

When we go inside the space of the exhibition *Poetics of Space*, in 3+1 Arte Contemporânea, we rapidly understand that it is a dialogue between two artists with different languages and methodologies. Works by Teresa Braula Reis (1990, Lisbon), with a sculptural presence that imposes itself in the space, and pieces by Gregor Graf (1976, Vienna), with a formally two-dimensional nature, apparently not complying to the specific characteristics of the space. They are, nevertheless, united by a universe of shared ideas that are grounded in the understanding of the inhabited space and its narrative layers. It is, in fact, the same universe that Gaston Bachelard enunciated in his *La Poétique de l'Espace*, in 1958.

The first work we can see is one of the four parts of the installation *Lieux de mémoire* (2016), by Teresa Braula Reis, produced specially for 3+1 Arte Contemporânea. A wall rises right in front of the entrance of the gallery and invites us to see the exhibition by stopping, observing and thinking. Built with mesh and rubble inside, here, referring to – as in the text by Pierre Nora that gave the title to this installation that starts here and continues through the gallery space – the collective imaginary of cities and their processes of construction, reconstruction and destruction.

This part of *Lieux de mémoire* resonates Arte Povera themes, visible in the adding of natural and industrial materials like sand, stones, and metal – each one of these materials was gathered from building sites throughout the city. The works by Teresa Braula Reis are, generally, site-specific, answering and in dialogue with architectural aspects that surround it. In this part of the installation, with a transposition from the exterior, the rubble of the building sites -, to the interior of the gallery, of white walls, a tension is created. If, on one hand, the materials of this installation are impenetrable and could close off spaces, on the other hand, they don't really do it in its entirety. With a height of only 30 centimetres, it is up to us to choose to go over the wall or simply just go around its two metres of length, to continue with our path.

Yet *in Holz und Heu | In wood and hay* (2016), a photograph by Gregor Graf, uses another method to confront the ways in which we live in spaces. When we look at this house and the environment around it, it is difficult to believe it is a real place. We are before a house in Switzerland, in the middle of a green space, with trees lined up in a small mountain. Only the narrow road behind the house denounces an urban connection. To create this almost perfect image, Gregor Graf subtly retouched the photograph in a process similar to Thomas Ruff in images like *Sammlung Goetz* (1994), erasing some elements from the bushes and enhancing others in the trees. This photograph can be understood in the cultural connection of Gregor Graf to his native country, Austria. If we ask an Austrian what is his favourite way to live, the most probable answer we are going to get will include a house in the middle of a green field but near a city. The concept of green here implies a lifestyle without traffic jams of endless hours to get to work, driving a long way to get to a supermarket or being a stranger in a village. Nevertheless, in fact, these country places chosen by city people – in Austria, in Switzerland or in Portugal – are almost always

industrialized rural environments. *in Holz und Heu | In wood and hay* presents itself, with its almost surreal tone because of its perfection, as a visual translation of this romanticized idea of living as one with nature, in a pure lifestyle, in peace and quiet, that today is difficult to accomplish.

The search for perfection also appears in the group of photographs *Rechteck | Rectangle* (2015), in which Gregor Graf portrayed what could be a performance, reminiscent of land art, with human interventions in the landscape that later implied photographic documentation, like the iconic *A line made by walking* (1967), by Richard Long. A man, driving a tractor in a field with the precision and rigor of a pencil on a blank sheet of paper, leaves, at the end, a rectangle that seems to mark the perfect spot to build a house. This almost artistic way of driving a tractor leaves the narrative open to many interpretations.

