

## eliane duarte: prayer

03.09 – 05.11.2023

Eliane Duarte's works push the boundaries of the canvas as a support and turn up as objects-amulets-prayers made of fabric, cotton, natural pigments, wax, seeds, rope, feathers, coins and many other elements. Her works hold a mystique and embody deities and unique forces, as described by the artist in one of her essays: "My work is all but a prayer, in the sense that each artwork is created slowly and they're all linked to each other, sewn, like mojo bags. I've devised something that would bring people luck and every item I bring in functions as an amulet"<sup>1</sup>.

While learning about her practice, one accesses nature's fundamentals, organic shapes, flowers, vines and garments that take place in her work through a process of visceral sewing. Sewing is an ancient practice, albeit often linked to the domesticated female realm. However, Eliane's voracity when working with these materials highlights the urgency of conveying strength through sewing, constantly overcoming the structural and aesthetic compliances of the art market. As the artist herself says: "I work with needle and thread as though they were innards, my large and small intestines... Through them I exist and try to make art. By using needle and thread I create my own little corner of the world, where I try to make sense of myself."<sup>2</sup> The artist reverses the linkage between the sewing craft and silenced women, and turns it into a means of piercing powerful expression that prickles and reveals the pains of a collective body.

The linkage between women and nature is also ancient, an affiliation that permeates cultures and gets more and more empowered as we experience the struggle of women for cultural and financial liberation at the same time we watch the irreversible consequences of the exploitation of natural resources. The approach of both women and nature as products to be exploited or goods to be consumed conjoins the need to awaken a new ecological and feminist consciousness.

Duarte's work addresses this question intuitively, through the choice for natural materials, the sewing practice and the way it challenges contemporary art boundaries in its time. When creating non-sculptural three dimensional artworks, Duarte made living objects and employed organic matter and "utilitarian" crafts methods. Making use of fabric scraps and recycling materials, she defied structures while empowering her ties to art through the connection between land and body. As for *camuflagem (camouflage)*, the artist creates sculptures with fabric. As she describes, "I've been working with scraps, new beginnings and survival for a long time." In *camuflagem* I've wrapped babassu in fabric, making it seem precious, protected – it's just my little homage to the many burnt trees. After wildfires, these little palm trees are the first to sprout"<sup>3</sup>. For the exhibition, the piece is shaped like South-America's map, establishing the connection between the artist and her homeland.

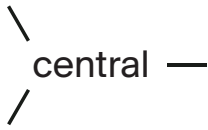
In her book *Death of Nature*, eco-feminist philosopher Carolyn Merchant discusses the perspective of the world as a living organism: "In investigating the roots of our current environmental dilemma and its connections to science, technology and the economy, we must

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1 DUARTE, Eliana. Tribuna Bis, 2002

2 DUARTE, Eliana. Entrevista para Claudia Saldanha no texto 'Agulha Guia'. 2019

3 DUARTE, Eliana. Obras comentadas.



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reexamine the formation of a world view and a science that, by reconceptualizing reality as a machine rather than a living organism, sanctioned the domination of both nature and women”<sup>4</sup>. Merchant presents the issue of a world that has lost its essence in favor of an extractivist and developmentalist mindset, mostly patriarchal and masculine.

It’s important to highlight the fact that the point of this analysis is not to reestablish nature as humanity’s mother, or advocate for women to take on the role of educators, but to assert that we must free ourselves from stereotyped labels that confine us. As taught by Indian author Vandana Shiva: “The liberation of the earth, the liberation of women, the liberation of all humanity is the next step of freedom we need to work for”<sup>5</sup>.

The idea of development as uprooting is also formulated by Vandana Shiva: “‘Development’ has meant the ecological and cultural rupture of bonds with nature...”<sup>6</sup>. Eliane Duarte’s work process is also a rooting one, one of reconnection to her own body and nature.

Eliane Duarte held a connection to her creative processes, which were often manifest in her artwork titles: *espiões (spies)*, *almas (souls)*, *cachos (vines)*, *fantasmas (ghosts)*, *iemanjá (yemanjá)* and *vênus (venus)* to name just a few examples that bring us closer to the inner universe the artist approached in her creations. When referencing deities and orishas, the artist highlighted the spiritual aspect of her pieces, and both daily and sacred elements comprised an innate production whose purpose was to transform, protect and care for those who beheld them. One of her pieces was titled “entes” (“dear ones”) – like relatives (parentes), her pieces were alive and related to her as such. According to Shiva, “Holiness is the bond that connects the part to the whole”<sup>7</sup>.

