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- Gonçalo, Alice and Leonor, and her parents (the curator).

## GALERIAS MUNICIPAIS – GALERIA DA BOAVISTA

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# Radial body

## Mariana Caló and Francisco Queimadela

Curated by: Susana Ventura

30.07 – 01.11.2020

“There is no perception that is not full of memories.”

Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*

In 2015, Mariana Caló and Francisco Queimadela created a first image of the ‘Sala da Memória’ [Memory Room],<sup>1</sup> inspired by the ‘memory theatres’ of Giulio Camillo Delminio (1480–1544) and Robert Fludd (1574–1637), conceived in the tradition of the art of memory. This art was initially invented in Ancient Greece as a rhetorical technique (also known as a ‘mnemotechnic’), which, through the mental association of places and images (*loci* and *imagines*), enabled orators to accurately recite the entire speech from memory.

In *The Art of Memory*,<sup>2</sup> Frances Yates writes that the most common mnemonic space in the classical art of memory was the architectural space, consisting in the imagination of a building or the mental recreation of a real building, following certain rules in order to facilitate the memorisation of images in their respective places. Imagine a house, with an entrance hall and successive large, bright rooms, arranged rhythmically and precisely, and then imagine an image or set of images in each of these places. Orators only had to imagine themselves going through the various spaces of the house to remember the successive topics they wished to speak about. There were also rules for the selection

<sup>1</sup> For the exhibition ‘O Livro da Sede’ [The Book of Thirst], in the Contemporary Gallery of the Serralves Museum, curated by Ricardo Nicolau.

<sup>2</sup> Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory*. London: The Bodley Head, 2014 [1966].

of images, because, as the author points out, some images are stronger and clearer, immediately stimulating the memory, while others are weaker and more tenuous and are less capable of awakening memory.<sup>3</sup> Unusual, dramatic, grotesque, sublime, obscene and comic images penetrate the mind quicker, making more vivid impressions on the memory. Mnemonic images did not, however, correspond to a direct representation of things that existed in reality, nor to extractions of the sensible world by the senses, possessing, from the outset, a meaning first attributed by the mind and always associated with an impetuous and intense emotion (more than symbols, they would be, more precisely, signs of power).

Camillo and Fludd attempted to convert the mental architectural space of the classical art of memory into a material physical structure, based on models of theatres (in Camillo's case, the Roman theatre theorised by Vitruvius, and, for Fludd, the Globe Theatre, associated, in the Elizabethan era, with the plays of William Shakespeare). This conversion triggers a magical power, which the authors themselves argued their theatres possessed. This power corresponded to a real materialisation of human memory, which could fit all the things the mind is able to conceive, even those which are not visible or are situated in the depths of the mind. Departing from an organisation based on the constellations of the zodiac and images of obscure meanings, some of which were related to kabbalistic teachings and myths, whoever entered these theatres gained access to the entire knowledge of the world and its complex connections, including the hidden connections that link human beings with the celestial universe and the divine (or the supercelestial world). Significantly, the human being occupied the centre of these spaces (the Vitruvian man who occupies the centre of the circle, nature's most perfect form, which the Renaissance artists believed to be an expression of the divine), while around them the world and the nature of things were revealed through the manipulation of mnemonic images. The same image could trigger very different meanings when associated with other images, passing through a thousand and one prodigious labyrinths of the mind, including dreams, fantasies and the most terrifying fears.

Caló and Queimadela's initial image already presented architecture in its colourful and backlit two-dimensionality. Three identical red doors are placed symmetrically on the three visible planes of different colours of a space, which nevertheless emerges as an abstract space. Curiously, it seems like a place we can escape to and remain as long as we like, because it offers, simultaneously and paradoxically, the certainty of a labyrinth

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<sup>3</sup> Frances Yates, *Op. Cit.*, p. 25.

