

TERRA LIVRE

exposição de
Diogo Simões

30.11.2023 — 17.02.2024

curada por
António Júlio Duarte
e Natxo Checa

Terra Livre (Free Land) is the exhibition by Diogo Simões (Miratejo, 1988) that can be seen at Galeria Zé dos Bois from 30 November until 17 February and which is the result of a working process between the artist, Natxo Checa and António Júlio Duarte, the curators. Focusing on a body of photographic work from approximately 2011 to 2020, the trio now presents us with a work that, while not destabilising the nature of the photographic image, nevertheless causes a stir in relation to the categories and framing of that image. For those who like to immerse themselves in this territory of hallucinations and deception, this is a feast. Such is the case with this writer.

With a well-established identity and an existence legitimised by the system, Zé dos Bois works to expand the territory of perceptions, nourishing the senses with stimuli that promote astonishment, growth, discomfort, power and truth. While not necessarily a territory of counter-cultures, ZDB has never ceased to be a space of various forms of resistance, where we find programme-makers who are alert, and it is in this context that this Terra Livre is now inserted.

This land that Diogo inhabits, where he moves around and which has stimulated the creation of these images, has had countless representations. We're talking about the south bank of the River Tejo, in particular Almada, Caparica, Miraço, Barreiro, Seixal, etc., and how this zone, full of contrasts that preserve the dialogues between the rhythms of the countryside and those of urbanity, often appears to us represented in politically committed images. What we mean by this is that the aesthetic dimension of the images taken in this zone invariably seems to be subjugated to a historical dimension that it immediately typifies, even before leaving the eye to pursue it gaze. Once this has happened, the viewer will find it difficult to observe the seductive portrait of a black young black man, veiled by a pall of smoke, a litre of beer in his hand, without projecting onto that portrait, images that populate continents and replace ideas. They look like images that are out there, but they're not. To feel, you have to look anew, always.

In the history of photographic images, a set of signs is being drawn up on which different cultures impose meaning. This process is not necessarily external to the artists who create them. This is not the Holy Land and there are no victims or culprits here. This is another strip, another zone, another creed. But here, too, there is resistance. We are learning to empower the images of social lives, most of the time without being aware of the endowment in progress. Sometimes, to endow them with singularity and originality is to banish them to marginalisation. We consciously or unconsciously reproduce stigmas, strengthening the cliché. The cliché is not empty. Reproducing something *ad nauseum* doesn't detract from its strength, it's "just" novelty, but what we mean here is that a photograph of a spider's web is obviously not always the same image. And the same applies to a photograph of a wave crashing on the beach, a photograph of a graffitied wall, a photograph of a ruin, a dead or embalmed animal, sofas without people and people without homes. If they become images, they will be autonomous, inhabiting the worlds of ideas and imagination. What may be less obvious is that this photograph of the spider's web is not about any spider's web, that one or any other. The subject of the photograph is the photograph itself, just as the subject of the painting is the painting and so on. This is not rhetoric. Meta-language and conceptual art are different things, and contemporary art, as a category, is not about that.

In this exhibition, it turns out that the mimetic processes that allow us to access the images place them in a different territory from the one that gave rise to them. Natural. This is also why, for the time being, we have avoided developing this primordial context. This is also the ordeal of the artist, who has to separate himself from the images, recognising that, in order to survive, they can only be meta-language. However, in the artistic dimension, where aesthetic experiences are promoted, all formal, particular and subjective territories are transformed into material logics, adding new relationships between thought and matter. When this material logic results in something new, the language of the human being expands, even if the culture doesn't see it. Culture, poor thing, is cross-eyed, we have to understand that.

