

Área de Diálogo

André Tecedeiro / Martim Brion / Pedro Boese / Tom Saunders

Galeria Municipal Banco de Portugal, Leiria

20/06/19 - 15/09/19

Area of Dialogue brings together four contemporary artists working across different media. Installed in the unusual spaces of the Galeria Municipal, Leiria, the exhibition aims to establish different relationships between works and practices, highlighting both convergences and divergences. By contrast with many contemporary exhibitions, which are thematically conceived of by a curator who then selects artists to fit the chosen narrative, Area of Dialogue maintains an ambiguity in its concept in order to allow the works to speak for themselves. In this way, it continues the tradition of the group exhibition organised by artists¹.

This type of exhibition is usually the result of chance and contingency, the result of being in a certain place at a certain time, of sharing conversations both continuous and fragmented. There is rarely an attempt to arrive at conclusions or definitions, rather there is a constant aim for development and evolution. From the perspective of thematised curatorial concepts, this type of organisation can appear unformed, but the reality is that the many unconscious continuities amongst artists who share an exchange are best left to articulate themselves. In this way, the concept of the show is allowed to emerge naturally, making it a reflection of an organic culture rather than the perspective of a single author or a dogmatic set of ideas.

But if this show comes under the broad category of a dialogue, then what are the specific qualities of the dialogue taking place here? Each artist is articulating a different position, and each position itself may be made up of multiple perspectives. In this instance, the exhibition space of the Galeria Municipal itself influences the form of the dialogue, as it comprises multiple smaller spaces, each different from the other and with parts of the original historical architecture visible. Far from the neutral white-cube space that has become the ubiquitous background to contemporary art, the Galeria Municipal here forms part of the wider dialogue, establishing mini-narratives and dialogue fragments that add up to form a journey through the different artistic practices.

The components and parts of this dialogue cover a range of the fundamental qualities of art: materiality, intention, the formal elements, the construction of the work, and how it relates to art history. There are similarities and differences at play everywhere. For example, Tecedeiro's work shares with Saunders' that it is composed of fragments of found material, but differs in that it stays true to a hand-made, organic approach to construction, whereas Saunders' images spend most of their lifetime entirely in the digital realm. Between Brion and Boese, there is a strong affiliation to the stripped back formal elements of late modernism, but again in the construction their work differs: Boese executes his works himself, whereas Brion has things fabricated, setting out the conditions in advance as if he were producing an industrial object. The installation of the works tries to establish a fluidity between them, allowing the similarities and differences to come and go.

¹ Although in this instance, credit goes to Martim Brion as the quasi-curatorial guiding force.

At times there are moments of harmony, and at times clear contrasts form an almost dissonant juxtaposition.

Another quality of any dialogue is its constructed nature: it is not a conversation, occurring organically. Merriam-Webster's first definition of dialogue is 'a written composition in which two or more characters are represented as conversing', i.e. it is a conversation that has been authored. Therefore, it is important that within the interplay and exchange, the viewer should be able to discern the individual practices as well as their place within the dialogue. To that end, a brief summary is provided below for all of the individual voices that comprise this particular dialogue.

Andre Tecedeiro's works are made from myriad scraps of material, roughly stapled together. In amongst the scraps, we see torn edges and fragments of text. The pieces seem to have been found in the endless debris of printed matter that accompanies our daily life. Colours are added to bring an overall harmony to the composition, without getting rid of the sense of chaos given by the multitude of fragments. Some pieces include recognisable cultural symbols such as Spiderman, which heightens the sense of child-like play. There is also a sense of the amateur craftsperson, making works for his or her self out of the things they find around. But there is also a tension in the work, an allusion to a kind of violence, which comes from the staples: what from a distance look like stitches are on closer inspection metal staples. This conveys the idea that the artist is trying to hold something together, that there is a fragility, which could disintegrate at any given moment.

Martim Brion's work investigates the continued aesthetic potential of a simplified language of colour and form. This investigation is carried out using two distinct approaches: the construction of objects and the recording of photographs. The objects and the photographs are in a dialogue: they approach the same problem or set of interests from two different angles. The objects presented by Brion in 'Area of Dialogue' are a series of small cubes, which investigate the idea of repetition and incremental change. Presenting the simple form of the cube, colour is used to deconstruct the simplicity, setting up spatial questions that link the work to the surrounding architecture, drawing the viewer through the spaces and hinting at a type of narrative or journey.

Brion's photographs, show a picture of the artist as observer and discoverer, looking at the world rather than trying to change it. The photographs find a similar formal language in reality to the one that is represented by the sculptures. If the sculptures appear to show themselves as primal, original objects, then the photographs link their language back to what already exists in reality.

Pedro Boese's work appears to originate from the concern with process, sequence and repetition that characterised late modernist abstraction as it developed into minimalism. There is an awareness of the potential of painting-as-object: one such piece, *Amy*, is a modular painting, which can be installed, in various spatial compositions. This points towards the sense of openness that is an integral part of most modernist abstraction. One talks more about 'a Mondrian' rather than any particular Mondrian: the style is what comes to mind, with each individual work being a somewhat differentiated version of the central concept. A modular painting is a logical development of this tendency, because although it is one work, it can have many forms. This suggests the idea that an

artwork no longer needs to be a fixed, final object, but something that is in a constant process of revision and adjustment.

Tom Saunders' work begins with a reflection on contemporary art as a cultural practice, which is then given form through images and text. The pair of lightboxes on display, *Art in the Graveyard*, combines documentation of contemporary art installations with archival photography, and also incorporate multiple layers of digital effects and processes. The end results sit somewhere between photography and painting, between an analytical and emotional-intuitive approach to making art. Alongside the lightboxes, a series of four prints continues this investigation. These image works are complemented by a series of wall-texts, which hint at various apocalyptic narratives; fragments of a dystopia that does not completely reveal itself. The text works mark the limit of the visual - a moment when imagery is absorbed into the word and the work becomes merely a graphic sign.

These individual practices establish dialogues amongst themselves through their respective similarities and differences. But the viewer also finds a contrast within each artist's practice between works of different scales. Each artist, whether consciously or not, has presented works that appear to have a central position, and smaller works that reinforce and extend the dialogue. Boese's centrepiece work dominates an upstairs gallery: a modular painting whose language is explored further in smaller framed works. Tecedeiro also presents large-scale, ambitious collages, which are complemented by framed works on paper, which appear to be investigations executed with a quicker and lighter touch. Saunders' contribution is based around two lightboxes, whose electrical energy naturally absorbs attention: yet their language is perhaps even more visible in the small prints that occupy a much quieter space. Brion is perhaps the artist whose techniques and processes seem to always aim at the same degree of precision and perfection, though here too there is a difference in scale, which allows his language to have a more or less dramatic effect.

This contrast of types of works, shared amongst all the artists, points to the central aspect of the dialogue, which centres on the variety of ways an artist can approach making a work. What jumps out here, over and above the difference in languages, is that the identity of the artist is marked by a consistent and passionate engagement with a line of enquiry, pursued in material form. Even if the classic opening line of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*² is true on a theoretical level, Area of Dialogue proves on a practical level that what is self-evident in the works of Boese, Brion, Saunders and Tecedeiro is that the artistic desire to communicate, work independently, and add something new/interesting/beautiful/challenging to the world is alive and well.

Tom Saunders,
Lisbon 2019

² "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore"