

Beto Shwafaty | Contrato de Risco

Since March of last year, when the Brazilian Federal Police began the first phase of the so-called “Operation Jet Wash” (Operação Lava Jato), countless images of the state oil company Petrobras’ head office building – named EDISE – in downtown Rio de Janeiro have proliferated in the national and international news with a frequency perhaps not seen since the distinctive-looking building was opened in the early 1970s. The bold design by a team of architects from Paraná led by Roberto Luiz Gandolfi had been selected in a competition promoted by the Institute of Architects of Brazil (IAB) and, although featuring some characteristic elements of the modern architecture already consolidated by then, it included advanced technological aspects – like an automation center – reminiscent of the “smart” buildings of today. Haunted by an oil crisis that had been forecast since the late 1960s, EDISE emerged in the Brazilian media as a “symbol of the so-called big Brazil”, as described in the legend to the photo of the building under construction published in 1972 by O Globo newspaper and reproduced in one of the screen prints that forms the series *Abstrações Sujas* (Dirty Abstractions), in the exhibition *Contrato de Risco* (Risk Contract).

Just as in many of his previous works, in this series Beto Shwafaty brings to the fore the way in which certain discourses and developmentalist or modernizing ideologies were associated to certain artistic and, above all, architectural manifestations during several of the economic booms in Brazil. Each piece from the series is composed of newspaper articles about different episodes related to the story of EDISE, screen-printed on cloth by a plate of solid concrete in relief, referring to the cladding in abstract-geometric patterns that decorate the main entrances to the building. The artist’s choice of this ornamental detail is one example out of many in his work of how the modernist aesthetic was tied to the progressivist ideologies promoted by the public authorities from the post-war period up to the so-called “Economic Miracle”. However, reproducing articles that date up to the 1990s, Shwafaty presents us with a snapshot of the political and economic transformations that occurred in Brazil during that period as well as in the building’s image and its representation in the media, turning from a symbol of a great Brazil to the stage for protests against the company’s privatization. As the artist himself says “in these works, there is the intention to explore the confrontation between regimes of image production, discourses and spaces and their respective interpretations, uses and readings at given times in history.”

Risk Contract presents a set of works that resulted from a study into oil as a kind of symbolic epicenter of the production of political discourses over the past six decades. Although Shwafaty has been developing this theme since 2009, this exhibition brings together for the first time a significant group of works that stem from various branches of this investigation. Here he creates an environment framed in a large panel painted in black and white geometric patterns referencing a patterns created by Athos Bulcão for the Petrobras building in Brasília. Once again, the reference is the concretist aesthetic and its decorative use in public buildings. However, in this case it is the pattern itself that is

altered, whereby the black sections gradually take over the entire wall. The exhibition space is occupied by 3D pieces that point to other developments of the same theme.

These include *Alcances e Limites* (Das ordens abstratas à exploração territorial) [Ranges and Limits (From abstract orders to territorial exploration)], which is formed by a sculpture whose elements include a manual drill but with a burnt wooden handle, accompanied by a brass sheet engraved with an image found in the Public Archives of São Paulo State, portraying the drilling and prospecting of an oil well in the transition zone between the Recôncavo Baiano and the Legal Amazon region. By connecting these symbols, materials, images and shapes, the artist proposes a commentary on the extraction of natural resources in the Amazon over the course of our recent history, while also raising an extremely current discussion about the sustainability of this land – its ranges and limits – at a time in which the risks of an irreversible environmental impact caused by the economic model in effect lies at the heart of international political debate.

Shwafaty’s projects invariably involve a kind of field research of an almost archeological nature, whereby historical documents, images, graphic patterns, objects and fragments of film are carefully selected and reconfigured in works that often reveal dissident aspects of the official historical storylines. On the other hand, his research methodology is much closer to a curatorial thinking than a strictly academic approach, insofar as his interest touches on the production of knowledge that comes about from elements that constitute the actual language of exhibitions and from the meanings created through the juxtaposition or serial connection of discursive and iconographic materials. This is evident, for instance, in his concern with the display strategies and their key role in the organization of the spectator experience and consequent contextualization and interpretation of the work, thus becoming, in his case, an atomic element of the work itself. But they are above all projects that, by challenging the official narratives through applying new meanings to images, discourses and forms, raise our awareness of the forces from the past that still engage our historical present.

Kiki Mazzucchelli

Opening: Wednesday, October 7th, 7-10pm
Período de exposição: 8 de outubro a 14 de novembro de 2015.
Horário de visitaç o: Segunda a Sexta das 10 às 19h / Sábados das 10 às 17h.

1 Contract of Risk (the Worker, Politician, Intellectual and Revolutionary) 2009/2015. Rusted iron, varnish, silicone rubber, aluminum, wood.

Dimensions: 119,5 x 50 x 42,5 cm.

Two rusted iron hands united, one open and the other closed, fixed in an aluminum lunch box whose interior receives black silicone rubber (in an allusion to oil). The object is fixed on a base that resembles a popular market box and all the materials and their respective organization in the work - as well as the action that the hands do - can be read in a symbolic way: be the fist of political struggles or the famous dictum 'stick your hand in gourds'... hands and their possibilities engender acts linked to the most basic levels of human relationships. In this case, the title gives to this assembly of symbols and materials, outlines that are allusive to the many struggle cycles for power, as well as to nature and social role of its actors.

