

Patricia Leite

Saudade do Brasil

Saudade do Brasil (1920) is the title of a suite of twelve dances for piano composed by Darius Milhaud after his stay in Brazil from 1917 to '18. The dances are named for places in Brazil, referring to the landscapes of Rio which enchanted him while he served on a diplomatic mission in the city. Milhaud was profoundly affected by Brazilian popular music, as evidenced by ballets such as *Le Boeuf sur le Toit* and *L'Homme et son Désir*. Through Milhaud, Brazilian music made its mark on the 20th century music, especially French avant-garde of the 1910s. The percussion and polyrhythm, absorbed by music of African origins and of Heitor Villa-Lobos (*Uirapuru*, 1917), are recognized as attributes of Milhaud's work.

Saudade do Brasil (in the singular, "ai, que saudade do Brasil!" Literally, "How I miss Brazil!") appears in the first verse of the samba song *Adeus, América*, by Geraldo Jacques and Haroldo Barbosa. The lyrics go, "O samba mandou me chamar" ["Samba sent for me"] and they are repeated: "O samba mandou me chamar".

Saudade do Brasil is the title of a song recorded by Tom Jobim for his stupendous album *Urubu* (1976). There, Jobim gave instrumental form to an exaltation of spirit, indirectly referring to his transcontinental musical dialectic between the U.S. and Brazil. According to a schematic narrative of bossa nova, Tom delivers the genre to the American people, which they transform into something abominable. *Águas de Março*, in the early 1970s, represents the master's redemption. In *Urubu*, the border between the national and the universal, the classical and the popular is redefined with each bar. Saudade do Brasil can be seen as a collage-manifesto of such as, with echos of Villa-Lobos, Pixinguinha and Ary Barroso, Ravel, Debussy and Gershwin.

Saudade do Brasil (2015) is the title of a new series of paintings by Patrícia Leite. Based in iconography, they utilize images of the parade held in Jobim's honor by the GRES Estação Primeira de Mangueira samba school in 1992.

The main paintings in the series are *Alegorias* [Allegories] made from low-definition computer screen prints of images of the parade, whose fragments are reconfigured in the paintings and in turn, reinvented. In these works, the artist continues the use of preexisting images and an investigation of movement, something that appears, for instance, in the previous series *Zabriskie Point* (2012). Yet, she delves into an issue dear to her: the purposely blurred lines between classical art and folk art, something hinted at in many of her previous paintings, which feature themes of architecture and vernacular painting. Leite's precursors can be seen in the work of Zizi Sapateiro, Lorenzato or Nello Nuno, regional (anti)-heroes whose paintings stubbornly do not travel well, but Hélio Oiticica's *Parangolés* aren't too far off. Jobim at Mangueira (too classical for samba, too popular for concert halls) seems like the perfect example. Bossa nova itself, the joyous antidote to the doldrums of the 1950s, looms as a paradigm ("que coisa linda, que coisa louca", *Chega de saudade!*) ["how beautiful, how crazy," enough of nostalgia!]. These compositions are nocturnal, sensual, exciting, dance-inspiring. Transfigured landscapes, framed by the architecture of the avenue and the allegorical floats. With Oswald de Andrade: Joy is the litmus test.

A painting like *Alegoria II* [Allegory II] (all the works are from 2015) has something extraordinarily organic, loose and spontaneous. Passionate, but not in a romantic way; dynamic but not schematic. The composition is facilitated by the more recognizable

figurative element, a garland of lights which divides the space, at the same time softening it, splitting it horizontally and bending it. The other elements in the picture at once draw near to and distance themselves from this line, generating rhythms and movements that are given potential in the employment of repetition, explored through vertical vectors, as if the allegorical float were passing right before our eyes. Some of these elements appear as if they were deformed by this movement, and the sum of these occurrences create a collective body — not necessarily a human one — , made of Matissean phytomorphic arabesques, two toucan heads, fragments of allegories and carnivalesque costumes, and so on. We are confronted with an interpretation of the Carnaval experience. In other paintings about Alegorias [Allegories], the pictorial questions are multiplied: simultaneousness, velocity, organicity, composition and texture. Not to mention color, deliberately vibrant, explosive and wild. In Alegoria I [Allegory I], the expressive use of texture and the mastery of the interplay between figure and background are the keynotes, but a wealth of decoration does not allow us to forget that we are on the samba walkway, where the parade occurs (or perhaps in a garden? Or a jungle?). Areas of vivid brushstrokes and monochromatic backgrounds overlap one another and create alternated logics; there is no sign of a clear, dominant perspective. Abstract art and so-called folk painting (a label that in itself is quite indicative of classist and authoritarian limitations) are in a constant process of exchange. One of the small, preparatory paintings made for the exhibition makes us feel like we're at a typical Brazilian festa do divino. Another, the portrait of Tom Jobim as the centerpiece of the allegory, has an affectionate title, Tonzinho, the diminutive nickname that poet Vinicius de Moraes used to call the musician.

A closer analysis of these images echoes Debussy's celebrated remark to Stravinsky: "The air must again be filled with beauty." It strikes me that, for Patrícia Leite, painting is primarily, more than medium; it is a trade. The fact that she chooses to paint things that are important to her, like the music and figure of Jobim, brokered by the tribute from Mangueira, this evocation through samba ("o samba mandou me chamar" ["samba sent for me"]) might seem overly simple, but they harbor an intense relationship with something that has been forgotten of late. I'm referring here to art and the dialogue which artists establish through it. I am not talking about citation, but the possibility of truly effecting an interruption in the temporal pressures of the present through art, a dialogue between the dead and the living, the central and the marginalized, the popular and the erudite, crossing centuries and different parts of the world.

Her paintings don't address issues that come from the outside (from the newspapers, the water shortage, political partisanship, the internet, trendy restaurants), but they have a fundamental power that is more important and more necessary right now. Of the vast archives of Jobim anecdotes, his penchant for aphorisms stands out, especially those regarding Brazil. This one is perhaps more than opportune: "Living abroad is good, but it's shitty. Living in Brazil is shitty, but it's good." In the recollections of friends, Jobim's work space is often described as a combination of a music room and a library, where dictionaries are more prominent than sheet music. The image of a painter surrounded by record albums is not so different.

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