



RUI TOSCANO

I AM THE COSMOS

OPENING

12 APRIL 10 pm

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Cosmic Imagination

Eu Sou o Cosmos [I Am the Cosmos] is the continuation of a series of works Rui Toscano initiated about 10 years ago, which had its most visible moment with the exhibition *Civilização, Tipo I, II e III* [Civilization, Type I, II, and III], presented at the Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea do Chiado and at the Centro Internacional das Artes José de Guimarães, in 2016. In these works, the artist gives continuity to a research motivated by the issues of the perception of space and time, and their correlative articulations with the experience of imagination, grounding them in themes related to space exploration, often in a dialogue with images depicting figures and architecture from ancient civilizations. As he convokes the visions of the cosmos created by humankind throughout the times, the artist explores formal, metaphysical and symbolic links between a distant past and the foreboding of a future symbolized by space exploration.

The diversity of motifs is complemented by a wide range of media: painting, drawing, photography, video, sculpture, but also obsolete sound equipment and image projection devices that acquire an unusual plastic and conceptual value once imported into Rui Toscano's creative universe – and on this particular note we must highlight the notable series of sculptures made with boomboxes he has been producing since the mid-1990s.

These elements come together as a constellation of many materials, image types, techniques, and cultural and historical references. They create a space prone to the mobilization of an unlimited imagination, where all intersections and coexistences are fertile. This explains the coexistence of representations of Ancient history with the images produced by a visual culture that was remade by technological devices, and is structured by the power of imagination, blending scientific knowledge and the praxes of fiction, particularly those of cinema and literature. In this context, the films *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and *Blade Runner* (1982) define a field rife with ideas and possibilities for this phase of Rui Toscano's artistic practice. Adding to this, many of his works are based on a practice of appropriation and reutilization of images, taken from scientific publications, encyclopaedias, or from photographs or films, which are later subjected to a process of collage or (re)assemblage of elements that establish thematic, aesthetic, or conceptual relationships between themselves.

Within this peculiar cosmology, Toscano compares different times and places, the visible and the invisible, the natural and the human; he invests in a multiform play of polarities. Let us look at the work *Ilha* [Island], two projections on two sides of a vertical and irregular piece of marble. This work deals with a confrontation between two visual archetypes, the interior of a cave and a huge explosion. It is also a confrontation between two types of movement, two rhythms: the first is slow and rough and intrinsic to nature and geology; the second is abrupt and destructive, originated by human action. We can see something similar when

we oppose *The Dawn of Man*, a vertical sculpture with several boomboxes – a tower descending from the ceiling –, and *Afterlife*, a drawing that represents a rising column of Egyptian pyramids, a monumental construction evocative of the *Tower of Babel*.

The confluence of these works in the same exhibition reveals how important the moment of installation is to Toscano's practice. The setup of the show is based on the possibility to connect different supports and types of image in the space, to build a visual syntax, an opportunity to overcome the limitations of the isolated work and, at the same time, to structure a space of images upon which the spectator will create different relationships, conveying meaning (or not) to its individual components. However, nothing is autonomous because each segment is also defined by all the others, which implies a reading modeled by a game of accumulations.

We know that human fascination with space exploration and with the vastness of the universe to the promise of their mystery, unfamiliarity and incomprehensibility. Between the cosmologies of Ancient times and space exploration, the domains of mythology and archeology, between scientific knowledge and creative narratives, there is a huge and connected field of imagination where fiction and reality coincide. In space, we assume, the laws of physics and of life are more complex and diverse than the ones we know. Therefore, it is a propitious space to investigate the declinations of what is imaginable and figurable.

In fact, Rui Toscano's artistic practice values the capacity to intensify and displace our imaginations, often implying an intermedial game, the creation of representations that take advantage of an interconnectedness and porosity between different media: drawings from details of photographs, drawings that look like photos, sound sculptures, videos in which movement is almost indiscernible, projections on objects. This is what we see, for example, in the series of drawings of black dots that become dots of light when they are transformed into their negative image; a profusion of stellar objects that make up globular clusters scattered across a plane of the universe. These are drawings that play with scale, between the very small (the dot of ink) and the incommensurable (the black infinite) of the sidereal space. This negativization of the drawing brings it closer to photography, as it transforms under the force of our inescapable imaginal impulse, the tendency to see a representation in every image, figurative or abstract.

