

DISSE-ME-DISSE (MURMURS): RIO DE JANEIRO, 19TH–21ST

In *Disse-me-disse (Murmurs)*, brightly colored small giants produced by the Rio-based Amazonian artist PV Dias force us not so much to look at as to “listen to” the images. In this series, the apparent silence of different landscapes — all depicting an idyllic Rio de Janeiro — is broken by things murmured and overheard across the 19th and 21st centuries.

The word *cochicho* (murmur), which could, according to Nei Lopes, be of Bantu origin, was one of the survival and (con)fabulation techniques that allowed us to get where we are now alive. An integral part of Afro-Brazilian religious ceremonies, certain premises of which are revealed only to the initiated, murmuring has a secret element that reveals a capacity to invert established power relations: authorship–authority is transferred to those who have the choice over what to silence and whom to confide in.

In *Disse-me-disse*, gestures and sounds of murmuring disrupt any idea that the people who were subjected to slavery were passive. In murmurs we can perceive their strategies, their cunning, their agency, and their complicity, and we are shown how these “landscapes” should be interpreted and heard today.

Aware of the unfeasibility of basing any vision of the future on developmentalist thinking — a striking feature of the 20th century — we observe in contemporary art a growing interest in revisiting the past, especially works of national iconography from the 19th century. The works presented here also cast doubt on the Brazilian historiography, which has often deliberately denied Black people’s historical agency, depicting them in ways that disregarded popular movements from the same historical context, like the Malês Uprising (1835), in Bahia, Cabanagem (1835–1840), in Grão-Pará, and Balaiada (1838–1841), in Maranhão. As Clóvis Moura points out, this exclusion was achieved by omitting or undervaluing individuals and groups or whole segments of society. The communication technologies and embodied performances of PV Dias’s characters serve to reveal social dynamics that defy this silencing.

This exhibition presents works that murmur about the creative output of European travelers, notably Johann Jacob Steinmann and Johann Moritz Rugendas, by making interventions in the house and in engravings from the collections of the Klabin sisters, Eva and Ema. Prick up your ears and listen to what these works have to say!

Curators

Ana Paula Rocha, Janaína Damaceno
& Paulo de Freitas Costa