

Rui Mourão: Tax Income Receipts and Freedom

The first information about his work that Rui Mourão sent me stood out for its clarity. Nevertheless, it was difficult for me at the time to enter his aesthetic universe – naturally enough, being as I was quite far away and having only a pdf file in front of me. A few weeks later, I had the chance to meet the artist in Lisbon and to see a video installation by him at the Anteciparte 2009. I found there the same clarity I had observed, along with a contemporary language and a wise use of resources. Talking with him, I appreciated his conceptual perspective, his well articulated ideas and the eloquent way he expresses his artistic practice. From that moment on, an exhibition of his work at rosalux appeared to be a logical and surprisingly natural consequence.

Like an “infiltrated” agent in enemy territory, Rui Mourão uses his real-world job situations – most of them under precarious employment conditions – to design strategies for resistance and thinking from within that lead to “conquering a space for freedom” (R.M.) (for example, see the video *Tróia* (call center), 2007, where the artist, who had been reading Michel Foucault, identifies the call centre he was working in at the time as a genuine panopticon). The working environment becomes the setting for his videos. Pragmatism and efficiency give way to critical interpretation and to contextual art. The “professional” handicap eventually becomes a surplus value and the corresponding income also pays the artistic work that mixes with the officially assigned tasks.

The artist has taken a different path in some other of the exhibited pieces, like in the video *S/ Título*, 2005, in which the political dimension is plainly expressed, and where we see police officers obeying instructions to move or stand still, given by the artist, in a curious inversion of the objective power relation. It is touching to watch all the fragility concealed under the uniform. In the case of the synesthetic video *S/ Título*, 2010 (a world first at rosalux), there are 3 dissonant elements that interact and relate conceptually to each other: images of steps over a geometric pavement, images of a performance where silence is interpreted in sign language, and the noisy sound track of a street demonstration.

The videos *Do outro lado do quadro (o pó da História)*, 2009, and *Por bem*, 2009, add to the subversion of the professional situation mentioned above new references to the history of art, and narratives related to the construction of the national identity - a subtle and intelligent way of inscribing his own practice in the historical continuum.

Another idea that one retains is that art is also a “perpetuum mobile”, a continuing process of adaptation to the different contexts it finds in its way through History, no matter how adverse or alien these contexts may be.

Finally, the work of Rui Mourão reminds us that to infiltrate the system can be another way of expressing criticism, and be an invitation to reflection. These days, so much uninteresting work is being produced – and consumed – that it is comforting to be able to identify oneself with the work of an artist, and to appreciate its quality. When the work belongs to a young artist, as is the case here, whatever concerns we might have about the future of the next generations and the future of the arts are eased, and, to infer from this, so are our feelings about the future of our world.

Tiny Domingos