

EU SÓ VENDO A VISTA



Postcard from Brazil

• Above: Marcos Chaves. *Eu só vendo a vista* 1980
 • Right top bottom: Ricardo Bisbaum. *You and Me* 1996.
 • Opposite: Virginia Ballar. *The Mist* 1999
 • All images courtesy of the artists



It is almost impossible to avoid idealising Brazil, whether it be the beautiful Rio de Janeiro with its beaches, mountains and girls; the Amazon with its partially untouched tropical forest; Brasilia and its sculptural modern architecture; Salvador and its Afro-Brazilian exuberance or the sensual atmosphere and racial miscegenation. Brazil as a country is a perfect screen for projecting interesting and beautiful utopias. As a Brazilian (artist, writer) born in São Paulo and living in Rio I'm not at all uncomfortable with the reading of this utopian image of the country, (but it is necessary to remember the uncared for street kids, the Indians being killed by land farmers, the Sem Terra movement being attacked by the police, the pollution on the seashore, the destruction of the Rain Forest, etc).

The sad images complement the beautiful ones and together bear witness to the extraordinary reputation Brazil has developed for awakening sleepy minds and persuading them to think differently. Brazilians are used to living and working with the feeling of impotency: condemned to inhabit a peripheral country. The people here see 'real' history happening only in Europe and North America. All actions and processes carried out inside its tropical and temperate borders seem to be 'unproductive'. But where would Western Europe and the USA be if they had not had the world as their courtyard, in which they have played some of the most wonderful (modern art, cinema, literature, philosophy) and destructive (war, colonial exploitation) games ever seen? Throughout the centuries people from Brazil have developed strategies of resistance and survival in an environment where one cannot count on concrete responses. In the beginning, the coloniser's logic meant an extractive economy that took goods away. The Republican age has seen the economic elite continuing to move their money to Swiss or Cayman Banks, getting rid of any responsibility to produce more ethical or existential values. Brazil's dark side (contrasting with its sunny image) is the picture of a people who work hard and gain nothing: the void returns as a deadly and perverse feedback that does not prevent the spread of an inferiority complex. The very negative index of wealth distribution among the population tells of a country where money corroborates a working relationship dissolved in savage and unproductive capitalist logic.

Imagination plays a role in such a situation: a role that is ambiguous, but that can be productive as well. Deleuze writes opposing dreams, arguing that it is not a good combative strategy because it avoids the exigencies of knowledge and experience: 'the groups who were interested in dreams – the psychoanalysts, the surrealists – formed tribunals that judge and punish: repulsive mania, frequent among dreamers' ('Pour en finir avec le jugement'). The dreamer is still trapped by his lack of real productivity. The images Brazilians create in their daily survival are effective in a different sense and offer new tools for action. If one wishes to produce interesting images from this part of the world,

by Ricardo Bisbaum

below the equator line, it is better to act as a sign operator than as a dreamer.

Artists in Brazil work hard and get almost nothing from what they do, the country's perverse socioeconomic structure dissolves important gestures in ephemeral figures forced to turn upon themselves, making it difficult to establish productive dialogues with the outside, the other, the different. Nothing is more fatal for art today than concealing its nomadic potential of multiple encounters among a possible transcultural scene. Under such adverse circumstances, images must be used as a form of action to indicate a connection with the outside (of the object, of the culture) and function as a display strategically conceived of as a transitory picture for an identity. That is the landscape: a poignant (humorous, beautiful, mysterious, sublime, etc.) constructed view which triggers your imagination creating open spaces for new and active images (and other related actions).

If an image is just the visible tip of a whole strategic process, then alternative views of the Brazilian artistic landscape should be added to the viewer's postcard collection, views that probably do not fit exactly into the previously formatted data bank. This generous person would be invited to transform his/her self-image to something more fluid, generated under the impact of diverse landscapes. But perhaps more important than postcards are the elements that will succeed in projecting a source that feeds and shapes our skill for dealing with imagination and images as an authentic property of our times.

