

The end begins at the leaf – choreographies of transformation: the rainforest and beyond.

The forest I first knew is called the Mata Atlântica, the Atlantic forest. It runs along the coast in Brazil from Rio Grande do Norte to Rio Grande do Sul and contains many different landscapes. One of these multitudes of forests covers my home city of Rio de Janeiro and creeps into the windows of my childhood memories; envelops me with its smell of rain, leaves and rotten jackfruit. There are days when I can almost smell it here as I carry it with me walking around London.

The second forest I came to know well was the Amazon rainforest, as I tried to track down an inkling of my father's family, always so shrouded in silence, a family made of so many different epic stories; of indigenous, Lebanese, and Portuguese people; of immigration, migration, loss, and gain; of a burning reach for respectability that resulted in so much pain. I am still trying to track these stories down. They are only ever recounted in snippets.

But I did come to know the Amazon in a different way since I first started going there fifteen years ago, and particularly since I began ethnographic research with quilombo (maroon) communities living near the border with Suriname, a relationship that took many years to build, and which resulted in my living there for two years. And funnily enough as I try to think of what I know about that forest, all the facts and information, all the history, all the days spent drinking coffee, playing dominoes and eating fish, all the journeys by canoe and hanging in hammocks in wooden boats, what first comes to my mind are the colours of the moss, the vines and the wall of forest, and the smell of wet bark and trees, and also of burning wood.

And the smell of burning wood is what struck me as I walked around this exhibition for the first time yesterday, the end begins at the leaf, and the effort that Antonio and Borba have made to return themselves and us to the essence of

the materials that are around us constantly, and that we persistently take for granted, are distracted away from. Materials whose extraction in places like the Amazon is so violent and so deep, a violence that as we glide around this cold city, seems almost other worldly, or maybe that we make other worldly so easily, as we try to point the finger and say: the violence is over there, not here.

It is a different sense of violence that I have as I watched tankers glide up the Trombetas River to ship so many thousand tons of bauxite from the forest around me to be made into aluminium in foreign plants, as the Amazon's blackest and therefore richest earth is removed to be transformed into our cutlery, bikes, bowls, and so on and on. And the quilombo families that I work with also have a different sense of all this violence as they return to their communities with these same manufactured goods, made from the earth of their land, and attempt to embed them in a collective life again somehow.

Transformation and movement seem constant here. Extraction and return. Extraction and return. And painstakingly what I seem in these rooms are Antonio and Borba's deep analysis of some of the materials involved in this deep relationship between our own bodies and experiences and the objects and materials and colours, flesh and fruit that make us and that we make and unmake and put together and take apart to keep living. Opening up the minute details and textures, looking at the softness and possibility to transform in the hardest places, making anew and offering us this story.

In this painstaking effort, I am taken back to the moments of making, and of painstaking protection that I have had the privilege to take part in on the Erepecuru River, which continue to refuse the unmaking and destruction that is always so close by despite the enormity of life that surrounds the communities. I wonder if it is in this painstaking effort, in the minute details, in the grains of earth and wood and crumbling coal, and in the purplest matchboxes of our homes, that we can find our next steps, and I thank both Antonio and Borba for bringing me along with them.