

## Maputo 346,77 km<sup>2</sup> – Cities

It was in the city of Maputo, and within its 346,77 km<sup>2</sup>, that we set ourselves to work, during an artistic residency, in the month of July 2018, in order to produce new oeuvres shown in loco, at Camões – the Centre for Portuguese Culture in Maputo. In a month we bonded intensely and affectionately with people, places and realities, with special focus on material culture. In the gallery, the first room reveals exactly that: drawings inspired by tattoos and inscriptions in ceramic and wooden objects from the Maconde culture, isolated in paper sheets, and tracing paper – that texture of artistic material that resembles the fragility of the skin. The tracing paper in which fictional images of the tattoos are inscribed is sometimes torn by the sharpened tip of a pencil, because the skin *cracks*. That is the principle and the praxis of traditional tattooing in north Mozambique. In the opposite wall – and with the traditional fishing models in sight – a tree is reshaped into a boat, in an ongoing poetical transformation: still a tree, still a boat; still and forever tree, now also a boat. Because we are very much interested in objects that accumulate, in their structure, their genesis and vicissitudes, at once its material history and its cultural history.

But to go back to the 346, 77 km<sup>2</sup>, since the beginning of this project the geographical boundaries of such a vast urban area have imposed new circumscriptions and limitations in a more or less conscious decisive process. To walk through the different city neighbourhoods, to turn here and there, to go back, to stop to ask questions and chat, to go back, is a process of *flânerie* in the city. On the other hand, the closer we get to the territory, the more it becomes a relation of discovery – and self-discovery – within the urban, historical and human landscape – real and fictionalizing.

The encounter with the many cities that Maputo contains in itself, and its historical and contemporary asymmetries, has proven to be a reflection that depends metaphorically on the use of construction materials, with special emphasis on the dexterity of self-construction, and symbolically on the material dichotomy of words historical and colonially inscribed in this city: the cement and the Caniço. In Maputo's contemporary map, from the colonial Lourenço Marques, it remains the wealthy area of Polana Cimento and the poor area of Polana Caniço, where in the past people of Mozambique were not allowed to build using modern materials. When it comes to the floor one steps upon and walks in other matters socially divide the city: the asphalt and the earth. Asphalt roads tend to be dirt track as one moves away from the centre. Big boats and open trucks where travelers hold each other so as not to fall (*My Love*, in the most positive of euphemisms), bring and take people. Crossed by decelerating road bumps, both asphalt and earth can bring together and divide in the map of the city's psychosocial geography. In the exhibition space of the great room of the Portuguese Cultural Centre in Maputo we also mirror that distribution of people. First, three tall tables made with pallets bought second hand, present a lid in regular cement. The tables' disposition creates a physical barrier that visually prevents the entrance in the room, and its rounded disposition conjures the delineated curve that borders between Polana Cimento and the emblematic popular neighbourhood of Mafalala (the neighbourhood of anonymous people but also of Craveirinha, Eusébio...). To the right, and further to the end, where in the map one would locate Polana

Canico, a set of nine tables are brought together like an organism. These are low tables also built with pallets and old odd wood, scraps from here and there, as we have seen time and again throughout the city, at informal market places, fruit stalls, and inhabited hedges. This we could call a *tectonic of self-construction and reutilization*. In these unstable and irregular tables some images and drawings punctuate: dividing and organizing urban walls, comparison between the height of buildings and trees, the similar distribution of objects in a shelf of a market and a museum. Furthermore, in the exhibition, drawings and photographs are shown in fixed dimensions: two blocks of A4 drawing paper that we brought with us and newspaper paper to print photographs A4 or A3 size. The bigger works achieve purpose through the junction of these elements: a construction. On the gallery's walls, small paintings also call for the strong visual expression of the advertisements manually designed that we can see scattered throughout the city. This strong imagery of the Mozambican landscape created by anonymous dexterous painters of commercial murals occupies shop and home façades and they can belong to the global brands as well as to any local shop (building materials, car pieces, hairdresser, restaurants...). In the exhibition, two images sum up in part the process and the theme of the project: the photographs we did at Centro de Documentação e Formação Fotográfica (CDFF), from the research we developed on the photo archive of Mozambican photographer Ricardo Rangel. The two photographs simultaneously register and stage, two photographs printed by Rangel himself in the photographic paper boxes they were found in when we went through the archive.