

Salette Tavares, 1975
ENVIRONMENT OBJECT
BY ANA VIEIRA

“Ana Vieira is an inventor of space. Wherever her hands come to rest, our eyes unfold ambiguities, hidden intelligences, the magic of the transparent opaque, the labyrinth, transparent to the play of readings which are at risk of turning into other readings.

The gift of manufacturing space is one which we have from our earliest childhood. The first gestures that we make created distance, marked the *topos* of each thing, and discovered the presence of that which is hidden beyond what it appears to be. Space is the presence not only of what is seen, of the surface which is shown to us, but also of the whole of each partial appearance plus the rest. The whole existence, with the side that we do not see but which we know is there. It is located on the other side, the hidden one, but drawing back the curtain is a straightforward act that only the theory of perspective has managed to reduce to the minimum, the *no* of being, the *yes* of the apparent. The total presence of the “here” and “there” is also, besides being the heart of the object, the relation between that object and what is facing it. As Merleau Ponty stated in *Phénoménologie de la perception*: “When I look at the lamp on my table, I attribute to it not only the qualities visible from where I am, but also those which the chimney, the walls, the table can “see”, but the back of my lamp is nothing but the face which it “shows” to the chimney. I can therefore see an object in so far as objects form a system or a world, and in so far as each one treats the others round it as spectators of its hidden aspects and as a guarantee of the permanence of those aspects. Any seeing of an object by me is instantaneously reiterated among all those objects in the world which are apprehended as co-existent, because each of them is all that the “others” see of it. {...} The house itself is not the house seen from nowhere, but the house seen from everywhere.

The completed object is translucent, being shot through on all sides by an infinite number of present scrutinies which intersect in its depths, leaving nothing hidden”. The same attitude is adopted by Heidegger in “Art and Space”, in which he says “We would have then to take heed that and how this play receives its reference to the belonging together of things {...}”.

System, system of places, systems of multiple surfaces, but systems which are still temporal, as at the root of space, always accompanying it, is the time that dominates it, the time to which it is subordinate. Space time, time space, this is what the artist’s fabrication provides, an object, so that it unfolds like a film or so that, over a period of time, we can read it. But time also as space made into a thing, when space dominates, treatise, memory and present, woven into the labyrinth of co-existence. This is the surprise inherent in an encounter with any of Ana Vieira’s objects. There, the subtle space is captivated by the thread of a time that she has made and that is also our memory, our memories. Without realism, without sentimentality, but very real and very unreal.

The making of experimental art like that of Ana Vieira and other artists of her type deserves our respect for the fearlessness that it demanded or is demanding. It is always costly for the artist to experiment; it is always highly useful from the point of view of artistic invention, but it always lacks the basic compensation of allowing the artist to pay her bills and live as a professional. The object to which we are referring was made possible thanks to a partial subsidy provided by the Galeria Ogiva in Óbidos. Now

that it is difficult for galleries to subsist, and since very few have been able to do what the gallery in Óbidos did, it is even more important that the question of small subsidies for works of an experimental nature should be guaranteed by legislation in the area of the visual arts. The first exhibition of this environment was therefore at the Galeria Ogiva between April and June in 1972. Only later was it put on display at AR.CO, during the month of June 1973. Ana Vieira made some corrections to it, the most important being the joining together of all of the furniture painted and upholstered in blue. The same shade of blue, used with a very definite intention, which we will analyse later.

Aesthetics is the science that studies the conditions and laws of artistic creation and everything that concerns the perception and reading of an artwork. One of the elements that is essential to a correct reading is the final execution of the object by means of creative reading, in *creative fidelity*. For this reason, the attitude of many modern artists forces the spectator to intervene as, with new proposals, they fear that spectators will pass by without paying the minimum of attention required to understand the new form. It is a way of forcing the reader to engage with the new code that has been proposed.

Anyone who is used to an artistic language might very easily classify a new language as non-sense. Of course, when we speak of languages, in the sense of spoken languages, the problem is less serious. People easily recognise their ignorance, because they have not learnt the language and can neither speak nor read it. It is not so with art. Everyone believes that they know, but people in general do not understand that it is necessary to decode a new language in order to be able to decipher it, and only the supreme vanity of ignorance leads people to reject as bad what they have not understood.

This century, the manifestos that exist to help people understand the new languages proposed have multiplied, but, from a certain point onwards, modern artists considering creative participation, the final realisation of the object that exists only when executed by the *active receiver*, have forced the public to intervene in this same object. Thus, in the face of a perfectly inactive society of masses, who suck up television images, or, slouched in the cinema, absorb everything that they are given, works began to appear that had to be finished by the public. This attitude is an extremely logical one. In 1973, the Museum of Modern Art in New York included in the catalogue for the exhibition "Techniques and Creativity" a multiple by Jasper Jones that contained drawn circles, three watercolour rings and a brush. The owner was invited to collaborate in Jasper Jones's work. The artist, as we have seen, included in the object itself the material and the instrument required for the collaboration. He formally included it: pulling them out would already be one intervention. Using them to paint and putting them back would be another. In both cases, the intervention is undertaken and the participation could be valid. But if this process is used a lot, the truth is that, to some extent, it has already become equivocal and banal. It will be hugely original when the public is forced to participate more deeply because its primary mode of participation has been denounced.

