

ALEXANDRE SEQUEIRA



Alexandre Sequeira est un artiste plasticien diplômé en architecture et spécialiste de la sémiotique et des arts visuels à l'Institut des sciences de l'art de l'UFPA (Université fédérale du Pará). Il est également maître en arts et technologies à l'UFMG (Université fédérale du Minas Gerais) et professeur à la Faculté des arts visuels de l'UFPA depuis 18 ans.

#### FOREST'S VOICES

For a few years, Alexandre Sequeira visited quilombos, communities founded by freed and escaped slaves, in the state of Pará. Amid the memories he lived with there, he realized that the affective dimension is one of the greatest forms of quilombo resistance, the reason why the cemeteries of these communities became important spaces in their territory and culture. Part of the historical experience of the quilombo is established through the cemeteries, marking cycles of life and death, and highlighting the ritual passing of time. Given the cultural centrality of these places, they are violently disputed by farmers or “grileiros”, speculators who are interested in land, and who see the attacking of cemeteries not only as a way to clear these lands, but mainly as a form of the political and cosmological dislocation of the people that are buried there, and are being reborn. Because of this, illegally setting fire to cemeteries has become a practice in Pará. Siege to memory is a denouncement of this situation.

Photography presents itself in the moment as a possibility of capturing a fragmented, residual element, but can be read as a cipher of something that goes further than that – a mirage of great synthesis. As Joan Fontcuberta points out, every photograph is fiction that is presented as truth. It is fiction by instinct, because its nature does not allow it to be anything else. However, what is most important is not its compromise with truth, but how the photographer makes use of this fictional character – to what intention it serves. In summary, what is most important is the control exerted by the photographer in imposing an ethical direction to this fiction.

“In 2006 and 2007, I was invited to carry out several actions in quilombos in the state of Pará – but specifically in the municipality of Cametá and Marajó island. These actions, promoted by the Programa Raízes and run by the Government of the State of Pará, had land titling for diverse rural communities in the state as their end goal. But the project’s scope of action aimed at being wider, involving not only legal issues, but also strategies to strengthen the cultural values of these social clusters, with a view to contribute effectively towards the permanence of the territories in question. My activity consisted, together with the residents, of building affective maps.

## **NOT TO FORGET**

Color pencils glided across the large white piece of paper stretched across the table, giving shape to the spontaneous occupation of the site (shown by the arrangement of homes, now aligned, now dispersed, suggesting a casual and winding outline), points for storing and selling of food, pools of drinking water, spaces of collective living. Around it, straits that snaked through the forest were signaled on the map as living spaces for the enchantments of the world of the waters. Added to these subjective territories were other natural sanctuaries and the land of the dead – a holy field where these communities buried and worshipped the memory of their ancestors. From the numerous stories told, a few stood out, like the biting cruelty at the dead of night in an attempt to eliminate the memories, remove the remains of the dead, of the ancestors, and of the symbolic resistance that lay beneath the earth. The destroyed cemeteries, desecrated graves, and burned gravestones do not erase the scar that remains on the living body and that tells their story. Given the sheer impossibility to register such acts, that cowardly take advantage of the dead of night, it is only possible to listen attentively so as not to forget.

## **LITTLE ANGEL’S GRAVE**

A piece of candle left next to the dry forest started a fire that quickly besieged a simple cemetery in a settlement in the northeast of the state. Even in the face of the imminent danger, the local residents selflessly continued with the worship of their ancestors, chanting prayers that sounded more like wailing. The documentation of this resistance goes on to be a way of evoking similar stories of pain and threat, forming Cerco à

Memória, an installation that appropriates photographs taken in northeast Pará, at an all souls night, which registers a fire in the forest encircling a cemetery. I make a poetic loan of this image to refer to the cruel and silent practice of erasing emotional bonds, which the inhabitants of some quilombos (hinterland settlements later founded by slaves) and agricultural settlements in the state of Pará suffer. Around the image is the litany of local communities, a lament to resistance.” (Alexandre Sequeira)

## SIEGE OF MEMORY | 2008

The end of a trip is just the beginning of another  
José Saramago

In tune with Saramago's words, Alexandre Sequeira always goes on a journey without measuring distances, the pleasure of the road is in the city to know, in the return to the place, in the affective relationships he establishes with people. Scenes, images and stories are constituted and shared; This was the case of Mocajuba, Lapinha da Serra – some others of Sequeira's works. The power of the encounter lies in the thread of memory, in the lived experiences, in the extension of the tender embrace that reaffirms the esteem to the other's body. In 2008, successive trips led him to former slave's communities and smallholder settlements. This time uneasiness prowled the environment, placing him amid the tensions, the usual silent threats. Memory and accounts brought back the nocturnal actions of erasure, the sharp cruelty of erasing memories, removing the traces of the dead, the ancestors, the symbolic resistance that lurked beneath the earth. The artist does not let go of what he listens and sees with his image, puts us in the center of the fire, inserts us in the risk situation, makes us think about the cemeteries that were and are burned in the illusion of exterminating kinship and affection.

The siege of memory leaves the marks of the violated tomb but fails to remove the tragic scar that remains in the living body that tells its story.

Marisa Mokarzel