

# FORT GANSEVOORT

PIPA  
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## CONVERSATION BETWEEN LUIZ CAMILLO OSORIO AND RANDOLPHO LAMONIER

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### 1 – What was your training as an artist like?

My training developed in a roundabout way, full of curves. I come from a working-class family – most of whom worked in industry, trade and civil construction – and I grew up in the low-income suburbs of Contagem, a city in the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte. In my house, there was no cultural program. There weren't even public mechanisms for promoting or accessing art in our community. So my contact with culture was very limited to what appeared on the TV, cinema and radio. Despite the monstrosity that was the Brazilian television programming in the 1990s, I was able to apprehend some references that significantly influenced me, such as Castelo Rá-Tim-Bum of TV Cultura, the green Xuxa program, some trashy films from the *Sessão da Tarde* daytime schedule, and much of the programming of MTV, especially the programs devoted to showing music videos.

At the age of 15 I took a free course in visual arts with Fernando Perdigão and Henrique Dias at the Contagem Cultural Center (*Centro Cultural de Contagem*). At the age of 16, I was a member of the Roda Viva Group (*Grupo Roda Viva*), a research laboratory for the performing arts whose teacher and director was Marcelo Veronez, now an exponent of musical and theatrical stagecraft in Belo Horizonte. At Roda Viva we developed a body of work related to Physical Theater and created a show based on texts from certain authors from the Theatre of the Absurd like Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco and Fernando Arrabal. Shortly afterwards, in parallel with the Physical Theater, I started working with educational and corporate theater for companies in Contagem and BH. We did plays about everything: environmental conservation, oral hygiene, alcoholic clowns, worms and lice, adolescent sex, STDs, folklore, bullying, depression in old age haha, it was crazy. At that time, I began experimenting with photography, creating scenes,

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# FORT GANSEVOORT

interventions in space and performance actions for the camera with the theater people. I consider this period to be seminal for the investigations I would immerse myself in years later at university. At the age of 18, I started studying at the University Theater of UFMG, but abandoned the course halfway through. Soon afterwards, I did a short stint with the *Grupo Oficina Multimédia*, directed by Ione de Medeiros, whose scenographic and visual research strongly influenced me. Throughout this first training period of mine, I had several conventional jobs that I was mixing with my artistic work. It was kind of absurd: sometimes I worked during the day as a bus collector and would then go off to perform at the theater at night. Or, I would present a show in the afternoon and at the theatre exit hand out leaflets for the shows of other colleagues. It was all very much based on tenacity, and done without knowing how to do it, I was there finding my issues, improvising with the absurd and seeking power in the most candid fragility. It was a very happy, intense period of discoveries, conflicts of identity, uncertainty and, above all, full of the vibrant presence of many friends who, like me, had thrown themselves, open-armed, into the experiment in courage which is living from (and for) art. At the age of 23, I joined the School of Fine Arts of UFMG and moved to Belo Horizonte. This represented a milestone for my work because, at university, I made other great friendships that influenced and supported my journey, and with whom I discovered resonances and a clearer notion of collective strength. From then on, I began to devote all my time to the visual arts and while I was studying, I gradually got involved in the cultural scene of Belo Horizonte. I believe that a crucial part of my training took place back there in Contagem, mixing Nirvana with the Xou da Xuxa and Samuel Beckett with Patati Patatá. There's an attraction for improbability that has always been part of me. I think I really like these complicated, messed-up equations. I really like to learn by taking risks.

**2 – Your work has a direct relationship with the city, or rather, with the margins of the city. How did this appropriation and dialogue develop? What's it like circulating among this marginalized audience? Do you get this feedback?**

The feedback is very immediate and direct since the marginalized audience I dialogue with in my work is almost always my mother, my father, my close friends and myself in the first, second or third person – “he” sometimes comes silently, sometimes noisily: “Randolpho Super Star of Victory”, “Randolpho the Collector”, “Randolpho the Faggot goes back to school to wreak revenge and terror”. There's no alterity. It's a very emotional conversation, without anthropological obsessions. I think I don't say much regarding difference, and even when I go there, I usually take a side and the conversation becomes kind of intimate, with an emotional tone or in the first person.

