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Niura Ribeiro<sup>1</sup>

## The reactivation of silent memories in the work of Patrícia Francisco<sup>2</sup>

*A reativação de memórias silenciosas na obra de Patrícia Francisco*

### Abstract

Revisiting the past of social and cultural processes has been one of the ways contemplated by certain contemporary artistic practices. And for this, research in archives has been fundamental to elaborate a critical-aesthetic reflection. The text addresses the poetry of artist Patrícia Francisco, who seeks to reactivate the silenced memories of the enslaved, through works materialized in photographs, video performances, objects and installations. Thinking about memory and forgetting are important vectors that can contribute to the awareness that atrocities will not happen again.

### Key words

Photography. Memory. Forgetfulness. Enslaved. Identity

### Resumo

*Revisitar o passado de processos sociais e culturais tem sido um dos caminhos contemplados por determinadas práticas artísticas contemporâneas. E para tal, pesquisas em arquivos têm sido fundamental para elaborar uma reflexão crítico-estética. O texto aborda a poética da artista Patrícia Francisco que procura reativar as memórias silenciadas dos escravizados, por meio de obras materializadas em fotografias, em vídeo performances, objetos e instalações. Pensar sobre a memória e o esquecimento são vetores importantes que podem contribuir para conscientização de que atrocidades não voltarão a acontecer.*

### Mots-clés

*Fotografia. Memória. Esquecimento. Escravizado. Identidade*

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2- Text received in: 27/08/2019  
Texto publicado em: 26/12/2019



A society without memory is anathema.

Andreas Huyssen

Andreas Huyssen claims that memory discourses of a new kind first emerged in the West after the 1960s in the wake of "decolonization"<sup>1</sup> and new social movements seeking alternative and revisionist histories. And this happens, according to the author, accompanied by the statements of the end of history, the death of the subject, the end of the work of art and the end of the metanarratives. It is a recoding of the past that succeeds modernism. But it is in the 1980s that discourses on memory accelerate in Europe and the United States. Memory and forgetfulness have been dominant concerns in several countries (2000, p. 10):

One of the most striking cultural and political phenomena of recent years is the emergence of memory as one of the central cultural and political concerns of Western societies. This phenomenon characterizes a return to the past that contrasts starkly with the privilege of the future, which so characterized the early decades of twentieth-century modernity (HUYSEN, 2000, p. 9).

Recalling the history of a society is critical so that facts that can often have a purposeful ideological bias not to touch on issues of existential, social and political pain do not fall into oblivion. If rescuing memories does not change the past, it at least raises awareness and can prevent deplorable events from happening again. The musealization of the culture of memory has been fundamental in the struggle against the politics of forgetting, especially in times of dictatorial regimes that can implement strategies of obsolescence and disappearance of pasts that do not fit their ideological interests. Although not all cultures value memory, the diffusion of memorialist practices has been addressed in the visual arts. The need for a historical consciousness to revitalize silenced memories may be a cause of struggle present in the poetics of certain artists.

The memory was the foundational axis of the poetic interest of the artist Patrícia Francisco from the beginning of her career, starting with subjective memories to later talk about stories of humanity and Brazilian culture, according to curator Paulo Venâncio. Firstly, it was family memories such as in *Portraits of Grandma Ana* (2008), a video performance with portrait films and souvenirs objects of her grandmother; later, he made *A Inventariante* (2011), creating a fake 500-documentary stop-motion documentary / animation in which he chose and displayed 12 everyday objects after his grandmother's death as an inventory request; and in *Passagens e Apologias, diário de uma viagem* (2013) shows the testimony of a trip through memories of a child in his early years, using digitized slides from his

1- Regarding the use of the term Decolonization or Decolonization, we tried to preserve the term used by the author Andreas Huyssen "decolonization", according to the Brazilian edition of his book *Seduced by Memory*, published in the year 2000. It is known that the author Thais Luiza Colaço, in *New Perspectives for Legal Anthropology in Latin America*, uses the term "decolonization" and not decolonization. To access the definition of Neck, see: <https://repositorio.ufsc.br/bitstream/handle/123456789/99625/VD-Novas-Perspectivas-FINAL-02-08-2012.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

personal collection with quotes from the audiences of the films *Arizona Stadecoach* (1942), *The Great Dictator* (1940), *The Grand Canyon- how it formed* (1992).