Eliane Duarte worked on our skins, and her work is a legacy of contemporary Brazilian art. For structural reasons, her work has not yet got due recognition in her generation’s consciousness. For this exhibition, we approach a set of original works, such as *flor de lótus (lotus flower)*, developed late in her life, and many others that have not been displayed for years. Hence they being as urgent as their creation, as reported in one of her notes: “...I’m creating. I find it more interesting, more urgent”.

Once more, I go back to the connections to holiness, to nature and to matter. While hailing the invisible and the untold, one gets closer to a subtle understanding of certain objects. As an exhibition, *Prayer* presents a political and spiritual organism intertwined to Eliane Duarte’s artworks and consciousness, which is restored according to the order of greatness of her work and to her potential for telluric connection.

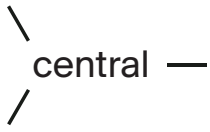
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4 MERCHANT, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. Harper & Row, Publishers, San Francisco, 1989. p.XXI.

5 SHIVA, Vandana. *Ecofeminism - The Search for Roots*. Zed Books, London and New York, 2014.

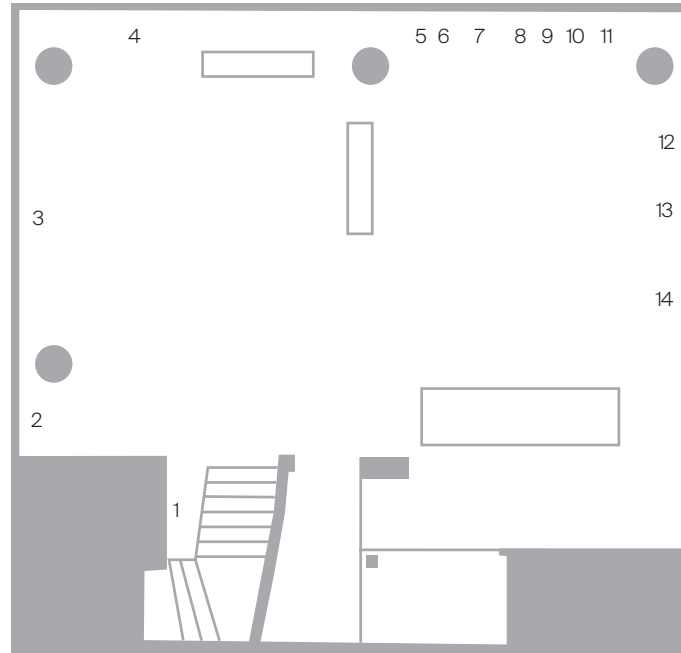
6 SHIVA, Vandana. *Ecofeminism - Homeless in the 'Global Village'*. Zed Books, London and New York, 2014. p. 99.

7 SHIVA, Vandana. *Ecofeminism - Homeless in the 'Global Village'*. Zed Books, London and New York, 2014. p. 99.



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1 *patuá*, 1995  
fabric, burlap, twine,  
beeswax, and seeds  
6 x 7 x 5 cm

2 untitled, c. 1990  
fabric, twine, cotton, and  
beeswax pigment  
90 x 15 cm

3 *the birds*, 1999  
fabric, burlap, twine,  
beeswax, and pigment  
variable dimensions

4 *bunch*, 2004  
seeds, sisal, and synthetic  
rope  
190 x 30 x 23 cm

5 *lotus flower*, 2005  
fabric, burlap, twine,  
beeswax, and pigment  
155 x 15 x 4 cm

6 *lotus flower*, 2005  
fabric, burlap, twine,  
beeswax, and pigment  
90 x 15 x 6 cm

7 *lotus flower*, 2005  
fabric, burlap, twine,  
beeswax, and pigment  
130 x 48 x 4 cm

8 *lotus flower*, 2005  
fabric, burlap, twine,  
beeswax, and pigment  
90 x 20 x 9 cm

9 *lotus flower*, 2005  
fabric, burlap, twine,  
beeswax, and pigment  
127 x 23 x 4 cm

10 *lotus flower*, 2005  
fabric, burlap, twine,  
beeswax, and pigment  
140 x 10 x 4 cm

11 *lotus flower*, 2005  
fabric, burlap, twine,  
beeswax, and pigment  
90 x 16 x 4 cm

12 *willendorf (venus)*, 1996  
fabric, burlap, twine,  
beeswax and pigment  
57 x 23,5 x 18 cm

13 untitled, c. 1990  
fabric, twine, cotton and  
beeswax pigment  
220 x 20 x 15 cm

14 untitled, c. 1990  
woven and stitched fabric,  
burlap, cotton and beeswax  
pigment  
93,5 x 28,5 cm