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PIERRE FRANCASTEL AND GEORGES DIDI-HUBERMAN: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THEORISTS TO THINK ABOUT PAINTING WORKS FROM THE GENERAL EXHIBITION OF FINE ARTS OF 1890

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Abstract: The present work intends to analyze the pictorial composition of some works presented in the general exhibition of 1890, acquired and awarded by the National School of Fine Arts, from the theoreticians Pierre Francastel in his work: *"Pintura e Sociedade"*, in 1990 and Georges Didi-Huberman, in *"Diante do Tempo"*, *"História da Arte"* and *"Anacronismo das Imagens"*, in 2015. Featured paintings are: *Os bandeirantes*, by Henrique Bernardelli, *"Caipiras negaceando"*, by José Ferraz de Almeida Júnior, *"Morro da Viúva"* (Rio de Janeiro, RJ), by Joaquim José da França Júnior; *"Praia Formosa"* (Rio de Janeiro, RJ), by Hipólito Caron; *"Turbínió"*, by Antonio Parreiras and *"Paisagem"* (de Barbacena, Minas Gerais), by Giambattista Pagani.

Keywords: Francastel; Didi-Huberman; Painting; EGBA from 1890.

Francastel and Didi-Huberman seek to question the notion of temporality commonly used to make a critical analysis of a work of art, which tends to reduce it to a certain artistic style. Francastel points out that, during the first half of the Quattrocento, spatial experiences are diverse and not aligned, often contradictory, but coexist in this same space. The painting works of Perugino (1446-1523) and Lippi (1406-1469), for example, are constructed from a plurality of systems. This analysis is correlated with Didi-Huberman, who verifies in the fresco *"Madona das Sombras"*, by Fra Angelico (1395-1455), multiple ideas, from different pictorial traditions. He identifies in this work three heterogeneous times, which are therefore anachronistic with each other.

All this multiplicity, according to Francastel, shows the character, at the same time, ephemeral and permanent, of Renaissance art. The passage from one stage of development to the another does not eliminate the previous ones. When the passage from one stage to the next happens, mastery – which had already

been acquired in the previous stage – of the stage reached does not happen immediately. When this domain is reached, the individual “automates more than abandons” (Francastel, 1990, pp. 91-92) their practices, appropriating their present and previous experience.

Such a reflection between permanence and ephemerality finds a happy correspondence in Didi-Huberman, when he points out that “There is only a history of symptoms” (2015, p. 43). The symptom is what arises, “appears”, denoting an imbalance, a discontinuity. It hides a visual paradox (symptom-image), which is externalized, taking things out of normality, and a temporal paradox (symptom-time), while revealing anachronisms, it interrupts the natural course represented by chronological time. We can speak of a paradox because, at the same time that the symptom denotes a discontinuity in the natural course of things, this course itself also continues to flow, with its inherent anachronisms. We therefore have repetition and difference (2015, p. 50).

Thus, there would not be a single style in works of art, although some may be predominant. They overlap or juxtapose in them, since artistic styles do not appear abruptly, but are the result of a productive process, which is influenced by the artist’s own time and space and by his interpretations of different temporalities and spatialities. Bringing these reflections to the EGBA paintings of 1890, we have some considerations that will be exposed below.

“Os bandeirantes” was made by Henrique Bernardelli in 1888 and received the first gold medal at the 1890 General Exhibition of Fine Arts (AI/EN 28.17). The work is a painting of the historical genre: at the same time that a presentation of everyday scenes predominates, in a realistic-naturalist conception, in which the bandeirantes “drink water like animals” (Christo, 2002, p. 34), it still a romantic conception coexists in it, which privileges

the narrative and an idyllic vision of the Indians, characters portrayed from an exotic perspective.



Figure 1. Henrique BERNARDELLI. The bandeirantes. 1888. Oil on canvas, 400 x 290 cm. National Museum of Fine Arts/Ibram/MT.

“Caipiras negaceando” is a genre painting made by José Ferraz de Almeida Júnior, in 1888. It is an example of a work of modernity, at the time identified with the realist movement, which privileges reality in its rawness, seeking to distance itself from romantic idealisms, which we notice in the artist’s choice to portray two characters in daily activities.



Figure 2. José Ferraz de ALMEIDA JUNIOR. Hillbillies denying. 1888. Oil on canvas, 280 x 215 cm. National Museum of Fine Arts/Ibram/MT.

“Caipiras negaceando” and “Os bandeirantes” were appraised by the EGBA judging commission of 1890 at Rs 7:000\$000 (seven contos de réis), around R\$ 861,000.00.

They were the best evaluated works in the exhibition. To give an idea of the prestige of both, the next most expensive painting belonged to Bernardelli himself, valued at 2:000\$000 (AI/EN 53.18-16).

In addition to these more obvious influences, our research sought possible interfaces between these works and the iconography of ancient Mediterranean ceramics, more precisely the Attic, Corinthian and Apulian ones. Thinking about the eye contact, made in person, of these 19th century painters with Greco-Roman art, we go back to their awards at the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts (AIBA). A Brazilian artist who received the prize of traveling to Europe to study painting would predominantly go to France or Italy. His itinerary did not include Greece,

which is why it is not reasonable for this artist to come across the art of a mural painted on a tomb, for example. The vases, with their powerful circulation, were the closest object coming from Greece and brought in their entirety to the museums of France and Italy, allowing Brazilian artists to contemplate these objects, turned into works of art, in European museums.



