

Josely Carvalho is a multimedia artist born in São Paulo, who lives and works in New York and Rio de Janeiro. Her work is the result of research and reflection based on questions of the body, shelter, exile, violence of war, environment, and feminism. The artist's political and feminist activism date back to the 1970s. Her work is a form of resistance. Carvalho considers each artwork a part of a collective Diary of Images. These works are *chapters* or *books*, narratives of everyday life impregnated by questions that travel between the individual and the collective. For example, during her work with activist and feminist groups, she was also working individually on the series *Na forma da mulher/In the Shape of Woman* (1970-86), which considered the issues of rape, pregnancy, and abortion. Works from this series were later part of the exhibition *Mulheres radicais: arte latino-americana 1965-1980/Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1965-1980* held in the USA and São Paulo in 2018. At that time, she also developed the *Conexus/Connections Project* (1986) in collaboration with Sabra Moore that brought together 150 Brazilian and North-American artists in an artist's book organized into sections such as *Body, Environment, War, and Death*. In 1990, Carvalho created the series *Meu corpo é o meu país/My Body is My country*, touching on belonging, shelter, and abandonment: issues that affect us all.

In the mid-2000s, bringing to the surface memories that were always near, the artist began the *Diário de Cheiros/Diary of Smells* with a work entitled *Nidus Vitreo/Glass Nest*, an interactive installation in which she recreated a nest, the eternal shelter, made of branches molded in glass resin. For the first time, she created a smell¹ of the nest, which emanated from the inside of the nest sculpture. After *Nidus Vitreo/Glass Nest*, she continued to create smells, the olfactory sense becoming prominent in her artwork.

The intention in this presentation is to reflect on sense and meaning, particularly in the installation *Resiliência/Resilience*, presented in her exhibition *Diário de cheiros: Teto de vidro/Diary of Smells: Glass Ceiling*, held at Museu de Arte Contemporânea (MAC/USP), in March of 2018. The exhibition presented a visual, auditory, tactile and olfactory experience permeated by the subtleties and nuances between smells, from chemical fumes of

¹ The artist develops the smells for her works in partnership with Givaudan do Brasil.

tear gas to pleasurable sensations of the Queen of the Night flower, and glass shards that lead us to questions related to political and social conflicts, as well as those deeply related to women. The exhibition brings together three installations with the general concept of the invisible barriers that limit us, preventing us from entering and advancing into male-dominated territories. Hence the title *Glass Ceiling*: barriers exist, despite their transparency.

The installation *Resiliência/Resilience* brings together six transparent glass sculptures, known as vessels, which each contain a smell created by the artist. They are *Anoxia* (absence of oxygen in the air), *Pepper*, *Dust*, *Barricade*, *Lacrimae* (tears in Latin) – who reference the smells detected in the streets of Rio de Janeiro, during the demonstrations against the increase in bus fares, in 2013. The sixth smell, *Queen of the Night*, is the female element. *Queen of the Night* uses the fragility of the flower and the inebriating strength of its smell to represent the necessary pause to take a breath and is the hope amid the world of violence in which we live. For the artist, the six smells together create the smell of *Resiliência/Resilience*. Another element of the exhibition is the sculpture *Marielle Franco*, named for sociologist and local politician assassinated for her activism in 2018. The sculpture is made of shattered glass doors found by the artist in the aftermath of the demonstrations.

The creative process and artistic trajectory of Josely Carvalho incorporates her discourse into site-specific installations, where she has found the ideal format for the realization of many of her works. The space of the installation is essential for the alliance among the pieces, which serve as the connection between the artist and the public. In the installation *Resiliência/Resilience*, the artist unified space and meaning, placing the female potency as the protagonist that bonds objects, subjects, and senses with one another.

The smells, essential elements in the narrative of the artist, are part of the installation as an artwork that is not isolated, but rather a group. For the spectator, the smell is a new element, a provoker of estrangement. Rosalind Krauss affirmed in her research that “The new is made comfortable by being made familiar since it is seen as having gradually evolved from the forms of the past.”² In this sense, it is possible to think that while in the installation, the spectator searches in their memory for similar shapes to the glass vessels, containers of smell nanocapsules, for example. There is a certain comfort in the attempt to

² KRAUSS, Rosalind. Sculpture in the Expanded Field: *October* Vol. 8 (Spring, 1979), pp. 30-44 (15 pages).
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identify the form of each one of them. It is also possible to relate them to something already seen. The discomfort may come from the inevitable and uncontrollable impact of the smells penetrating the nose. From then on, outside of the visual aspect, the experience is abstract, impalpable, untouchable, and particular. Something completely new is presented.

