

Flamboyanzinho, Flor-de-pavão, Flamboyant-mirim, Barba-de-barata

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Galerias Municipais – Galeria da Boavista
Rua da Boavista 50, Lisboa

Tuesday to Sunday 10am-1pm and 2pm-6pm
Free entrance

Guided tours by appointment
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curated by

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Galeria da Boavista

Flamboyanzinho, Flor-de-pavão, Flamboyant-mirim, Barba-de-barata are some of the popular names by which *Caesalpinia pulcherrima* is known in Brazil. While poison brings us closer to death, depending on the dose, it can also work as a cure. The exhibition includes pieces from various artists and museum collections and documentation from various sacred places: Andreia Santana, Candice Lin, Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro, Cecilia Bengolea, E. M. de Melo e Castro, Sarah Ancelle Schönfeld, Thiago Correia Gonçalves, artefacts from the 17th and 18th centuries (A ring with secret compartment for poisons and a Bezoar Stone, both belonging to the Lisbon Pharmacy Museum), the Xangô Stone (Salvador, Brazil), the Barreto Pharmacy and the Botanical Garden of Lisbon.

‘Flamboyanzinho, Flor-de-pavão, Flamboyant-mirim, Barba-de-barata’ takes as its starting point the performativity of *Caesalpinia pulcherrima* given by its toxic and curative properties. Like other native species of South and Central America and the Caribbean, the “Flamboyanzinho” was adopted in Europe from the 17th century onwards for its commercial and scientific qualities. On American soil, the “Flor-de-pavão” formed part of a network of exchange between African and indigenous women, who, as one of the strategies of resistance to the colonial slave regime, used the toxicity of the plant’s seeds to perform abortions. When it crossed the ocean, the “Flamboyant-mirim” became part of another network, dissociated from its history of alliances in insurgency movements, and considered a flower of high economic value due to the beauty of its flamboyant colours and forms. The toxic, curative, and performative properties of the “Barba-de-barata” like those of other migrant plant species, played an important role in the political and social dynamics of the colonial period. Together with the other works and artefacts gathered in this exhibition, these properties now help us reflect on notions of transit, be they oceanic, psychic, metabolic, subterranean, hormonal, poetic or cultural.

If, on the one hand, we can link toxic substances to strategies of maintaining life through death, we can also understand such substances through the prism of their regenerative power in healing and rituals, whether to provide pleasure and nutrition to the body, or to facilitate contact with the divine. Methods for handling such poisonous substances can be preserved for centuries in the form of recipes. An example of this is the filtering out of cyanide from cassava leaves in the preparation of *maniçoba*, a dish of indigenous and African origin eaten mainly in the North and Northeast regions of Brazil. This dish is also associated with Círio de Nazaré, the largest religious event in Brazil which brings together

more than two million pilgrims while following a rope (Thiago Correia Gonçalves). Knowledge of the plant world and of remedies prepared from leaves, roots and fruit are also preserved through oral tradition, songs, and sayings. Intergenerational transmission of such knowledge is not limited to the organs of speech and hearing, but encompasses the totality of the body, which carries ancestral memories of pleasure and pain. The alliance between a human body and a vegetal body also allows for the activation of counter-narratives featuring dissident bodies and subjectivities: morphological, poetic, and political approximations which open pathways that deviate from the linear trajectory of the hetero-patriarchal regime (Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro).

These living ancestral memories, which may also be understood as a space for the preservation of knowledge, are transformed as they are socialised, potentially resulting in therapeutic processes and of production of meanings. Whether with the aid of chemical substances or forces of nature such as electrical storms, such memories can also be transmitted through dance, a combination of stimuli that are internal and external to the body. A manifestation of diasporic cultural memory, Dancehall is a form of collective dance associated with the eponymous genre of popular music that emerged in Jamaica in the 1970s. Guided by powerful bass waves from Sound Systems and by body movements informed by the local urban culture and traditional African dances, this form of cultural expression imbues the creativity of performance with a regenerative power (Cecilia Bengolea).

