

Coincidences [edit 4]

Adriana Varejão and Adriano Pedrosa

Adriana Passionfruit, peach, or melon?

Adriano Passionfruit. Does this have much sugar?

Adriana No.

Adriano Are you excited about the show?

Adriana I am. I postponed this show twice to have time to do it and in the end I started working on the limit.

Adriano The extra time didn't help much. Although you kept thinking about the work, and we talked about it.

Adriana I used the time that I gained to do wonderful things which now I've had to interrupt. I was taking samba and singing lessons.

Adriano And did you get anything out of those classes, for your life, for your work? [*laughs*]

Adriana That's so bourgeois! Does everything have to have a purpose?

Adriano It's not a purpose. But I think it's wonderful when we manage to get something out of another activity or another discipline.

Adriana Yes, but that can't be planned, with a specific goal. Sometimes it's just a desire to waste time. Waste is necessary both for pleasure and for work. Waste can be a key word for that crisis of yours you mentioned earlier.

Adriano Do you think so, Adriana?

Adriana It's a baroque maxim, Adriano. Waste for the sake of pleasure.

Adriano I'd like to clarify that my interest doesn't lie in production as progress, something protestant and bourgeois, but in production as pleasure. Although I do think that work can redeem us. [*laughs*] And our personal life is part of that too.

Adriana Go to Ouro Preto, Adriano!

Adriano When were you there for the first time?

Adriana When I participated in the Salão Nacional de Belo Horizonte, in 1987. I was 22 years old and was reading a lot of Jorge Luis Borges.

Adriano There is a curious reference to Ouro Preto in Borges' "Tlön, Uqbar, **Orbis** Tertius," which I was rereading the other day. It is something about a revealing letter that unveils mysteries about the imaginary region of Tlön, and whose envelope bears a postage stamp from Ouro Preto.¹

Adriana What a coincidence. When I arrived at Ouro Preto I was shocked, in ecstasy. On the first day I met a beautiful guy called Zé. We went out with a group of people to Boca da Mina, a great bar. Unrepeatable conversations, *cachaça*² with honey, the music of Beto Guedes, João Bosco, Milton Nascimento. It all seemed very magical. I slept, and when I awoke I went out for a walk on my own, climbing those cobblestone slopes of Ouro Preto. That was the first time I had entered a baroque church in my life—Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Pretos do Alto da Cruz, or as it is more commonly known, Santa Efigênia. I ended up missing the opening of the Salão Nacional. I visited all the churches in the town several times and walked barefoot in the streets. During that year I dated Zé and went back to Ouro Preto seven times.

Adriano What a beautiful story!

Adriana Relationships lead us to particular things, places.

Adriano Or vice-versa. But you're not Catholic.

Adriana No. I'm not familiar with Catholic iconography. When I walked into a church and saw that little lamb, the saints, I couldn't read the symbols. So for me it all practically boiled down to matter, coupled with lived experience, romances, pleasure, sensuality.

Adriano Useful wastes.

¹Jorge Luis Borges, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis, Tertius," in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, edited by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (London: Penguin Books, 1970), p.39.

² *Cachaça* is a Brazilian alcoholic beverage produced from sugarcane, also known as *pinga*. N.T.

Adriana In that sense, Ouro Preto was a very typical experience for me.

Adriano Until today all of that is very strong in your work.

Adriana Yes. I read a bit of Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, but for me the strongest reference is Severo Sarduy, who took a poetic approach to the baroque in books such as *The Baroque* and *Writing over a Body*. Paulo Herkenhoff has also been very important in this process; he was always in my studio, followed the work closely, and often wrote about it bringing in enriching information.

Adriano It seems that at first your trip to Ouro Preto brings more explicit, figurative references into your work. Later that becomes more complex and subtle, on a conceptual level, as opposed to figure and theme.

Adriana It's true. You know that some people simply cannot spend the night in Ouro Preto. My mother, who's from Minas Gerais, would walk around the town and tell me, "These stones are alive, they scream."