After working with biographical memories, Patrícia moved to Rio de Janeiro in 2014 and a new focus emerges on memory; this time, the environment, because it begins to live more directly with the landscape of the sea. This opened a new poetic course on collective memories.

The video *Ambientes - Série Vermelho* (2014-2015) is one of the works in which the representation of sea images appears to discuss issues about the preservation of environmental memories and human disrespect towards nature. This paper raises questions about mixtures of references, the citation - which produces games with the history of images and the visual loans between different disciplines - were conceived from 7 videos, 11 paintings and 500 photographs recorded at Botafogo beach in Rio de Janeiro. Francisco operationalizes his procedures through video in which he projects sequential photographs and sometimes seawater movements that result in an overlapping collage of images, permeated with each other by the transparency obtained with the reduction of their opacities. Walking along the sands of Botafogo beach, he collected, recorded and documented a reality of the waste left by society that does not care about preserving the environment in which he lives. There is no interest in camouflaging the technique of image overlay layers, as the framing geometries of the photographs are visible. In contrast to the subject of photography, the tones that border on monochromatic bring more lightness to the subject of images.

For the work, the artist creates a false panorama of several current views of the Sugar Loaf of Rio de Janeiro in which the sea image appears and overlays layers of photographic images of garbage in the landscape itself. There is a paradox here in associating a nationally and internationally known tourist landscape and commonly reproduced in postcards with images of the urban waste produced by the society that frequents such a landscape. Sometimes the dirt covers the whole image of nature, subverting the scale of the smaller mountains themselves and as a backdrop in the composition; other times a clean landscape is placed next to a landscape with debris floating in the water. It is the memory of trash that overlaps the beauty of what could be the lush landscape.

These images are associated with pictorial reproductions of still lifes from different eras and languages. The memory of the history of culture joins the contemporary landscape. By engaging the correlation of trash images, dead fish carcasses, cardboard and all kinds of dirt with the aestheticization of the beauty and finish of classic pictorial still lifes, such as those of Michelangelo Caravaggio, Pedro Alexandrino, Albert Eckhout, by Eugène Delacroix (lifeless animals) and Paul Cézanne (skulls). Some of these evoke the idea of death, echoing dead fish and rats, and the juxtaposition of plastic bottles thrown overboard echoes with Giorgio Morandi's pictorial bottles. While presenting an upside-down still life with a fruit basket painted by Eckhout, Patrícia juxtaposes a heap of rubbish on the beach sand. In both painting and photography coexist in opposite realities. This

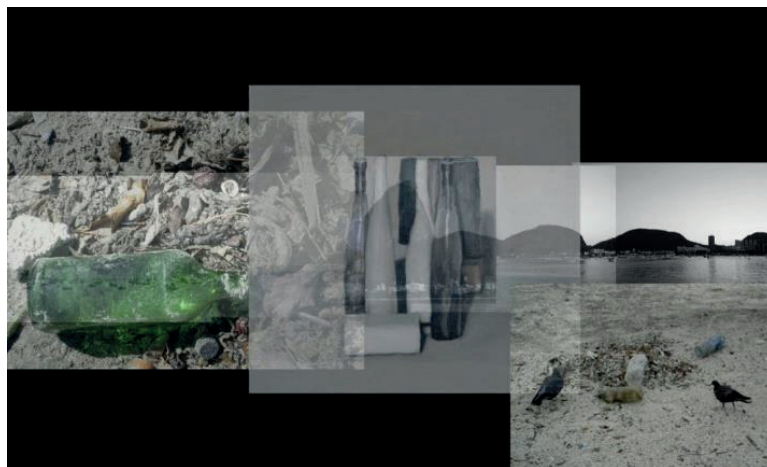


Figure 1 Ambientes - Série Vermelho, 2014-2015. video frames.  
Source: Archive of the artist

