

The strength of a shelter

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Josely Carvalho has clearly distinguished herself as one of the most impressive artists working with the Internet as a new medium. In the last few years, in particular, the artist is undertaking a major effort in giving shape, body, and amplitude, through partial montages, to her most ambitious project, *Book of roofs*, of which the print/video/sound installation.

Tracajá is its first page. Book is a very comprehensive work in progress that explores the concept of shelter in all its consequences and contradictions. In this work, the clay roof tile is at the same time a metaphor and materialization of this idea: it protects us from the rigors of nature and the hostility of foes, and offers a refuge for our inner core, like the snail's shell or, in this specific case, the tracajá turtle's carapace. But it also functions, in the work, as matrix and generator of meanings, from which a web is built from correlated themes: the situation of those that don't have a roof to shelter themselves; the abandoned children in the streets of large cities; those that leave their homes to migrate to other countries looking for new opportunities; nations that lose their dwellings because of foreign invasion; entire generations that are extinct because of war or catastrophes, etc.

The concept, originally materialized in the shape of installations, combining sculptures built by stacks of clay roof tiles and video projections upon them, now becomes a new space of interactions that brings together old and new technologies and migrates to the virtual space of the Internet. Like Prospero's magic books in Shakespeare's *The tempest*, Josely Carvalho's *Book of roofs*, with its tiles, now in both handmade and electronic formats, is constructed so that each roof tile functions as a page. In each page, a thought, an image, a sound, or a combination of them is inscribed as a construction of her individual memory and, with the collaboration of other Internet users, a collective memory is developed on the loss of and search for shelter. It is an artwork of great intellectual maturity, social responsibility, undeniable sense of humanity, associated clearly with a powerful desire to create art.

Book of roofs, both in its previous presentations and in the current *Tracajá* installation, presents the problem of the large mass of people that don't have a roof, in a pluralistic manner. First of all, it is an artistic work, therefore not a sociological essay on the theme. In this sense, it is a sensitive approach to the subject that sees this problem from all possible angles of consideration. This is the main reason why it is, above all, a work in progress: it asks for feedback from other persons – artists, installation visitors, or Internet users – from all parts of the world. And that is also the reason why *Tracajá* must be proposed as both an installation and an Internet site, since it is in these spaces that dialogue can happen.

Josely Carvalho is part of a recent generation of artists working with the Internet as a new language for two-way communication and for developing collaborative works. The possibilities of interactive dialogue opened by the Web have been appropriated by artists like her to create a new media for the arts: net art. The facility with which Carvalho's art migrates to the Internet comes from the fact that her work already has the character of the Net, since it is built upon the idea of collecting a bank of texts, images, and sounds, a kind of multimedia database. Carvalho's effort, as an open structure and a work in progress, is a process inherent to the Internet itself, and because of it, she can migrate easily to and from cyberspace.

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida said that there are two main aspects to be considered in a work of art: its forme (form, structure) and its force (power, strength). In many works, form predominates, but Carvalho's work has strength. In it, the subject matter not only is approached with an aesthetically defined form, but also with such a capacity to touch, as well as to impress, that makes it "disturbing." It has a very strong character and moves the audience. In this sense, it is not a simple work of art in a contemplative sense. It is a work that makes people think and take a stand. It asks for positioning. The works that distinguish themselves from the gigantic number of contemporary art pieces are the ones that have the force and the capacity to place their message in an efficient and strong manner.