

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Monumento Nenhum (Unmonument) and Chacina da Luz (Luz Massacre) <sup>1</sup> discuss the loss of memory of public space and the city of São Paulo relationship with its historical and cultural heritage. Built with fragments of columns, pedestals, and statues fragments, the installations reproduce the pieces' situation, as found in the storage of monuments of the Department of Historical Heritage of the city of Sao Paulo (Departamento do Patrimônio Histórico, DPH). Carried out simultaneously, in 2019, at Beco do Pinto (Pinto's Alley) and at the Solar da Marquesa de Santos (Manor of the Marquise of Santos), they are a kind of "ready-made of oblivion".

Ready-made because we take the objects in the monument's storage facility to give them a new meaning through the placement in a new context (the facilities of the Museum of the City of São Paulo at the Alley and at the Marquise's Manor). Oblivion because we are talking here about the erasure of the forms of social production of <sup>2</sup> monuments in São Paulo public space, and the opacity of the mechanisms that resulted in their implantation and removal. Ironically, neither of these symbols of power have survived the city's autophagic dynamics. Then, we speak here of the loss of traces on how the city of São Paulo is constructed and deconstructed, hiding its past.

In Unmonument, we remade the piles of bases, pedestals, and fragments of missing, stolen, and attacked monuments that were in the DPH storage in Canindé district. These piles had caught my attention when I was preparing the intervention *Memória da Amnésia* (Memory of Amnesia, 2015) <sup>3</sup> and researching at that storage. Meticulously arranged, they rearrange a proposition by the art critic Rosalind Krauss, in "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" (1979) <sup>4</sup>, differentiating modern sculpture of traditional monuments, based on the suppression of the pedestal. But what happens when all you have is just bases and pedestals? What aesthetics of memory and

oblivion are at play in these abstract forms, which combine pedestals, broken pieces and furniture, inside a shed that houses fragments of monuments that no one else wants?

Without traces of their past, those enigmatic totems challenged us to ask: Where did they come from? Why were they dismantled? What did they support, from a material and symbolic point of view? Would the Unmonument be the monument of the history of São Paulo? In this direction, this art project opens up the reflection about the history of art in dialogue with the history of public policies on memory and its unfolding in the construction of the public space as a place of erasures.

In Luz Massacre, the focus is eight sculptures that decorated Lago Cruz de Malta (Maltese Cross Lake), located inside the Jardim da Luz (Luz Garden). Mostly implanted in the 1870s, the statues honor the seasons and some Roman-Greek mythology deities without reference to historical facts or supposed heroes. A recurrent scenario of postcards and photos of the city of São Paulo in the early twentieth century, they were overturned in 2016, in an act of depredation. Stored in the park administrator's house by the DPH, the morning after the attack, there they stayed until the exhibition at the Museum of the City of Sao Paulo.

The police report that registered the event does not add any relevant information to the case, since it does not indicate the time or number of people involved in the depredation. The installation presented at the Manor of the Marquise of Santos recovered the post-crime scene, exactly as I found it in the basement of the Luz Garden administrator's house in 2017. The installation title was born when I saw the pieces lying on a gray felt, covered with dust and suffering attacks from the dismal environment infested with pigeons and cats. A scene worthy of a massacre, with dismembered bodies and severed heads, the episode, without an activist motivation, highlights the incipience of the notion of the public good, as a common good, and of urban space as shared territory among us. The tensions between the right to memory and

the right to the city emerge there. They are symptomatic of the fragility of the relations of belonging and citizenship in the Brazilian political tradition.

A file cabinet with a bust hooded at the top articulated the Unmonument intervention at Pinto's Alley, and the Luz Massacre, at the Manor of the Marquise of Santos. Found in the municipality monuments storage and moved to the exhibition space, this sui generis combination between scrapped state bureaucracy and severed monuments articulated both artworks. Because we used it as the place to access our research materials, we signed it with "Open the Archive" and "Leave the Archive Open" messages. In the current Brazilian conjuncture, it gained a political sense, functioning as a statement of the motivations of the Unmonument and Luz Massacre, abundantly replicated in social media.

Despite their differences, both artistic works invert the role of art in the field of public policies on memory. Instead of being its object, the art here thinks about these policies, suggesting a debate about the social production of the aesthetics of memory and forgetfulness in the public space. In this sense, they refer to what Jorge Otero-Pailos defines as experimental preservation.<sup>5</sup> A commitment to the social negotiation of memory and not to the conservation of the goods themselves. A practice that points to the present instead of the restoring mythical pasts, deeply marked by colonialism's inheritances.

Brazil history brings both the extermination of memory and the erasure of the other inscribed on its pages since the beginning of colonization. We are memoricide experts. African slavery, the Inquisition, and the indigenous genocide are constitutive of the DNA of our colonial history. The relativization of the cruelty of the Brazilian dictatorship, the maintenance of its documentation under secrecy, and the few spaces dedicated to its memory are

some indicators of the effort to opaque the presence of violence of our historical experience.

In this context, to occupy the historical heritage realm, laying down monuments and stacking their pedestal is more than conceptual and programmatic decisions of a set of artistic works. It is a bet on art potential to contribute to the discussion about the city and its stories, in a continuous exercise of "disinvention" of tradition. As historian Eric Hobsbawm <sup>6</sup> has shown, unlike customs, which are updated continuously, tradition's characteristic is its tendency to the invariable. In the case of invented traditions, they appear at times of great transformation and respond to specific groups' need to legitimize their actions and social and political insertion/ power. To "solve" their impasses, they create an artificial past. From the perspective of experimental preservation, to "disinvent" tradition is to adhere to art's potential to break away from models oriented to permanent solutions, with proposals open to continuous updating of memory.

The installations Unmonument and Luz Massacre at the Museum of the City of Sao Paulo received more than 40,000 visitors and a lot of press and media coverage. The debate around the statues of the Luz Garden presented at Luz Massacre installation was intense in our public programs and in the mediasphere. As a result, the Department of Historical Heritage of the city of Sao Paulo decided to restore the mutilated statues right after the exhibition closure, in September 2019. In spite of the fact that restoration was never a motivation of the project, their decision of taking action, after so many years, is a strong indicative of the strength of art and experimental preservation to tension the structures of power. Something that all the performative and activist movements of contestation of monuments and historical heritage are proving all over the world.

**Giselle Beiguleman**

## Notes

- 1 A video documentary about the project and registers of the public programs carried out along the exhibition are available at <http://monumentonenhum.art.br>.
- 2 Detailed information about the artworks presented at the Museum of the City of São Paulo and the historical sites they occupied are available in my essay "Between Monuments to Nothing and Our daily Massacres" at the end of this volume.
- 3 Curators and guest critics Agnaldo Farias and Paulo Herkenhoff discuss Memory of Amnesia intervention in their contributions to this book.
- 4 Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field", October 8 (1979): 31–44, <https://doi.org/10.2307/778224>.
- 5 Jorge Otero-Pailos, "Experimental Preservation: the potential of not-me creations", in *Experimental Preservation*, org. Jorge Otero-Pailos, Erik Langdalen, e Thordis Arrhenius (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2016), 11–40.
- 6 Eric Hobsbawm e Terence Ranger, orgs., *The invention of tradition*, 1a ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).