This group of works defines a field of aesthetic and conceptual possibilities in which the expansion of our perceptual limits is both intensified and challenged. In this context, it is important to highlight a series of paintings Toscano started in 2015. They are large format, square, monochrome paintings where we can glimpse two circles: one larger and less noticeable due to its diffuse contours, and a much smaller one within the limits of the first, with sharper contours that, according to the artist, intend to suggest the idea of a close-up of a star, of looking a star in the eye.

These are paintings that stimulate our gaze, that make us move forward and back again. Sometimes, the circular shapes become more perceptible, but suddenly they become an oscillating mass, revealing sensations, moods, and an internal movement that plays with the vibrant qualities inherent to painting. Explicitly, the artist explores the physiological phenomena of light and color – phenomena that, because they are produced in the body of the observer, belong exclusively to the domain of that body.

We inhabit the conditions of our perception. I Am the Cosmos. We know that images are the product of a medium, with its ontological characteristics and cultural connotations. But we also know that the experience of each image is also a product of ourselves, of our body as a living medium of images. Indeed, the place from which images and imagination spring forth is the body. It is precisely from this idea of the corporeality of images that Rui Toscano urges us to realize that the exploration of space begins within our eyes, in a body, and in the imagination that shapes it.

RUI TOSCANO (1970) was born in Lisbon, where he lives and works.

He studied Painting and Sculpture at AR.CO (Centre for Art and Communication) and at the FBAUL (University of Lisbon – School of Fine Arts).

Since 1993 he has presented his work in galleries, museums and alternative spaces. In 2001 he won (ex aequo with João Onofre) the Latin Union Prize.

His solo exhibitions includes Civilizations Type I, II and III, CIAJG, Guimaraes (2016), Civilizations Type I, II and III, MNAC, Lisbon (2015), Journey Beyond the Stars, Travessa da Ermida, Lisbon (2015), Empire, Appleton Square, Lisbon (2014), Sound Sculptures 1994-2013, Culturgest, Lisbon (2013), Universo Paralelo, Ex Elettronica, Rome (2011), Out of a Singularity, Cristina Guerra Contemporary Art, Lisbon (2010), The Great Curve, Chiado 8 – Arte Contemporânea, Lisbon (2009), Cluster, Distrito 4, Madrid (2008), T de Tornado, Cristina Guerra Contemporary Art, Lisbon (2007), Abstrakt, Sintra Modern Art Museum, Sintra (2006), Sampa Works, Espacio Distrito 4, Madrid (2004), The Exorcist, Cristina Guerra Contemporary Art, Lisbon (2004), and 1, MACS (Serralves Contemporary Art Museum), Porto (2002).

From the group shows Toscano participated include Dimensões Variáveis, MAAT, Lisbon (2017), Shots of Architecture, Spazio Ridoto, Venice (2016), This – Hasn't – Happened, CA2M Centro de Art Dos de Mayo, Madrid (2015), Marulhar – Mostra de Arte Portuguesa, Oi Futuro Flamengo, Rio de Janeiro, (2014), Beyond Memory, Museum of Seam, Jerusalem (2012), Electric Nights, LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial, Gijón (2011), Da Outra Margem do Atlântico – Alguns Exemplos da Videoarte e da Fotografia Portuguesa, Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro (2010), Look Again, Tabakalera, San Sebastian (2009), Stream, White Box, New York (2007), An Atlas of Events, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon (2007), Expanded Painting, Prague Biennale 2, Prague (2005), Metaflux, 9th International Architecture Biennial, Arsenale, Venice, Italy (2004), Video Invitational, F A Projects, London (2003), Expect The World, Moi Non Plus, Sparwasser HQ / Parkhaus Treptow, Berlin (2002), Squatters, Parque de Estacionamento dos Caminhos do Romântico, Porto (2001), Take Off, Galerie Krinzinger, Benger Fabrik, Bregenz, Austria (1997) and Independent Worm Saloon, SNBA (Sociedade Nacional de Belas Artes), Lisbon (1994).

His work is published in books and catalogues, and it's represented in several public collections such as Serralves Foundation, Caixa Geral de Depósitos, FLAD (Luso-American Development Foundation), António Cachola, Madeira Corporate Services, PLMJ, Portugal Telecom, Fundación ARCO, Fundación Coca-Cola, MEIAC (Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo), and also in numerous private collections in Portugal, Spain, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Brazil and USA.