

# LU^ . CÃO

an exhibition by  
**Alexandre Estrela and João Maria Gusmão + Pedro Paiva**  
curated by Natxo Checa

**Produced by Galeria Zé dos Bois at  
Calçada do Tijolo, 41A 1200-167 Lisboa**

Extended hours during Arco Lisboa  
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It was 2006 and to escape the Lisbon tedium, I challenged João and Pedro, who I'd previously worked with at ZdB, to go on artistic excursions to all corners of the globe. The plan was to stuff our pockets with dollars, exchanged from the cash we'd wangled through open calls, chuck our film gear in the aeroplane hold and spend the next five years exploring the least-likely locations for artistic endeavor... Angola, Brazil, Argentina, Morocco, Chile...

In Atacama, every public building we went into would have a reconstructed grave containing a mummified body in the foetal position, some ceramic pots and a few old rags, and like idiots, we'd stare at them for hours. Out in the desert, we'd sit agog contemplating the mountains silhouetted against the night sky, the shimmering stars piercing our eyes. Nowhere on earth were the stars this close, it seemed, the sky threatening to fall down on our heads at any moment. We'd drink red wine and conjure up visions of ancestral nights in primeval America, when the dead would be buried in the mountains, those mummies that modern-day bureaucrats put in museums for modern-day tourists to look at. To see up close something so far away. And in a display case... an exhumed mummy with an elongated melon head pointing to the stars; a dead body in a hole, pots and cloths, a piece of glass over it all, and some educational diagrams explaining how the Amerindians would slowly reshape the encephalon. João and Pedro were really into it, and they'd say big words, like *macrocephaly*, *magnetic efluvium*, *abyssology* and *phantasm*. I thought they could see stuff I couldn't and, always having been wary of words, I thought instead about how screwing under the Andean night sky must be awesome.

When I went to Lagoa das Sete Cidades (Azores) with Alexandre, I imagined we'd work in the same manner, but his aversion to travelling about and getting his feet dirty saw us confined to a damp wooden cabin in the middle of a volcanic crater.

Outside, in the cold, a cloud hovered over the volcano; inside, in our shivering despair, we sharpened a cryptomeria tree against the fireplace. The landscape that had been sold to us as being unspoiled had become a Kenyan lake, a dump for chemical fertilizers, and the green slopes that tumbled down to the blue lagoon were now a Japanese hillside belonging to some rich cattle farmer. Everything echoed elsewhere.

At midnight, having built up our courage with a spiff, we ventured out and into a tunnel that penetrated the volcano's outer wall, bound for the sea. We made our silent way along 1,200 metres of never ending spider webs. All stimuli became hugely exaggerated. In the total silence, we were

attacked by entoptic phenomena, underscored by the satanic barking of a Cattle Dog, shrill sounds we later discovered were escaping from a drainage valve in one of the pipes that ran the length of this Homo faber cave. Halfway along, the meagre light of a Stone Age Nokia revealed two isometric cubes and a geometrical vulva painted in the warm rock.

It was from the black of the basaltic rock that Alexandre's first idea came, *Viagem ao Meio* (Journey to the Middle), a structural work that crosses film as a material with video footage as a means of representation... So, we went back into the cave with a 600 metre roll of film under our arms and when we got to the midpoint, we unrolled the virgin tape onto the ground, in amongst the sludge, all the way to the tunnel opening, leaving it to bear witness to the gradual invasion of natural light into what was a huge darkroom, the black centre of the volcano. Afterwards, Estrela filmed the tunnel with a digital camera, advancing step by step as far as the exit onto the sea, at all times focused on the oscillating spot of light at the far end. Later on, at ZdB, we would recreate the experience and project the two images simultaneously, overlaid, in a longitudinal cinema equipped with a high bench, reached by two steps; a two-way journey, via two mediums, digital and analogue, with the exit glowing from beginning to end.

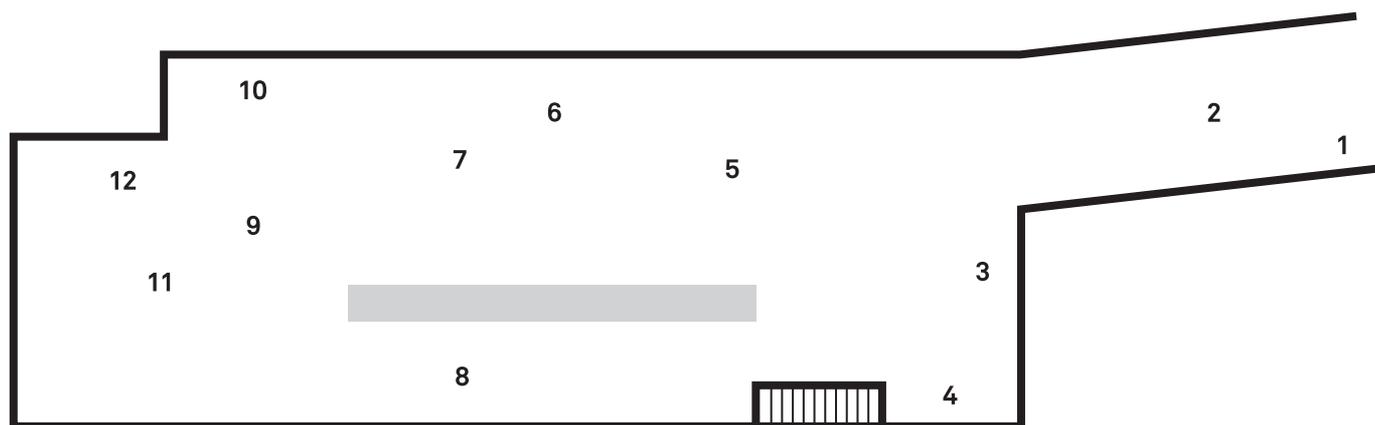
But we didn't stop there. After our experience in *Atlantis*, I persuaded the artist, now full of enthusiasm, to venture into the outside world. We reached Timor timor - the east of the east, as the locals call it - where we were invited by a bunch of tracksuit-clad aristocrats to witness the "mountain keeper" being exhumed six months after his Catholic burial. In *Mundo Perdido* (Lost World), we participated, incredulously, in his renewed funeral rites... it was cool: there was *Sumol* orangeade and buffalo with chips.