But this is a sheet of paper and there are no hyperlinks here. This is an exhibition. The photographs are against the wall and there are no screens. Most of the images are in a format of around 75cm on the largest side, with a discreet black frame, without the protection of glass and there is a set of four large-scale images, printed on canvas. The layout is classic, linear, but there is no narrative. That the journey through the four rooms that house this exhibition takes place to the sound of a popular metric, guided above all by dialogues of colour, light and shade, is an invitation to question the apparently familiar references of the images. This is not documentary photography and this is not an explanatory text. Here, in order to have a voice, we have to use words that mean things and risk a poetry of references chewed up by a particular being. There, in order to truly experience the image, we have to do the opposite: forget the particularity of the individual and let the senses see beyond understanding.

Photography is image and image is idea. This is an old, apparently simple, structural statement that doesn't provoke much discussion. However, contemporaneity, with its speed, immediacy and paraphernalia of technological devices, seems to have overloaded the power of truth that has always inhabited pre-semiotics, from which springs a grammar that allows us to speak of formal and material logics, whose origin is spiritual, in the sense that it connects each individual with the universe. But if ideas are images, then how do we experience images? When we talk about aesthetic experience, we're talking about knowledge that takes shape in the senses. This is also why art and images carry with them the power to open doors of perception. It is in this vast field of the imagination and the individual and collective unconscious that images exist.

Therefore, what doors of perception do these images open?

First of all, perhaps it's important to return to the notion that the same photograph is not always the same image. Photography, as a technique that allows us to materialise images, is just "another" creative tool. In order to access its specificities and powers, we need to find the time to connect with its essence, i.e. to be amazed once again by its magic.

Why are the portraits Diogo presents here so compelling and seductive? We are captivated by the figures absorbed in their worlds. So many people, so many worlds, so much freedom! And, at the same time, the melancholy of the everyday gesture against the deafness of the monochrome takes root. There are some cows that are transported by comets of light to a sacred place, from where they will survive the fate of falling onto our plates. The soundsystem echoes, but the rooms are large and the sound is lost. The figures mould their bodies on the beds, in the fields, in the sand, where they fall asleep clinging to pleasure. We can hear the needle, one is lit, a ball is played and the toil continues. Corners. Paths. Cracks that occur inside and outside the images.

No image is emancipated without understanding, but the process of making something visible is long and often painful. During this process of giving to the world, the artist almost always moves away from the magical experience that only he can access when he immerses himself in the process of making. In that first magical moment, when intuition, knowledge and perception merge, time stops. Photography stops time. The white horse ceases to exist. We stare at the horse's head, listen to the chatter of the ants, feel the crawl of the approaching snake. We switch on the stereo and recognise ourselves in the dark.

In a creative, engaged process, with intentions more or less brought to consciousness, this time that photography manages to stop, grows inside us and an image is formed in the body. Sometimes in the gut, sometimes in the stomach, sometimes in the genitals, sometimes in the throat, sometimes in the jaw, etc., etc. We are in the world, we feel the power of the image that is enthusiastically emerging and we make the representation. Once we let go of the device, the image continues to change. The next moment, after the film has been processed, we look at the frames and it is in this material that the magic of an image is revealed which, coming out of us, casts a strangely familiar gaze and bewitches us. We feel this power, sometimes with disbelief, sometimes with frustration, but always with amazement.

In the photographs of immediacy (those that are born outside the body, on the screen) there are lethal doses of dopamine. Here, everything is political, everything is immediately public, consequential and mundane. Here, thought can't reverse the hourglass. It smells of power and fuck anyone who doesn't want to play. Here, where images of photography stop time, everything appears to us without a metronome. I would even say without territory. No man's land and everyone's land. A land of beaches and people who work the sea. A land of dense pine forests and arid areas, where freedom vibrates at low frequencies and nobody sees anything. A land of tearful skies and the smell of salt, but also of a segregating urbanism that insists on locking people in drawers and throwing the key into the river. A land of resistance, like art.

