

NOVO BANCO Photo 2015: Ângela Ferreira, Ayrson Heráclito, Edson Chagas
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Introduction to the interview with Angela Ferreira

In the opening pages of the project *Revolutionary Traces* (2014 -15), Ângela Ferreira declares, ‘Buildings can be read as political texts and this is what I try to do.’ In many respects, this sentence summarizes most of her practice, which is indeed a relentless inquiry into the reading of the buildings that surround us, into the consequences of both their presence and their disappearance. Her incisive attention, however, goes beyond the surface of each architecture scrutinized to explore and provide nuance to the various historical episodes imprinted in those buildings. At multiple levels, Ferreira’s work questions the meaning and interpretation of modern architecture and urbanism, in which the artist sees some of the most constitutive aspects of our current sociopolitical, cultural and economic experience. An experience that for someone like Ferreira, whose personal and professional journeys are embedded in historical discourses framed by post-colonialism, is the subject of experimentation and revolutionary approaches to contemporary art. Her most recent work, *A tendency to forget* (2015), subject of this exhibition, follows some aspects characteristic of such *modus operandi*. On the one hand, it reflects on the architecture, both in its structural form and in its capacity for it to be inhabited. Whilst on the other hand, it presents an episode of Portuguese colonial history.

A tendency to forget (2015) is based in an insightful view of the life and work of anthropologists Jorge and Margot Dias, whose researches on the Mozambican Makondes granted them international recognition in the 1960s and 1970s. *Os Macondes de Moçambique I, II, III, and IV* written in 1964, 1970 and 1966, as described for most of their contemporaries, were essential readings for those scholars attempting to fully grasp, respectively: historical and economic aspects; material culture; and social life and ritual of that society.¹ The artist’s research unveils not only the importance of those achievements at the dawn of the so-called New Anthropology, but also the discovery of a hidden political agenda behind Dias’s investigations and their alliances to the Salazar Regime. Jorge Dias studied folklore and ethnology in Nazi Germany, for instance —details that are blurred in his biographies, leaving to the readers’ imagination what could be the influence that the war and that period of his life could have had into his studies on humanity.² The same could be said of Margot Dias, whose hesitation to respond to any direct question about that period was notorious.³ However, as anthropologist Harry G. West points out, “for the Dias, war did not end with the fall of Berlin. Like all subjects of

¹ Dias, Jorge, *Os Macondes de Moçambique I: Aspectos históricos e económicos*; and Dias, Jorge and Margot Dias, *Os Macondes de Moçambique II: Cultura material*; and *Os Macondes de Moçambique III: Vida social e ritual*; *Os Macondes de Moçambique IV: Sabedoria, língua, literatura e jogos* (with Manuel Viegas Guerreiro). Lisboa: Junta de Investigações do Ultramar, 1964, 1964, 1970 and 1966

² West, Harry G. “Inverting the Camel’s Hump. Jorge Dias, his wife, his interpreter and I” in Richard Handler, *Significant Others: Interpersonal and Professional Commitments in Anthropology*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004, p. 51 - 92

³ *Ibid.*, p. 81-82

Portugal, the continue to struggle with the dilemma of self-distorting compliance with authoritarian power or self-destructive resistance to it, even past the day when the Salazar regime, weakened by wars waged against it by African nationalists like Rafael Mwakala, fell in 1974.”⁴

It this latest feature of their story, ambiguous and ambivalent at once, that most attracted Ferreira in the first place. The attention here is not focus on providing evidences of that history, on the contrary, Ferreira furnishes the viewer, with the possibility of reading between the lines, or better said, challenge him or her to extract a non-written history from the montage she has made of the anthropologists’ imaginary. Ferreira digs into that history, and in particular into the diaries of Margot Dias, subverting her colonial gaze in a critical twist that transforms the researcher into the subject of another researcher’s study. The work, a human scale sculpture that the viewer is invited to inhabit, is concerned with memory. Memory of the events of an untold story, and the institutionalization of that undelivered memory, secluded—at least to date—in the archive of the former Overseas Ministry, currently Ministry of Defence, whose façade Ferreira reproduced in the sculpture. A memory erased from Portuguese’s popular imaginary, that the artists urges us to remember.

⁴ Ibid., p. 82