Figure 3. Wild boar hunting. Crater with Corinthian columns. Andromeda Group. London. British Museum. 1772,0320.6+. ©britishmuseum.org



Figure 4. Metal casting. Attic Enochea of Black Figures. London, British Museum. 1846,0629.45. ©britishmuseum.org

Comparing Bernardelli's painting with paintings on ancient Mediterranean vases, we can see important correspondences:

a) the grandeur of wild boar hunters in

relation to animals and the grandeur of the Indian in "Os bandeirantes". There is an idealization of these characters;

b) labor themes, that is, man's routine activities, are present both in the painting and in the vases. The "profession" is a prominent theme: the metal smelters, the hunters and the bandeirantes;

c) there is an exposition of the crudeness of the craft, without idealizations, both on the vases and on the painting. It is enough to look, for example, at the subordinate position of the bandeirantes, crouched, in the middle of the headquarters, and compare it with the hard work of the founders;

Comparing Caipiras denying with the iconography of the vases, we have:

a) "denial" as a ritual underlying the work. It is possible to draw a parallel with wild boar hunters: all, equally positioned, with their spear in their right hand, to attack the animal;

b) in relation to the crudeness of the work activities, we can compare the risk of the smelter, when inserting the metal in the furnace, with the risk of attacking rednecks in the middle of the forest. The fire, highlighted in the painting of the furnace, reminds us of this danger, in the same way that the caipiras' weapons refer to a need for protection in their work practice;

c) cooperation between young and older men at work: among wild boar hunters, there are bearded and beardless men; the "caipiras", a young man and an older man, perform the activity together.

In both paintings from the 19th century, we see the importance of collectivity, of working in groups or in pairs. This is what we also see in the images on the vases: the smelters working in pairs and the wild boar hunters in a group.

Let us now turn to landscapes. “Turbínio”, by Antônio Parreiras, was made in 1888, when the artist was in Italy. “Praia Formosa, by Hipólito Caron, was painted in 1888. Giambattista Pagani painted “Paisagem (de Barbacena)” in 1890. The three artists received their second gold medal at the 1890 exhibition. Joaquim José da França Júnior, with “Morro da Widow”, received an honorable mention.

Parreiras, França Júnior and Caron composed, together with other artists, under the guidance of the German painter Georg Grimm, the so-called “Grupo Grimm”, from 1884 to 1886, which was engaged in painting outdoor landscapes. In “Morro da Viúva”, it is possible to perceive the influence of Grimm on França Júnior, as his work presents clear contours and defined design.



Figure 6. Hippolyte CARON. Praia Formosa, Rio de Janeiro. 1888. Oil on canvas, 38 x 54.5 cm. National Museum of Fine Arts/Ibram/MT.

In “Turbínio”, an Italian word that means “whirlpool”, Parreiras is concerned with representing a natural phenomenon in his landscape. The work still bears the influence of his former master George Grimm, with the detail-oriented workmanship and very evident contours, rigors from which he would distance himself in the following decades, approaching impressionist works, with thicker brushstrokes. This canvas brings greater drama, emphasizing a moment of movement of nature, with intense winds. We noticed similarities between “Turbínio” and “Agar e o Anjo”, by Nicolas Poussin. Although the themes chosen by the authors are different – one is based on an ancient passage of the Bible, while the other is concerned with representing a present event –, the arrangement of elements in the works makes us perceive some similarities. The canvases bring an idea of movement from right to left, which is suggested by Agar accompanying the angel and by the arrangement of trees and clouds, in Poussin’s case, and by the palm trees affected by the wind, in Parreiras’ canvas. It is possible that both authors made use of regulating strokes to achieve proportionality with diagonal lines, which give this effect of movement and meaning.



Figure 5. Joaquim José da França Júnior. Morro da Viúva, Rio de Janeiro. 1888. Oil on canvas, 70 x 100.6 cm. National Museum of Fine Arts/Ibram/MT.

Many of Caron’s works bring these two characteristics, however, when analyzing “Praia Formosa”, we realize that the colored masses, both in the vegetation and in the buildings, are becoming increasingly dense, and some contours no longer appear delimited. It is about more freedom, more poetry from the artist, who is not so tied to a fidelity in capturing reality.



Figure 7. Antonio PARREIRAS. Turbinio, Venice. 1888. Oil on canvas, 349 x 208 cm. National Museum of Fine Arts/Ibram/MT.

elements in their rawness on canvases.

In “Paisagem”, by Pagani, the human smallness in front of the landscape and the clear contours remain. However, the layout of the natural landscape is different. It surrounds the entire image, the sky appears in the gap between the trees, directing the viewer’s gaze primarily to the center of the screen (perspective with a vanishing point). The lighting featured on the screen is also different from the others analyzed. It is possible to see that the painting was done during the morning, with the sun at its peak, which illuminates the sky, the trees and the trail. We still need to research the artist and his work.



Figure 8. Giambattista PAGANI. Landscape (from Barbacena). 1890. Oil on canvas, 74 x 110 cm. National Museum of Fine Arts/Ibram/MT.

Focusing on the arrangement of trees on the screens, they are predominantly on the right in both. The characters are in the lower portion of the screen and on the left. Despite being in the foreground, they are much smaller in size compared to nature. In the case of Poussin, the majesty of the trees and rocks and, in the case of Parreiras, the force of the wind in the whirlpool, causing the intense movement of the trees, combined with the smallness of the characters, suggests that the natural landscape must be the highlight in the screens. It is also worth mentioning the sky in these two works: it is shown to the left of the canvases, occupying the entire upper portion, with a glare contrasting with darker and denser clouds, which move towards the left. On both screens, heavy clouds announce bad weather, which dates back to periods of turbulence. The presence of rocks in most of the canvases and in the foreground also denotes the authors’ choice to enhance natural

It must be noted that this work is part of an analysis that stands out for the multiplicity of inspirations that an artist undergoes to paint his canvases. We did not fail to notice the differences between the productions, keeping in mind that they always dialogue with their historical context. However, we are interested in the dialogues that they may provoke, based on the comparisons.

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