da vida, trazemos quase todos a marca da influência negra. Da escrava ou sinhama que nos embalou. Que nos deu de mamar. Que nos deu de comer, ela própria amolengando na mão o bolão de comida. Da negra velha que nos contou as primeiras histórias de bicho e de mal-assombrado. Da mulata que nos tirou o primeiro bicho-de-pé de uma coceira tão boa. Da que nos iniciou no amor físico e nos transmitiu, ao ranger da cama do vento, a primeira sensação completa de homem. Do moleque que foi o nosso primeiro companheiro de brinquedo (FREYRE, 1933, p. 367).

There is in Freyre's words in 1933 a survival. Survive there the soaked look of experiences that would eventually lead to modernist understandings in Brazil. Among mulattos, sensualities, religiosities and sexualization, we find the permanence of an agenda that tried to conform the forms of black presence in the country. From the words and inks of names such as Di Cavalcanti, Jorge Amado, Lasar Segall, Tarsila do Amaral and Oswald de Andrade, comes a country that now wanted to review its roots and thus sought to redefine the role of a diffuse entity that was named the people. In the writings and paintings that emerge in the first decades of the twentieth century, there is above all the permanent and perverse game of invention and negotiation with what would then be a Brazilian mestizo character. A mestizo who is heir to the notions that flooded Brazil in the late nineteenth and traded with the constant currency of miscegenation. Now negatively, now as the source of the nation's greatness, the bodies and existences of black subjects invented by Brazilian modernism were now the motto for thinking about the destinies of the country. In juxtaposition with Gilberto Freyre's words, any of the modernist canvases that thematized the black and his life practices and the modernist game of reiterating the essentialization based on racialization will be given.

In the eternal negotiation between racial theories, miscegenations, bleaching projects, and attempts at national roots, the intellectual elites of the country have not escaped the vanguardian European logic which has only reiterated its essentiality.

Collections, Institutions And Representativity

Not for nothing, the title of this writing is the banner of the collective Front Three February on the facade of the Museum of Art of São Paulo-MASP. If in 2018 it stands over one of Latin America's leading institutions, a huge banner that categorically asks "Where are the Blacks?" Is because this is an outstanding debt to the local art system and its institutions. The visual arts in Brazil seem to make a point of keeping their white domains in infinitely white displays, displays and collections. This statement is confirmed when we aim at some important projection collections in Southeast and South of Brazil.

An indispensable point for thinking “where are black people in Brazilian art and art history” cannot do without a look at collections. The collections are par excellence where we can give thought to the presence of blacks as authors in Brazil. If we take into consideration the importance that technical reserves have in the elaboration of exhibitions, which are understood as editing islands for the history of Brazilian art, the emptiness of these collections regarding the representativeness of black authorship is unavoidable. Just as the history of Brazilian art seems to allude to an infinitely white self-image, the same can be said when taking institutions and their collections. It is to understand that, taken from the key we raise here to think, we will see that in Brazil it was always about collecting and consequently exposing white artists and mostly men. The search to cross categories intersectionally exposes us to even more alarming data, since the presence of black women, for example, seems undermost.

The Pinacoteca of the State of São Paulo, during the process of building the exhibition “Territories: Afrodescendant Artists in the Pinacoteca Collection”, held between 2016 and 2017, intended to revise its reserves until then. The purpose of the proposal was a tribute to its former director Emanoel Araújo, a black agent and an unavoidable presence in the Brazilian art scene, when it comes to the relationship between blacks and visual arts, which directed the institution between 1992 and 2002. To the unsuspecting reader It is important to emphasize that when we take Araújo's trajectory, as in other cases, we are facing not a space of opportunity and recognition of black professionals in the area, but an exception that only confirms this rule. The catalog of the show brings us another issue that allows us to affirm the whiteness of the Brazilian collections. Until Araujo's administration, which began in 1992, the Pinacoteca collection in the state of São Paulo had only two works by a single Brazilian black artist. These are the *Autorretrato* (1908) and *Cigana* (1910) paintings by the black artist and exponent of the painting by Arthur Timótheo da Costa (1882-1922), both resulting from a donation to the institution in 1956. The Pinacoteca, created in 1905 by the government of the State of São Paulo, spent more than half a century without any black artists in its collection and until the 1990s, with only one represented in its collections. It is no exaggeration to say that for almost a century this was an entirely white collection, and this kind of finding only appears when we look at the race marker. This marker seems continually scarce in our approaches to Brazilian art.

At the time of “Territories [...]”, in 2016, and in view of recent acquisitions and those headed by Araújo's management, the collection then had just over 100 pieces of black authorship. In consultation with the collection department of the institution for writing this article, the total number of pieces reached 11,544 works and data on black artists was still inaccurate in face of a work that was still being done. It should be noted that the Pinacoteca of the State of São Paulo is, today, the collection in São Paulo with the largest number of black artists.