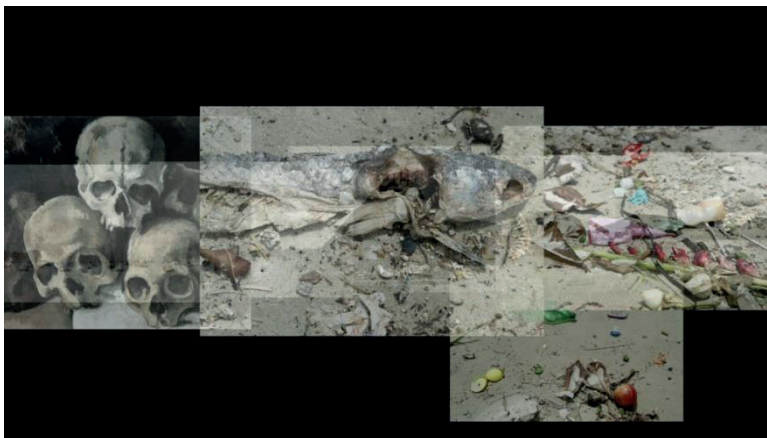


Figure 2. Ambientes - Série Vermelho, 2014-2015. Video frames.  
Source: Archive of the artist

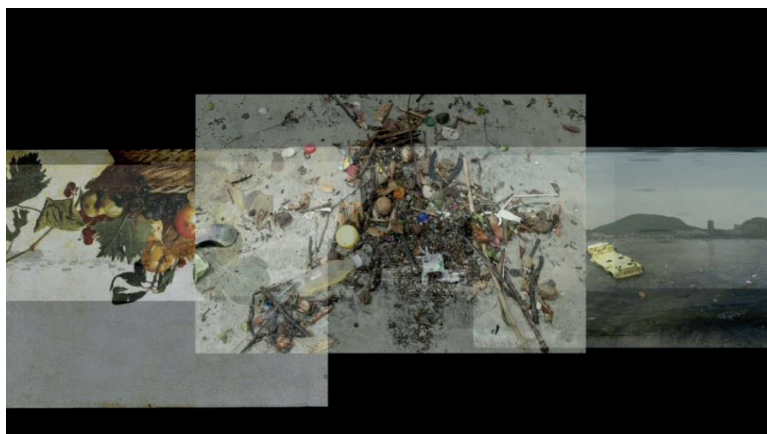


Figure 3. Ambientes - Série Vermelho, 2014-2015. Video frames.  
Source: Archive of the artist

procedure of resorting to different media alludes to the history of photography when it emerged, which, as is well known, sought its parameters of representation in pictorial references, either in its themes or in the patterns of formal composition.

Another paradox that is established is the association of environmental degradation images with a musical classicism. The video is accompanied by sounds captured and mixed by NASA around each solar system by the 9th. Symphony, by Beethoven's 3rd adage *molto e cantabile* movement and by a song *Muovesi L'amante*, created by Leonardo da Vinci. One may ask: what is the relation of the images present in these works with the songs chosen to accompany them? For the artist, the songs were those she listened to at the time in her studio and was revisiting Beethoven's symphony, just as the images were of that reality that lived when walking along the beach of Botafogo. Da Vinci's song also coincides with works she did in the period related to the theory of painting in which the artist wrote in slide frames; The sounds captured by NASA were incorporated into the work to refer to the notion of space, as suggested by the word "Environments" that makes up the work's title. In addition, I had studied piano, history and music theory for almost seven years. By associating the work of current landscapes with still life paintings and music from various eras and origins, the artist ends up valuing the memory of cultural tradition.

As can be seen, this work is characterized by cross-cutting media such as video, photography, painting and music. Bringing to the institutional space of art images of natural garbage that narrate certain social behaviors can help to preserve the memories of a city as representative of an exuberant nature as Rio de Janeiro.

