

CATERINA TOGNON

Francisco Tropa

Terra Platonica

Curator **Simone Menegoi**

Works created with the support of COTISSE

Opening 30 May 9pm / midnight

Palazzo da Ponte, Calle del Dose in Campo San Maurizio, San Marco 2746, Venice, Italy.

31 May / 5 October 2013 (Closed August)

Caterina Tognon is proud to present *Terra Platonica*, a personal exhibition of the Portuguese artist **Francisco Tropa**, with works created exclusively for the occasion. These new works are inspired by ancient cosmologies and include: slender structures in brass and multicoloured glass canes; a cycle of sculptures made from coloured glass sheets leaning lightly against wooden supports; blown glass objects, two of which are in the form of a light installation; a cycle of forty silkscreen prints, also made specially for the exhibition; and finally, two suspended wooden sculptures from 2002, chosen due to their affinity with the subject.

The exhibition is the most recent stop on Caterina Tognon's tour of contemporary art and traditional glass-working techniques. It is part of a cycle that began with Claire Fontaine's exhibition in 2011, followed by Hubert Duprat's in 2012, in which internationally renowned artists, with whom the gallery had never worked before, were invited to create glass pieces in Venice and then present them at a personal exhibition at the Calle del Dose gallery.

Chosen to represent Portugal at the Venice Biennale in 2011, Tropa transformed the pavilion space into a sort of platonic cavern populated by overturned shadows of natural and artificial objects: an eloquent example of how the artist loves to ask philosophical questions about art and reality in general through works of great visual and poetic suggestion. *Terra Platonica* considers the question, particularly dear to the artist, of fiction and truth in relation to art, starting with some obsolete representations of the cosmos. The first, taken from a nineteenth-century text by Flammarion on "astronomical myths" called "Terra platonica", shows our planet as a cube suspended in space, whose square and flat upper face constitutes the inhabited part. The second depiction of the cosmos is developed from the illustrations in Cosmas Indicopleustes' Christian Topography from the sixth century AD: the earth appears flat and rectangular, surmounted by a firmament of barrel vaults similar to a baldachin. The third representation, with which modern viewers are perhaps more familiar, refers to Dante's Divine Comedy: it hypothesises a spherical earth, hollowed out on one side by a deep conical chasm (Inferno) and dominated by a high mountain (Purgatory) on the opposite side. All of the paintings are obviously untenable; the one taken from Flammarion, which gives the exhibition its title, is doubly so, not just because it offers a model of our world that is incompatible with modern science but because the attribution of this model to Plato is wrong. Plato associates the form of the cube to earth as a fundamental element, equal to water, air and fire, but he does not describe our planet as a cube.

Tropa's interest in these models is philosophical and aesthetic. On the one hand, they bear witness to the fundamental human impulse to depict reality according to ideological or religious principles and so on, even at the cost of deforming it and of contradicting ourselves. (Indicopleustes' contemporaries, who on the whole were supporters of the geospheric theory, already considered his cosmology untenable).

On the other hand, these images of the world attract Tropa because of their aesthetic charm, both as pure forms devoid of any sense and as possible models of what art could be: a suspension of the question of "truth" in order to create a universe that finds its justification within itself and its internal coherence.

Tropa has created a series of silkscreen prints from the illustrations of Cosmas Indicopleustes' treatise. The colours are dazzling, the prints set out on the gallery walls like a fresco. Stylised and

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deprived of the original explanatory texts, presented in dozens of chromatic variations like Warhol's Marilyn, these fifteen-centuries-old depictions of the cosmos are reduced to abstract motifs.

Earth as imagined by Dante is transformed into two blown glass bottles – they are deformed, but still recognisably taken from the Inferno-Purgatory model – which in turn are transformed into shadows: two powerful light bulbs project the forms onto the walls. Worth noting is that the artist has used two sections of agate like masks with a central opening to mould the light: the irregular form of the opening allows the shadows of the two bottles suspended in a sort of cavern to appear – once again, the platonic archetype of the place of illusion.

The cubic earth that Flammarion's work attributes to Plato is the central theme of the exhibition, and at the same time is the one interpreted in the most general and abstract way. The cube appears in the suspended wooden sculptures *Approaching Creative People* (2002), depictions of cubes in asymmetry that turn on themselves and generate optical illusions – the concave one seems convex and vice versa. The series of sculptures made from four square sheets of coloured glass leaning against wooden supports is based on the form of the cube. As well as the platonic solid, these works pay tribute to Richard Serra's famous *House of Cards* sculpture (1969), made up of four square sheets of lead that hold each other up. Finally, the cube, connected to the circle, returns in a cycle of small brass and coloured glass cane sculptures that look like architectural models. Their elegant variations of form and colour are evocative of the formal logic of another minimalist artist, Sol LeWitt, or the fantastical architecture devised by Paul Scheerbart (*Glass Architecture*, 1914). Each of them, like a jewel or a precision tool, is contained in a wooden box made to measure, which, once opened, also acts as a pedestal.

A pair of blown glass works occupies a position apart. One is a sort of hourglass-shaped object and the other is a pyramid. The forms aim to evoke the polarities of male and female, man and woman: the symbolic inhabitants of these impossible cosmoses.

The exhibition will also include a video made by the famous Portuguese director **Joao Botelho** in the Gianni Seguso furnaces on Murano. The photos of the works are by **Pedro Tropa**.

The glass pieces were made with the support of **COTISSE**, a non-profit cultural association founded in Venice in 2011. The association supports and spreads the knowledge of the artistic, technological and human resources represented by the art of glass blowing on the island of Murano.

At the same time as Venice, the artist is showing at Gregor Podnar's gallery in Berlin.