Given such data, it is unavoidable to affirm that our collections still do not know the black presence in quantitative terms, and it is indisputable to affirm their tiny participation. Cases like Pinacoteca's are not a rarity, becoming an exception in terms of Brazilian institutions. In the face of such a scenario, why not ask ourselves how these data reflect the structural racism of the country and its insistent reiteration in the art we call Brazilian? The same consultation was made to another central institution in the Brazilian Visual Arts systems that has in São Paulo, a kind of metropolis, with all the subjection relations that this word evokes. Consulting the collection sector of the São Paulo Art Museum Assis Chateaubriand-MASP, one of the most important in Latin America, we were informed that the Museum currently has more than 11,200 works and that although there is a willingness in the teams to investigate the presence of black artists, this indexing has not yet been performed. These statements point to the need for questions about the presence of blacks in collections in the country to be consolidated as an urgency. Both MASP and Pinacoteca held, from 2016, breathtaking exhibitions on the presence of black artists, including individual and collective exhibitions, as we have mentioned in this text. However, only exhibitions without an organized takeover policy make these actions small black breaks in completely white agendas. Something begins subtly, but the situation does not allow us to withdraw from a constant state of alert to the collections of a country with 56% of self-declared black subjects.

It is also worth mentioning here in São Paulo the position that the Afro-Brazil Museum, founded in 2004 by Emanuel Araújo, occupies in this debate. The institution is today one of the only ones in Brazil dedicated to research, preserve and expose the artistic production and the legacy of blacks in the national culture. Plagued by a precarious situation, the Museum in Ibirapuera Park is one of the few oases to understand some of the permanences, dynamics and recurrences in this production. The institution's collection - made up largely of Araújo's private acquisitions - today has an invaluable set of pieces divided into a curator of strong subjective intonation, which expresses its director's theoretical and political positions.

In the extreme south of the country, a group of women researchers has been conducting investigations in the collections that make up the collections of the state capital of Rio Grande do Sul. There, the main key to the search has been the presence of women in the collections of Porto Alegre, and the data also help us to think about the questions we propose here. The formulations elaborated by the researchers Cristina Barros, Marina Roncato, Mélo Ferrarri and Nina Sanmartin, in the research "Women in the Collections: The presence of the feminine artistic production in the public collections of Porto Alegre" (2018-2019) has also touched the crossing of the data of intersectional form. In the Rio Grande do Sul Museum of Art-MARGS, of the total of 644 male artists, only 23 are black. Among women, the number drops to 384 white artists against just two black women. In the Barão de Santo Ângelo Pinacoteca, linked to the Art Institute of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, the number of male and white artists is 297 against only five black artists, and 210 white women against only two black artists represented. Even

the contemporary collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Rio Grande do Sul-MAC does not escape the institutional perversity of these numbers. There are 603 white artists in the collection against five black artists.

Beyond the numbers, one has to dedicate oneself to what they represent. Art institutions that disregarded, during the formation of their collections, the existence of black artists. Such data focus not only on what museums have but also on what they exhibit. How can the representativeness and visibility of the production of black artists be viable in the exhibitions that arise in these institutions, if the raw material of these exhibitions is undeniably composed of white artists? Taken in this way, these questions become relevant data in the investigations not only of black researchers and curators, but as founding elements of the research that raises the stories we tell here.

One note that we will not delve into here, but which should be cited, is the presence of black subjects in management and curatorship. The Museum of Art of São Paulo, during the exhibition "Afro-Atlantic Stories", in 2018, brought among the curators signatures the names of the researcher, anthropologist and black curator Hélio Menezes and the black artist Ayrson Heraclito. However, after the exhibition, the board of curators of the institution, in a team with more than 15 names, has only the presence of curator Amanda Carneiro, who, among other works, is one of the coordinators of the Center that has discussed the issues. decolonial and its relationship in the institution, besides having attended the impactful individual of the black artist Sonia Gomes, also in 2018. In the curatorial assistance should be mentioned the presence of Horrana Santoza. Two black women among a group of mostly white people. A look at the paintings of museum teams triggers another alarm, the tiny participation of black subjects in spaces that think and decide actions in Brazilian museums. In the local case, the work of art historian, researcher and curator Izis Abreu has started a series of surveys about the representation and representativeness of black subjects in the collection of the Rio Grande do Sul Museum of Art, giving materiality to an urgency facing the special type of erasure promoted in the far south of the country on the terms of racialization.

The writing of an unsubmitable history of Brazilian art necessarily involves the decision of the field to bring these debates to itself as the privileged place of thought in our stories, at the risk of continuing to focus on a perverse shadow that masks the presence of constant racism. which remains unchanged. Fertile ground for these analyzes is summoned in the displays of the exhibitions, which thought from an assembly logic like the one we researched (SIMÃO, 2019), have tried to account for what contemporary books of Brazilian art history only shyly begin to sketch.

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PORTO ARTE



Revista de Artes Visuais

v. 24 n.42

nov/dez 2019

e-ISSN:2179-8001.

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How to quote: SIMÕES, Igor Moraes. Where are the blacks? Deletion, Racialization and Nonconformity in Brazilian. *Porto Arte: Revista de Artes Visuais*. Porto Alegre: PPGAV-UFRGS, nov-dez, 2019; V 24; N.42 e-98264 e-ISSN 2179-8001.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22456/2179-8001.98264>