Postmodernist images act under the effect of mixtures, hybridity, and recycling, depending on widespread eclecticism, the bricabracque of practices, references, genres, and times. This is contrary to the modernist regime that had adopted an exclusive character based on original meanings, essence, hierarchies and styles. This conception of contemporary art of reactivating cultural memories of the past can be grounded in the writings of André Rouillé (2009, p. 356) and Dominique Baqué (1988, p. 178). Another author, Linda Hutcheon (1991, pp. 52-71), considers postmodernism in its relations between "the past and the present, between the culture of the present and the history of the past", placing itself in a "reevaluation of the past". The postmodern "does not deny the past so much and is not as utopian with the future as the historical vanguard or modernism." Thus, it can be inferred that the postmodern conception in art is conducive to artistic practices that bias memories.

If in the work *Ambientes - Série Vermelho*, one more aesthetic concern predominated to refer to the memory of art history, in another artist project, the *Mar Negro*<sup>2 3</sup> exhibition, there was a bias of documentary and historical approach, more linked to the social and biographical issue of slavery. Reviving this memory is one of the premises of her poetics, because forgetting, according to Huyssen (2014, p.158), would be situated "as silence, disarticulation, evasion, erasure, erasure, repression" and that is precisely what the artist seeks to avoid on artistic

*2- Esse trabalho foi exposto na Galeria Mamute, em Porto Alegre, em 2015.*

*3- A exposição Mar Negro ocorreu na Pinacoteca Municipal de Porto Alegre, em 2017, com curadoria da autora do presente texto.*

practice. "Hindered memory, manipulated and compulsory forgetting," as Paul Ricoeur warns, referenced by Huyssen, are phenomena that Patricia Francisco does not want to occur with the past of slavery.

## II

To work with memories, the archive is a place that provides a wealth of images that artists can appropriate for their poetic reflections. The notion of literal file refers to a material space that holds documents and objects. In the most incomprehensible figurative sense, it concerns the practices of knowledge and memory of discursive norms. Even if managers of institutions are intent on preserving archives for the knowledge of history for future generations, memory is always transitory, susceptible to political, generational, and individual changes and not forever stored, according to Huyssen (2000, p. 37 and p. 33) detects: "It's one of the biggest ironies of the information age. If we cannot find lasting preservation methods for electronic recordings, this could be the era without memory." The same can be said about the conservation of photographs, which contradicts the stigma propagated at the time of its emergence, which was to eternalize moments. This threat to oblivion comes from the technology itself that should be a space for spatial and temporal preservation. For Ernst van Alephen (2018, p. 54):

The archive is a selective place. It must be more than the storage of heterogeneous elements and objects; It is not an arbitrary collection (...) the file is governed by the functions of unification, consignment and classification. It is not a passive place that stores itself uncritically. These acts imply the distinction between archivable content and non-archivable content. (...) It is an active content producer.

Although this archive conception puts it as an active place, if it is not revived by research, it risks being relegated to oblivion without an active function. Thus, the artistic practices that mobilize archives probe the possibilities of what art can do from what these preserved memories can offer for critical aesthetic reflections. Exploring the archive through art brings to light sleeping images in their conservation niches. Such images serve as information and knowledge and when revisited become active agents of inherited or constructed legacies that aim to shape cultural, social or political memory. As Ana Maria Guasch (2011, p. 19) recalls, when referring to Freud "the archive must be a counter-offensive in the face of the threat of this drive to destroy or forget memory".



