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Alan Fontes

The insistence of artist Alan Fontes (Minas Gerais, Brazil) on repeatedly approaching a single theme, “the house,” has been framing his work in an interesting and complex aesthetic play. The exhibition recently presented at the Galeria Laura Marsiaj, in Rio de Janeiro, shows that the loyalty toward this aesthetic project has elevated his work to a level of vigorous poetic impact.

In the *La Foule* (The Crowd) installation, part of the series of paintings entitled *Sweet Lands*, Fontes once again approaches the theme of “the house,” as backdrop for a meaningful reflection on contemporary human condition. One of the most recurrent resources in Fontes’ work is the metalanguage. These are paintings and installations that address the theme of representation itself; images that represent images. For instance, many of his paintings use photographs to incorporate images of walls that belong to houses—his, among these.

This resource is also part of *La Foule*, a piece inspired by Edith Piaf’s homonymous music that narrates through the use of metaphors a brief romantic affair in the middle of a multitude attending a party. In this installation, Fontes reproduces a small living room, painted in gray tones, where he places every day, painted white objects like bottles, chairs, and rugs. A very large canvas colored with acrylics, was placed on one of the walls of these “houses,” to simulate the continuation of the living room: furniture, TV and several photographs.

An enigmatic game is created between the three and two-dimensional spaces. It serves as a visual metaphor for the idea of the relationship between the real and the imaginary. The environment appears to leave traces of the intimacy of the couple described in Piaf’s song. Through the painted photographs complemented with absurd scenes—like a couple resting on a bed placed on a deserted beach, or a burning house—the images are remainders of the narrative. The effect of uncertainty is reflected on the viewer’s feeling that the characters of the songs once lived there and left the place like an empty stage.

The reflection based on an intimate circumstance in *La Foule* is completely missing in the work *Sweet Lands*. It consists of two series of realist paintings that simulate aerial photographs: *Casa*, with images of isolated houses, and *City*, with roofs that belong to a residential area. Notwithstanding Fontes’ affirmation that the series *Casa* is about the “portraits of individual desires, affective micro-landscapes,” his images reveal a pasteurized aesthetic of a certain tendency in contemporary architecture, whose projects lack any cultural identity; they are symbols of the exhausted human interaction in the large urban centers.

These encaustic paintings achieve a strange, and therefore unreal, flat light. They remind us of the work by Edward Hopper (1882-1967), particularly his domestic scenes that evoke the solitary sense of modern American society. They also conjure themes like loneliness, emptiness, the stillness of urban life, that are also present in some works by British artist David Hockney, with his metaphysical environments, for instance, with images of empty sofas, or of barely splashed water, as result of somebody jumping into a pool.

The house has been a central theme in Fontes’ work for some years now, especially the house in large urban centers, like the one the artist showed in works entitled *Kitnet*—in Brazil, the term *kitnet* is used to refer to small apartments, generally ones with barely one room. Fontes represents prosaic environments, with solitary characters or completely devoid of any human presence. They are bathrooms, living rooms, Rooms with only furniture, objects and portraits hung on the walls like the sole vestiges of life.

Why are so many portraits of the artist present in the images? It is one more indicator of the complex jigsaw puzzle of his entire body of work that negates the classic aesthetic principle of the role of art as representation of the world.

The notion of art as object in itself is clearly present in several of Fontes’ works, as they are after all images about other images.

Fontes relies on a typically postmodern language, permeated by pastiches and symbols of contemporaneity: irony, chaos, self-reference, the senseless. Above all, Fontes found an ideal territory—the house—to reflect on the existential dilemmas that are part of urban society. Under this idea of the house—the most trivial of human symbols—lies humankind’s assault to materialize the world and to achieve our own isolation. Alan Fontes proposes a profound experience of everyday life against the loneliness predicated by our social values.

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