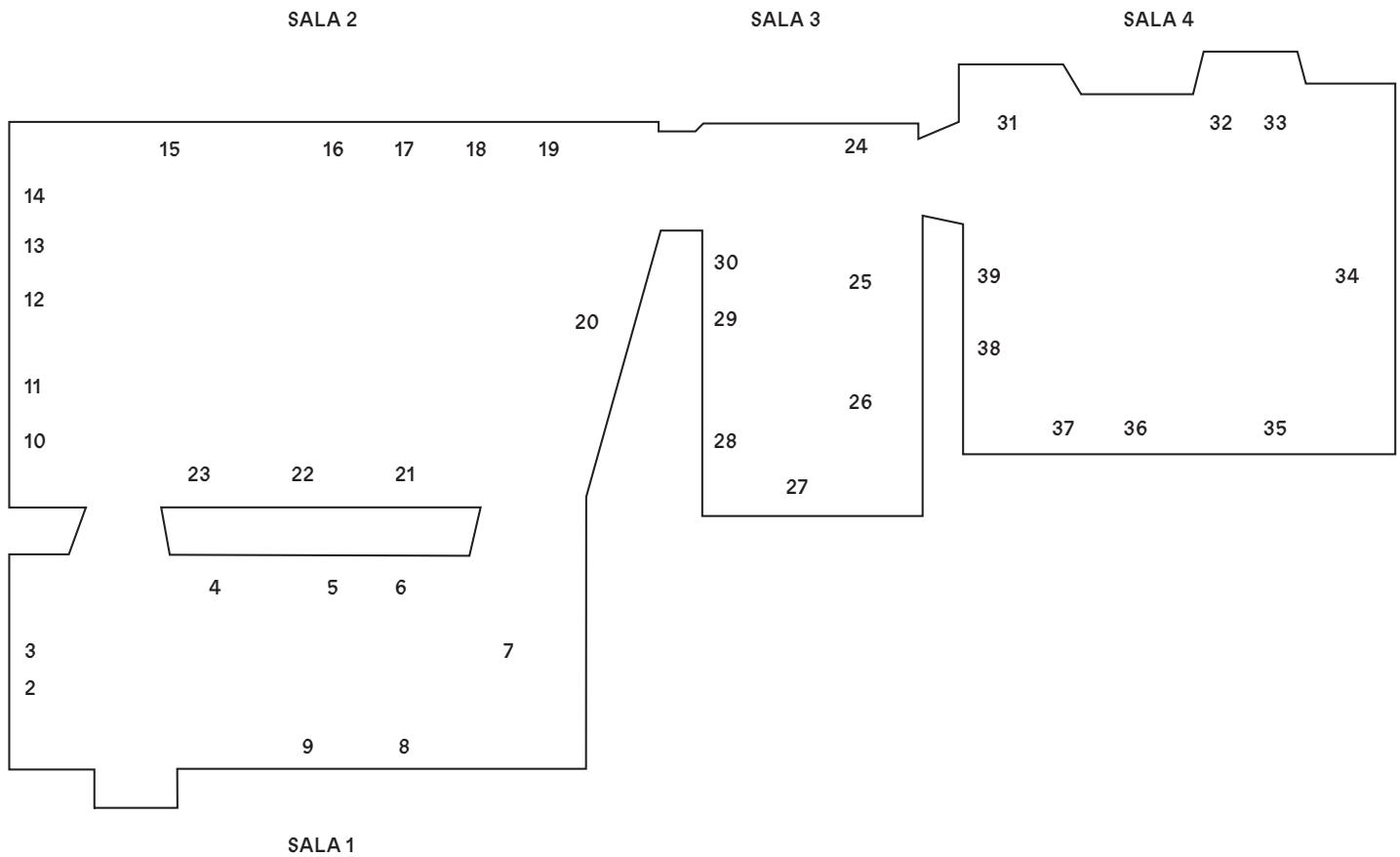
This art is a dimension that allows for knowledge that goes beyond understanding. We've already said that. Here, in this zone, a banquet is at our disposal and in this experience the common is apolitical. What unites us - and here I'm referring to an

intra- and inter-species relationship - is so much vaster than a territory of legitimised references that only a state of anhedonia can justify a lack of empathy with the pleasure of existing beyond the limits that society imposes on us. We fly from the windows of buildings to wild beaches and sleep on the sand, embracing with our bodies the stories of all the people who have slept there. We squint our eyes and see ideas dancing around seaweed, but also the rubble that characterises the landscape of this country, so incredibly giant in its diversity and so stupidly mediocre in its fears. We return to the cage, because sometimes we don't know if we are free beings or domesticated animals.