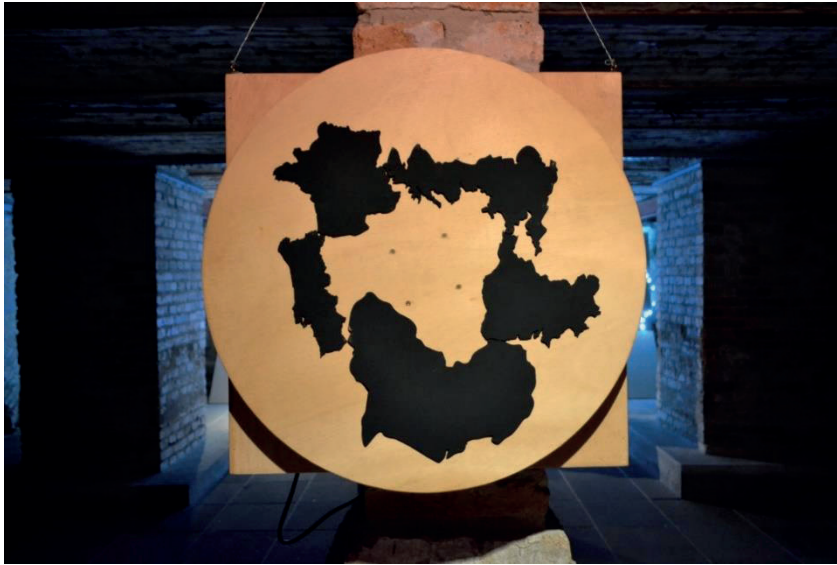


Figure 4. The Wheel is Africa, 2016. Musical object, wooden wheel with maps of Africa, Brazil, Portugal, France and England in raw MDF, engine, presence sensor, MP3 player, Ponto Preto Velho sound, "Minha cachimba tem milonga, minha cachimba tem dendê", 60x60x15cm. Source: Archive of the artist

To design some works for the Black Sea exhibition, Patricia Francisco researched slavery in the archives of the Hipólito José da Costa Communication Museum - Photographic Collection and Porto Alegre Museum Joaquim Felizardo - Sioma Breitman Photography at the National Library Foundation - manuscripts in Rio de Janeiro, where he rescued portraits of blacks and texts with the registration of the names of enslaved. For the artist (interview, 2019), "working with archives is a way of updating the present". Thus, archival research served to inform, structure and shape their works. From previous works, the artist used methods of association of different media, of different images and that generated crossings of meanings. The Black Sea exhibition consisted of works on videos, photographs and objects that commented on the social fabric of slavery.

The video *Mares* (2016) features several photographs interspersed with moving images of seawater, ships, maps, saints (Santo Expedito, Santa Barbara, Nossa Senhora Aparecida, Iemanjá) and other elements associated with the Rio de Janeiro, where the enslaved people from Africa arrived, usually captured in various ports. Amid such images, one in particular, the close-up on the head of a dead fish, with its mouth open and its body decayed, may be a symbol of the suffering that awaited those who would be enslaved when they arrived in Brazil. The venue of the exhibition, the Porto Alegre City Hall Basement, can also be thought of as an allusion to the hold of the ships that brought lives to be enslaved.

The *Roda é a África* (2016) is a musical object that brings together maps of countries that had their stories hybridized with the African continent such as Brazil, Portugal, France and England, accompanied by the sound of Ponto de Velho Velho, a figure that represents, in *Umbanda*, the enslaved black man.

The notion of document may be dependent on the idea of functionality of photography. It is not from today that certain contemporary artists resort to documentary photography, investigating archives from other disciplines to realize their artistic propositions. Reactivating archival documentary images can be one of the possible ways for artists to position themselves on a particular social issue. These are documentary-based images that Patrícia used to design *Atlas Atlântico* (2017) and the video *Batismo* (2017).

Figure 5. *Atlantic Atlas*, 2017. Installation 500 sea and black enslaved photographs, 10x15 cm each, 500 led lamps. Hipólito José da Costa Museum - Photographic Collection and Museum of Porto Alegre Joaquim Felizardo - Sioma Breitman Photobook adhesives on architectural structure in MDF. 6 meters x 2.20 meters x 15mm. Source: Archive of the artist

