



# CINNAMON

## AN INFINITE DESIRE: *GOZOLÂNDIA* BY PRISCILA FERNANDES

By Óscar Faria

The description of *The Land of Cockaigne*<sup>1</sup> (1567), a later work by Pieter Brueghel, in a guidebook at Alte Pinakothek museum, in Munich, mentions as follows: “Paradise? The literary source [for this painting] was a story published in 1546 in Antwerp, based on a farce by Hans Sachs [16<sup>th</sup>-century German shoemaker and poet] that decries sloth, gluttony and indolence.”

During the time of the Lutheran Reform a change in style is detectable in Brueghel’s paintings. This is identifiable in terms of a greater simplicity in the representation, corresponding with the ideals of the austere life-style proclaimed by Protestantism. Brueghel and Sachs were contemporaries, and a direct influence of a Protestant ethic can be found in both their works.

Inspired by Sachs’ religious and political beliefs, Brueghel, in his painting *The Land of Cockaigne*, wished to make an image that would contain a moral. On the 52x78 cm panel there are three main figures - a soldier, a peasant farmer and a clerk- who, lying on the ground around the “Cockaigne tree”, appear to be dreaming following a huge feast. This satirical view of idleness is underlined in a preparatory etching for this piece, which is inscribed with, “All you loafers and gluttons always lying about -farmers, soldiers and clerks, who live without work. Here the fences are sausages, the houses are cake, and the fowl fly roasted, ready to eat.”

*The Land of Cockaigne* is also addressed by situationist Raoul Vaneigem, although with a very distinct ethic. “In *The Land of Cockaigne*, abundance is natural, kindness is native and harmony is universal. Nothing, from the myth of the golden age of Fourier, has exalted more nobly the dreams of the body and of the earth, the secret and joyous symphonies that compose a reason carefully forewarned about the rationality of laborious tumult, active misery and competitive fantasy.” He adds that “The Land of Plenty erects itself as a project within the subject: everything comes to he who learns to desire without end. ‘Do what you want’ is an emaciated plant that only asks to grow and embellish itself.”<sup>2</sup>

During the transition from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several French artists portrayed the tension between work and leisure, translated into works such as *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1886) by Georges Seurat, *In the Time of Harmony. The Golden Age is not in the Past, it is in the Future* (1893-95) by Paul Signac, *Luxury, Calm and Pleasure* (1904) by Henri Matisse and even *The Bathers* (1894-1905) by Paul Cézanne. Impressionism, Divisionism and Fauvism, the movements driving these works, place us before a world that is being transformed by the Industrial Revolution. Movements such as these have been referred to as ‘poetry in painting’<sup>3</sup>, where the call to nature, the last bastion of hope for a glimmer of the lost paradise, is evident.

The ideas of Felix Fénéon (1861-1944) also became popularized at this time. Signac, in 1890, painted a kaleidoscope portrait of this writer, anarchist and art critic. Fénéon famously coined the term neo-impressionism and was the inventor of a new literary genre, “Novels in Three Lines”. A novel by Fénéon: “The marine paintings by Mr. Seurat extend with calm and melancholy and even in the direction of the far off decline of the sky, monotonously they murmur.”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Land of Cockaigne* (*Luilekkerland*, in Dutch literature) is a land of gluttony and sloth, a mythical land of plenty where no one needs to work, as food and drink can be found in abundance and for free. There our desires are always met.

<sup>2</sup> Vaneigem, Raoul; *In Praise of Refined Laziness*, in the volume *Laziness*, Editions du Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Russel, John; “Seurat”. London: Thames and Hudson, 1965

<sup>4</sup> Fénéon, Felix; “Novels in Three Lines”, Avesso Collection, Leça da Palmeira, 2014.

Priscila Fernandes has worked with these sources to produce her installation *Gozolândia e Outros Futuros* [Cuckoo Land and Other Futures], commissioned originally for the 32nd Biennial of São Paulo. The project includes a film and a series of *photo-paintings*, through which the artist reflects on current working conditions, comparing them to Abstract Art, particularly the political and social contexts of this movements' emergence.

The photographs were produced by Fernandes adding scratches, holes and dyes to the photo negatives, thus allowing this developing process to circumscribe the territory of the image with a festive, carnival and even idle atmosphere.

In the original installation, the artist placed deckchairs in front of the photographic prints, allowing the Biennial visitors rest but also so that they could take their time to enjoy the work. The photographs direct us to the theories of colour - from Johannes Itten to Wassily Kandinsky, from John Peter Russell to Paul Cézanne. There is a visual and verbal happiness in these prints, of which the vorticism "AhAhAh" is exemplary. These creations celebrate, above all, life and its passions, in the Spinozian sense<sup>5</sup>.

Filed entirely in the Ibirapuera Park in São Paulo and in the cultural institutions located within it: the Museum of Modern Art, Afro Brazil Museum and Biennial Foundation. The film comprises a series of shots that not only evoke idyllic and leisurely periods in life: childhood and old age, but also stories of exploitation: the colonisation of Brazil by the Portuguese, and of competition: "I want success, I want a massive car", says a body-builder in a scene that intrudes in the frames of great serenity that transpire in the film.

Fernandes' narrative begins with two girls picking candy floss from trees "everything is made of sweets here", they say. Then ends with a little boy who, after rolling on the grass, says, "Ai! Que preguiça!" (Ah, such laziness!), a quote from the famous novel *Macunaíma* by Brazilian author Mário de Andrade. When the main character in the novel says this phrase, he doubly underlines his laziness - *ai* in Tupi (spoken by the indigenous peoples of Brazil) and *preguiça* in Portuguese both mean "sloth". Therefore in this project, there is a perspective of others, whose voices so often remain unheard<sup>6</sup>.

The journey we take with Fernandes directs our attention for a few moments toward what leisure insinuates. It is the right to laziness, relaxation and sleep. There will be time for running, yoga, dating, playing and visiting the library. In the fingers walking along the spine of a book the artist can be seen flicking through exhibition catalogues. notably that of the 1949 exhibition at the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art, *From Figurative Art to Abstractionism*, before returning to a page in a monograph dedicated to Seurat showing his painting *Bathers at Asnières* (1887). Next is a shot of the Ibirapuera lake, where a young woman is sitting on one of the banks, directly recalling the melancholic and ghostly figure in Seurat's painting. A temporal arc unites these two characters forever.

Finally, comes a moment where the artist appears wearing a 'pointillist' leotard and improvises a dance. She moves circularly, facing the camera, making rhythmic waving gestures with her arms. The motion of her feet expresses a desire to take flight, up towards the treetops and the sky: that absolute freedom, which should also be the intention of art.

In this last moment of her video Priscila Fernandes becomes colour, becomes nature. The artist has finally found her *Land of Cockaigne*.

---

<sup>5</sup> "Whilst our feelings or affections originate in the external encounter with other existing modes, they are explained by the nature of the affected body and by the necessarily unsuitable idea of this body, confused image contained in our condition. These affections are passions, as we are not their suitable cause" (III, def. 2) in Deleuze, Gilles "Espinosa e os signos", Rés Editora, Porto, 1970, p. 52.

<sup>6</sup> As recently noted by anthropologist Eduardo Viveiro de Castro, "(...) the battle of the indigenous peoples is also our battle; the indigenous struggle. The indigenous people are an example to us." From Castro, Eduardo Viveiros de "Os involuntários da patria", published during the act "Abril Indígena", Cinelândia, Rio de Janeiro, 20/04/2016.