

**“Swimming”** – a video-installation project by Daisy Xavier and Célia Freitas.

Since the year 1996, artist Daisy Xavier has been developing a series of investigations comprehended under the general title “Amphibians”. The output has consisted of installations and photos that do not lack the ballast of her pictorial work – which has been exploited for many years by Daisy Xavier – due to the forceful plastic and chromatic features that generously share the exhibition space with conceptual or reflectional elements. If the body was an ever-present allusion in the paintings, it has acquired, from the “Amphibians” onwards, the statute of the direct object of the working action. The poetics of the body condensed in this research is expanded towards the photos in which volumes of fragments of feminine bodies of diverse ages are superimposed in a bold and intense skin play. The photos of submerged models were bagged masses suggesting shapes but denying direct appropriation, the same way as in the installation using blankets covering bodies on the sidewalks of the big cities, which have become the dormitories for the homeless.

This accumulated experience now attains the monumental configuration of the video-installation “Swimming” – a four-hand project in collaboration with filmmaker Célia Freitas. The multiplication of a minimal module of repetition, in the form of gestures, is embedded into the automatic reflexes incorporated by each culture in their way of walking, running, or swimming. The act of swimming holds the capability of transforming an environment that is naturally hostile into a natural one. It is said – I do not know if pediatricians would confirm it – that if a human baby is put in the water, the newborn would naturally swim, and that the loss of this natural ability would eventually happen due to his/her insertion into the state of culture. Later, some new training and learning will be needed in order to regain this aptitude. Those who swim are amphibians due to an acquired ability and not by their genetic fate.

The repeated minimal module, as in the rigorous musical intervals by Terry Riley or Steve Reich, get multiplied and undergo simultaneous directional variations, morphing into a musical composition by Philip Glass. In an example that is closer to us, the few percussionists that are featured on the samba school parade (in fact, it is the same one cloned by means of electronic devices), they are not just standing aside while waiting for the samba school to pass by – they keep steadily playing with no disruptions in tempo, becoming the show stoppers. Spatiality is upset by the two big screens and the six projectors positioned in angles, which produces a paradoxical dynamism – the slowness of the swimmer’s rhythm is countered by the vertigo of the multiple directions converging towards this nearby infinite located at the corner of the projection wall. I am looking forward to the soundtrack, which, from what I could gather, will surely stand up to the plastic event.

With this work, contemporary art in Brazil will once again bring forth the demonstration of its capability of dealing with the ‘big’ issues – such as the compression of time and space time in modern life – while at the same time keeping track of beauty, plastic generosity and local characteristics. After all, who else could better deal with water in a manifestation of powerful language that is full of light, if not the artist who was born in the land of sun-drenched rivers and beaches? No artificial folklores nor nationalistic demagoguery included.

**Paulo Sergio Duarte**

PAULO SERGIO DUARTE – art critic, professor of art history and researcher at Centro de Estudos Sociais Aplicados [Center for Applied Social Studies] / Cesap from Universidade Candido Mendes in Rio de Janeiro; teacher of Theory and History of Art at Escola de Artes Visuais do Rio de Janeiro – Parque Lage [Rio de Janeiro Visual Arts School].