Adriano But what did you see there? What did you find there?

Adriana I don't know.

Adriano Was it a concrete image of things or a force within them? The architecture, art, or an atmosphere, a history?

Adriana It's definitely a force. But it's not about architecture or art. Despite the monuments, which are dead matter, the strength lies in the living stone. Minas Gerais is pure stone. According to acupuncture, there are certain points in your body that you're not aware of, but when one is pierced by a needle it feels as if you're tuning it. As if the needle were an antenna. Acupuncture is such a refined medicine that you tune a specific point, triggering an energy that spirals through your whole body. Ouro Preto is an acupuncture spot in the terrestrial globe. It's a place that has history, memory, water, crystal, violence, all of this articulated and built in

such a way as to cause us, or some of us, to feel that force. And for some people that is unbearable.

Adriano So we are not talking about a concrete set of images.

Adriana No. It's about all that baroque matter, what can be perceived through it—a feeling, and not the intellectual tradition of what that is or was. It's a more philosophical instance, compressed in the cracks, between stones, in the grain of the wood. It's not something concrete or hard; it's elastic and absorbent like a spongy matter.

Adriano How would you go about defining that dimension? Energy, force, spirit, atmosphere, ambience?

Adriana Remember when I told you about the glass factory in Mexico, where I made a work? There, matter acquires its shape through the interaction of the blow with the heat. I was reading the book by the Yellow Emperor and there's a passage in which he says that creation is an infinite process and a result of the interaction between energy and intelligence.

Adriano But the crooked Mexican glass, in which you drink wine, expresses that.

Adriana Ouro Preto is a box of jewels. When you get there you ought not to know. And then you will see Chinese dragons and you will ask what China and all that wealth are doing compressed there. It is a force or a drive that "blew" all of that. There is a desire to penetrate, dissect, unfold that body to discover where the force is, where it came from. It's a dense body composed of superimposed layers. That reminds me of the story of the onion. The mother asked her daughter to peel an onion, so the girl did and then said, "I peeled and peeled and never found the onion." That's what bothers many people about Ouro Preto.

Adriano What scares or seduces. I was thinking about the stones of Ouro Preto that scream, and that reminded me of the cuts in the tiles of your work. There is a series of works that bears those incisions. Surfaces, which here we can call stones, in which you make the cut and reveal

the scream. Something that relates to history, to other dimensions that remain submerged. One can think of the deep, slow history which is that of the mentalities according to the *École des Annales*.

Adriana Interesting. And *azulejo*³ means burnished stone in Arabic, as we wrote in my last catalogue.⁴

Adriano You mentioned the moment in which you entered a particular church, as well as a group of images linked to the Catholic church with which you had no familiarity and therefore you could establish a more material and concrete relationship with this group of images.

Adriana One of the things which impressed me was how matter could be so animate and at the same time have such a strong relationship with death.

Adriano What kind of matter, for example?

Adriana Wood.

Adriano Wood as it is used in the sculptures of saints and in the architecture?

Adriana Yes. Especially the altarpieces in the church of Nossa Senhora da Conceição de Antonio Dias, where the wood is extremely dark and from which little angels sprout out. Those altarpieces lost some of their original color and are now grayish-brown. It looks like a sea of matter from which small ivory-colored angels emerge. Matter swallows form. As Walter Benjamin once wrote "in death, the plenitude of matter." Aleijadinho⁵ was buried in that church.

Adriano In your work, the cut is not made over a null, white, minimalist surface from which you reveal a complex and excessive interior. Rather, the first, original surface itself, even if ordered as is the case with the tiles, is already charged with a visual excess. The loaded surface suffers an incision through which you reveal an other disordered, corporeal, interior excess.

³ *Azulejo* is the Portuguese term for tile. *N.T.*

⁴ Adriana Varejão and Adriano Pedrosa, eds., *Adriana Varejão: Trabalhos e referências 1992–1999* (São Paulo: Galeria Camargo Vilaça, 1999), p.4.