Back in Lisbon, João and Pedro showed me an unusual quasi-documentary film they'd made in São Tomé that they called *Papagaio* (Parrot). When I asked them why, they came out with another one of their strange words, *ventriloquism*. It featured a trance ritual whereby the spirits of the dead entered the bodies of the 'supernaturalised' locals; a band plays music, African spirits are summoned and lost souls involuntarily come down to visit those who give themselves over to this hypnotic force. The artists filmed away and then shared the camera with the possessed; the film was one thing, and then another: it was a film directed by them, and a zombie movie besides, like a theatre of the living dead, like light at the end of the tunnel in the middle of who knows what.

Natxo Checa

*Translated by Eva Oddo and Jethro Soutar*

ground floor



1.

**Moondog (even date, odd date), 2013**

A.E.

Two perforated Inkjet Prints

60 × 48 cm each

2.

**3 Suns, 2009**

J.M.G. + P.P.

16mm film, colour, no sound, 0'50''

Official Portuguese Representation of the 53rd Venice Biennale,  
DGARTES, Ministry of Culture, Portugal.

3.

**L'Ours, 2003–13**

A.E.

Video projection on glass screen, sound

Video: SD MOV (PAL), colour, 5'48'', loop, mono sound

Screen: glass, 176 × 224 cm; cardboard circles

pasted on the wall, 15 cm Ø

Sound: Original soundtrack by Paul de Jong, 2003

4.

**Wave, 2011**

J.M.G. + P.P.

16mm film, colour, no sound, 2'43''

Coproduced by São Tomé Biennale and Frac Île-de-France/Le Plateau,  
Paris

5.

**O Cobra Verde, 2009**

A.E.

Video projection on screen, sound

Video: Single channel, SD MOV (PAL), colour, 4' 40'', stereo sound

Screen: 260 × 350 cm

Sound: Original soundtrack by Paul de Jong, 2003

**Falling Trees, 2014**

J.M.G. + P.P.

16mm film, colour, no sound, 8'55''

Produced by Fondazione HangarBicocca, Milan

6.

**Longing for Darkness, 2014**

A.E.

Video projection on sculpture, sound

Video: SD MOV (NTSC), colour, 12', loop, silent

Sculpture: table with glass top 40 × 175 × 125 cm;

Genelec 8020 speaker

Sound: Alexandre Estrela, after an original by Sei Miguel  
and Fala Mariam, 4'40'', 2014

7.

**I to Infinity, 2006**

A.E.

Video projection on screen, silent

Video: single channel, SD MOV (PAL), colour, loop, silent

Screen: 202 × 270 cm

**Projector (camera test), 2016**

J.M.G. + P.P.

16mm film, colour, no sound, 2'34''.

Coproduced by Aargauer Kunsthaus, Aarau and SeMA Biennale Mediacity  
Seoul 2016

8.

**Waterfalls, 2010**

A.E.

Video projection on metal screen, sound

Video: SD MOV (PAL), colour, 2'54", loop, mono sound

Screen: metal, painted grey, 60.2 × 80 × 10 cm

**The Initiate, 2008**

J.M.G. + P.P.

16mm film, colour, no sound, 2'39"

9.

**Viagem ao Meio, 2010**

A.E.

Superimposed film and video projections, sound; and a two-storey bench

Film: 16 mm, colour, 60'

Video: SD MOV (PAL), colour, 120', stereo sound

Screen: 300 × 400 cm. Bench: wood, as long as the film's projection cone

**Papagaio (djambi), 2014**

J.M.G. + P.P.

16mm film, colour, no sound, 43'42"

Produced by Fondazione HangarBicocca, Milan

10.

**Washing Machine (camera test), 2014–2015**

J.M.G. + P.P.

16mm film, colour, no sound, 2'40"

11.

**Aquário, 2010**

A.E.

