

Recado da mata

One of the most recent works presented in the exhibition by Caio Reisewitz is *Ambé*, whose title much like the other works displayed (excluding *Penedo*), refers to a place name of Tupí¹ origin. *Ambé* is the name of a rural community 80km from the center of Macapá in Amapá however, in the Amazon region it also means that which is rugged, frizzy and rough. Much like the vast majority of Reisewitz's works, in this photograph we are unable to distinguish human presence. We see only a thick tangle of branches, trunks and leaves characteristic of the Amazon rainforest. Nevertheless, the inability to distinguish human presence in the jungle does not mean it is uninhabited. The indigenous place-name reminds us that for Amerindians the jungle is continuously full of a multiplicity of beings that remain invisible to us - visible only to shamans. These shamans include not only the spirits of ancestors and all animals, but also those of other jungle beings, such as plants, lightning, thunder, rain, night, day, etc. By pasting fragments of different photographs, overlaying them, and re-photographing them with colour manipulation it provides the scene with a bluish tint. In *Ambé*, Reisewitz creates an unreal almost spectral environment, he shows an image of a dream or a vision of a shaman. Even without being able to see the invisible beings of the jungle we are still able to sense their presence.

Many of Caio Reisewitz's photographs have a hazy appearance. Whether capturing the fog in *Penedo*, or manipulating the exposure speed and colour in *Itatinga* and *Itupiranga*, Stella Teixeira de Barros points out that Reisewitz's photographs are not solar but bleak.² The photographer prefers cloudy days, not because they are “when things look sharper”³ as critics suggest but quite the opposite: Because everything in them becomes more gray, blurred, misty. It is as if through the cloud, the mist and the indefinite thing, the invisible of the jungle, their spirits, their souls, manifest themselves. It is they after all who are responsible for transmitting the message of the jungle.

Ambé, as well as other works exhibited here, were developed as a way to respond to the readings of the beautiful books written by two great thinkers and indigenous leaders: *A queda do céu* [*At the Fall of Heaven*], by Kopenawa in co-authorship with Bruce Albert, and *Ideas para posponer el fin del mundo* [*Ideas to postpone the end of the world*], by Ailton Krenak. The title of this exhibition also takes the title of the preface that anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro wrote for Kopenawa and Albert's book, which in turn refers to the tale “*O recado do morro*” [“The Message of the Hill”] by João Guimarães Rosa. In the story, a homeless man and a hermit warn the people of the region about a message they have received from Morro da Garça (Hill of Garça) itself, that “In a group of seven men, one of them would be murdered by treason”. In the preface, Viveiros de Castro recaptures the idea of imminent death proclaimed by nature, now not from the voice of the hill but by the voice of the jungle. As a shaman Kopenawa is the one who is able to hear “the encrypted message of the forest”⁴, a disastrous message “A warning. A word of warning. One last word”⁵ which is transmitted by the Xapiri (the name the Yanomani gave these spirits). Henceforth, Viveiros de Castro

¹ Tupí: belonging to the indigenous people in Brazil.

² Stella Teixeira de Barros, *Você não está sozinho*, São Paulo: Galeria Brito Cimino, 2005.

³ *Idem*

⁴ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “O recado da mata”, Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, *A queda do céu*, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2015, p. 41.

⁵ *Idem*

qualifies the book as a “testimony-prophecy”⁶. Kopenawa warns: “The forest is alive. It will only die if whites insist on destroying it. If they succeed, the rivers will disappear underground, the soil will collapse, the trees will wilt and the stones will crack with the heat. The dry earth will remain empty and silent. Xapiri spirits, who descend from the mountains to play in the jungle in their mirrors, will flee away. Their parents, the shamans, will no longer be able to call them and make them dance to protect us. They will not be able to fend off the epidemic fumes that devour us. They will no longer be able to contain the evil beings who will transform the jungle into chaos. Then we will die, one after another, both the whites and us. All the shamans will end up dying. When they are no longer alive to hold the sky, it will collapse”⁷.

In photographs such as *Tipioca* and *Upurupã*, Reisewitz finds a way to make this message even more eloquent, more visible. He superimposes part of the Planalto Palace (the headquarters of Brazil's federal executive branch) onto an image of the jungle, we can glimpse it as a ghost or an apparition floating menacingly. We must not ignore that this exhibition takes place at a time when the government under the current president Jair Bolsonaro. Jair Bolsonaro is an admitted accomplice to the greatest devastation ever imposed on the Amazon and Pantanal in recent history. Deforestation reached its highest level since 2008, additionally, there have been repeated attacks against the indigenous population, their territories and their given rights which were stipulated in the 1988 Constitution. In the last two years, several Brazilian cities including those in Southeast and South have been covered for days by smoke from the forestfires. It is no longer just a message, but a loud cry of help from the jungle.

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⁶ The expression belongs to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “O recado da mata” *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁷ Epigraph by Davi Kopenawa, in Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, *A queda do céu*, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2015, p.6