⁵ Antônio Francisco Lisboa (Brazil, 1738–1814), whose nickname Aleijadinho means handicapped, was the most famous sculptor of the Brazilian baroque.

I'm saying this in a more literal, figurative and descriptive manner, as in *Línguas* [Tongues], but also in a more conceptual way concerning that procedure, when you discover and dig out meanings. There's a duplicity, a deceitful game that brings us to your idea of vertigo.

Adriana Yes. It's as if there were a desire to deceive the senses.

Adriano Something built for that.

Adriana A column in architecture whose continuity is a painting that simulates the column. They are games that produce some form of vertigo. You can't trust what you are seeing.

Adriano What you *think* you are seeing. They are games of representation. Vertigo is also linked to excess.

Adriana And to simulation and to games. Do you want some coffee?

Adriano Yes, please.

Adriana It's interesting because the baroque jewel is an organism that absorbs everything. In Mexico, for example, the whole Amerindian culture transforms things, as is the case with the *mestizo* saints such as Nossa Senhora de Guadalupe. Another example refers to Chinese manifestations in Brazilian baroque, which come from *chinoiserie* and from Macau.

Adriano The other Portuguese colony. Your visual work changed a great deal after Ouro Preto.

Adriana I changed a lot after that. It's a long story. I began to involve myself with Chinese philosophy, to practice tai-chi chuan, and returned to Ouro Preto with my then Chinese husband.

Adriano But he wasn't Chinese.

Adriana No, but he had been adopted by a Chinese master, a general **under** Chiang Kai-shek. When I went back to Ouro Preto I began to observe all those Chinese manifestations that took place inside the baroque. I realized that that matter was so generous it also absorbed China. In the Catedral da Sé in Mariana you come across red and gold murals. You know when you embark on a trip that feels like everything, all of the codes speak to you?

I asked myself how all those Chinese elements ended up there. It's like a fiction. As you live your life, history is reconfigured according to your experience.

Adriano That reminds me of the desire to reread all the books we've already read since now we read so many others that we will see the first ones differently. The desire to reread and re-view films, arts, places, and lovers of the past.

Adriana You go to a bar and there's a singer who sings a song for you. You go to a play and the actor is someone with whom you're in love and he's interpreting the character of the book you're reading. And history begins to formulate itself in this manner, but so clearly, so full of facts that prove that that happened in the past, that you no longer know if your time is now, if all of that is really taking place.

Adriano What is fact and what is fiction? That's very Borges.

Adriana Have you never felt that?

Adriano No. What is that?

Adriana Try it.

Adriano It tastes like sugarcane.

Adriana It comes after the scraping⁶ stage.

Adriano Delicious. Sometimes coincidence gives me a sense of panic.

Adriana Not panic, ecstasy! Coincidence is a confirmation. Coincidence is the key word. I must remember that—coincidence.(the incidence of diferent spaces at the same time)

Adriano But did you think you would have a contact or experience with that universe, that force, through art? It seems to me that art often remains beyond all that you're saying.

Adriana The exhibition and the market remain, but art itself I believe not. **Adriano** It's true, I believe that too.

Adriana You liked it, right?

⁶ Scraping here refers to a Brazilian raw brown sugar candy called *rapadura*. N.T.

Adriano I did. Thank you, Adriana.

Adriana You're welcome, Adriano.

Rio de Janeiro, 12 and 13 October, 1999.

Founded in 1711, the former capital of the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, Ouro Preto (Black Gold), derives its name from the black granite found in the region. When crushed, this granite reveals gold of the highest carat. Ouro Preto represents an important period in the country's cultural and political history: the city was not only the setting for the battles for political emancipation in the nineteenth century, but its religious sculpture and architecture are also rich manifestations of the Baroque style. The most significant group of artworks from the Baroque period--religious sculptures and architectural ornaments in wood and stone located in the city's churches--was created by the Brazilian master Aleijadinho (Antônio Francisco Lisboa, 1738-1814). Ouro Preto was declared a "world cultural heritage" by UNESCO in 1980.