



*Sopro*, 2015  
 Madeira, tinta acrílica, tinta de spray, tecido e pregos | Wood, acrylic paint, spray paint, fabric and nails, 30 x 19,8 x 3,8 cm  
 Em colaboração com | In collaboration with Omar Barquet  
 Coleção particular | Private collection

## SARA BICHÃO

Hugo Dinis

The artistic practice developed by Sara Bichão (Lisbon, 1986) is located in a mysterious limbo between the materiality of the objects present and the emotionality of the memory past. This double concern persists not only in the various elements that make up the works, but also in the personal actions they frequently invoke. To understand this interrelationship between objects and actions, this text will mainly reflect on the emotional significance involved in the choice of different materials used in the production of the works. It will also explore how the differentiation between each chosen material is relevant - if not essential - in creating a certain performativity that reveals emotions and stories that are associated with the works in question. In this intermittency between materialisation and performativity occurring in each process of construction, and without seeking to base itself on rigid interpretation, the arduous task of the discursive text is to emerge from the beginnings of an understanding that is essentially sensory in nature, to enable the natural enjoyment and flow of the works and their inherent characteristics. As such, this text will analyse the importance of the artist's academic training as a painter; the increasingly latent three-dimensionality of the artist's recent sculptures; the relationship with surrounding architecture in installations of her work in public spaces; the different materials used; the performative actions that give rise to the works; the stories and memories present in the objects; and, without limiting the interpretation of the works, the emotions, impulses, tensions and pleasures that arise from the relationships between the different bodies involved in the formation of the work.

In order to better understand the artist's work, it is necessary to reframe it, initially, as an exploration of the two-dimensionality of painting and, subsequently, as a natural performativity that leads in part to its liberation into the spatial domain as three-dimensional objects, sculpture and installation in the broadest sense. Trained as a painter, the artist came to an early realisation that the physical and standardised limitations of canvas do not provide adequate material freedom for the capturing of light, an aspect that has always interested her. This issue was present in the exhibitions *Open Gates* (2012), at Rooster Gallery Contemporary Art in New York, and *Adrift in space, mel in pace* (2015), at the Barbara Davis Gallery in Houston. On these occasions the construction of pictorial supports in forms unconventional within the practice of painting (such as circular, triangular or trapezoidal forms) made from extraneous materials (such as cement) constituted actions in which the emphasis on only three primary colours (blue, yellow and red) in conjunction with white promote a meaningful and primordial photic alphabet of pure, clear and immaculate colours. Light is revealed in the way it is reflected in three-dimensional objects, which in turn cooperate in the construction of physical spaces where they capture that surrounding light. These spaces are not undifferentiated, however; rather, they are privileged for the capturing of light. According to the artist, they are closer to a daily experience of architecture and, in this sense, to the life surrounding the objects and bodies themselves. This apparatus becomes visible in the exhibitions *Recheio / Dressing* (2014) in Carpe Diem Arte e Pesquisa in Lisbon; *Somebody's Address* (2014) at the Rooster Gallery Contemporary Art in New York; and the *Net* project (2015) at the Belgrade Cultural Center. It is notable that in 2017 the relationship with surrounding architecture became fundamental to the works developed for the artist's most recent projects in the Atelier-Museu Júlio Pomar and the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum.

At the exhibitions *My sun cries* (2016) at the Fundação Portuguesa das Comunicações in Lisbon and *Coastal* (2017) at the Barbara Davis Gallery in Houston, the objects used by the artist become more complex in their appropriation and transformation of commonly used and timeless materials, including bars of soap, raw fabric, wood, shells, stones, sponge, cotton, latex, ropes, among others. It is the sum of the objects – juxtaposed, interconnected, nailed and knotted and painted together – that constitutes the final object. The different elements that make up each piece are inter-related to create narratives – at times perceptible, at others unintelligible – constituting sensorial gestures and possible visions of everyday life. The preference for organic and natural objects over those that are artificial and industrial suggests an ethics of respect for nature and its fundamental role in the maintenance and balancing of the universe; that is, in life and its cycles of death and renewal. The artist's profound belief in the objects she observes and intuitively selects indicates that past actions and sentiments can be revealed and nurtured in the objects that surround her. In this sense, daily life is not seen as a social, political or cultural construction, but rather one of personal stories and journeys of the artist's own experience. By choosing objects that appear to reveal a neutral colour (such as raw cloth or stones), the artist finds spaces of pictorial activation in which the colours are inserted in a logic that could be termed as a *sign without a signified*. In this context they can be said to function as mere impulses for sensorial and emotional experience. Here too, in the artist's own words, an "ethics of emotions" is revealed, as the works bear within themselves the principles of their own existence, that is, of their appearance. Thus, the creation of a work is always provoked by the artist's intuition, motive, experience or even trauma, rather than by a need to simply produce work. Objects thus become transformed into relics (perhaps even in the sense of religious worship), invoking personal stories associated with objects of value, hope and happiness.

Yet, when deprived of their original function, objects undergo a performative action of conversion and recontextualisation, creating new configurations of fragile, delicate pieces and precarious structures. Although also performed independently by the artist, this performativity became visible in the collaborations developed with Ana Rebordão (Lisbon, 1986) in Museu do Côa in 2012; with Omar Barquet (Mexico, 1979) in Diagrama, Mexico City in 2015; and most recently in 2017 with Manon Harrois (France, 1988) at the artist's residence in Clermont-Ferrand in *She has nothing to say / She has everything to say*, a piece later invited to the Coimbra Biennale 2017, which went under the theme: Curar e Reparar [To Heal and to Mend]. The artist's interventions are always made through an intimate and personal relationship with the physical and plastic qualities of the materials, with the interiority of the people with whom she collaborates and with herself. Thus, taking these aspects into account simultaneously, it is as if lived experiences and their associated feelings are enunciated at the moment of the works' production, becoming inscribed into their meaning. In this way, it can be said that it is through emotional experience, through a certain attraction to the magic of things, that the works are structured and built. Both in terms of the choice of objects and in the manipulation of the relationship between the components, the personal process (which in the case of Sara Bichão overlaps with the artistic process) follows a design that is attached in such a way that the promiscuous tension between art and life, the work and the artist, shines through in the gesture and contact between different materials. This tiny, discreet action may be a loving act of pure childlike fulfilment, of provoking differentiated emotions of happiness and sadness, of euphoria and restraint. In a dimension of isolation and immersion, the artist engages herself emotionally (with her memories, lived experiences and relationships) to produce small catalysts of stored changeable memories, that is, past histories that become formal fictions and materials upon being transformed into artworks. By opening new

scars through the materialisation of pieces that carry indexes of the past but are now revealed as present moments, the artistic object becomes a fetish for the possible experience of a hidden past.

Considering the artist's works are constituted as maps or unstable constructions of past actions, it may be said that the tensions they emanate are of an unpredictable and emotional kind and reveal a suture of sensual or sexual allure. This symbolic charge, the mutable tensions set in motion by the works, are inserted into an emotionally charged domain that inevitably acts on physical bodies (of the artist and of the spectator), even if this remains unconscious. If we consider the relationships between the various materials, the intimate relationship the artist develops with the objects and the way in which lived stories intermingle and immerse themselves in the physicality of the objects, it could be said that the energy of these pieces reaches the intimacy and sexuality of bodies. It may be suggested then that, through her works and materials, the artist writes letters of love and passion. Within these meaningful, careful objects we find words of affection and dedication in their most sincere and generous form, and even if we are unable to decipher them, we are inevitably struck by their deep compassion and truth. In the end, discourse tends to assign that which cannot be named to love.