By transporting us to the interior of a Berlin nightclub, we disconnect from the flashes of lightning in the sky of Spanish Town, Jamaica, and are carried away by the rhythmic pulses of strobe lighting. In Galeria Boavista, we are absorbed by the enormous photograph running the entire length of one of the gallery walls. As a result of chemical interactions between psychotropic and photographic substances, this image reminds us how pharmacy and photography have been intimately linked since the beginnings of their industrial development. MDMA, the active ingredient in ecstasy, one of the most popular recreational drugs since the 1980s, is currently in the last phase of clinical trials for the treatment of patients with post-traumatic stress disorder (Sarah Ancelle Schönfeld). Shrunken down to the molecular scale of synthetic substances, one can transit through the molecular structure of words through *fractopoems* broadcast on television (E. M. de Melo e Castro). Characterised aesthetically by transformation, the videopoem here is a medium which allows us to examine the limits between representation and reality, insofar as words

in visual poetry serve both to generate mental images and function as graphic compositions. This occurs through the fragmentation and recombination of written, sonic, and visual language, operations also observed in the photographic language of the fractal images generated by the revelatory processes of hallucinogenic substances.

Within the exhibition, these alkaloids serve as guides and stimulate us to consider the conditions that have kept living beings, facts and objects invisible in certain social contexts: a ring with a secret compartment for poisons that was worn by an Italian nobleman (Pharmacy Museum), and forms of illegal gambling introduced in the Caribbean by working class Cuban-Chinese migrants (Candice Lin). The former was closely associated with the power of the 17th-century Italian aristocracy, a class that financed and made use of official medical knowledge of the time. Despite claims to rationality, this knowledge was permeated by notions of magic and performativity, characteristics historically associated with therapies originating from other cosmologies. The second was produced in 19th-century Cuba by marginalised groups of indigenous, African, and Chinese workers, the latter sent forcibly to sugar plantations in the Caribbean in the context of the Opium Wars. The magical meanings that sustain *La Charada China* as a cultural practice for picking lottery numbers based on dreams was developed from a mixture of popular traditions that survived oceanic crossings and the segregationist system in which they were embedded, creating botanical proximities between opiates, sugarcane and psychotropic, emmenagogue and poisonous tropical plants.

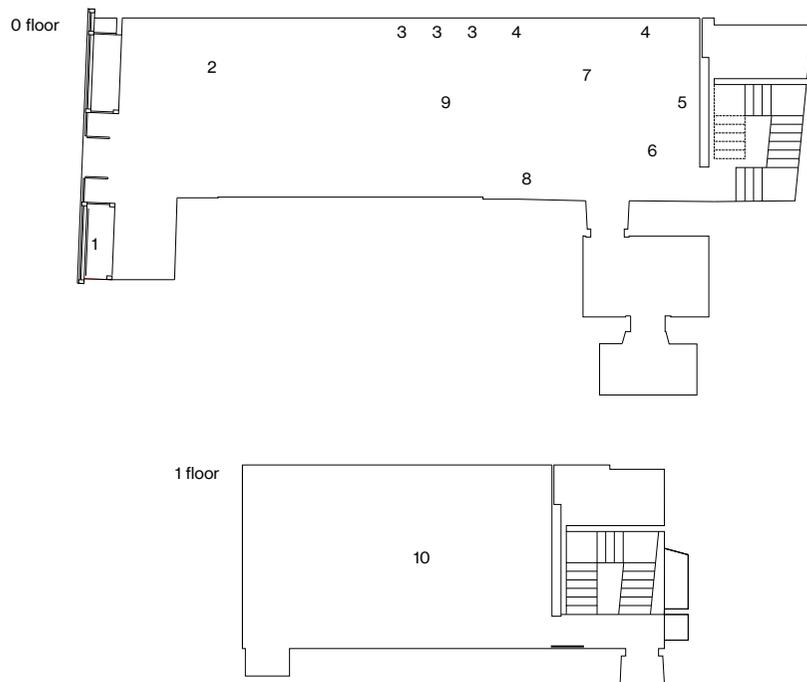
As they can only be experienced by humans through ingestion, the alkaloids derived from these plants react in the dark and highly complex environment inside us (E. M. de Melo e Castro). The exterior-interior transit of ingestion is inverted in the case of the Bezoar Stone (Pharmacy Museum), a mineral compound formed in the stomach and urinary tracts of ruminant animals and used by Arab doctors from the 8th century and in Europe from the Middle Ages as an antidote against all poisons, and carried in many rings, bracelets, and necklaces as a magical and precious amulet. Similar patterns of exchange structure the history of the Xangô Stone, a sacred Afro-Brazilian natural monument located in the city of Salvador in the state of Bahia, Brazil. The stone served as a hiding place and escape route for enslaved people crossing its underwater passage, allowing them to access a realm beyond the reach of manorial power. An element of the city's cultural, symbolic, and mythical heritage, a site where practitioners of *candomblé* from many nations make countless offerings, the Stone was listed as cultural heritage of the city by the City Council in 2017 after years of struggle by practising communities for visibility and recognition of their traditions.