## Ground floor

1

*Headstand*, 2020  
Gouache on paper  
28 x 36 cm

2

*First Light*, 2020  
Gouache on paper  
28 x 36 cm

3

*Star*, 2020  
Silkscreen print  
55 x 71 cm

4

*Extraterrestrial*, 2020  
Silkscreen print  
55 x 71 cm

5

*Venus*, 2020  
Silkscreen print  
55 x 71 cm

6

*Wonderments*, 2020  
Gouache on paper  
28 x 36 cm

7

*Sky Disk*, 2020  
Gouache on paper  
28 x 36 cm

8

*Memory Room for Radial Body*, 2020  
Three-dimensional wooden structure  
and painted silk panels  
343 x 343 x 295 cm

9

*The Book of Thirst*, 2015  
16 mm film transferred to HD video, B/W,  
sound  
Sound composition by Pedro André  
4', loop

## Upstairs gallery

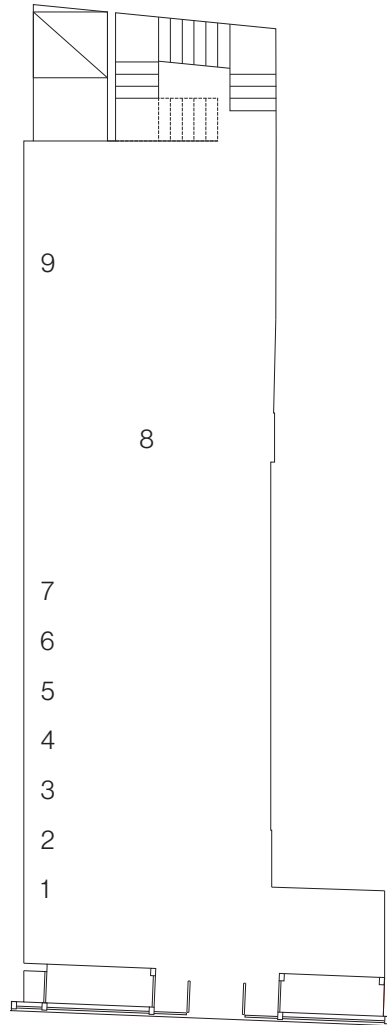
10

*Spilt milk*, 2019  
16 mm film transferred to HD video, B/W,  
sound  
4'47", loop

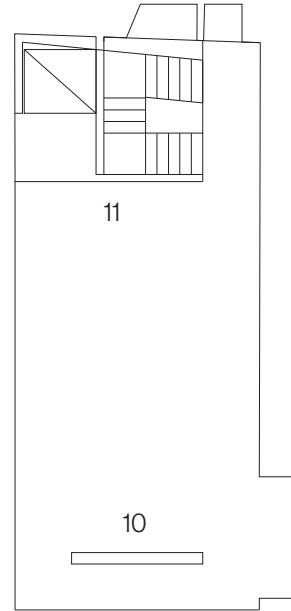
11

*Memory Room*, 2015  
Fujitrans print on light box  
50 x 70 cm

Ground floor



Upstairs gallery



and a tentative approach towards a reality one might want to construct there. Another version thereof, a silkscreen print, is subject to the variations characteristic of an image gradually constructed in thought. In the present exhibition, this image reappears as a kind of reminiscence (another part of memory), constituting the statement of transforming the exhibition space into a space of memory.

Its visualisation, however, occurs when we are already situated in a mental space constructed from a mnemonic principle in which the installation – understood as the relationship between the various elements – is established, and continues to establish itself, as a space of memory. This space of memory is essentially defined by the distinctive nature of the orange-red colour of its atmosphere. Like in the first image, we are tempted to remain in the space, in a state of trance that is triggered by the chromatic intensity (created through the use of red filters on the windows and interior lighting). This concentrated, saturated atmosphere is conducive to an intimate encounter with the art works and the activation of mnemonic images, where spectators can create infinite dialogues with the images triggered by the art works on view in the gallery and the ones inhabiting their memory. This is, in fact, an effect of the various art works on the body, constituting a dual movement of introspection and expansion. The body, as a receptacle of memories, is invited to centre itself, to examine itself from the inside, from its innermost part: its memories. Simultaneously, the body is induced to position itself before the stars, the world and the universe, as occurs at the beginning of the exhibition with the presentation of silkscreen prints and small drawings. The prints construct different orders from the celestial to the supercelestial world, allowing, precisely, for the body to establish itself as a point of origin and reference, and also for it to come out of itself, to admire itself from the matter which connects it to celestial bodies and the cosmos, dust and the infinite. The small drawings thicken the web of magical connections created by the artists and awaken the body, once more, to a vision of itself that is hidden in the depth of the soul. They evoke the principles of abstract geometry (also present in the prints) and those of nature, ultimately opening the time of the work to the infinity, which runs through any artistic creation. From the tiny particle of matter to that which exists beyond the stars, the works confront us with a time that is not restricted to the present, eliciting the past (the distant past of the composition of the universe, but also that of the knowledge of the centuries, that of memory) and the future (that of catharsis, dreams, the indiscernible, the infinite). Memory is understood as a continuous construction of the present where past and future necessarily join and merge with one another.