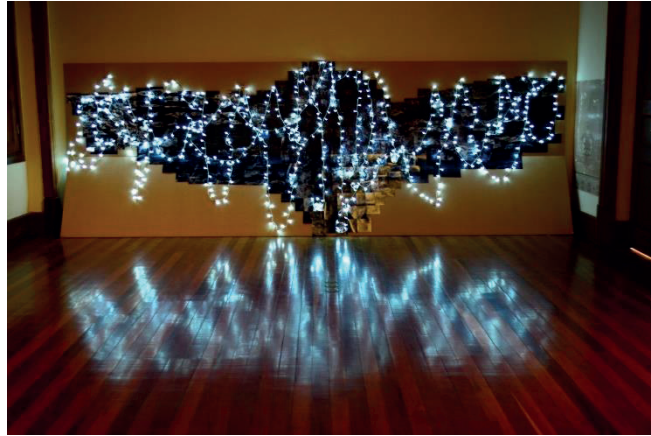
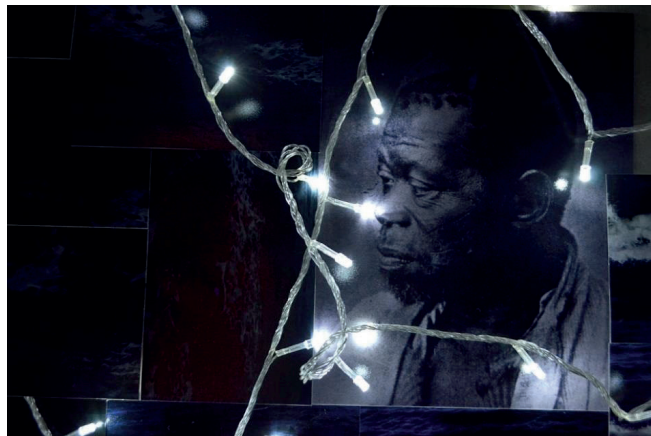


Figure 6: *Atlas Atlântico* (2017) (detail). Source: Archive of the artist



*Atlas Atlântico* (2017) consists of a large panel of nocturnal photographs (10x15cm each) of seas and portraits of enslaved blacks collected from archives, which are juxtaposed on a panel whose sloping base reinforces the idea of the sea. The images have darkened tones and a network of wires with lights placed over the photographs creates a plot that symbolically aims to bring to light this sad past to reactivate memories that were silenced by a part of society that still hides its history. The artist builds an atlas of bodies, often forgotten by history. He



associates the image of the black man with the sea as a path to slavery and illuminates a story so that it is not forgotten. This method of shedding light on images of suffering lives can also be found in certain photographs by French artist Christian Boltanski, as in his series of faces of people upon whom the artist places spotlights. With this it recalls the atrocities of the holocaust with the Jews. The situation of blacks and Jews are memories that need to be remembered so that such atrocities never happen again.

For the work *Batismo*, Patricia used a book of baptism records of children of slaves found in an archive. The camera scrolls through the pages with the names of baptisms whose records date from 1704 to 1707 of the births in Irajá, Rio de Janeiro. The children of the enslaved, according to the artist, were registered only by their first names, thus denying them the right to social identity of their family descent. At the time of registration, the name of the slaves' owners was often placed, as reported by the artist in her Doctoral Project:

*Aos vinte e oito de setembro de mil setecentos e quatro batizei e pus os santos óleos a Jerônimo filho legítimo de Francisco e de sua mulher Esperança, escravos do Capitão Manoel Vidal forão (sic) padrinhos Thomé Correa Izabel Gonçalves João de Barcellos Machado" (Livro de Batismo, 1704-1707, Biblioteca)*

