

1. This exhibition will be claimed as Cinthia Marcelle's first retrospective but it is not

A família em desordem (The Family in Disorder, 2018–) collapses Cinthia Marcelle's work as a whole into a dense, neatly stacked barricade. Duplicated within two rooms, this barricade is built from materials common to the world that have over time also become Marcelle's own: rolls of black plastic sheeting, brown paper and fabric; stacks of bricks, notebooks and wooden battens; reels of shoelace, rope, tape and velcro; bags of stones; barrels of earth; and boxes of chalk sticks and smoke grenades.

If you are familiar with Marcelle's work, you may have seen these materials before in different guises. Sticks of chalk, for example, were stuck into gaps in the grout between interior brick walls to make *Educação pela pedra* (Education by Stone, 2016) and used to write the erased words that produce mountains of dust in *Sobre este mesmo mundo* (This Same World Over, 2009–). *A família em desordem's* inventory-as-barricade is not exhaustive, but its materials produce multiple associations with her work and the world. If you leaf through the pages of this book you will find more: coils of velcro moving and expanding in the hands of others; bricks carried like a stack of books; and earth that seems to be everywhere – clinging to objects, saturating filmed and photographed scenes.

In Barcelona (2022), as in Oxford (2018), São Paulo (2018) and Turin (2020), a group will occupy one of *A família em desordem's* duplicate rooms. In the absence of the artist and before the exhibition begins, they will do as they desire with the materials left at their disposal. We have taken to naming this future space the room of disorder, but it is better described as being of a different order: one not found in Marcelle's own work. By breaking open the barricade, the group will allow something else to emerge. As they undo and redo the labour of installation, this room will be reordered by the decisions they make and the dynamics between them. What they produce will be patterned by unrolling, unreeling, unboxing, decanting and every other unpredictable gesture that follows.

The researcher Patrícia Mourão, who witnessed *A família em desordem's* first incarnation in Oxford, describes this work as a retrospective, one that acts against the very artistic authority that retrospective exhibitions serve to enshrine.¹ Conventionally, but by no means exclusively, retrospective exhibitions resolve the task of presenting one artist's work as a whole by ordering it according to biography or formal development. So doing, they confuse the life of the work with the line of an artist's career. If Marcelle's work has grown, however, it has done so not by progression but by accretion, gaining density through the accumulation of interconnected layers.

Across her work, motifs recur, in different configurations. Similar gestures are performed at radically different scales. The unravelling that transforms a length of tightly bound cotton into a dense tangled ball in *Noite* (Night, 1999), for example, recalls the undoing and expanding at play in *A família em desordem*. Materials shift shape, travelling across installations, photographs and moving images. Large-scale works are re-made, loosened from specificity to any one site. Series do not begin and end; they recede and emerge, and may be shown together or held in reserve like a pack of cards to be played in a game of association. This exhibition will assemble the series of diptychs *Conjunção de fatores* (Conjunction of Factors, 2011–) as a group, for example, but elsewhere the placement of individual pairs has pulled the meaning attached to site-specific installations in other directions. *O acumulador* (The Accumulator, 2019) appeared alongside *Não existe mais lugar neste lugar* (There is no more place in this place, 2019), the gridded ceiling on the verge of collapse Marcelle installed at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and *A tempestade* (The Tempest, 2014) accompanied *Dust never sleeps* (2014), her transformation of Vienna Secession's Grafisches Kabinett into a seemingly abandoned space coated in soot.

The recurrence and repetition that forms Marcelle's work as a whole does not resemble an image of time as a straight line. Instead, it brings to mind something looped in on itself, wrapped and tangled like *Noite's* cotton ball. Artist and theorist Simon O'Sullivan has detected similar patterns

at play in the work of other artists: those who also adopt found materials, sites, situations or objects, and whose ongoing practice is similarly marked by the recurrence of motifs across disparate works. For O'Sullivan, a reworking of what is found in the world allows such practice to refer at once to itself and to already-existing registers of signification, while the production of continuity and connection allows time itself to become a material. Such a practice, he argues, constitutes a world of its own that is also a 'fictioning' of the world-as-it-is.²

The world such work makes is not a place of escape or withdrawal. It is undoubtedly both of the world-as-it-is and relevant to it. It can therefore serve – and this is true of Marcelle's work – to question what is taken to be our single and certain reality and its inevitable future. This work as a whole as world of its own can challenge our existing means of making sense of the world-as-it-is, invent new ways of knowing and search for an imagination able to shift entrenched patterns and codes. As O'Sullivan says, it is by reimagining the world-as-is that art finds its purpose and gains its power.

