

DANIEL FROTA: IRREALIS MOOD
FONDAZIONE SANDRETTO RE REBAUDENGO,
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Brazilian artist Daniel Frota's (b. 1988) new show fills The Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Foundation with sculptures and videos which interrogate the gap between history and stories.

In his first solo exhibition in Italy, the artist layers politically-charged materials on top of one another, for example tempered glass on brutalist concrete bases. Presented within a place of free thought and aesthetic consideration, the meanings associated with the artworks are turned upside down and important questions considered: for example, what happens when our mental constructions fade? Through these compositions, Frota focuses less on what's 'real' and more on the idea of alteration and fabrication – breaking the stability of the world as we perceive it.

Following the compilation of two years of research, the show demonstrates Frota's interest in 'ucronia': a crisis of modern thought deriving from the genre of science fiction in which it is possible to reinterpret an event that has happened. His multi-media works act upon this, reconstituting events as conceptually fluid sculptures or film installations. In the same way, the chosen title, *Irrealis mood*, references a linguistic term: a group of verbs that allow the speaker to form sentences about things that might have happened.

In the wake of his interest in ucronia and this specific syntactic structure, the artist focuses on events from the 20th century history of science, architecture, literature and art, and dismisses them as fact. Using this hypothetical language as a thread, Frota interweaves cultures and offers them within a new context as re-written narratives.

Ginevra Bria

GINEVRA BRIA: From where does *Irrealis Mood* take form? Could you please describe inspirations and insight behind your first solo Institutional exhibition in Italy?

DANIEL FROTA: The exhibition *Irrealis Mood* happened from a collaboration between Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo and École Nationale Supérieure des beaux-arts de Lyon, where I participated in the postgraduate programme last year. The exhibition is a result from the last two-year research, initiated when I was living in Amsterdam and follow up by last year's production in Lyon. 'Irrealis mood' is a term taken from linguistics. It characterises a group of verbal modes in the English language that allows the speaker to form sentences on things that are unknown to her or him; things that are not yet confirmed; or things that are unverifiable. It is a set of grammatical moods used whenever contingency and unpredictability is involved. I stumbled across this term while writing very personal observations — that turned out to be pretty ambivalent as well — on what would be my own cultural heritage in relation to a geographic and economic state of affairs of a nomad practice. I decided to write them as open ended questions, 'what if' was applied in the beginning of the sentences as a hypothetical exercise of displacing my own perspective into an imagined and possible scenario. 'What if the floor plans of our projects were nothing more than descriptive drawings of their ruins? What if Charles Darwin's face appeared on banknotes? What if modern times were born in the northeast of Brazil?' were a few of those. The exhibition references events from 20th century related to history of science and architecture, such as the eclipse from 1919 and the deterioration of modernism in Brazil. The works trace back memories in which there was a shift or a break in the prevailing set of beliefs, questioning the difficulty of committing to ideologies nowadays. By looking into particular moments where beliefs were subjected to revision, the exhibition tries to map the source of my ambivalence and skepticism towards this heritage.

How did you define uchronia's notion by materials and different kind of surfaces? How your composing process does become a way of forming, of representing a fictional present?

The notion of uchronia came into play when I realised that the 'Irrealis mood' could be a tool to write the exhibition. Uchronia is a subgenre of sci-fi literature which relies on modifying a historical event in the past, and consequently recreating a new, fictional present. It basically suggests the ability of reading reality not as a necessity, but as a possibility. The show is composed by sculpture and video works mainly. In reconstituting events from the past, I was interested in how alternative materials and different ways of combining them could reshape symbolic relations and bend ideological meanings behind the originals. In the same way that discursive strategies of storytelling could draw attention to the differences between history and stories. For instance, the three floor pieces in the show is a series of sculptures that have the quality of architecture models or diagrams. They reference architecture as long-term plans, as something made to last. They use a material vocabulary from modernism — glass, concrete, geometry — but they are found materials, leftovers cracked on the edges, reassembled as non-permanent compositions. In most of them, the materials are just resting or leaning against each

other, composing informal and provisory arrangements. A process that is analogous to the one of composing sentences, changing the position of words, shifting associations. In that sense, I'm very much interested in the relation between sculpture and writing.