Creation, as Worringer said, is an objectified sentimental projection - objectified empathy. Ana Vieira projected an ambient object. In other words, one defined as separate and reified, demanding active understanding yet intentionally closing itself to any dubious intervention, creating what is presented. The reading realises the object in the complete rejection of our subjective intervention. This is the place of the objective.

A house inhabited by silence, by the poetic absence-presence of the artist who made it, is an inside that is populated by the outside.

The house is a dwelling. The house is the cohabitation of internal and external spaces that interpenetrate each other. But the house is the untouchable maternal womb, the mystery of creation. The real house that we experience has windows, which bring the outside into its inside, and doors, which take us inside, charged with the exterior, and which allow us to leave, charged with the inside with pieces of the outside.

Ana Vieira's ambient object is a house with its various rooms, walls, window, and doors. But the main door is closed. I saw people surround the house and focus on the door in their desire to enter to play at dolls' houses. But this house does not allow you to play in that way. Its dimensions are the real dimensions of the houses in which we live and it contains air, light, railings, flowers, and soil from the garden. It contains furniture, doors, and fitted carpets. The trees, clouds, and earth are there. And the closed door negates the poet's easy illusion of seeing himself understood only because his environment has been traversed. The route here is a commitment to a reading that understands the original and decided plot, which compels us to the route surrounding it, to the penetration of the gaze. There are four sheets of transparent nylon that shut off what is open, walls that the colour of the foliage and the sky eliminate in the continuation of the walls.

With regard to the imitation of reality, the house plays with abstraction and concreteness in the combining of patterns that signify inside (partition walls, doors, walls), and outside, plants, balusters, trees, sky, garden soil. Reflection, shade, presence, and absences.

The hard yet walls on the verge of breaking are ethereal with blue and transparent with green from outside. In this, we see the wise and decisive use of colour. The furniture, which is blue itself, loses matter. The trees from the garden on the inside walls are green, white gates, coloured fruits and flowers. The blue monotone creates the ethereal.

There are two structuring movements. That of realisation and that of derealisation. Transparent cloth, hanging cushions, drawings and colour in the creation are walls

are gates
are doors
are trees
are clouds
are fruits
are flowers
it is a floral fitted carpet.
All real.

The derealisation of the painted walls causes them to disappear, giving way to ubiquity. The blue-painted furniture (the colour of air), the rug which is real but which is placed against the fitted carpet made with the fabric of transparent curtains (created carpet) evades reality and is an impossible rug. The same occurs with the hat rack and the mound of soil with flowers. What is most real is the impossible made presence.

On the other hand, there is realisation.

The kitsch objects have been transformed into real objects. The plastic flowers and fruit, unlikely imitations of the authentic, are poetically transformed into picked flowers and fruit, a signal image of the real *gesture* that they render concrete. They are real fruits with taste and smell; they are the plant in the vase, rising up like a small creeper, balancing itself in the poetic gesture of growing and blossoming. They are the flowers abandoned on the sofa and scattered on the ground. The most real, the most absolutely real, the remains of a presence that absented itself and left everything

hanging in time.

Simplicity. Enchantment. Far from the claim that any of these objects has for itself in wanting to deceive and resemble reality in its oh-so-similar plastic. Ana kills deceit and defines herself as essentially anti-kitsch.

A manifesto on space, Ana Vieira's environment brings the "life of the form", space, clinging to it. A dialectic of refusal, it is the living continuity of the entire history of spatial creativity. An ingenuous testimony of centuries of experience in this domain: when I approached it, the first reaction that I had was to imaginatively place a baroque angel on top of the nearest cloud. From that point on, everything was clear to me. I had the code with which to read it. Mannerist space, rococo space, ancient space, many spaces, distant roots which are all present.

Importance of the vertical and horizontal co-ordinates.

- Vertically, the limits of the house provided what was impassable on foot, and what was habitable by the eyes (which are also our real body which "is in the world") and was swallowed into the inside, as in Velasquez's *Las Meninas*.

- Horizontally, we found that the ground was affirmed and the roof suppressed by the oblique invasion of the clouds, the last of which had fallen in the furthest corner of the house, near a writing desk, poetically asleep in the slumber of infancy.

The ground was the long continuity, the roof the affirmation of the large, broad space of the celestial arched roof invading the house with clouds. Here, the photograph fails the object. We saw none in which the transfigured cushions there did not become shabby and meaningless. There, however, they were clouds.

This suppression of the roof reminded me of the effective suppression of roofs by the effects of painting and baroque and rococo plaster.

From the hanging cloud to the cloud on the ground, we pass from the suppression of the roof to the subsequent affirmation of the base, like the fundamental coordinate for the *definition of the ethereal* through the tension created between the horizontal opaque and the transparent vertical planes. The carpet, the rug, the fallen fruit, the soil, the flowers that topple over, and the flowers in the vase that delicately rise up are the ground.

The dwelling of *silence* was the house of the female poet that left her lyricism clinging to the empty house through which she passed, which she shaped, which she touched with the conscious precision of what it meant and what we must also understand in the proposed opening.

The encounter with this environment came to me to the exact extent that it structured what I think about space, what I have always experienced as space, in architecture, in sculpture, in painting, and in my own poetry."

Colóquio-Artes, no.22, 2.ª série /17.º ano, April, 1975, pp. 24-28

Catalogue Ana Vieira: Muros de Abrigo / Shelter Walls; Ponta Delgada [Azores], Museu Carlos Machado, Lisboa, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2010, pp. 228-230 (org. Paulo Pires do Vale)
