

IN TIMES LIKE THESE

Text: Érica Burini

Letter to Efratia Gitai

I have been in the company of your letters, written in another century, to your parents, siblings, friends—politicians, intellectuals, and artists—and later to your husband, children, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren. I wanted you to know what a group of women is doing on the other side of the planet, thinking of you. These are worlds so different, so distant, yet they have shown so many points of connection.

In the past year, I followed 11 artists (Adriana Conti Melo, Ana Sefair Mitre, Isabel Gouveia, Jussi Szilágyi, Lília Malheiros, Luciana Monteiro, Maria Lucia Simonsen, Michaela A F, Rosana Spagnuolo, Solange Renault, Sueli Espicalquis) in bi-weekly meetings—already happening before my arrival in the group—to discuss the research and poetic practice of each amidst episodes narrated from their lives, doubts, references, and a selected bibliography. There were also other women important to this continuous construction: Tania Rivitti, Alayde Alves, Thais Rivitti, and Paola Ribeiro. Some who arrived more recently and others who have already departed, all imprinting their worldview and art in the comments. Discussions often turned to the constitution of the artist. After all, who is this subject? And how can women, juggling multiple roles (mothers, daughters, caregivers, wives, architects, psychologists, mathematicians, judges, among others), enter this exclusive group? You, who had life as a work, with the organization and publication of your letters, have much to teach us.

Observing the synergy of the meetings, I was inspired to bring together the works of the 11

artists from the newly named Rosa Choque collective, along with works from artists at the Marília Razuk gallery and from the collection of Alayde Alves, marked by a desire for experimentation—a characteristic of contemporary Brazilian art—and support for young artists producing and expanding the artistic circuit today. I also see the collection as your work, proactively reflecting your vision of art.

When the project turned into an exhibition, more women joined: Marília, Larissa, the two Julianas, Jeane, Thiá, Maria, Mariana, Noemi, and others. Men too, of course. At some point, we all reflected on you and on all those seeking a room of their own, in the words of Virginia Woolf. We gathered around a common ideal.

This story written by us, however, has no hero or climax, something very much in tune with Ursula K. Le Guin's innovative text that we read together with Rosa Choque. There is a proposed inversion in the way of telling the story of humanity and even fiction: instead of the adventures of weapons and their killings, our narratives can be about bags or baskets (depending on the translation) and their power to contain, store for the future. With this radical paradigm shift, we chose to narrate the silent accumulation of work, the slow construction of knowledge and techniques, stories of care instead of war, of life instead of death.

You must be wondering how all of this translates into the artworks. I know that the question of form and content in art is dear to you. I remember your discussion with Amos Gitai, your globally acclaimed son, in a letter from February 1985. You dissected the script

of Berlin-Jerusalem and revisited a specific statement from the filmmaker in an interview to refute and analyze it in a surprisingly rigorous and sweet way—two seemingly disparate adjectives, but ones you mastered in conversation and writing.

Well, I see signs of this transformative perspective on time, history, and so-called civilization in the deposition of thick layers of paint on canvas, which take time to make and dry, in the observation of fruit rot, in the wear and tear of a paper that only reveals one word: LIVE, in drawing with soot, in the corrosion of copper, in the folding of paper into an airplane shape, in the experience with color and form in the plane and space, in the perspective that shows human insignificance, in the materiality of everyday life, of jute, hemp, nylon, in the rediscovery of unheard figures, in interest in events of domestic or family relevance, such as a child's birthday and marriage, where we find considerations about social constructions of race, gender, and class but also about affection. And what reminds me most of you is the concerns with the present time, also perceived in a discerning way and expressed

in strong and confident positions, such as concern about consumer society and the waste produced from the perspective of identity or the exploitation of iron ore seen through the emptying of the landscape, for example.

All these various paths led me to you and the correspondence you exchanged in life. Looking through your eyes was crucial for me to deal with the density of these artists' production. I needed, in some way, to glimpse a life I have not yet lived. Feel the weight of an experience I have not had, something beyond my few years lived.

This confession of mine aligns with the fundamental proposal of the exhibition "In Times Like These," which is protagonism. Taking voice also implies vulnerability, the exhibition of fragilities, weaknesses, and insecurities. After all, the act in question is one of exposure. However, this honest but painful externalization is necessary for the effective immersion in the artistic experience we seek and the radical change of perspective we were talking about.

Érica Burini June 2023

In Times Like These Artists: Adriana Conti Melo, Amélia Toledo, Ana Sefair Mitre, Ana Mazzei, Fernanda Gomes, Hilal Sami Hilal, Isabel Gouveia, Jussi Szilágyi, Lília Malheiros, Luciana Monteiro, Mano Penalva, Maria Lucia Simonsen, Michaela A F, Renata Tassinari, Rosana Spagnuolo, Solange Renault, Sueli Espicalquis, Shirley Paes Leme, Tatiana Blass, Ventura Profana

Curator: Érica Burini

Production: Jeane Gonçalves

Design: Thiá Sguoti

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