It was very important to me the few times my family were able to leave the suburbs for the Center to visit some of my exhibitions or watch me in the theater. But the dissemination of my work among the people of the city where I grew up, among people I don't know, is virtually zero. The situation of culture in Contagem underwent a great improvement between the first and second decades of the 2000s, but nowadays almost nothing is happening, there are no incentives for culture, there is no preservation of the city's historical/cultural heritage. The Cine Teatro de Contagem cinema, where I first performed, is close to being demolished. And the neighborhood of São Luiz, where I grew up, has no square to this day.

**3 – Despite dealing with urban tensions and the imaginary of social movements, your artistic philosophy, because of the sewing, the embroidery, the weaving of the thread in the fabric, has a more dilated and slower temporality. It's as if your work had a strident content and a quieter form. Is this contrast intentional?**

It wasn't intentional at first. I didn't spend a long time thinking before I started working with fabric. This relationship with the cloth and with sewing came from the family. My paternal grandfather was a tailor in the interior of Minas Gerais, my maternal grandmother always sewed at home and my mother was a seamstress in the automotive industry for over 20 years, until she retired. I had never thought about sewing. In fact I had a certain aversion for sewing, I think because since childhood I had observed the physical and emotional wear which my mother underwent working on a production line – it was an intellectually and emotionally limiting process, without room for any kind of autonomy. I don't remember when I started working with sewing, but it emerged little by little, first as scenography elements or costumes for my photos, and then some patches and embroidered words began to

# FORT GANSEVOORT

emerge. Soon I wanted to use the sewing machine and my mother taught me the basics, choosing the thread, the path the thread takes between the bobbin and needle, rewinding the reel, finishing off. And suddenly she was involved. We started sewing together and it was an important process for us; she was often disturbed by the subjects that the works presented, and thought others charming. My mother was impressed by the fact that we could sew the crooked lines, use the back of the cloth, show the corrections, patches, stains, flaps and scraps. There was no right or wrong way, the sewing would not be inspected or revised, and didn't have to perform any function, other than what we wanted. For a long time, I did the Belo Horizonte-Betim commute, bringing the fabric I needed to sew on my mother's machine. The route of the BR 381 road is full of landscapes that I love – the Industrial city of Contagem, the rotten viaducts between the Amazon neighborhood and Carrefour, and the surrounding mountains being sliced like a cake, every day. In these comings and goings, the subjects arose very spontaneously. I don't usually follow any kind of criteria regarding the issues which I'm going to work with, but in that first contact with sewing my main subject was undoubtedly my relationship with Contagem, a kind of measuring of the size of my body in relation to the city. I gradually found my own way of sewing. I immediately realized that I needed this sewing to be personal and passionate. I needed it to be an instrument of identity and individuality. But I also needed it to be porous, sensitive to its context, able to talk with its time. Thinking now about how sewing appropriated my life and the vocabulary of my work, I feel that I am to some extent avenging my mother's story – and perhaps my own, in advance.

In 2016, I started a series of embroideries on carpets called "Scrap Chronicles" [*Crônicas de Retalho*]. I think it was then that I definitely understood that I had a lot to address with sewing. Gradually I began to conceptualize my dilemmas and I've begun mixing subjects as they present themselves in my life – urgent, absurd, asking for everything of me. Today this contrast in the relationship between technique and language, media and content is no longer accidental. Sometimes it's a deliberate language exercise, sometimes it's pure piss-taking, but it always makes some sense to me.