The physical action switches in *Rechteck | Rectangle* from the observed to the protagonist in the group *am anderen Ufer sah ich dich stehe | I saw you standing on the other river bank* (2016), *acht einsame Berge | Eight lonesome mountains* (2016) and *acht entlegene Berge | Eight remote mountains* (2016). This group results of a set of walks made by Gregor Graf alongside the frontier of Linz. In *am anderen Ufer sah ich dich stehe | I saw you standing on the other river bank* the blue line denounces the city's frontier that, because of its specificity, prevents any connections between the two neighbourhood areas. *acht einsame Berge | Eight lonesome mountains* (2016) and *acht entlegene Berge | Eight remote mountains* (2016) reveal groups of different houses separated by wide streets alongside the Linz frontier. Each house is surrounded by a fence allowing us to understand them only with a circumscribed vision, that here is summed up in the roofs that, formally, look like mountains. This relation between human construction and nature goes over the formal aspect – just like when we walk on a mountain, in this path we can only go around the obstacles if we want to reach the other side.

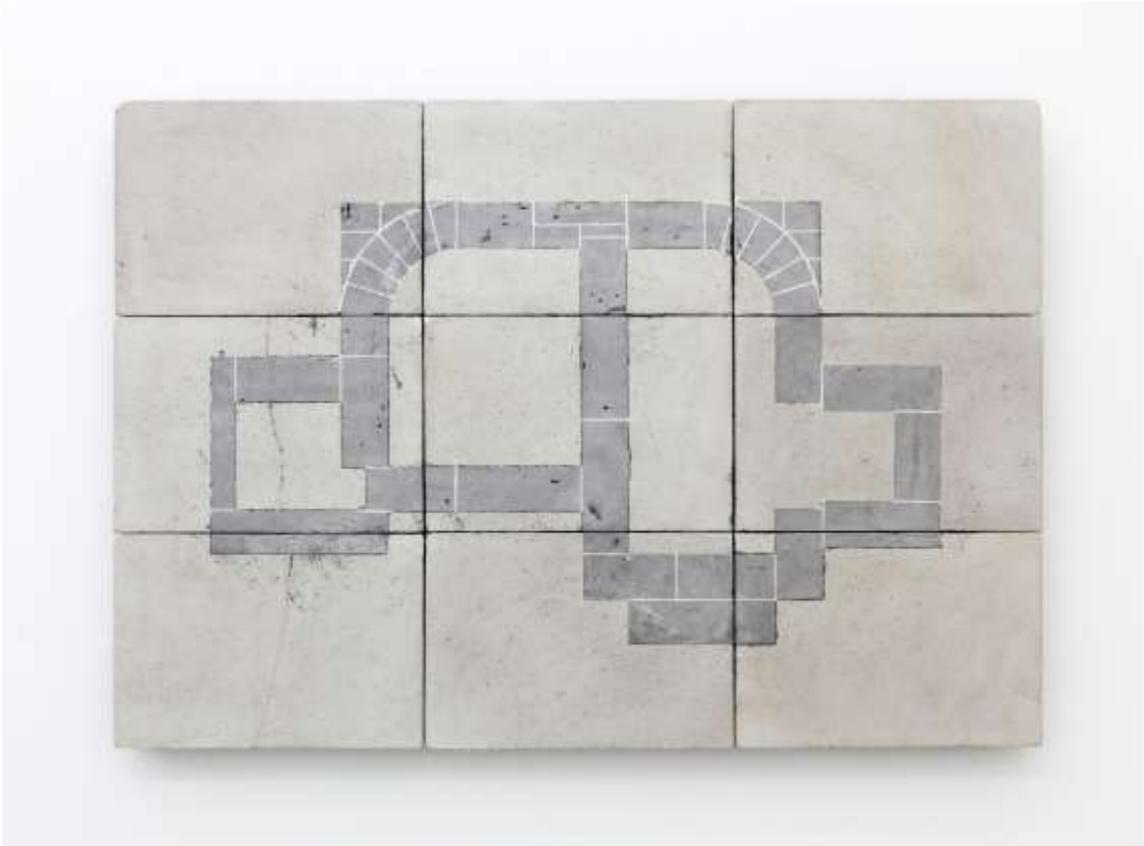
At the end of the room, the video-installation *Broken Souvenir* (2016), by Teresa Braula Reis, also focuses on the connection between human construction and nature, through two actions in two Hantarex CRT monitors. In the upper monitor, we see the implosions of a demolition of a building while the monitor below presents implosions on a stone quarry, the place where we take the aggregate to make concrete, iron and other materials for this industry, responsible for the construction of buildings like the one we can see in the action above. We are thereby before a relationship as dichotomous as cyclic of the destruction of the natural landscape, in an extreme acceleration of time so that man can build, followed by the destruction of the human constructions, in an act that takes matter almost to its original state. This video-installation is filled with subtle layers as the reference to the film *Behemoth* (2015), by Zhao Liang, made through appropriation and edition of part of its sound. As *Behemoth*, *Broken Souvenir* clearly states the problematic relationship that we live between industrial and economical progress and the destruction of the natural landscape.