The central space of the gallery is occupied by a three-dimensional piece conceived especially for the exhibition. Its architecture recalls the first image of the 'Sala de Memória' and its doors, which appear to be painted in the same colour palette that covers the dyed silks that form its four planes. The 'Sala de Memória' acquires a three-dimensionality whose proportions resonate with the body that is invited to inhabit it.<sup>4</sup> The colourful translucent silks form a veil around the structure, which, according to the light and time of day (time as a matter of composition, altering the perception of the work), gradually reveals different degrees of transparency. The veil converts the bodies – those inhabiting its interior and those which move around it and vice-versa – into shadows or native movement-images that are varying in transience and clarity. Its architecture also recalls traditional Japanese houses, in which *shoji* panels are used to create a space of intimacy inside the house, revealing the reality and world outside according to a desired degree of translucence. A space of intimacy is not a private or interior space, although it can be contained within them. It is a space in which the body can be one with itself and fly over itself, through itself, as is practised in various Oriental meditation techniques. In the 'Sala da Memória', this movement also allows the body to mentally project the memories it carries with it onto the planes and which delicately envelop it.

Reflections of other images, other worlds, appear on the coloured veils. The body describes, once again, the dual movement of introspection and expansion, or contraction and dilation, which instils the exhibition with an intense corporal rhythm, coming face to face, in this moment, with images from memories belonging to the artists themselves. Following one of the mnemonic principles, these include sublime images of suffocating beauty, as well as strange, violent and disturbing images. The resulting film is presented on a dizzying loop together with a high-pitched sound. Even if autobiographical in nature and accentuated by the form of the film itself, composed of photographs that appear for different time periods and allow the camera to glance upon certain details, the images highlight the infinite oscillations of the experiences of being in the world, a variety that creates a space of empathy and sharing. The collection of images and their association (montage) allows for the remaking of the past and the creation of a continuity, which opens up to the spectator (and, with them, the future). They are images, which pass through various states of mind – from delight, inebriation, shock and fear to a deep sleep (or dreaming) – depicting banal experiences and trivial gestures as well as extravagant

manifestations. These depictions can be observed in the masked bodies, the dance of light movements (which only photography captures) and that which can exist deep in the human mind, indiscernible between human and animal, and including the suffering of the latter.

The final work – on the upper level of the gallery – presents a suspended time: that of a continuous present in which past and future are juxtaposed and mixed up in the alternations of images, between the temporality of boiling milk and the silent scream of a woman, which goes on forever, slowly, throughout the film, until the final moment in which it becomes definitively stuck. Time, its passage, the duration it is inculcated with, is a recurrent expressive matter in Caló and Queimadela's work, which acquires, in this film, its quasi-annulment, both as a result of the simultaneity of disparate times and the limit the artists impose on the movement of the images.

Caló and Queimadela constantly return to the above-mentioned theme of time and duration, in addition to other themes that run through the exhibition. The exhibition presents a complex system whose various connections – body-universe, body-memory, memory-time, image-memory, natural-artificial, body-animal – are shaped by the continuity that exists between their limits. The body, which moves, inhabits, sees and feels, is the primordial object of reference and memory. The successive encounters develop from this idea of body-centre relationship. *Radial body* presents a spiral that the body spins inside and outside itself and upon which the body unfolds in its multiple metamorphoses and complex wanderings through the thickness of time that runs through each image (as in any art of memory), ultimately questioning its own finitude and timelessness.

Susana Ventura  
July 2020

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<sup>4</sup> According to Yates, a type of *loci* would be a space in which the proportions of the mnemonic image would be defined by the inscription of a human figure with their arms outstretched in an attempt to touch the two opposite sides of this space.