2. One thing is clear: it will not be easy to understand³

A Conjunction of Factors will begin with the work that illustrates this text, *Já visto* (Déjà vu, 2019–). Formed by the repeated appearance of the same three things in a subtly different relation to each other, its position – here on these pages and within the exhibition – may serve as an invitation to follow the associative logic that binds Marcelle's work together. *Já visto*, however, could also be a tribute to the experience from which it takes its title, namely that of being convinced you have already been in this exact same situation while also knowing that you have not. This usually safe and fleeting escape from habitual perception has proved deliciously evasive to powers of explanation. Scientists have found sophisticated ways to induce déjà vu but can offer no satisfactory cause for why it occurs.

While testifying to our potential to be simultaneously convinced and doubtful of what is real and exemplifying all that evades explanation, the experience of déjà vu has also held an irresistible pull for philosophers. For Henri Bergson, who called it 'false recognition', déjà vu is the upsurge of a usually suppressed remembering of the present intertwined within every instance of perception. The falseness of this recognition of present as past, however, makes our experience of it no less vivid. What is false, in this sense, gains force from proximity to truth.

The conjoining of truth and falsity or reality and fiction is characteristic of several of the films that Marcelle has made as a duo with Tiago Mata Machado. *Nau* (Now, 2017), for example, offers a static shot perspective of a roof whose tiles are gradually being displaced from within. One by one, men emerge through the gaps they have created and gather on the roof's surface. Some of them bear torches or flags fashioned from the t-shirts that others have used to make ski masks. They light a fire, tear up cheap foam mattresses, wrap themselves in blankets. The men's actions and their clothing suggest that they are prisoners staging a rooftop protest. As such, this scene resembles a real and very plausible event, and the fact that these men are not actors enhances our false recognition.

The work's soundtrack and its original title *Nau* (translated into English as the homonym 'now'), however, seed other allusions. As we watch, sounds of shifting roof tiles and crackling fire join that of the ocean, and the word 'nau' means ship and more specifically refers to the larger, slower vessels historically used for colonial commerce. When first shown as part of Marcelle's occupation of the Brazilian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, *Nau* also recalled migrant boats, drifting offshore and unaided on the Mediterranean Sea. A layering of associations, by which the roof is also a deck and the prison a hold, recasts the scene as an allegory whose implications oscillate between present and past.

Marcelle's first solo exhibition in 2005, which presented her then-recent works *O Conversador* (The Conversationalist), *Retirantes* (Retreatants), *Cerca miragem* (Fence Mirage), *Pista* (Clue) and *Confronto* (Confrontation) as a unified installation entitled *Viagem solar* (Solar Voyage), amplifies her subtle engagement with the fictive. An invented narrative emerges between the assembled works and a text, written to accompany them, which takes the form of a conversation between a traveller and a headless horse.⁴ By the time they meet on the road, the traveller has

become disoriented. The landscape is shifting, his vessel has abandoned him, and he holds on to a certainty he no longer trusts. The intensity of his voyage seems to have saturated him to the brink of delusion. Where he has been clings to him, it will not let him go.

We can see from its vestiges that this place has left the traveller's white socks impregnated by earth and his hat stuck with burrs (*Retirantes*), that the road has rolled back (*Pista*) and that fence posts – unearthed and upended – can now present only an illusion of control (*Cerca miragem*). We might guess that this voyage took place within the Brazilian state named 'General Mines' (Minas Gerais) for the extraction from which it still thrives. More specifically, it could be in and around Belo Horizonte, a city that grew from a village founded by one of the colonial fortune hunters known as *bandeirantes* ('flag-bearers') to become Brazil's third largest metropolis, one that contains islands of ancient forest and is hugged in on all sides by the rugged, mountainous terrain that lent it the name beautiful horizon.

The rest (as the horse tells the traveller) is for us to invent.

Marcelle's fictioning of this knowable landscape⁵ suggests a journey not only through space but across time, between a past before the city began and a future when natures other than human may reclaim it. With *Confronto*, however, our traveller seems to have resurfaced. He is back in the world-as-it-is. The scene is a familiar one: a busy intersection where a waiting queue of cars is entertained by two fire-jugglers. The lights change and, as usual, the jugglers stand aside and the cars pass through. At the next red light there are four jugglers, and at the next one, six. Each time they stand aside, but then there are eight. At this point, it becomes evident that something remains askew. Disobeying their signal, the jugglers remain in place too long. In a matter of seconds, their entertainment becomes a roadblock.

