LEFT PAGE *Time Zone* (DETAIL), 2022

I shall be gone and live
or stay and die.[1]

Noëlig Le Roux

1 Shakespeare, ***Romeo and Juliet***, Act 3, scene 5. Quote in exergue of the book by Nicolas Bouvier, *L'usage du monde* (1963), Paris, Éditions Payot, 1992.

2 La "S" Grand Atelier (Vielsalm, Belgium), founded some thirty years ago by Anne-Françoise Rouche, is a unique artistic space that supports the creative work of artists with mental disabilities. La "S" Grand Atelier is conceived as an open platform, where talents can flourish freely and where the labels and barriers that exist between different art worlds are dismantled. There, for several years now, Sara Bichão has been collaborating with Anaïd Ferté, the artist leading the textile workshop, and Barbara Massart, a transdisciplinary artist. Together, through residencies lasting from several weeks to months, they have developed a polyphonic body of work, showcased at BPS22 (Charleroi, Belgium, 2025).

In search of experiences, validation, and new perspectives – both artistic and commercial – artists are always on the lookout for opportunities that carry them to new places and horizons. Exhibitions, research projects, commissioned works, residencies, festivals, and meetings – artists receive no shortage of invitations and often find themselves far from their studios.

For Sara Bichão, as for her fellow artists, mobility – especially on an international scale – is a key issue. She has embraced this reality, which is intrinsic to her practice, and frequently leaves her home city, Lisbon, to undertake projects that span anywhere from a few days to several months, with some even extending over multiple years. Since 2023, she has been developing a long-term collaboration in the form of creative residencies with La "S" Grand Atelier, an arts centre based in the Belgian Ardennes, where artists with mental disabilities with artists from elsewhere.[2] In 2022, together with artist Violaine Lochu (b. 1987, France), she embarked on a travelling project lasting nearly two years. Following a residency exchange – one that took her to the island of Ouessant in Brittany and Lochu to the Azores archipelago – they reunited for a series of exhibitions spanning Brest, Lisbon and São Miguel Island. During this period, Sara Bichão was invited to work in New York (2022), exhibited in Copenhagen (2022) and then in Vienna (2023), before taking part in a festival between Sète and Lisbon (2024).

These frequent shifts in location and environment, along with the disruptions and upheavals they bring, infuse Sara Bichão's work with renewed energy. While they challenge her sense of stability, they also sharpen her ability to adapt to

unfamiliar contexts, heighten her receptivity, and safeguard her from a routine that she seems to dread. The artist now seems to have integrated her wanderings into her practice, as a driving force that shapes her artistic *modus operandi*.

Like the aforementioned creations, or those she developed a few years ago with Omar Barquet or Manon Harrois, Sara Bichão's work navigates between solo productions and partnerships. Recently, the "Diver's Flight" exhibition (Galeria Filomena Soares, Lisbon, 2024) which brought her together with Armineh Negahdari, Diego Bianchi, Gyan Panchal, Julien Carreyn, and Miriam Cahn, bore witness to these movements between solitude and engagement that mark her artistic journey. Fuelled by her travels, and nourished by her encounters and discoveries, she returns to her studio – her own personal sanctuary. Sara Bichão moves in and out of this place, which serves as a familiar point of reference – one she departs from and returns to time and again.

It is also through her movements that she gathers the materials composing her works: shells, driftwood and fishing gear washed up along the coast, or clothes, tools and various objects collected here and there, or found at the homes of family members. This mobility, whether near or far, has led Sara Bichão to develop tools and working methods suited to her nomadic approach. The notebook is one of them. It accompanies her, both in and outside the studio. Sara Bichão does not use it to sketch a place or scene from life, nor to keep her diary. Instead, she employs it as both a medium for factual note-taking and a repository for words and forms that emerge onto the pages in step with her inspiration and imagination. At times, the functional and the poetic coexist on a single page – as inseparable as they are in the unfolding of her life.

The pages alternate between references, lists of materials, budget calculations, measurements, and sketches of installation plans, with short poems and drawings whose execution betrays their rapid creation, as if they had to be captured before they vanished. The format of her notebooks – 14 by 9 cm – aligns with the artist's poetic impulse, their pocketable nature ensuring they are always readily at hand. Practical and easily transportable, the notebook has thus become the primary medium for Sara Bichão's drawings, and she never hesitates to remove pages in order to share them with other eyes.

Created through a spontaneous process, sometimes akin to automatic writing, these sketches may form the genesis of those that later migrate onto other surfaces. They may reappear on cotton jumpsuits worn during performances such as Violaine Lochu's at the Centre d'art contemporain Passerelle (Brest, 2023) with the *Double V* costume (2022), or others laid on the ground such as *Skin* (2000). They are also printed on loose canvases, stretched across structures (*Fell Asleep I* and *Fell Asleep II*, 2024), or held in place by ties to the walls of the exhibition space (*Map*, 2020).

fig. 1. Sara Bichão's work in process, La "S" Grand Atelier, Vielsalm, 2023

fig. 2. Studio (2013-2020), São Vicente de Fora, Lisbon, 2015

fig. 3. *Untitled*, 2010

3 This relationship between graphic signs and the body, and their protective function, bears resemblance to the calligraphic inscriptions found on various talismanic objects, usually concealed from view upon their creation (just as Sara Bichão embeds hidden elements within her works) and believed to protect those who carry them.

