



## SHADOWED SYMBOLS

Agnaldo Farias

*Here on Lopes Chaves street  
I grow old, and ashamed  
I don't even know who Lopes Chaves was.*

Mário de Andrade

The documents that have been found don't allow us to conclude who ordered their construction, who made them or when they were made. It is only known that this is a group of eight marble and mortar statues, originally implanted in a symmetrical arrangement on the margins of the Maltese Cross Lake (Lago Cruz de Malta), a name consistent with its shape, built in 1825 when the botanical garden was elevated to the status of Gardens. Luz Gardens (Jardim da Luz) as it came to be known, of French inspiration, was frequented by São Paulo society throughout the nineteenth century, in front of the namesake railway station inaugurated in 1874, with its structural ironwork of English origin, serving as an example of the different cultural importations that São Paulo has undergone. The Gardens, today a park, were an attraction in the young metropolis until the early twentieth century, when the process of decay set in, with the progressive flight of the public, the cessation of maintenance – a tradition cultivated in all parts of the country –, its use becoming infrequent and dangerous.

Sculpture is the genus, statues, the species. Returning to them, or what is left of them, it is known that they represent seasons and deities: Fall, Winter, Spring, The Sower, Ceres, Venus, Bacchus and Adonis. They were, therefore, aligned with the spirit of the time, indeed the spirit of the time in which they were made and dating

back to the sixteenth century: qualifying a public space by endowing it with works of art, particularly statues of historical and allegorical personalities, in every case figurative, invariably devoted to the representation of abstract concepts – virtues such as motherhood, heroism, determination, justice, among other values and themes that people thought should be established and transmitted as immutable values to be revered.

Dignity, loftiness, grace, among other predicates supposedly embodied in these and other statues scattered throughout the city, rather than simply embellishing, perhaps to subconsciously shape physical and moral gestures, in a word, to guide the conduct of the community in which they were erected. A project divided between poetry and delirium, as can be seen, brings within itself a notion of beauty along with the vision of a uniform society, without divisions, sharing the same desires and values. The time honored strategy of imposing on all, the traditions and tastes of a few.

It is interesting to imagine that the eight retrieved statues spent decades submerged in the silence of the gardens undone by the advance of unimpeded nature and the accumulation of rubbish, broken by the rustle of the foliage, the noises of the varied commerce of bodies and drugs of the shadowy patrons, surrounded by the low-pitched sounds of the city, indifferent to the stillness of the old abandoned oasis, later an urban tumor. After decades without anyone's attention, their marble bodies slowly eroded by the action of heat and cold, the abrasive effect of the huge city's polluted atmosphere.

Then, at the end of the century, in 1999, by initiative of Ricardo Ohtake, secretary of Green and Environment of the Municipality, following the rehabilitation of the Pinacotheca building, based on the radical renewal proposed by Paulo Mendes da Rocha during the administration of Emanoel Araújo, the Gardens were rehabilitated and renamed as a park, a legal status allowing them to be fenced in. The thick brush was thinned, the old geometrical order restored, forgotten

buildings, revealed, like the underground aquarium accessed through a brick tunnel with windows overlooking the lake, which was later found to be named for Diana, goddess of the hunt.

It was as if the statues had been reborn on the lake shores, punctuating the regularity of its design, reflecting on the flat surface of the water, in contrast with the modern and contemporary works that the Pinacotheca, since the restoration, took the initiative to place, as permanent installations throughout the park, an exhibition curated by myself and Emanoel Araújo, in the early 2000s.

Once the conditions of the park were recovered, without the barriers that separated the park from the museum, now one of the city's most prestigious institutions, all was well, or so it was thought, until the morning of June 22, 2016, when the eight statues awoke beheaded, their parts dismembered, each one beside its respective pedestal. Just as no one knows who ordered their creation, or who created them, it is not known who destroyed them or why. It is known when, but to no avail, and that they have since been stored in the basement of the park administrator's house, which had also been renovated in the 1999 project.

Stored in the basement, the statues, awaiting some unlikely initiative from the so-called responsible organs, generally paralyzed – stalled in who knows in what layer of the bureaucracy – they resembled the corpses found in ditches, I refer to the corpses the dictatorship produced in quantity and which, not wanting them to appear, it piled in ignominious mounds, without identification or proper burial. Much like those victims, the statues would lie in the shadows until someone remembered them or, more likely, bumps into them, and then decides, perhaps, another destination, which may well be the Canindé Monuments Storage, the dreary cemetery of São Paulo's memory, where all of the uninteresting monuments are sent, either because they are partially destroyed, or their original meaning has been lost, or because the preservation of memory, despite the heroic efforts of a few militants, is a topic neglected due to contemporary immediacy.

There, condemned to public invisibility, deprived of a larger meaning, they will disappear without fulfilling their destiny, which is to remind us today how and what we once thought, a past that, due to the current dynamics of compulsive discarding and dismemberment, grows old ever faster.

