

nunca foi sorte

curated by ludimilla fonseca

with works by allan pinheiro, ana hortides, Fábio Menino, gabriella marinho,
gustavo speridião, janaína vieira, leandra espírito santo, marta neves
31.05 – 30.07.2022

The expression “the die is cast” has its origins in the dice games of Ancient Rome. It comes from the Latin *Alea jacta est*, which is literally translated as “the dice have been thrown”. In Portuguese, the word “dice” is substituted by “luck”, meaning that “whatever happens next, it is fate or destiny”. The expression became a popular saying after being said by Emperor Julius Caesar by the time he crossed the Rubicon River and invaded Italy. Therefore, more than “a final decision”, the phrase “the die is cast” expressed a declaration of war. The conflict only ended when Caesar seized power in Rome and declared himself dictator for life. In other words, when it comes to history, it’s never been about luck. It’s always been about war.

The exhibition *Nunca foi sorte* (It was all luck) explores the idea of meritocracy in the current Brazilian political context, in which the concept is crowned as prophecy. The juxtaposition between capitalism and a certain Christian religiosity is ancient and its most recent updates correspond to convictions such as “social insecurity as an inevitable reality”, “success as divine providence” and “entrepreneurs as saviors”. The social structure, with all its complexity and inequality, is reduced to a matter of strength and faith.

Most of the works presented are brand new and all of them are based on issues and impressions of the here-and-now. The idea is that the reunion of the artworks in the exhibition space produces an image of collectivity. Questioning origin and social class, work and consumption, home and body, these artists assume the confusion between visual arts, social communication and material culture in neoliberalism.

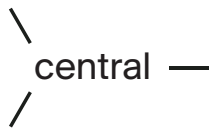
They share experiences and inquiries, even though they might come from different contexts. In this way, there is a certain consensus permeating the exhibition: artistic research and production is work; dialogue between artists is a matter of class, before being formal and/or conceptual; the gallery is a space of negotiation; curatorship is a freelance gig; everything one sees here is at stake and it’s for sale.

The project was developed as a curatorial exercise that made no propositions, but brought together filtered concepts and impressions of each of the respective artistic repertoires: precariousness, aesthetics, construction, the art market, the outskirts, vernissage, advertisement, meme, plan, irony and disappointment.

In Fábio Menino’s paintings, the pictorial space is concentrated on objects, pointing to the relationship between work and consumption. Hands appear in the artist’s canvases for the first time, demonstrating a decoupage of the worker’s gestures. In a dialectical conception, the segmented body is subordinated to repetitive labor and, more recently, to digital mediation.

Automated bodies reproducing mechanical gestures are Leandra Espírito Santo’s laboratory. On one hand, her research emphasizes that, for instance, emojis are iconic reductions of a performativity that has been practiced for decades, on the other, the provocation lies in the suggestion that is the corporal expression itself that it is probably reduced to icons on cell phones.

In terms of communication, Marta Neves is a master of irony. The artist was already exploring the logic of the meme before it was a dictionary entry. In these brand-new works, she talks less about protest and more about constant practices of resistance; it is less about aging and much more about dumbing down, losing color, losing joy.



And the work doesn't end when we get home. Starting from an investigation of memories and absences, Ana Hortides addresses the relationships between home, body and origin. Burrowing into the structures, her new works explore the materials and social relations that constitute the construction of houses. In this way, the context of home is expanded to the place where it is located: the outskirts.

Daily life in the urban periphery is at the center of Janaína Vieira's research. The artist began her career working with collages and the notion of "cut-outs" now supports a reflection on demographics. An overlapping subject, childhood in the favela, is also a fundamental topic: notions of belonging, social climbing and visibility are concurrent to the children's growing processes. For the first time, Janaína presents assemblages, in which the choice of each object conveys the ambivalence between the imaginative freedom of childhood and the violent imposition of social control.

An institution specialized in the above mentioned issue, the police in Brazil is a contradictory symbol of insecurity and fear. And Allan Pinheiro deconstructs this corporation. The procedure of displacing and dismantling institutionalized materialities refers to a refusal of hierarchies, contesting the notion that certain people belong to specific contexts and should not intermingle. This is the main activity of the police: to prevent certain individuals from circulating and advancing, even if this means mass incarceration and assassination.

Gabriella Marinho is interested precisely in things that persist in spite of systematic attempts at erasure. Working with clay, she materializes ancestry and investigates issues of collective memory connected to territory. The artist is attentive to those religious elements that escape intolerance due to the fact that they are rooted in their communities. A resistance that is cosmogonical and therefore powerful in escaping the sophisticated and constantly renewed mechanisms of catechization and genocide.

Facing these chasms, Gustavo Speridião's work is a testimony on the inherence of the art system (based on history and the market) and political-economic regimes (constituted by the same binomial). In this way, his obsessive research about plans in painting corresponds symmetrically to his endless investigative and imaginative processes about revolutionary plans.

Before there was the popular saying: "The early bird gets the worm." In Portuguese, this expression is translated as something like "God provides for early birds", meaning that no divine providence comes without human effort. Now there is a famous hashtag in Brazil that says: "It's never been luck. It has always been God." Both are mantras repeated within a social framework in which classicism, racism, sexism, ethnicism, and religious intolerance are understood as "the way things are." In the midst of tee shirts with "faith" logos, sessions with life coaches, plenty of positivity, new treatments for impostor syndrome and yoga, we keep going after each drink in the pool, each bill to be paid, each therapy session, each million-dollar look, each invitation to an exhibition, each dinner with a curator, each work sold. Entrepreneurs advice: work while others sleep. Pray while they're on vacation.

One example that permeated the whole development of this project was the episode that happened to soccer player Paulinho. At the end of the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2021, he posted a selfie wearing the Brazilian National Team jersey and holding the gold medal. In the caption, he wrote: "It's never been luck. It has always been Exu," an excerpt from the song "Eminência Parda" by the rapper Emicida featuring Dona Onete, Jé Santiago and Papillon. Exu is one of the most well-known entities of Afro diasporic religions in Brazil. He is a powerful deity, acting as a Divine Messenger and Gatekeeper to the Spirit World. Exu sits at the crossroads offering choices and possibilities to humankind. So, it's no surprise that repercussions to Paulinho's post were overwhelming - in terms of hateful comments, as well as those expressing identification and support. This event reiterates that it has never been luck, it's never been god, much less a strategy. It has always been racism, class struggle and being in a pickle. We still call it "war".