Video projection on plexiglas and paper, stereo sound

Video: SD MOV (PAL), colour, 1'32", loop, stereo sound

Screen: plexiglas and fabriano paper 200 gr., 52.5 × 93 × 50 cm

Sound: *Barbecue Grill* by Alvin Lucier

12.

**Cowfish, 2011**

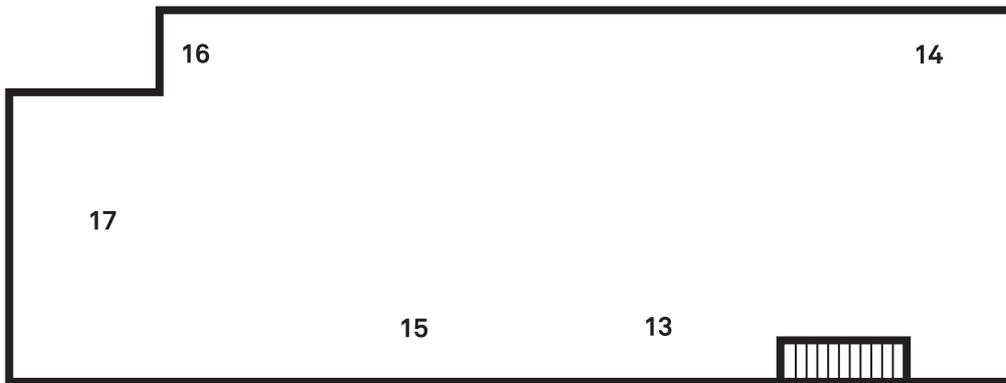
J.M.G. + P.P.

16mm film, colour, no sound, 2'25"

Produced by Museo Marino Marini, Florence

Thanks to Lamu Palm Oil Factory

**first floor**



13.

**Flauta**, 2010

A.E.

Video projection on prepared screen, sound

Video: HD MOV (PAL), colour, 1'45", loop, mono sound

Screen: wood structure, 78 × 100 × 15 cm

14.

**Glossolalia ("Good Morning")**, 2014

J.M.G. + P.P.

16mm film, colour, no sound, 7'10"

Produced by Fondazione HangarBicocca, Milan

15.

**Heat Ray**, 2010

J.M.G. + P.P.

16mm film, colour, no sound, 2'27"

16.

**Turtle**, 2011

J.M.G. + P.P.

16mm film, colour, no sound, 2'40"

Produced by Frac Île-de-France/Le Plateau, Paris

Thanks to Jardim Zoológico de Lisboa

17.

**Solar Watch**, 2006

A.E.

Video projection on aluminum sculpture, silent

Video: SD MOV (PAL), colour, 2'48", loop, silent

Sculpture: aluminum painted white, 67 × 119 × 84 cm

### **L'Ours, 2003–13**

A.E.

Seals are able to recognize polar bears from a distance by identifying the triangle formed by their nose and two eyes. Consequently, the bears have developed the habit of hiding their nose with their paws when hunting. In *L'Ours*, the reflected image of a man bounces to the sound of a monotone voice repeating the sentence: 'You will become the man, who saw the man who saw the man who saw the bear.' From time to time, a polar bear furtively emerges on screen. The bear's face triangle perfectly fits over three black dots pasted on the wall. The triangular structure of the dots crystallizes the image of the bear's face, which from then on remains immanent in the video.

### **O Cobra Verde, 2009**

A.E.

The video *O Cobra Verde* follows the bare branch of a two hundred year-old wysteria, which crawls horizontally along an iron fence. The plant moves slowly, struggling and eating the metal on its way. The video was recorded in nightshot mode which emphasizes its dark hue. An uncanny sensation of struggle is enhanced by a primal scream, a guttural sound that summons the effort of centuries. Composed by Paul de Jong, it is the sound of a crying newborn, slowed down so that it resembles a gruesome adult voice.

### **Aquário, 2010**

A.E.

A rubber band floats adrift in an aquarium. The movement of this odd geometric body is accompanied by the sound of pure frequencies, punctuated with occasional piano notes. The electronic sound establishes a sonic illusion which results from the superimposition of two frequencies with contradictory movements — an ascending and a descending frequency (Shepherd's paradox). To each note played corresponds the appearance of a video frame which intersects the flow of images, visibly interfering with the rubber band's geometric contour. When a high note is played, a posterior frame of the same video momentarily appears on screen, breaking the image flow; conversely, a previous frame is introduced whenever a low note is heard. As the video progresses, the rubber band wanders through the screen, carrying along the drawing or the mark of past and future moments. The video is absorbed by a sheet of paper inserted in an acrylic structure, which reflects, divides and again projects the images in the neighboring walls.

### **Longing for Darkness, 2014**

A.E.

After filming a model of the Neolithic monument of Carnac it became clear that the endless rows of menhirs heading towards the sea are a form of musical notation. These would function as a suprahuman score similar to the Australian landscape sang by aboriginal people in their song lines. I asked the musicians Sei Miguel and Fala Mariam to follow the video's progression with their brass instruments. The result was a profound sound that mirrors the title *Longing for Darkness*, the same title of a lost film by Peter Beard.