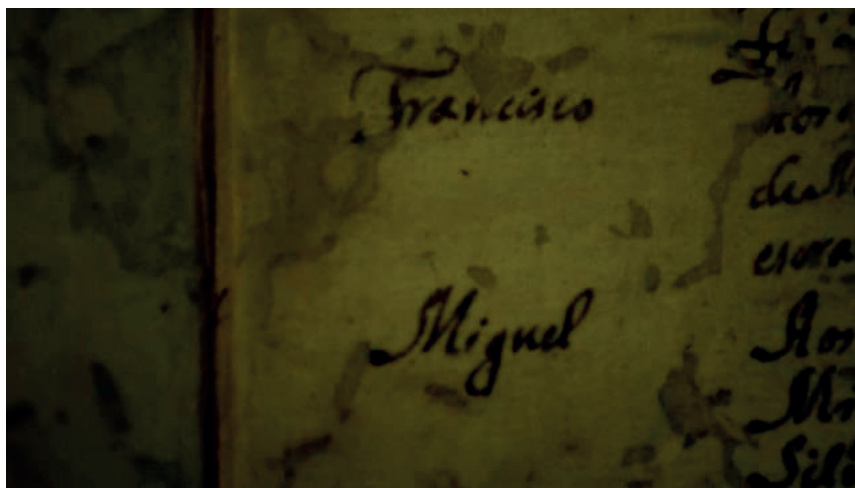


Figure 7. *Batismo* (2017). Video, 7 min. Manuscript Collection Book of the National Foundation, Rio de Janeiro. Source: Archive of the artist

The fading state of some traces of the names on the archive pages is significant from so often hidden stories, as Patricia (interview, 2019) refers: "I don't want to be silent in a country that naturalizes slavery. A country that killed and humiliated blacks and did not make up for it." The archive, in the words of Jeffrey Wallen (cited Alphen, 2018, p.16), is "a place where truths that remain hidden are revealed and that actively conform and produce the identities of the people it records." But in the case of Patricia Francisco's

4- The artist exemplifies that if the penalty was 300 lashes and the body could withstand 50 lashes, the performers needed to heal the wounds every 50 to improve and then continue applying the punishment.

Baptism, it is worth asking what identities it is if the children of enslaved were registered without surnames? They were denied what John Tagg (2005, pp. 53-54) defines by portrait: "a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the social inscription of a social identity." The obliteration of their family identities was a right that was usurped. There was a disregard for recording the origins of the enslaved, therefore, a policy of forgetting what triggers in bodies without ancestry.

The body, as we all know, was the receptacle for the punishments inflicted on the enslaved. Francisco begins to work on his performances with a material that symbolizes the sufferings of corporal punishment: salt, which in the time of slavery had the function of healing, but in an ironic sense. This product was placed, according to the artist, on the wounds of the enslaved to heal the cracks resulting from lashing, which obviously caused a lot of pain. The aim was for the wounds to heal so that they could continue to perform the number of lashes to which the black man had been condemned<sup>4</sup>. In the *Sopro* video performance (2016), the artist took more than a kilogram of coarse salt to the shore and, for ten minutes, was blowing the coarse salt to bury it in the sand: "metaphorically, it was like burying salt you could clean and alleviate the pain: It's always my body's relationship to theirs. I mestizo, a body in art", reports the artist (testimony, 2019).



Figure 8. *Sopro*, 2016. Video performance, 10 min. Source: Archive of the artist

5- The artistic residence was the town of Slanic Moldova, which is 6 hours from the capital Bucharest, Romania, where there was a salt mine with all the salt walls. The artist acquired around a ton of this material to perform the video performance.

In another work done in Romania<sup>5</sup>, Patrícia made the video performance *Cura de Oxum* (2017), a name that refers to the orisha of rivers and waters, where she spills almost a ton of salt into a river in the shape of a cross and with her hands. She pushes all the salt into a river's water as if washing it; In a third performance at the Helio Oiticica Cultural Center, for an exhibition called "Incendiary Policies" (2017), the white-clad artist laid on a surface, placed salt where she set candles around her own body: "I lent my body to talk about an enslaved body", says the artist (interview, 2019). This work is also a work that refers to a current reality of black people who continue to die, especially in Rio de Janeiro.

A historian of Visual Culture such as James Elkins (2011, p.8), in his text "Art History and non-art images" discusses a certain typology of images that do not come from the context of art, which perform a utilitarian function. and which may have a purely documentary function. This is how Patricia enters the African-based terreiro culture.

