

**Faca amolada,
por José Augusto Ribeiro, 2023**

Escultura cega is Zé Carlos Garcia's first exhibition at Galeria Marília Razuk. The show presents eight of the artist's new pieces, made since 2022, which continue a series of investigations on three-dimensional languages, on constructions with organic materials, and on the possibilities of association between two or more beings, objects, and cultures - through procedures that formalize mixtures, but also preserve what remains as the differential distance between a component and the other ones. In the context of his recent work, the attentive and diversified dealings with three elements that most strongly define his production, stand out: wood, bird feathers, and horsehair. Another important aspect of the set may be derived from this first characteristic, because it is related to the work's capacity to coordinate, on one hand, the physical vigor and visual impact of synthetic structures with, on the other, the entanglements and unexpected undertakings of a work which is, at once, thorough and prone to fabulations.

This is, indeed, a work that presents itself to the senses full of surprises, with unpredictable, ingenious, even miraculous articulations between repertoires, materials and figurative suggestions. For example: does it cause an epistemological torsion to stand before a long, hairy tongue made of wood and horsehair (from the series *Línguas*, 2022), inspiring erotic attraction and repulsion, stretching out from the wall? Or how should one react to a self-supporting vertical work, also made of wood, entitled *Vela* (2022), which has tiptoe table legs, like modern furniture from the 1950s and 1960s; that stretches upwards in a slender and sinuous body, however disproportionately, while resembling an excessively long horn, and that has, in the middle of its extension, a kind of small animal trunk, covered with guinea fowl feathers? Not infrequently, there is the insinuation of dead animals in the artist's production; but would this be allusive to a bird impaled by a sculpture? From the crossbreeding, the work seems to inquire about the circulation of forces, values, and thoughts, about the invasions, inequalities, and violence, about reproductions and disappearances, exchanges and rejections, about the transformations and instabilities implied in these phenomena.

They are, finally, hybrid sculptures - in which we see animals, fruits, vegetables, eggs, ornaments, utensils, religious objects, or, in general, fragments of these and other interspersed elements. These are works

in which we see the fruit, in fact, (jabuticaba, cashew, blackberry) and the fruit carved in wood; the feather and its carved reproduction; the food, the feather and the artifice, with different aspects, smells, tastes, colors, textures and temperatures, in a profusion of stimuli in a chain - sometimes contradictory, always surprising. Just as it causes astonishment that this instigation is triggered by bodies that are strangely synthetic, or rather, produced by the synthesis of several components - by units that are usually lean, concise and, at the same time, showy, complex, as a result of the size they assume, the articulations they make, and the resources they mobilize for such articulations.

The processes and techniques for making the work also combine knowledge from more than one domain. Zé Carlos' sculpture is undoubtedly informed by the constructive principle of assembling structures, of collage, and of many other dialectical operations in the manipulation of dissimilar materials. The work, however, takes place entirely by hand, in the handling of wood, of other elements, and of instruments such as axes, knives, and gouges. In the results, it is remarkable how the artist explores the maximum potency of craftsmanship, with meticulous, detailed operations, paired with other minimal, succinct ones, without surrendering to virtuosity or to expressive or sentimental outpourings. The work is concerned, rather, with the rigor of the actions themselves and with the specifics of each constituent division of a piece. In a chunk, a cosmos.

The skills that Zé Carlos acquired in the conception and elaboration of three-dimensional objects come, in part, from the experience of 15 years of working, between 1998 and 2013, with the idealization and construction of allegorical cars for samba schools, in the carnivals of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and, once, Soweto, South Africa. The allegorical eye and manual dexterity developed there to a great extent - and, at this point, it would be necessary to distinguish between, from the outset, the narrative and exuberant character of the samba schools' parade (comprising a complex of cars, allegories, costumes, samba-enredo, and dancers) and the enigmatic, austere, and ambiguous temperament of Zé Carlos' own work. Another part of his technical and imaginative capacity comes from his sculpture studies at the School of Fine Arts at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, in the early 2000s, and from the period when he attended the Parque Lage, also in Rio de Janeiro, in the first half of the 1990s, when he started systematically visiting museums and art galleries and researching publications about the field, history, and the then recent artistic production.

Zé Carlos was born in Aracaju (SE) in 1973 - a "blond devil who sparkled" of black, indigenous, and Dutch descent. Even after moving, in late childhood, to Niterói and, later, as an adult, to the city of Rio de Janeiro, Zé Carlos continued to expand his experiences with the landscape of the hinterlands in the northeast of Brazil, with the miscellany of meats, fruits, vegetables, and spices in the region's street markets, with the sculptures and embroideries produced by artists from Ilha do Ferro, in Alagoas, and Ilha do Ouro, in Sergipe. All this sets up a vast field of interests and references that has been in play, for 15 years, in the artist's production. The confrontations of this work unfolds more or less like this, with, for example, the intensity of the Brazilian baroque pathos, from the 17th and 18th centuries; with the wisdom of the vernacular tradition of Brazilian craftsmen; with liberating manifestations of contemporary art, particularly those of Tunga; and with stories, symbols and cultures of African and indigenous ancestry.