It's this: one thing is one thing and another thing is another thing, but both are part of the same thing. This is not rhetoric. We are all connected, even if there is no shortage of people promoting the idea of safety zones. The mediated image tries to feed the myth that there is a centre, where the origin is, and around which margins are founded, where everything that degenerates from that origin goes. But with photography we create particular images and in this photography, analogue and slow, resistance is ontological. It reinvents and/or subverts the established discourse of power. Infinities are erased, concretised, abstracted, levelled, compared and adapted. A man doesn't know where he's going and we offer him the river. On street corners, we make visible the ghosts that have lost their way at this crossroads. In the alleys, we invent ways out.

Because, by freezing time, the photographic image connects us with the present, we are sometimes intrigued by the fact that it tells us so much with so little. It's certainly a (serious) game that photography plays like no other. We're talking about that feeling of what is strangely familiar, at once popular and mysterious, perennial and ephemeral, particular and universal. In *Terra Livre*, we recognise Portugal, but what we are offered above all is a glimpse of a territory of people who belong nowhere but the places that intersect with the photographic experience of the artist, Diogo Simões. It is a territory of intimacies and stories that, in this way, rise to immortality.

Sofia Silva, November 2023



ESCADAS

1. *Ringue*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 231×289 cm

SALA 1

2. *Garras na Maxada*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75×60 cm

3. *Burri*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75×60 cm

4. *Segundo aniversário*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 60×75 cm

5. *Marchas de 2016*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75×60 cm

6. *Bambino*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75×60 cm

7. *Alternadora*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 200×248 cm

8. Chakras

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75×60 cm

9. Associação

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75×60 cm

SALA 2

10. *Núria*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 60×75 cm

11. *Putos a jogar à bola no final do Verão*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 60×89 cm

12. *Porta CCL*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75×60 cm

13. *Manel a caminho da Seca*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75×60 cm

14. *Ponta*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75×60 cm

15. 55

Impressão jacto de tinta, 60 × 75 cm

16. *Carrinha em frente à casa da Madalena*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75 × 60 cm

17. *Azul*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 60 × 75 cm

18. *Patacão*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75 × 60 cm

19. Sem título

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75 × 60 cm

20. *Teresa*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 231 × 289 cm

21. Sem título

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75 × 60 cm

22. *Apanha*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75 × 60 cm

23. *Veia*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 60 × 75 cm

SALA 4

31. *Entre o comboio e a A2*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 60 × 75 cm

32. *Graca e Dé*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75 × 60 cm

33. *Cozinha do Batori*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75 × 60 cm

34. Sem título

Impressão jacto de tinta, 289 × 231 cm

35. *Maria na casa da Teresa*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75 × 60 cm

36. *Cheias, 2021*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75 × 60 cm

37. *Díptico Fábio*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75 × 60 cm

38. *Pavilhão n.º 1*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75 × 60 cm

39. *Johny*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 60 × 75 cm

SALA 3

24. *Robala na Lagoa*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75 × 49 cm

25. *Alga, ponta do mato*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75 × 60 cm

26. *A caminho da quinta*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 60 × 75 cm

27. *Amigo Nuno*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75 × 60 cm

28. *Férias do Fred*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75 × 60 cm

29. *Vento*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 75 × 60 cm

30. *Lagameças*

Impressão jacto de tinta, 60 × 75 cm

TERRA LIVRE
DIOGO SIMÕES

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