In the rear of the gallery, we find a revolving door, a portal which can lead us to the end of our journey in this space or transport us to the parallel dimension of buried, forgotten, and unclassified objects. Emerging from its psychedelic and chameleonic finish is a form inspired by descriptions and drawings of archaeological discoveries which, though they have been excavated, have never been considered official artefacts. Despite a certain system of organised labour that renders the contributions of field workers invisible, these artefacts have survived the museological and hegemonic status of history (Andreia Santana). Objects that have been preserved as living entities, transformed over time, once from drawings and now taking the shape of a door offering a passageway.

Oceanic crossings enabled cultural appropriations and exchanges in which the action and meaning of migrant substances were given new contexts, variously contributing to the construction of diasporic cultures, or generating wealth for dominant groups. The exhibition is continued in two other sites which embody systems of thinking and operating that were enhanced by the extractivist colonial system: The Botanical Garden and the Pharmacy. From the specific context of the city of Lisbon, these two spaces allow us to reflect on the issues raised in Galeria da Boavista that relate to the processes of circulation, ritualisation, transformation, commercialisation and institutionalisation of objects and knowledge related to the natural world.

Acknowledgments

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1
Museu Nacional de História Natural e da Ciência/Herbário Lisu

Caesalpinia pulcherrima
 Photograph mounted on backlight
 ULisboa-MUHNAC-LISU138803
 University of Lisbon / Museum of Natural History and Science

2
Candice Lin

La Charada China, 2018
 Earth, clay, cement, guano, seeds of various plants, grow lights, reflective mylar, straw, lime, video, glass jars
 Courtesy the artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles / New York

3
Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro

Gastrite, 2019
 Photo prints on cotton paper
 120 x 80 cm (each)
 Courtesy the artist

4
Museu da Farmácia

Luxury ring
 Italy (?), 17th century
 Brass, iron and enamel paint features a secret compartment to contain poison and antidotes. Exceptionally large and elaborate luxury ring with a secret compartment concealed by a rectangular lid. Made of bronze and iron, it is decorated with enamel inlays and embossed gargoyles.
 Courtesy Health and Pharmacy Museum Collection, Lisbon

5
Sarah Ancelle Schönfeld

All You Can Feel / Maps, MDMA, 2013
 MDMA on photo negative, enlarged as vinyl Wallpaper
 535 x 298 cm
 Courtesy the artist

[All You Can Feel / Planets, Opium], 2013
 Liquid Opium on photo negative, enlarged as C-Print
 69,5 x 69,5 cm
 Courtesy the artist
 Note: this work has been installed in the window of Farmácia Barreto, Rua do Loreto, 24-30 nearby Galeria da Boavista]

6
Andreia Santana

Mist, 2020
 Iron and extensor with galvanized coating
 275 x 175 cm
 Courtesy the artist and Galeria Filomena Soares, Lisbon

7

E. M. de Melo e Castro

Fractopoemas
Viagem Interior, 2004-2005
Plasma Total, 2004-2005
 Video poetry, 10'54" | 4'17", sound
 Collection Eugénia de Melo e Castro

8
Pedra de Xangô

Pedra de Xangô
 Images of the "Caminhada da Pedra de Xangô" walk and newspaper articles documenting the process of listing the Afro-Brazilian sacred natural monument located in the city of Salvador-Bahia, Brazil.

9
Thiago Correia Gonçalves

Maniçoba, 2021
 Installation.
 Linen stained by residues extracted during the cyanide filtering process from cassava leaves from different regions/continents and embroidery.
 5,35m / 3,05m / 3,05m
 Courtesy of the artist

10
Cecilia Bengolea

Lightning dance, 2018
 Video, 6'03", sound
 Courtesy the artist and Galeria Àngels, Barcelona