**4 – I perceive in your artistic philosophy a constant play between the word and its visuality; between the political effect and the lyrical affect. I think the more tensioned this relationship, the less explicit the effect, and the more powerful the work is. I prefer "The Prophecy" [A Profecia] to "The Promise" [A Promessa]; I like "Neighbouring Sounds" more than "Bacurau." How do you see this?**

I like to play with the oppositions and polarities of the word, to risk unlikely balances, to feed strangeness. I've always had difficulty writing, to construct a logical line or to narrate linear, causative events, through writing. My concentration is bad and my attention is super diffuse, so the writing was not something that was always present in my work practice. But there was a time, perhaps in the first year of college, when I began to collect small texts on the back of notebooks, behind my paintings, a lot of fragmented things that on their own didn't make much sense even to me, but which acquired another form and another power when presented in relation to something else. So I understood that I communicate better by organizing fragments, building the lexicon with a lot of seemingly asymmetric, incongruent information, which is often almost nonsense. Having assimilated and incorporated a research method that was initially intended to compensate for a deficiency, ended up becoming a strategy and then a language. When a word emerges in my work, I'm interested in everything it has to give: meaning, form, rhythm, sound. Sometimes even the residue of the word can interest a work: its decomposition when diluted in the image x meaning game, its antithesis when tensioned in its context to the limit of its own meaning, its corruption when dispossessed of its semiotic reason as the result of another purely formalistic, compositional or aesthetic gesture. The word is very powerful. It can often, in the form of a title or caption, completely change the reading of a work on its own, in the same way a soundtrack can carry on its shoulders the entire direction of a scene. For a long time, the word has been gaining prominence in my work and this requires ever more attention from me. It's almost a paradox, a delicate equation where I seek to leverage the discursive power of the messages I'm transmitting, while I hope that they are open to other possibilities and other levels of interpretation. When I make a work, I always hope that it's bigger than me – I mean, I hope it can receive, through contact and the relationship with the audience, everything I cannot give. I'm happy when a work achieves autonomy and goes beyond my limitations, when it escapes me and reduces me before it.

# FORT GANSEVOORT

**5 – The fabulatory and allegorical dimension enters your work as a kind of political fiction, mixing delirium and struggle. Which artists do you regard as allies?**

This subject is very important to me now. I think that actively exercising one's political imagination has never been so important, exercising our ability to invent stories and take other possible or impossible paths. Reality is crushing us with the rhetoric of there being no way out, with a nihilism that immobilizes us and dismembers us even in the face of the worst atrocities. Neoliberalism, with its agenda of extermination, wants to kill people from the inside out, it wants to destroy our desires and our subjectivities, which is why culture and art in Brazil are being combated with so much violence.

In this context of terror, I find courage and an appetite for life and work in the beloved people who surround me. There are many of them and it's not possible to name them all here, unfortunately, but there is a group of companions who have accompanied me since the first works from my time at college, friends who teach me and strengthen me our exchanges and coexistence – and also in a direct dialogue between our languages and narratives: Victor Galvão, Rosa Maria Unda Souki, Dayane Tropicacos, Sara Mosli, Sara Não Tem Nome, Lúcio Honorato, Dani Maura, Desali, Marta Neves, Julia Baumfeld, Paola Rodrigues, Pedro Saldanha, Bruno Rios, César Machado, Malu D'ângelo, Cristina Madeira, Hugo Honorato, Jonas Filho, Daniela Pedrosa, Ian Gavião, Daniel Pinho, Julia Rebouças, Raphael Fonseca, Patrícia Azevedo, Brígida Campbell, Bruno Vilela, Gui Cunha – and Violeta Parra.

**6 – Your work has recently been circulated by international institutions. What has this reception been like?**

It has been happening gradually. Since university I've been participating at international photography, cinema and video art festivals, mostly in Europe, but last year this process intensified a little more. I participated for the first time in four group exhibitions in the United States, and in September I came to France where I presented a work at the exhibition "Jeune Création Internationale" at the 15th Lyon Biennial. Now, living in Paris, I have access to a circuit that once seemed very distant and the response has been positive. At the moment I'm working on exhibitions scheduled for this year and next year, if the Covid-19 crisis allows.

**7 – How do you imagine, and what do you wish for, your work in the future?**

Honestly, I don't dream about any future for my work; I hope it remains unpredictable to the end.