

Perhaps it is not a small world

This text is part of the book "Talvez o mundo não seja pequeno", A Bolha Editora, 2012.

The drawings of Virgílio Neto are of great visual appeal not only because of the artist's unique stroke and the variety of subjects he approaches, but also because how he weaves these subjects together establishes a synaptic sequence in which the exercise of seeking and finding is magnetic. His work reflects the prevalence of the visual fact, a signature trait of our times. Yet it should not be interpreted as a sum of multiple components, but rather as the relationship the artist establishes among them. A careful analysis of his drawing boards reveals that the artist repeatedly insists upon an affirmation of the whole. The arrangement of compositions and the selection of negative spaces – blank framings – replicate a framing technique that abides to rigorous montage procedures. Variations ultimately constitute an exercise in exploring a trove of richness, reaffirming the humbleness of a person who draws so well and beautifully: that which is not drawn compliments the gaze. It clears up the air so that we can breathe and, perhaps, reflect. Fillers are composed in the style of Carlos Drummond de Andrade's *Elefante*^[i], a rickety animal, pieced together from scraps. Large and fragile, yet persistent.

The title chosen by the artist for this book, *Talvez o mundo não seja pequeno* (*Perhaps it is not a small world*), echoes the lyrics of Chico Buarque's "Cálice",^[ii] written during the bleakest of hours of military rule in Brazil. It is as if he were trying to say *there is no world other than this small world*, meaning that *this world is not small*, thus offering a way out of this conundrum through an investigation of the contents of this world. Yes, the world is small. The worlds within are large, however. In Virgílio Neto's working boards we see, among the many recurring subjects, the sacrifices, submissions, masks, knots and ligaments, and also various forms of indirect torture. It is grounded in the political character of figurative art in [Latin] America, but belongs to a much larger universe. The world not being small, how is it to be recorded on paper? How does Virgílio Neto work out his investigation of this not-small-world?

In this book we watch the artist in a quest to see, have and be in a work that is at once continuous and unfinished. It does not end, but merely accepts the limits imposed by a certain number of pages. In this trajectory the contours of what he wants to say start to emerge. And what are the things he wants to talk about?

About the directions we take and those we should. About the choices we make and the enigmatic nature of what appeals to us, for curiosity is the quintessence of humankind.

About the order of things and the construction of a poetics by free association, tethered but to the precepts of contiguity, similarity and contrast.^[iii] Impulse here tends to sweep along content.

About the direct and indirect drawing. About the mirror and its reflection; the duplicate and the original. About the occupation of space as a form of domination and all that does not need occupation, as the act of retrieving an image stumbles upon the desire for a greater profusion of new registers and there is no time for such.

About blotting and giving up, and notions of logic and the absurd. About juxtaposition, lack of purpose and the creation of new purposes, since drawing unfolds as thought in the act of drawing.

About the disposition of space, as support is the plane upon which the universe rests; about that which is done and finds a perfect counter-position only in that which was not done and the space it occupies; about the question we constantly make trying to understand the world. For drawing is an inquiry into and investigation of origin.

About saturation, persistence, the encrypted message, and the narration of all things expired, for the artist is at once witness, stockman, chronicler and scribe.

About the lines of a drawing as a conductor of electrical charges, weaving together seemingly unconnected associations whose logic lies in the connection. About the pencil and lead and the drawing as a minimalist and definitive calligraphy. About the necessary minimums and maximums. About longing contained in emptiness and the plenitude of filled in spaces.

About how drawings are read and understood. About the urgency of speaking, about the drawing as an open faucet, as an incessant wave of spilling forms and words, for the dynamic of confrontations does not paralyze the artist's hand.

About contours, the underside, the outside, the surrounding space. About brushing up against, reclining and hiding. About shadows and repeated or dissimilar forms. About allusions and uncertain impressions which memory failures can interrupt, but which the body does not forget.

About the destiny of what is lacking for us. About working schemes, order and contents, about the mystery of things and the urgency to solve them. About signs of minimum and maximum understanding. About the imprecise location of contents, for they are disturbing.

About threats: margins, borders, and paper bleeds that interrupt narrative, shaping drawing according to its own design. About anchors, counterweights and ballasts and all that exists to ensure balance, but which can be jettisoned in an emergency.

About the pacific coexistence of scribbles and scrawls, and precise, neat drawings. About essential enigmas and undecipherable things. About the format of sets and groups. About the very stuff which brings creatures to life.

About art. About me and you.

About truth.

The truth that is not to be found in life, in our daily grind or in the words of good men and women. Those things we do find there can be confounding, but are nothing more than acts of good will or expressions of character. This truth runs as a seam through acts of our own design and memory. This truth can only be seen in a drawing.

Ralph Gehre, August 2012.

[i] The poem, *O elefante* (The Elephant), by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, in *A Rosa do Povo*, 1945.

[ii] The song “Cálice”, by Francisco Buarque de Hollanda and Gilberto Gil, written in 1973, although its release in an album would have to wait until 1978. The last verse: **Perhaps the world is not small** / Nor the world an accomplished fact / I want to invent a sin of my own / I want to die from my own poison / I want to lose your head for good! / My head will lose your good judgment / I want to smell the smoke of diesel fuel / I want to intoxicate myself until someone forgets me. **Talvez o mundo não seja pequeno** / Nem seja a vida um fato consumado / Quero inventar o meu próprio pecado / Quero morrer do meu próprio veneno / Quero perder de vez tua cabeça! / Minha cabeça perder teu juízo. / Quero cheirar fumaça de óleo diesel / Me embriagar até que alguém me esqueça.

[iii] An Aristotelian concept, developed by Carl Gustav Jung after 1906. See *Freud/Jung: complete correspondence* (Paris, 1975), Rio de Janeiro, Imago, 1982.