

MAPS FOR INDIVIDUAL USE

Rosário Rebello de Andrade's work follows a persistent plan. Conceived as a long journey, each stage (each slowly matured project; each thoroughly thought-out exhibition) connects with the one preceding it in the same way day and night follow one another. The resulting images can, consequently, be read like genuine pages in a diary. However, these pages keep the dangers of delirium, drift or chance under control, being artfully planned and constructed narratives — actually, they are faux diaries, truthful reflections on days as they should be or should have been. Rosário Rebello de Andrade turns inner experiences into parts of an ideal journey; her pieces are offered to our understanding as guides, maps we can use individually. With them, the artist assembles a corpus of images that also act as illustrations in a book: airy constellations, elegantly traced routes, borderlines of equally imaginary lands; the artist dots these papers with signs of light and dark, uses dashed lines that define mysterious orientations, traces lines of sharing, lines of union, lines of convergence and divergence, and weaves from them nets for communication and capture. These graphic signs overlap or coincide with equally abstract landscape elements (from water, sky and earth), to suggest humid atmospheres, frozen explosions, motionless foamy waves, hard ground areas or immaculate snow expanses. Besides this, Rosário Rebello de Andrade makes use of another group of signs (sometimes in *trompe-l'oeil*, sometimes in silhouette, sometimes as tridimensional objects) that, due to their recurrence throughout her career, appear to us as an (almost heraldic) emblem of her artistic presence and signature: a signet, in which she replicates the mark of her own hand, a rose and a thorn-covered branch, illustrating the two faces of the botanical world, a stag, representing the threatened freedom of the animal realm, the disjointed arms of a Greek cross as the deconstructed vestige of a lost and sought sacredness; finally, a heart, that essential indicator of life and humanity, heightened by the colour in which it is conventionally drawn, is another constant companion in her travels.

In a suitcase that, in combination with her works on paper (maps, as we call them here), makes up the whole set of instruments that identify her as an author, she keeps, among other things, the tridimensional incarnations of the aforementioned elements (natural objects or clay reproductions), like one keeps souvenirs from a journey (a life journey — lived, desired, imagined) or a saint's relics. The written word, due to its character of reality recorded on a fixed support, is another integral part of her authorial identity.

Rosário Rebello de Andrade's project of self-knowledge and revelation is fulfilled stage by stage, always ready to shake off the threat of becoming a mere programmatic discipline — which it achieves by triggering narrative and fictional processes that are offered to us as exercises in freedom; in fact, what appears to be fixed and repetitive in it is actually in constant flux, in terms of both form and meaning. Consequently, her maps do not preserve us from neither the storms of the soul nor the anguishes of being; sometimes, they even lead us straight into the maelstrom of doubt before offering us some possibility of solace. All these subtle shades and transparencies, lines and tiny collages, patches and spills, interplays of backgrounds and lines, delicate textural combinations, scintillations and obscurities increase the unbalance between these meanings while multiplying, freeing and enriching them at the same time.

We might, by coining an oxymoron, say that Rosário Rebello de Andrade has approached this new stage by the light of blindness. The artist has summoned the world (called up several voices) for this project: she uses as her starting-point several texts, one by Daniel Faria and others by herself and a number of her friends and acquaintances. Questions follow one another: what do we (still) see once we go blind? What can we (still)

make others see? How do they (still) see, those who do not see? What can they (still) not see, those who yet benefit from the fragile 'firefly light'?

The most celebrated blind man in Western history was also the one who most helped us see: he forever displayed the complex reality of humans, in all its awful foulness and in all its beautiful glory; weaving and unweaving (not through cunning, as Penelope did, but to help us learn their composition) the web of our personal and political relations, of our relations with nature and the divine. And he listed places, the names of men and peoples, the names of the things they used in their everyday lives and in the symbology of their ceremonies, the names of the animals and monsters that served or haunted them, the names of the gods that led, punish or favour them. Finally, he also made maps of the seas, lands and stars.

After telling the story of a long and pitiless war, where all excesses, both honourable and vile, were committed, rewarded and punished, Homer then set his sights on narrating the long hardships and eventual redemption of a hero (warrior, traveller, adventurer), who tenaciously sought his port of peace. The man in the short poem by Daniel Faria, which inspired Rosário Rebello de Andrade, went blind after the death of the firefly that gave him light and gave up finding his way home, waiting only for his Mother; Ulysses sought something equivalent, his Home; but he was the one who blinded someone else (the Cyclops); he was the one who, by never giving up, managed to vanquish, through strength and cunning, all mists and darknesses, all monsters and spells.

Here, Rosário Rebello de Andrade takes one more step in her collecting of those initiatic journeys that make up the history of humankind. Even though this exhibition gathers together a variety of contributions (the aforementioned letters from friends, which she generously likens to fireflies lighting up the darkness), its path is an individual one: whoever wishes to follow her map(s) is free to do so in whatever way they see fit. That lonely stance is quite distant from the epic approach, closer instead to a lyrical, ascetic path. There is, of course, no linearity in the steps she displays before us — each drawing is evocative of all others, and our previous allusion to the idea of a book (even though the set of works shown does include a book) is actually more like the idea of a loose-leaf binder, whose arrangement will depend on the mood of each moment, on the mood of all those who look at them, as well as on the atmosphere and limitations of each place where this set of works is shown. Furthermore, the artist obliterates, through erasure, superimposition or miniaturisation, certain parts of the written sentences (even the ones written in Braille — so as to blind the blind by interfering with the main means to their understanding of the world).

In the small picture of the Stag, the artist confronts us with an animal rich in symbolic power, a pure force of Nature outraged and imprisoned — we can only see it by looking into a lightbox, and even then only its back, as he contemplates the snowy horizon (him and us alike blinded by whiteness) like Caspar David Friedrich's pilgrim looking at the grey sea of clouds at his feet. As a final note, Rosário Rebello de Andrade has created a piece of clothing specifically for the exhibition — 'Pele' [Skin] displays, like ex-votos, vibrating tattoos or multiple spirit-chasers, a number of truncated sentences and isolated words (taken from the previously mentioned letters); in fact, it is a vast ceremonial mantle, illustrative of the reconnecting spirit that emanates out of all her work.

Paris, 8 August 2018

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