

18.06.2021 | 04.09.2021
JOÃO VASCO PAIVA

EXOLINGUISTICS

"Landscape of Fear" is a topographic model introduced by John William Laundré which suggests that a territory can be mapped according to the movements of prey and predator. It represents relative levels of predation risk as peaks and valleys that reflect the level of fear of predation a prey experiences in different parts of its area of use. It postulates that prey are in a constant state of fear/a constant state of awareness, and has the ability to learn and respond to differing levels of predation risk.

Laundré also proposes that, within the concept of the "Landscape of Fear", the insertion of new predators on a given territory affects its biodiversity, affects the presence of other predators and variety of prey, and consequently the flora - transforming the landscape itself.

In an urban setting such conceptual frameworks can also be applied. Our movements within our habitats are defined by safety and risk - the urban space is designed with such purpose. And while this is more obvious when we talk about the usage of hostile architecture, it exists on a deeper level in every device that constitutes the public and private spaces. From kerbs, to doors, to sidewalks, parks and roads, our space is designed to orchestrate our daily life, and such concepts become interiorised in ways that also determine our relation with the *Other*, and with the topographies that surround us.

"Exolinguistics" is the first individual exhibition of João Vasco Paiva at Lehmann + Silva, and introduces a new body of work constituted by watercolours and ceramics produced over the last year.

While the ceramic works are renderings of hostile architecture devices found in the streets of New York, the watercolours reference a manual of technical drawings of street furniture, drainage and overall components of the Hong Kong public space, published by the Hong Kong Government Highways Department. The devices present in these drawings constitute a landscape designed for safety and control, for space optimisation, and circulation fluidity - concepts that overlap in a place with such high population density.

As these devices are recognisable, their presence elicits automatic responses and behaviours. Still, the ability of a common citizen to misuse, ignore or change such devices should not be disregarded. Such appropriations are present not only in daily life interventions, but also in particular instances such as the Hong Kong 2019 protests, where some of these devices were appropriated to create barricades and other instruments, in order to stop or slow down the progression of police forces.

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Questioning their nature and function, being aware of their strangeness, renders them a foreign system that can be confronted. This makes them identifiable as alien structures and allows for them to be defied, propelling a new, perhaps needed, perception of the habitat, of the landscape to emerge and alongside it, an alternative perception of ourselves within these surroundings.

The works in this exhibition derive from a misuse and misreading of these technical drawings, compelled by a deliberate illiteracy of their instructions and therefore an acknowledgement of the objects they represent, through a perversion of the system of their representation.

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