Construction and destruction are ambivalent concepts that denote contradictory obsessions of contemporary society: we want to be eternal but we are attracted to destruction at the same time that we are taken by the impulse to build rampantly. This contradiction is present along the works of the two artists in this exhibition, as in the watercolour drawing *Treppenanlage | Staircase* (2016), by Gregor Graf. The staircases here represented were built as a solution to a circulation problem in a building site. To solve the problem that arose because of constructions and modifications, the urban planners built a pedestrian pathway around a bus station. In this drawing, Gregor Graf withdrew any impressions of the context, elevating it to an object in itself but without any practical function as the three-dimensional staircases, made of rubble, that confront it and are part of *Lieux de mémoire*, by Teresa Braula Reis.

Also the last two pieces of this installation function as individual objects even though, in the space of this gallery they seem to blend in with the walls, almost as chameleonic objects. By reinterpreting and reducing architectural structures to sculptures, Teresa Braula Reis places her work here in dialogue with its historical precedents like minimalism and post-modern sculpture. *Lieux de mémoire* explores the concept and the matter of the modern ruin, in distinct ways. The pair of white concrete objects, raised vertically, refers us to the eternal quality of matter that will always be as wanted as is unattainable while the pair of rubble objects, placed horizontally on the ground can be associated with the idea of total deterioration of matter.

Between duration and mobility, fragment and wholeness, progress and ruin, reality and idealization, it might look as we are somewhere, nowhere. Nevertheless, the more we look at the spaces we build the more we understand just how these conditions are, after all, unfathomably close to the reality that we are living today, in a world of uncertainties and truths that are mistaken for fictions. *Poetics of Space* presents itself therefore as a group of observations about the search of meaning of the spaces in which we live in with the inherent relationship to the way we understand that it is, in fact, the basis of the fundamental and universal questions that torment humanity.

Luisa Santos 06.2016















POETICS OF SPACE
TERESA BRAULA REIS
GREGOR GRAF
CURATED BY LUISA SANTOS
01.07.16 - 24.09.16
3+1 Arte Contemporânea
Lisbon, Portugal
www.3m1arte.com

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Teresa Braula Reis, *Lieux de mémoire # 1 | Memory places #1*, 2016, white cement, wood, 240 x 20 x 20 cm

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Gregor Graf, *O.T. | Untitled*, 2011, 9 pieces of plaster casts with inlaid coloured plaster, mounted on aluminium, 62 x 90cm

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Gregor Graf, *Treppenanlage | Staircase*, 2016, aquarelle on paper, 57 x 42 cm, artist made frame

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Gregor Graf, *acht entlegene Berge | eight remote mountains*, 2016, aquarelle on paper, 57 x 42 cm, artist made frame

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Teresa Braula Reis, *Broken Souvenir* (stills), 2016, (x2) XGA video 4:3, colour and sound 1'40" loop, (video appropriated from online platform, sound from *Behemoth* (2015), by Zhao Liang)

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Teresa Braula Reis, *Lieux de mémoire #4 | Memory places*, 2016, galvanized iron, enamel paint, rubble, 45 x 30 x 75 cm,

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Gregor Graf, *in Holz und Heu | In wood and hay*, 2016, digital C-Print mounted on Dibond wooden frame, 150 x 97,86 cm, Edition of 5

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Support:

