

Where is João Pombeiro looking for freedom?

In the dialogue with Tiny Domingos, João Pombeiro talks about wanting to make a connection between the history of Berlin and this exhibition. The Berlin wall, a very appropriate symbol, disappears at first from the mind, while entering his exhibition at Rosalux. "Freedom is a state of mind" and it is also a gesture. A palimpsest of different signs, acts and citations – the wall unfolds a compact space of conceptual expression. João Pombeiro reloads this attitude of mind and freely develops his posture in a widened art-theoretical context.

Taking a look at João Pombeiro's website (www.joaopombeiro.com), we can see a bunch of very different directions, strategies and problematizations, which involve elements from disparate fields of experience, substance and style and express artistic traditions, but do not follow up their implications. Somehow confusing, these elements do not seem to be coordinated in a stable conceptual frame. But I would say that this is *not a less* mature and *less* rigorously internalized conceptual process but rather a *different* approach: João Pombeiro seems to be someone who is searching for very disparate sources of information and images and builds fragments into a personal palimpsest which is by nature provisory, temporary and fluid. This attitude does not look for the abode of a doctrine in which to grow and is not concerned with speculating on a theoretical norm. It rather proceeds accumulatively, receptively and sensitively towards hints, reacting to situations, spontaneously and rather candidly – in an "everyday" rhythm. Even if the process is not so analytical as to be self-critical, his approach brings in distortions, unexpected turns of established frames, destabilization. These deviations open territories where a long-awaited freshness, free expression and a lack of self-restricting consciousness unfold a deep conceptual substance. Vivid, spontaneous and receptive – this attitude turns out to be very effective in developing an active potential on a smaller or bigger scale.

If we think of his other works, João Pombeiro's work for the rosalux art office in Berlin gains a dimension which it would otherwise lose. Seeing this uniquely constructed space in the gallery, minimal but condensed, and isolating it from the context of his other works, we could be tempted to associate this work with structuralist frames of interpretation, with a preoccupation with text as an architectural image. In this light his images and texts could be seen as rigorously building on each other, in order to create a stable edifice of meaning. From a different perspective, we could also see his work as a graphic game, where text loses its significance to become a compact surface with calligraphic qualities. His text-image could also function as a sign, signifying a coded, underlying context.

João Pombeiro rather casts a glance at all these fields of "exercise" and turns the game to his will. These references are used to fortify his game but are finally completely ignored, for the artist seeks to follow his personal sense of free, vagabond expression. Stating a truism, making a riddle or a joke, João Pombeiro goes and round in a circle, visually and conceptually until the circle he constructs is undermined by its own means. "Every art definition follows a circular logic" – which overlapped analysis: a general statement, a particular work and a graphic form collide and the closed circular affirmation with its inclusive borders, the stated rules by which the work functions and the pre-determined statement suddenly open up. Text and image deconstruct each other, making way for free spaces of expression. "I went to the big opening at the gallery, but everyone was there just to be seen, so I left and went to the movies. His statements question their own content. An affirmation is set in circular motion and evidence is repeated until a distance from the object slips in and the initial meaning is turned upside down. Unexpected, evident absurdness fragments what it cites until a new conceptual continuity emerges.

The visual text is associated with sonority in the spoken riddles. So, João Pombeiro is adding another device for freeing the immobile canonical statement. Verbalization in a continuous litany of tongue-twisters destabilizes the well-guarded structure of written words. Sonority brings mobility into space. Continuous, tricky shifting, humour and negation impose an affirmative space of discourse.

Marta Jecu

Art critic and PhD candidate in Berlin. Writes for several art magazines like E-cart, Umelec, Praesens, Idea: Art+Society.