

Rosana Paulino (São Paulo, 1972) was born in a family of African descent, and her first memories are of having to play with white, blonde dolls because no black dolls were available. This starts her own personal story demonstrating how the issue of black representation results in an almost complete absence of black people from the most diverse aspects of Brazilian life, including the history of visual arts, particularly plastic arts, and from the history of Brazil as a whole. As an artist, art researcher and teacher herself, she possesses extensive, rigorous information on this absence of representation, and more specifically, of self-representation. A brief historiography of the issue primarily highlights the presence of black people as artists adhering to European canons, such as the sculptor Aleijadinho (1730?-1814), Artur Timóteo da Costa (1882-1922) and brothers, and Estevão da Silva (1844-1891). They are also present as an exotic theme in the work of Dutch painters Franz Post (1612-1680) and Albert Eckhout (1610-1666). Renowned artists belonging to Brazilian modernism tended to follow the liturgy of modernism taking on European artistic practice and taking the Black and the Indian as themes usually inserted into exotic paintings of tropical flora and landscapes, with numerous examples found in the work of Tarsila do Amaral, Portinari, Emiliano Di Cavalcanti, and Lasar Segall. While there are instances of self-representation by black people in Brazilian art dating back to the 1930s, these were only recognised as such a short time ago. At the time of their production, they were viewed as artists belonging to a parallel art history, a black narrative considered secondary. This was the case of Heitor dos Prazeres, Yeda Maria, Rubem Valentim, Mestre Didi, and Emanuel Araújo. And while it is true that a generation of black artists has begun to produce intensively since 2000 – Sidney Amaral, Michelle Masthé, Renata Felinta, Paulo Nazareth, Rosana Paulino and others

– the Rio de Janeiro-São Paulo visual arts circuit was, until a few years ago, almost exclusively white.

Rosana Paulino's work contains a political and ethical dimension which demands that this hidden story is recognised and made visible. The book *The Honor Code. How Moral Revolutions Happen* by Kwame Anthony Appiah contains a paragraph dedicated to recognition: "We human beings need others to respond appropriately to who we are and to what we do. We need others to recognise us as conscious beings and to acknowledge that we recognise them. When you glance at another person on the street and your eyes meet in mutual acknowledgement, both of you are expressing a fundamental human need, and both of you are responding – instantaneously and without effort – to that need you identify in each other."ⁱ

The work of Rosana Paulino is a permanent call for the recognition of black people in history, as well as for the recognition of Afro-descendants in the present day. She demands, by extension, the recognition of all those who may be condemned in some way to be "the Negroes of the future", to use Achille Mbembe'sⁱⁱ expression, in a not so distant future as

the result of neoliberal financial globalisation. This demand is embodied in the denunciation of violence against black people made in the work 'Ama de leite' [Wet nurse] - the headless body of a woman, with no arms or legs, whose name derives from her function: to feed the children in her care.

Using various techniques – painting, drawing, photography, and weaving – the artist challenges and deconstructs colonial canons of knowledge production and circulation, particularly scientific knowledge and religious narratives, which were pivotal in justifying the slave trade and the colonisation of the spirit.

The set of works displayed in 'Atlântico Vermelho' [Red Atlantic] immediately evokes the consequences of European expansion. The expansion which destroyed Amerindian societies and imposed the slave trade between Africa and the Americas. Over more than three centuries, millions of Africans were captured and then sold as slaves, under the legal, moral, religious and economic rationale that they had no souls or rights, for they were part of the natural world. This attitude, which was espoused by much of contemporary European society, represents a dual-pronged violence, the effects of which are still felt to this day: violence towards nature, which was subjugated to colonial ventures; and violence against those who were enslaved, who were seen as part of the natural world. The work of Rosana Paulino seeks to permanently redeem these two subjugated entities, by unveiling this violence and lending visibility to the story of black people and of nature.

The piece 'História Natural?' [Natural History?] is illustrative of this aim, as it simulates what could be a volume of an Encyclopaedia. In a book comprising twelve illustrations, organised using the common titles and taxonomies of botany, zoology, mineralogy and 19th century European science, the artist makes impressive use of engraving and collage to disrupt the epistemology of science and the colonial project. The title 'Atlântico Vermelho' [Red Atlantic] evokes the work of Paul Gilroy: *O Atlântico Negro* [The Black Atlantic].³ As a whole, these pieces by Rosana Paulino extend the proposition of the slave trade, in which the Atlantic took centre stage, to its extreme, giving it a contemporary guise which avoids the amnesia produced by the now routine use of the term 'slavery'.

Rosana Paulino's work challenges memory, which is not limited to the act of remembering, but which derives from a process of filtering and the ongoing production of a narrative conditioned by trauma, nostalgia and denial. It addresses memory as a constant reconstruction. It is for this reason that her work has taken the construction and attempted temporal anchoring of family memories as a starting point. This can be seen in 'Parede da memória' [Memory Wall] (1994-2015), a work comprising 1,500 pieces, which reproduces eleven images from her family archive (housed in the collection at the Pinacoteca in São Paulo), or 'Bastidores' [Embroidery Frames], a set of frames containing photographs of faces of the women in her family, but with their mouths stitched over, silenced, deprived of speech, shouts, sound.

The set of works exhibited here, as a result of the themes addressed and the materials used – watercolour, sketches, textiles, clay, threads –, their liquidity – the occupation of the space is fluid and spilling – and the sculpted figures – women bound, amputated, caught on hooks –, serve another of the artist's concerns: to make visible the vulnerability to which black people have always been subjected, and, particularly black women. The lines are fine and delicate, the sculptures superbly crafted, but the expressions reflect great suffering, the pain of people at the mercy of those who dominate them.^{iv}

The work of Rosana Paulino also addresses other effects caused by colonialism, slavery and the expropriation of natural resources in Central and South America and in Africa, which quickened in later decades, particularly our forgetting of the extent to which nature is able to provoke the natural sublime within us. Many pages in the work 'História Natural?' [Natural History?] address this topic, such as the piece 'Paraíso Tropical' [Tropical Paradise] (2017).

In the 1980s, a group of mainly American philosophers – Milton Mayeroff, Carol Gilliam, Annette Baier, Virginia Held, Eva Feder Kittay, Sara Ruddick, and Joan Tronto – introduced a new debate in the field of ethics, termed 'ethics of care'. The innovative aspect of this philosophy, which departed from the idea of ethics as a set of universally valid, utilitarian imperatives, was that it considered that caretaking was not only relevant to the moral life embedded in interrelationships between people and their diversity, but that it was rooted in the intimate life of subjects, be they animals, the environment or even public service politics. 'Atlântico Vermelho' [Red Atlantic] displays the artistic boldness of considering caretaking as an active principle of life and art in the present, while applying the same intention to the past, particularly in relation to the history of the subordination of black people.

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i. APPIAH, Kwame Anthony (2010), *The Honor Code. How Moral Revolutions Happen*. New York. W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., p. xiii.

ii. MBEMBE, Achille (2013), *Critique de la Raison Nègre*. Paris: La Découverte.

iii. GILROY, Paul (1993), *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

iv. Despite its absence from this exhibition, this work is hugely important in the overall oeuvre of the artist.