Would this be the fate of these statues, but it is likely that Giselle Beiguelman's intervention will turn things around, who knows? Thanks to the artist, it may, with luck, be changed. Known nationally and internationally for her artistic production linked to digital media, Beiguelman, in an apparent contradiction, has been making important contributions to the problem of memory, as in her recent book, *Memory of Amnesia: politics of oblivion*, which seems destined to be a reference on the theme. But there is no contradiction in this movement. Who, inside of a library or just thinking about one, even more thinking about the books themselves, their properties and potentialities, has not wondered what would happen if their pages were attacked by some plague and disappeared? The prodigious Ukrainian Stanislaw Lem, in his *Memoirs Found in a Bathtub*, speculates about this event with the power of a Kafka. Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* addresses the issue in its dystopian society, where books are forbidden and must be memorized. And all those who reflect today on the subject, in an arc that goes from Borges to Manguel, through Canfora, Darnton, Carrión, and so many others, hold fast to these retreating authors, until they reach those who railed against writing, for its presumptuous damage to the exercise of memory, for discarding the priceless Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory.

That being said, what will be done when the "cloud" where we now store our knowledge for some reason collapses or is destroyed, such as happens, for example, in *Gravity*, the grim prognosis of Mexican filmmaker Alfonso Cuarón, projecting a catastrophic disaster for our digital world, triggered by the crash of a secondary Russian satellite?

Giselle Beiguelman, artist, curator, and academic researcher studies the present to find in it our past. Going towards the past departing from the city of today, in its tangible physical dimension, thinking of it as a repository of all of these extracts of time, the sum of these residues and their meanings, constantly reformulated by superimposition, obliterated, reprocessed.

Unmonument and the Luz Massacre is the title of the exhibition held in two interconnected spaces, one open – Pinto's Alley (Beco do Pinto), the other, the entrance hall of the Manor of the Marquise of Santos (Solar da Marquesa de Santos), both next to Pátio do Colégio, located on the same steep hill where the city of São Paulo was born in the sixteenth century – 1554 –, at whose foot until a few decades ago two valleys could be seen: those of the Tamanduateí River and of the Anhangabaú River. Today out of sight, the former has a channeled bed and is subjected to a narrow, pinched concrete canyon; the second one, even more debased, flows through underground galleries beneath a road complex that bears its name.

Unmonument brings to light a grouping of three pieces installed in Pinto's Alley, a narrow staircase next to the Manor of the Marquise of Santos, which connects Roberto Simonsen Street, at the highest level, to Doutor Bitencourt Rodrigues Street, several meters below. It consists of three pieces, all from the same Canindé storage. The first one, named Horse Hooves, consists of a pile of bases of unknown sculptures, topped by the bottom part of a monument sculpted by Victor Brecheret and dedicated to the Duke of Caxias – precisely the hooves of the horse on which the patron of the Brazilian army was mounted, bombed in 1991 in protest against the low military salaries. The piece Ramos de Azevedo consists of a similar arrangement and has, at its apex, placed upside down, as the name of the honoree implies, the base of a monument to the great architect Ramos de Azevedo, responsible for several of São Paulo's most important buildings, among them the Pinacoteca do Estado. The third piece

consists of two column fragments – Broken Column – erected in honor of aviation heroes, in the person of Eduardo Chaves, who, in 1915, landed in Mooca coming from Santos. The column has migrated twice and, broken in two, is presented with the lower end standing and the upper part thrown to the floor.

It is symptomatic that the army's patron is the target of an attack by members of his corporation, an unmistakable sign that they no longer recognize him as such. Caxias, the Iron Duke, lost his prestige, the monument in which he was represented was broken, and ironically he was left with the pedestal of the pedestal, since the horse is the soldier's pedestal. A similar situation met Ramos de Azevedo, the master builder, whose former base with his name engraved was ingeniously placed by Beiguelman on top of a pile, facing the ground. As the artist declares, her performance was limited to the appropriation of the monuments' remains, operating with them as if they were readymade, performing exchanges of syntax.

As for the Broken Column, it should be remembered that the base or pedestal is a crucial theme in the history of sculpture in general and of statuary in particular, confined to the magical assumption that led to its creation. A base is a way of underlining the importance of what goes above it, an effect corresponding to that of the frame of a painting, which serves to highlight the painting, in contrast with the prosaic wall, as if porous, a window to the imagination. The bust, the hero on a horse, all that one chooses to occupy the top of a pedestal, is justified by our need for symbols. We make death masks; sculpt faces or meaningful situations because we want the chosen people and scenes to instruct our insignificant lives. We exhibit them on a more or less ornate pedestal to reiterate this importance, so that no one will doubt it.

The column, in turn, is an exponentialization of the base, important in and of itself. Stripped of any figure, it ascends to heaven, connecting to the magical assumption as it reconnects "religare" – the root of the word "religion" – the ground to the earth. Naturally, a column was

the figure chosen to pay tribute to aviators, to aviation heroes. It is symptomatic that it has broken, which translates the contempt, the arrogant ignorance that scorns those who have built the path we now tread.

The Luz Massacre, an installation inside of the Manor of the Marquise of Santos, is, in my view, the quintessential piece of the show. A series of simple blankets, the kind you might see homeless street dwellers using, were spread side by side to form a crumpled gray rectangle over which the vandalized statues, the equally beheaded bodies, both without feet and the bases on which they once stood, were juxtaposed. The composition paraphrases the arrangement made by police when they lay out the bodies of the victims of a massacre, an effect enhanced by the use of the black and yellow tape, employed to prevent the manipulation of corpses at the scene of a crime by anyone other than forensic professionals. Thus the symbols are executed, their bodies turned to rubble, the collective memory crumbling through the violence of those who do not recognize themselves in it, a blindness fed by the absence of dialogue, of respect for the other. It is up to us to begin by asking who decides what should be remembered and, by extension, as Giselle Beiguelman asks, "what should be forgotten, how it should be forgotten, when it should be forgotten".