3. We are always already more than one⁶

The narrative of a traveller's return from a solar voyage to an apparently normal urban scene transports *Confronto* into the realm of fiction, but this work also belongs elsewhere, as one of a series of works entitled *Unus Mundus* (2003-). This title refers to the medieval concept of 'one world' – an undivided, all-encompassing timeless, spaceless, primordial reality transcending divisions between matter and mind – which was later taken up in the domains of twentieth-century psychology and theoretical physics by Carl Jung and Wolfgang Pauli. In Jung's work, the *Unus Mundus* underpins his hypothetical concept of synchronicity as an explanation for why chance events sometimes chime with our thoughts, feelings or dreams. In a clinical setting, Jung found patients' experience of these meaningful coincidences to be a powerful tool, one that could 'puncture a hole' in rationalism and 'break the ice' of 'intellectual resistance'.⁷

The event of eight fire-jugglers occupying the same pedestrian crossing did not occur as the manifestation of an unseen order that unites the universe. Marcelle's *Unus Mundus* instead plays with the effect of coincidence by assembling what is normally scattered and separate, and recasting synchronicity as an orchestrated concentration of things so ubiquitous they become close to invisible. At any one time, there could be many more than eight people within any one Brazilian metropolis playing the role of entertainer to waiting traffic. The effect of collapsing these scattered actions into one space is that their collective presence is felt and is seen.

The dynamic setting for *Confronto*, as a staged event caught up in the flow of traffic, also enables a reversal of power whereby the entertainers break their unspoken social contract and produce an unprecedented form of collective action. This work straddles the border between fictioned and as-it-is worlds by establishing real relations with and amongst those who perform as fire-jugglers and between them and the drivers and passers-by who also form part of the scene. Marcelle's solo works in photography and film, as well as those made with Mata Machado, rely on a process of engaging others that is not explicit but nonetheless evident in the final work. In a 2017 interview, the two artists describe a technique akin to improvised theatre: they provide a 'stage' and certain pre-established actions and motivations, but they must also convince non-actors of the strength of the gestures they are asked to perform.

The characteristic use of static camera shots – seen in *Confronto* as well as *Leitmotiv* (Leitmotif, 2011) and the trilogy comprising *Fonte 193* (Fountain 193, 2007), *to come to* (2009) and *Cruzada* (Crossing, 2010) – lends the scene a stage-like quality, one that gives prominence to the setting, and the changing ensemble within it. In *Cruzada*, this effect is enhanced by the use of colour – not only that of the crossroads, ploughed into red earth, which transect the scene and form its setting, but also those worn by the four sets of four musicians. On entering the scene via four separate paths, each group is dressed in a different colour and playing an isolated instrumental section from ‘Avante Camarada!’. At the intersection, they unite and comingle, achieving a harmonious rendition before dividing again. Each group, now a mixed set, marches a separate path toward the four corners of the screen. As they exit, their gradually fading music remains audible.

The actions of these acting non-actors must focus on creating a scene as envisaged by Marcelle. In both *Fonte 193* and *to come to* those who do this do so alone. As the drivers of a fire-truck and an earthmover respectively, each is performing work they normally do but with a different motivation. The fire-truck must drive a perfect circle into the ground, emptying water into the centre to form an inverted fountain. The earthmover must plough the image of an infinite figure of eight. Their experience of work time is distinct from that of responding to emergencies or facilitating construction. It becomes akin to the time of creative labour, which (despite claims made over it) is more productive when not subject to demands for productivity.

The long-rehearsed techniques Marcelle uses to engage others in the production of work are also present in the processes underpinning *A família em desordem*, but in this case, there are notable differences. Those who collectively re-order one room will be given some ground rules, but Marcelle’s pre-envisaged form will not guide them. In previous incarnations, *A família em desordem* has involved workers employed by host institutions to perform other roles. As such, it has forced a displacement from established functions to a form of labour beyond ‘core business’. Not only this group, therefore, but also the institution hosting the work must be convinced that creative time has value.

4. Hide and Seek

Within Marcelle’s films, people are not seen. They merge into a collective formation or become indistinguishable from the tools of their trade. In *to come to*, we see the vehicle not its driver; in *Leitmotiv*, sweeping brooms but not those wielding them. In *Conjunção de fatores* we get closer. The people portrayed in this series are known to Marcelle to degrees ranging from passing acquaintance to familial bond and, as in her films, she engages them in the performance of actions involving themselves and everything else that entangles them within a particular setting. The title of each diptych transforms Marcelle’s collaborator into the performer of a role that they do not normally play, and the passage between each set of two images lends a semblance of narrative without offering any explicit relationship between cause and consequence.

In one of the two images that form *A tempestade*, for example, we see Bia da Silva, dressed in a uniform and standing in a basement room that is built against a rocky outcrop, with one leg submerged to the knee in a bucket of water that she may well be about to kick over. In the second, she has gone, leaving only the bucket, lying on its side near a pool of spilled water. As cleaner turned tempest, Da Silva has cast off one role to take on another, and the Brazilian idiom ‘chutar o balde’ (kick the bucket) suggests a motivation for this act. The phrase (in distinction to the meaning of a similar English idiom) can imply rage manifesting as a lack of control but also unrepressed anger as the enaction of a necessary and cathartic liberation: a gathering storm that will feed the earth while bending the trees⁸ by throwing everything up in the air.