Some of the works coming from *Terra Platonica* will be exhibited at his solo show at the Verrière of the Hermès foundation in Brussels.

Our thanks to:

Formia, Scuola del Vetro Abate Zanetti e Roberto Finotto, Gianni Seguso, Effetre International, Paolo Cenedese, Pietro e Riccardo Ferro, João Pinote Wood Prototypes Cascais, Damiano e Leo de Mattia, Pieve di Livinallongo, Belluno. Serafim Machado and NSF Laser Cut, Lisbon, and the Jorge Bastos Printmaking Studio, Lisbon.

Special thanks to the Centro Vittore Branca of the Fondazione Cini, San Giorgio, Venice, for hosting the artist.

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Francisco Tropa

Born in 1968, in Lisbon, Portugal. Lives and works in Lisbon, Portugal.

STUDIES

1995 – 1996. Alfred Toepfer Scholarship Programme, Kunstakademie Münster.
1992. Ar.Co Scholarship Programme, Royal College of Arts, London, United Kingdom
1987 – 1992. Studied at Ar.Co, Lisbon, Portugal

TEACHING

1996 – 2007. Professor at the Sculpture Department of Ar.Co, Lisbon, Portugal

SOLO EXHIBITIONS AND PROJECTS

2013. TSAE solo show, La Verrière Hermes, Bruxelles
Gregor Podnar Gallery, Berlin, Germany
Terra Platónica, Caterina Tognon Gallery, Venice, Italy.
2012. Museu, Galeria Quadrado Azul, Porto, Portugal
Flores, Galeria Quadrado Azul, Porto, Portugal
Stela, Fundação Leal Rios, Lisbon, Portugal
2011. Scenario, Official Portuguese Representation, 54th Venice Biennale, Italy
Untitled, 12th Istanbul Biennial, Turkey
Literal, Circular – Festival de Artes Performativas, Vila do Conde, Portugal (with Laurent Pichaud)
Tali, Galeria Quadrado Azul, Porto, Portugal
2010. Scripta, Galeria Quadrado Azul, Lisbon, Portugal
Farol and Giant, Galeria Quadrado Azul, Lisbon, Portugal
Giant, Auditório do Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves, Porto, Portugal
O vapor que se eleva do arroz enquanto coze, Auditório do Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves, Porto, Portugal/ Beursschouwburg, Brussels, Belgium/ Appleton Square, Lisbon, Portugal (with Osso Exótico)
2009. Culturgest, Lisbon, Portugal
Galeria Distrito Quatro, Madrid, Spain
2008. Tesouros Submersos do Antigo Egipto, Chiado 8 Arte Contemporânea, Lisbon, Portugal
The Assembly of Euclid (the final), Galeria Quadrado Azul, Porto, Portugal
Festival Trama, Porto, Portugal (with Osso Exótico)
2007. The Assembly of Euclid, Matadero, Madrid, Spain
The Cyclist's Trance, Livre Circulação: Serralves no Algarve, Convento de Santo António, Loulé, Portugal
Traço sobre um muro, Circular – Festival de Artes Performativas, Vila do Conde, Portugal
2006. The mark of the Breast, Culturgest, Porto, Portugal
Figura sentada; Homem em erecção; Tiro inflectido; O Gigante, Teatro Rivoli, Porto, Portugal (with André Maranhã)
The Assembly of Euclid: The Cyclist's Trance, Galeria Quadrado Azul, Porto, Portugal
Yes No, Auditório do Museu de Serralves, Porto, Portugal (with other artists)
2005. The Assembly of Euclid, LisboaPhoto, Cordoaria Nacional, Lisbon, Portugal
Galeria Quadrado Azul, Porto, Portugal
Sítio, Parque Natural da Ria Formosa, Algarve, Portugal
2004. Vanitas e Vanitatis umbra, Galeria Quadrado Azul, Porto, Portugal
2003. L'Orage, Centro de Arte Moderna José de Azeredo Perdigão, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon, Portugal
Queijada de Sintra; Carapau adormecido; _ figura, Galeria Quadrado Azul, Porto, Portugal
2002. Aproximando pessoas criativas; Murete; Farol; Os potes; Linhagens, Porta 33, Funchal, Portugal
Tiro Inflectido, Mugatxoan, Arteleku, San Sebastian, Spain/ Os Dias de Tavira, Tavira, Portugal (with André Maranhã)
_ figura – anzol de ouro, Os Dias de Tavira, Tavira, Portugal (with Projecto Teatral)
2001. Figura sentada; Homem em erecção, Galeria Monumental, Lisbon, Portugal
2000. Imaginação morta, Les Voûtes, Paris, France/ Instituto Franco-Português, Lisbon, Portugal (with Osso Exótico)
Survolée / Rollover, Nouveaux Rituels, Bordeaux, France (with Osso Exótico)
1998. Peça, Official Portuguese Representation, 24th Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil (with Lourdes Castro)
Budha; Atraso, Fundação de Serralves, Porto, Portugal
Tiro de núpcias, Galeria da Mitra, Lisbon, Portugal
Duche, Teatro Nacional de S. João, Porto, Portugal
1997. Projecto Casalinho, Alpiarça, Portugal
1996. Ilocalizável, boqueirão da praia da gale 5, Lisbon, Portugal
1993. Copo de água, Ar.Co, Lisbon, Portugal
1992. 1 metro quadrado, Jardim Botânico da Faculdade de Ciências de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal (with André Maranhã)
Demonstração de difracção usando ondas de água, boqueirão da praia da galé 5, Lisbon, Portugal
1991. Galeria Monumental, Lisbon, Portugal

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