2 Precarious Forms in an Unstable Arrangement (the Reverse of the Symbols: Value / Time / Representation) 2014-2015. Carbon steel, sumauma plywood, silicone rubber, automotive paint, 20 cents cruzeiro coin (1977).

Dimensions: 87,5 x 80 x 70 cm.

What may seem like a sculptural base is actually the form of the logo of the Petrobras Company (1970s), which gains form through materials, shapes and colors that refer to the cycles of expansion and growth deposited in the company. The 'grey BR' which gives color to the steel-based is a standard and commercial color from the Company; the sumauma plywood (from Amazon origins) refers to the exploitation of natural resources. To form the central diamond is necessary that each of the logo's arrows point to opposite sides (and we could read such opposition in broader ways: between raw material and industry or nature and culture, for example). In the center, the diamond is filled with black silicone rubber, a clear allusion to both the oil as the diamond of the Brazilian national flag. Encrusted in the center of this piece, there is a 20 cents 'cruzeiro' coin (1977), the only one with a commemorative picture of the oil industry. Today, out of circulation, that coin no longer has real value, it became a relic of the past, a commemorative piece whose function lies only in the fact that it is a historic device of memory and representation.

3 Scope and Limits (from Abstract Orders towards Territorial Exploitation) 2013/2015. Stainless steel laser cutted, rusted iron, aluminum, electrostatic painting, wood (partially burned), brass plate engraved in bas-relief, automotive paint.

Dimensions: 60 x 80 cm brass sheet; stainless steel cut 120 x 90 x 0,4 cm; stone, drill and wooden handle: 117 x 50 x 30 cm.

This work refers to the cycles and historical actions, guided by economical interests, both local and global, on the environmental and human resources of the Brazilian Amazon. The configuration of materials, images, shapes and symbols act as a reflection, as a visual and material feedback on the transformation of the Amazon (as a territory, value, idea, word and concept) on a great marketable product - a fact that can be traced to the large contracts made between the 1960s and 1990s, from interventionist projects of the Brazilian military dictatorship as well as by recent influence of neoliberal policies from the 90s or even the recent developmental waves.

4/10 Projection I and II (Plans in Progression) 2015. Pantograph, sumauma plywood, oil paint.

Dimensions: 85,5 x 141 x 3 cm / 125 x 90 x 3 cm.

Pantographs (rulers used to enlarge or reduce drawings) are fixed on plywood cuts of geometric shapes that allude to both concrete art as to the acts of territorial planning (to demarcate an area). However, there is no drawing to be enlarged or reduced, only the surface of the wood itself, and its corresponding expansion is a black area - in reference to oil. This metaphorical action of expansion and transformation of materials evokes the promises related to the operating cycles that are never realized completely, remaining only

in the field of projections (economic, ecological and social ones...). In other words, much of what we expect to occur in terms of planning remains restricted to the field of images, of abstraction, design and drawing. This series, in development, involves several plywood plates in geometric cuts (as the rhombus, trapezoid, hexagon), pantographs and oil paint.

5 It's All Allegory 2015. Chemo-engraving in bas relief, brass, automotive paint.

Dimensions: 56 x 64 x 3 cm.

As a figure of rhetorics, allegory produces the virtualization of meaning: its expression conveys one or more means beyond the literal one... that is, one says B to mean A. An Allegory needs not to be expressed only through texts: it can address the eyes and be found in other forms of language. In this work, we see a journalistic text dealing with the privatization plans for a brand new 'PetroBrax' next to an image of an allegoric car from Nenê da Vila Matilde samba school in the 60s (from the archives of MIS-SP). In this image, we see two black men pushing the car that has both a scenic oil derrick and a plate with a design of the Alvorada Palace in Brasilia, together with the phrase 'The Awakening of a Giant'.

6 Decor '(for black hall) 2010/2015. Wall (wall painting).

Variable dimensions (gallery wall: 437,5 x 793 cm).

A wall painting that departs from an abstract tiling pattern made by the artist Athos Bulcão for the Petrobras Saun building in Brasilia (1962). However, unlike the fixed proportions of the original tiling panel, this version suffers gradual and progressive changes, up to achieve a totally black area. There is also a reference to the Black Hall of the National Congress, which also has a panel in relief of Bulcão.

7/8/9 Dirty abstractions I, II and III 2015. Screen printing on textile, MDF, reliefs in reinforced concrete.

Dimensions: concrete slab 62 x 62 x 6 cm; screen printing on fabric 56 x 38 cm.

The three independent parts evoke, each, moments in the history of the Edise building - the Petrobras headquarters in Rio de Janeiro. Newspaper clippings act as both documents and interpretations of the sociopolitical cycles that the company went through, and become witnesses of the formation of public opinion about the building and the company (via print journalism). In a first piece we see the developmental promises, to then observe the building plans and urbanism in the second piece, arriving finally to the third piece where we realize the collapse of those promises of progress and expansion cycles linked to that redevelopment area. The confrontation between these public readings about the building, which instill connotations and readings to the building and the Company, and the apparent self-sufficiency of the abstract reliefs (which means nothing a priori) are the main axis of these works: how something that means nothing (aesthetical forms, architectonic reliefs) may receive several interpretations through the sociopolitical contexts in which it is communicated.