In another work from this series, *Discípulo praticante* (Practicing Disciple, 2011), Marcos Lacerda seems to have exaggerated his dedication to the task of sanding a wall to the point of self-oblitration: performing an erasure of the border between self and environment that echoes a motif seen in other works by Marcelle. In *Gigante detrás* (Background Giant, 2006) and *O conversador* (The Conversationalist, 2005), she uses camouflage to partially erase the cut between figures and

the landscape that contains them, thus undoing a hierarchy between background and foreground and blurring the line that divides what is interior and exterior to ourselves.

The vanishing acts that emerge from within Marcelle's work as a whole include that of her own subjectivity, typically made present only as one amongst and in relation to others. Rarely too is she seen. An exception to this is *Capa morada* (Stay, 2003), a series made with Jean Meeran during a residency in Cape Town. Here, Meeran captures Marcelle engaged in acts of camouflage. Using coloured sheets and items of clothing, she is seen attempting to recede into the background of the city's streets, walls and market stalls, not trying to be invisible but rather to minimise the difference between herself and the environment, not to show up⁹ but instead blend in.

As Hanna Rose Shell has noted, camouflage is not just an off-the-shelf pattern. It is also a technique, taught in the field. As such, it is a form of 'cultivated subjectivity': a self-aware and meaningful 'way of seeing, being, moving, and working in the world'.¹⁰ For non-human life too, camouflage has not evolved merely as a process of copying but (as the author Theo Reeves-Everson puts it) a form of invisibility that 'masks the roar' of a being that is 'fighting for its ability to flourish'.¹¹ Attempting to disappear thus betrays the dependency between interiority and exteriority that is hidden within home territory but revealed outside of it.

Marcelle's most effective camouflage proves to be her surface, her skin. Serving as mask and bearer of identity, it allows her to disappear amongst passengers heading to the townships. As Meeran has said, looking like a wall does not make you a wall, and looking like a group of people does not make you one of them either, but there are ways that Brazil can be recognised in South Africa and vice versa, including – as the artist and curator Gabi Ngcobo has pointed out – the role each played in laying down a framework for racist ideology in their respective continents.¹² The conflation of ethnicity and colour is significant to both, but their respective pasts have produced different forms of racialised subjectivity.

The ambiguous perception of race in Brazil bears traces of both the nineteenth-century ideology of *branqueamento* (whitening) and the 1930s-born appropriation of the mixed heritage subject as a generalised (that is, culturally white European) national identity.¹³ Space has now been made to identify specific Indigenous heritage, but Brazil's census still asks the remainder of its citizens to choose a colour they perceive themselves to be: *branca*, *preta* (not *negra*), *parda* or *amarela* (white, black, brown or yellow). Differing from those used in daily life, this choice of words cannot affirm this majority non-white population's association with any specific heritage, or with legacies of migration, colonisation, slavery and enforced miscegenation. As captured by Meeran, Marcelle loses her place in this colour scale by finding herself in an invisibility that hides self-recognition.

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1 Patricia Mourão, 'O beijo de Judas de Cinthia Marcelle', *ARS*, 16 (2018) no. 33., pp. 43–57.

2 Simon O'Sullivan, 'Myth-Science and the Fictioning of Reality', *Paragrana*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2016, pp. 80–93.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

4 André Sena, 'Temos direito ao vetor. O que tangencia apenas vem', *Léo Bahia Arte Contemporânea*, Belo Horizonte, 2005.

5 See Simon O'Sullivan, 'Fictioning the Landscape', *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2018, pp. 53–65.

6 Simon O'Sullivan, 'Myth-Science and the Fictioning of Reality', *op. cit.*, p. 84.

7 Carl Jung, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969, pp. 109–10.

8 Audre Lorde, 'The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism', *Women and Language*, vol. 11(1), 1987, p. 4.

9 Hanna Rose Shell, *Hide and Seek: Camouflage, Photography, and the Media of Reconnaissance*. New York: Zone Books, p. 10.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

11 Theo Reeves-Everson, 'Surface Fictions', in Henriette Gunkel, Ayesha Hameed and Simon O'Sullivan (eds.), *Futures and Fictions*. London: Repeater, p. 193.

12 Gabi Ngcobo, 'Galinha d'angola: no retreat no surrender no retreat no surrender', in Jochen Volz, Júlia Rebouças and Gabi Ngcobo, *Cinthia Marcelle: Chão de Caça* (exh. cat.). São Paulo: Fundação Bial de São Paulo, 2017, p. 65.

13 See Abdias Nascimento, *O Genocídio do negro brasileiro: Processo de um racismo mascarado* [The Genocide of the Black Brazilian: Process of a Masked Racism]. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2016 (1977).