Smells are made of volatile molecules that float in the air and, once detected by the nose, are transmitted to the brain, where olfactory information is processed. Recent studies³ revealed new important information on how the structure of the olfactory system and the surrounding environment influence different experiences to the individual. As Professor Fábio Papes, from the Unicamp Institute of Biology, says: “If the senses are distinct for each person, it is not only because their physiologies are different, but also because the very cellular construction of the sense organs are not the same, then we must regard each human being as unique from a sensory perspective”.⁴ What is important to us here is to remember that there is a sensory individuality: a certain smell can be considered in different ways by different people, provoking different reactions.

The installation *Resiliência/Resilience* creates an olfactory and visual space. The olfactory space provokes the losing of oneself in thoughts, memories, and sensations. It diverts attention from the visible world to an immaterial world, which stores images, impressions, and sensations. Here possibly resides the discomfort of an unexpected event provoked by an olfactory work of art, which is multisensory. We can close our eyes after being faced with experience and still have a residual memory. We can hold our nose, but still, images and sensations persist.

Art asks time and perception from us. The time that today seems so difficult to have to give. In our daily lives, made tense by the lack of time, by the saturation of images, by the smells of the streets and cities, the desires of consumerism divert and impede us from assimilating

³ The research involved 17 researchers from four laboratories specializing in the study of olfaction in three countries. They are: in Brazil, the Laboratório de Genômica e Expressão (LGE) from the Instituto de Biologia (IB), Unicamp, whose team is coordinated by Professor Fábio Papes; in the United States, Duke University and the Monell Chemical Senses Center and in the United Kingdom, the Wellcome Sanger Institute, where research is coordinated by Professor Darren Logan. The result of their work was published in Life Magazine, 2017.

⁴ GUIMARÃES, Maria. Variações do olfato. Revista Pesquisa Fapesp, São Paulo, ed. 255, mai. 2017. Disponível em: <<https://revistapesquisa.fapesp.br/2017/05/23/variacoes-do-olfato/>> Acesso em: 03 dez. 2019

and observing the world around us with attention. To what point does art enable us to recover the notion of possible time, as well as our capacity to observe, reflect, think, perceive, and recover our sensible experience and our physical senses and relearn how to use them? As the philosopher and historian Susan Buck-Morss, when discussing synesthesia, perception, and experience, stated, “...In this situation of ‘crisis in perception’, it is no longer a question of educating the crude ear to hear music, but of giving it back hearing. It is no longer a question of training the eye to see beauty, but of restoring ‘perceptibility’.”⁵

The installation *Resiliência/Resilience* exposes the artist’s particular thinking and vision regarding questions of social conflicts, female potency (I recall here the glass sculpture that has inside of it a form that reminds one of an umbilical cord, where the smell of the Queen of the Night, might rest and exhale), violence against women, and femicide. They form her vision of resilience, the human capacity to handle crises and overcome them.

What we intend also is to propose a reflection about to what point contemporary art criticism and us as the public are capable of reflecting and absorbing the expansion of the senses in the field of artistic creation. It seems to us that the olfactory sense is still an obstacle to be overcome, despite that the expansion of new materials used by artists today seems to us to be a fact. We wonder if the field of art criticism stimulates reflections on questions relevant to our time: the threats to women’s rights and the violence that exists.

Art is an expanded space where resistance happens. In times that individualism and virtual worlds reign, not losing sight of the notion of what truly exists in the real world seems to be indispensable.

In these times of crisis, it is not just the visual sense that is required by art. The use of the visual sense in the fine arts was favored for centuries when compared to the other senses, even though Impressionism⁶, as an example, impacted it in the mid-19th century. Going

⁵ BUCK-MORSS, Susan. Aesthetics and anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin’s Artwork Essay Reconsidered. *October* Vol. 62 (Autumn, 1992), pp. 3-41 (39 pages)
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⁶ CRARY, Jonathan. Unbinding Vision: Manet and the Attentive Observer in the Late Nineteenth Century. In: *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*. Edited by CHARNEY, Leo, SCHWARTZ, Vanessa R. University of California Press. 1995 Chapter 2, p 46-71

beyond the limits and breaking standards has always been the work of modern and contemporary art.

In this field, Josely Carvalho, the only artist in Brazil and one of few internationally who create smells that give a potency to artwork, proposes that we give the senses more attention, and reclaim them as an indispensable requisite for accessing what is most potent in us: our sensibility and the awakening of our numbed perception.

The installation *Resiliência/Resilience* gives visibility to what must not be forgotten, reaffirming that the field of art is, besides a space for aesthetic purposes, is a space of resistance, reflection, and debate. It is a space with transforming power.

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