Could you please shortly describe *Sol Preto* (2016)? How did you conceive it and why?

Sol Preto is a video I shot in the city of Sobral, Ceará, in the northeast of Brazil. From this small city in the countryside, a group of British scientists documented a total solar eclipse in 1919 and the photographs taken back then were considered the first successful proof of Einstein's General Relativity theory. The video depicts a visit to the city nowadays, telling the story of the scientific expedition through the local perspective. It combines footage in two local museums — one dedicated to Dom José Tupinambá da Frota, the local bishop and one of the authorities that welcomed the group of scientists, and the Museu do Eclipse, dedicated exclusively to the event. I was specially interested in the clash between the local extreme religiosity and the scientific inquiry. Among the population, rumours about the end of the world spread with the arrival of the scientists from abroad. Illiteracy, technological delay and local superstitions overlap with the experiment that opened up the path to modern physics. The video is narrated by two local musicians through a duel of 'repente' recorded inside the dome of the new planetarium of the city. 'Repente' is an oral tradition that uses improvised verses to tell a story. The two narrators then built an improvised history around the eclipse, associating the natural phenomenon with progressive ideas of the time in Brazil, such as the beginning of modern art. This work also brings a personal link to the city of Sobral, since I've been there several times during my childhood to visit my mother's family, that still lives in this region.

Moreover, talking about *Uma jornada infinita de sonhos e descobertas* (2016), which aspects, which approaches of Lina Bo Bardi's practice/theories do affect/impress you the most?

This installation was born from an encounter I had last October and it is based on a photograph I took in São Paulo inside Sesc Pompéia. I knew that some of the original crystal displays designed by Lina Bo Bardi in the 60's were stored in the Sesc Pompéia buildings, also designed by her. The displays were originally designed for the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo in 1968 and in the 90's they were abandoned after a long dispute with political and ideological overtones between the directors of the institution. Composed by sheets of tempered glass stuck vertically into concrete cubes, this display system was an anti-museum critique on the linear and authoritarian guidance of the walls. Their modernist ideal of transparency and freedom for the visitors, over time, were betrayed by their material deterioration. The structures suffered with the humidity and heat from Brazilian tropical climate, the sheets of glass where the collection of paintings of the museum where hanging started to dilate, putting the preservation of the artworks in danger. After Lina Bo Bardi's death in 1992, MASP built white plaster walls where the paintings were installed and put the displays in storage. The picture of the original displays disassembled, with the concrete cubes completely cracked and the sheets of glass leaning against the wall crossed by masking tapes

stuck in my head. Two months later I visited the inauguration of the painting collection of MASP, with new versions of the display system, marking the come back of Bo Bardi's original project. The beauty of the reproductions couldn't hide the patina of anachronism that seemed to have grown on the structures after almost 20 years in storage. The concerns now are different, an institution seeking its roots, anchoring itself in a project that was not at all about safety. The title 'Uma jornada infinita de sonhos e descobertas' is a quote found in the presentation text of the new reproductions in MASP — it is the definition of art signed by the sponsor bank. This installation recreates the state of those objects in the photograph, some sort of monument to the original project dismantled in storage. In Brazil, Lina Bo Bardi became an institution herself. With her husband, Pietro Maria Bardi, they were responsible for big part of the development of Brazilian progressive thinking. But she is not only praised for her architecture projects. I'm very interested in her thoughts on Brazilian design as well. She was fundamental in drawing attention to Brazilian popular craftsmanship by proposing its essential link with the beginning of industrial design. She was sensitive to the local culture and Brazilian colonial history. While in the early 60's the first design school in Brazil was inaugurated under influence of Max Bill in Rio de Janeiro, importing a german curriculum from Hfg-Ulm, Lina Bo Bardi was idealising from scratch the Escola de Desenho Industrial e Artesanato outside the main center Rio-São Paulo, in Salvador, Bahia — a project that unfortunately never came to life.