A net woven with white and black ropes and embroidered on a net cloth, still containing objects collected on the beach and from religions of African matrix, evokes the sea surface in Iemanjá meets the Black Old (2017). As she worked on the subject of slavery, the artist was immersed in the syncretism of the religious issues of the enslaved. From the contact and experiences of coexistence with religion, especially Umbanda - which, in the artist's view is more syncretic, more connected with the people who were enslaved and who would have been born in Rio de Janeiro - began to appear in photography. and installations on religious symbologies. According to the artist, the people brought practices of African-based religions to relieve their suffering, but they practiced in secret in the slave quarters, in the woods or by the sea, often using syncretisms such as Our Lady of the Rosary, St. Anthony, which related to Orixá and Exu. In his work there are many references to Preto Velho, a representation of an old black man who would be the former slave, as he is the figure most linked to slavery. According to Roberto Conduru (2007, p. 25),

Afro-descendant religions in Brazil have been prominent in the constitution of the Afro-African problem (...) During slavery until 1888, religious practices were surrounded by Catholicism, which restricted the diffusion of its imagination and its production. (...). It is a story of curbing, concealing and concealing so that they could keep their traditions alive.



Figure 10. Curing the Fia, 2018. Photograph, printed on cotton paper. 20 x 30. Source: Artist Archive

The Africans managed to bring their beliefs to Brazil by surviving in their memories, but had to redo their apparatuses of ritualistic materials. The plasticity of materials has always been associated with their experiences. For Conduru (2007, p.31 and 37) many pieces are still kept at a distance and remain inaccessible to the lay public and many works that emerge from African-based religions are foreign to Western modernity. It can be said that many works produced by artists linked to the Afro-Brazilian religion demand interpretative codes. It is necessary to recognize the importance of this knowledge of culture, as shown by Patrícia Francisco.



Figure 11. Lady of the Rosary, 2018. Photograph, printed on cotton paper. 100 cm x 70 cm. Source: Archive of the artist

A series of photographs framing objects linked to rituals show symbols used in African religion: Healing the Fia, Praying the Fia, in the terminology of this entity, Lady of the Rosary, Patuá de Valia, Sacred Spell, Save Your Light, Chora Saravando Angola, all made in 2018. These images show the plant used by the old blacks, called rue, next to a hand or associated with the rosary or white roses, used to bless and make a spiritual cleansing; the candle means "save your light"; The rosary made of a seed called Tears of Our Lady was made by the enslaved for their prayers. According to Conduru (2007, p. 44), "as the forms, also the elements and modes of meaning of the pieces are varied, complex, responding to the rich mythology of religions".

It is interesting to note the religious syncretism in Umbanda culture, such as the seed rosary that has a metal cross with the image of Jesus Christ. In other of its facilities - Offering to Preto Velho n. 1 and 2, offering to Old Black n. 1, White Cloth Series, Love was born 1 - appear white clothes of the dress linked to the ritual; the seated Old Black stool that is used in the umbanda, the cattail straw mat because every ritual is done on the floor, glass of water, candle and roses, white cloth and black and white plaid. As author Elkins states, art can look for non-art images. Roberto Conduru (2007, p. 46) summarizes well the situation of artistic production derived from religious practices, saying that "it is a still repressed, marginalized force, an art of resistance, before as now that it has recently begun to develop more fully, waiting for sensitive interpreters (...)".

With her works Patrícia Francisco revives memories of the social and cultural history of identities that were denied, subjugated, explored in total inhumanity as was the Brazilian history of the enslaved. Rekindling dreams of freedom, rekindling memories that have been silenced over time, and giving dignity to a people and culture that society often puts into oblivion have been the purposes of its poetics.

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**Como citar:** RIBEIRO, Niura. The reactivation of silent memories in the work of Patrícia Francisco. *Porto Arte: Revista de Artes Visuais*. Porto Alegre: PPGAV-UFRGS, nov-dez, 2019; V 24; N.42 e-98281 e-ISSN 2179-8001.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22456/2179-8001.98281>

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