One of the pieces in this exhibition - which, by the way, has not just any title, but an image-title - *Dragon* (2022), seems to summarize a mythological confrontation in a sculpture that, as it protrudes from the wall, moves in all directions: up, down, toward the observer, with a spear in hand, a horse's foot up, and what are probably the feathers of a soldier's helmet, in its lower part, facing the ground. If the text's hypothesis is correct, implicit and condensed in that volume are a huge winged creature, an armed combatant, and the complete episodes of a fight that is supposed to be or was fierce.

Through the surface of this economic figuration - if we can call it that, against the backdrop of the fantastic dimension that the scene itself lets us imply - a profusion of juxtaposed volutes rises from the base of the sculpture and spreads down to the horse's thigh; and that can also remind us of the body of an animal covered in long, thick hair, which, when combed, undulate and form pompous curves at the ends. This spot is interrupted only by a perfect sphere, with a smooth surface, which fits (and seems almost to float) in a cavity that opens in the work, in its frontal and lower section. At the top, the spiral turning of the spear and, below, the lightness of the feathers, between wood and floor, converge to insinuate this lightness, this gracefulness, which contrasts with the violent impetus with which the piece bursts from the wall. At certain points, *Dragon* seems light, very light, even airy, but light it is not.

Another complex piece in the exhibition is *Chorando pitangas* (2023), from which an exuberance of varied solutions and a harsh dryness emerge - the sculpture is and exists in the trunk and branches of a

dead tree^[1]. From each branch, a discrete element emerges, elaborated with distinct procedures and cultural repertoires. From the completely twisted branch resembling a feature of colonial furniture, to the simple, direct piece, made only with a few cuts, in the shape of a flattened hand, like an ex-voto. From there to the tip of the branch from which a pipe emerges, from there to another tip from which a kind of doll with its hands raised...

The very title of the work refers to a cultural shock and adaptation. The expression "chorarando as pitangas" refers - according to scholars from different fields, among them the ethnographer Câmara Cascudo - to the adaptation coined by indigenous Brazilians of the Portuguese expression "chorar lágrimas de sangue", which describes intense suffering, or copious weeping. Indigenous Brazilians who then spoke ancient Tupi found in pitanga a possible replacement for "tears of blood", since "pitanga" in this language means "reddish". Incorporated into Portuguese, the word also came to designate the fruit, whose buds are red and have the shape of a tear. In other words, the poetic operation changed the dramatic tone of the original expression, and it worked!

By the way, there is a work in the exhibition entitled *Palavra* (2022) - and which points to recent, new motivations for his production in general. The work is made up of seven reliefs of thinned eucalyptus, which are disconcerting for the simplicity of their production. The elements have the appearance of signs, of icons. At the same time, they vaguely refer to a set of masks, or shields. For the artist, the group would organize an inscription on a wall, they would be letters or a line of scribbles, like graffiti. The astonishment tends to occur because of the succinct, direct character of a polymorphic work, with multiple meanings, made, again, with a few strokes.

The coexistence of strength, subtlety and brutality, in this piece, confirms qualities that were already ongoing in Zé Carlos' production, but this time, with a roughness unusual in the work (or, perhaps, comparable only to the stone busts the artist made in 2017). But this junction, now, of sharpness and harshness is added, by contrast, to the recurrence of pointed, ultra-worked elements, with smooth, homogeneous surfaces, quite characteristic of Zé Carlos' sculptures for almost 10 years and that, in their extremities, are fragile and violent, delicate and dangerous. For this reason also, by the directions it points ahead, the exhibition *Escultura cega* seems to mark a significant moment in the artist's trajectory, marked by the growing public repercussion of his work and the increasingly distinctive affirmation of his singularities on the Brazilian cultural scene and, little by little, on the

international stage. If we wanted to make the exhibition's title complete, perhaps it would be important to say at this point that Zé Carlos' sculpture is blind and sharp.

[1] Zé Carlos has been running a farm for ten years in the mountainous region of the state of Rio de Janeiro. Now located in an Environmental Protection Area, the farm was, until then, a heavily deforested agricultural exploitation area. Over the last decades, the forest has grown back, incorporating native and exotic plants brought to the region by its former owners. Since the acquisition of the site, the artist has implemented a management plan that foresees, among other actions, the removal of "invasive" species and their replacement with native species of the Atlantic Forest. The wood from these exotic trees removed in the management plan is then treated and used as raw material for Zé Carlos' work. The trees removed are mainly pine (*Pinus elliottii*) and eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*), which are not native to South America and, on the contrary, are considered harmful to the soil of the Atlantic Forest. For his recent production and this set of actions, the artist received the Arte Sostenible Six Sense Ibiza Award, at this year's edition of the ARCOmadrid fair, in Spain.