4 Wassily Kandinsky, *Du spirituel dans l'art et dans la peinture en particulier* (1910), Denoël, Folio/Essais collection, 1989. [*T. N.*: our translation]

5 Bernard Andrieu on the body, in: "Quelle épistémologie du corps ?", *Corps. Ecrire le corps*, Vol. 1, 2006/1, no. 1, p. 16. [*T. N.*: our translation]

A consistent repertoire of abstract forms emerges – symbolic or schematic motifs, expanses inhabited by celestial bodies such as the sun, moon, and stars, rendered in simplified forms, alongside silhouettes that take on human, animal, or hybrid appearances. Interwoven lines organise themselves into labyrinthine networks, unfolding in circular waves or swirling curves.

This recurring visual vocabulary in Sara Bichão's work is applied to various textures – paper or fabric – whose fibres evoke the body and its covering, the skin, which both covers and protects. Sara Bichão imbues the surfaces of her works with both symbolic and corporeal significance. The traces and marks she inscribes function equally as imprints or stigmata – friction, scratches, the result of impacts, tensions, struggles, and accidents, sometimes mended with stitches – as part of a graphic lexicon: mysterious, enigmatic calligraphies, as though her works possessed magical, mediumistic or even protective properties, weaving connections between the body of the artwork and its surrounding space.[3]

"Art, in its entirety," wrote Kandinsky in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*[4], "is not a goalless creation flowing into nothingness. It is a power whose goal must be to develop and to refine the human soul [...]. It is a language that, in its unique form, speaks to the soul of things that will become its daily sustenance, and which it can receive only in this manner." A similar horizon shapes Sara Bichão's practice, grounded in her conviction of art's power to reveal "the soul of things" – to recall Kandinsky's notion – and to connect us to it. Yet in Bichão's work, there is no trace of the divine. For her, art is an inner necessity, both a means of accessing and being in the world, and a system of knowledge that operates on an analogical, spiritual, and even magical level.

Firmly rooted in the realm of the sensory, her artistic practice is inseparable from an approach that engages both body and mind, the visible and the invisible.

She does not position herself at a distance from the world in order to interpret or critique it. On the contrary, she creates works that merge with it – where the surface and the motifs inscribed upon it serve as connective threads linking the artwork to an exterior that also shapes it. Like the body, the artwork is "at once an inside and an outside, an intention and an expression, belonging as much to the visible as to the invisible, to the living and the dead."[5]

During her residency on the island of Ouessant in Brittany, isolated within the historic Créac'h lighthouse, surrounded by wind, ocean, rocks and birds – more so than by the islanders themselves – Sara Bichão declared, "If I'm here, I have to become part of it, otherwise I get sick." For Bichão, there is no alternative but to integrate herself, physically and spiritually, into the places she inhabits. Her perspective echoes Nicolas Bouvier's reflections on travel, expressed in an interview upon his return from a long journey through Eastern Europe and Central Asia: "With travel, we uproot ourselves, sever our ties, become more vulnerable, more mobile.

We are forced to commit ourselves daily, become more receptive, and are better able to reflect – that is, to experience things in relation to ourselves, rather than through the environment that shelters us or the framework that defines us."[6] Sara Bichão has embraced this dimension of travel as her own. By breaking ties with her original context, she allows herself to be fully permeated by the spaces she encounters and discovers. She surrenders to the environment and its elements, learns the language if she does not yet know it, and thinks with it as a way to better inhabit these new territories.

In a single movement, Sara Bichão draws on the paths she travels to find the material she reinjects into her works. With her collected fragments – laden with histories, memories, imprints, and imaginings – she thus sets new journeys in motion. She extends their memory by grafting them onto her works, which in turn become their hosts. At once body, dwelling, and vehicle, the artwork offers shelter and expression, protection and presence to our gaze.

March 2025, Paris

6 Nicolas Bouvier, Interview on RTS – Radio Télévision Suisse, 1963. [*T. N.*: our translation]

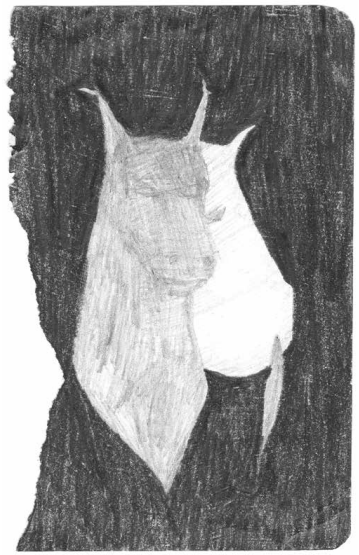

fig. 4. *Untitled*, 2010