

of fiery land

Daniel Moreira e Rita Castro Neves
sound of Gustavo Costa

Those who do not recall the past are doomed to repeat it: George Santayana's famous sentence, quoted in multiple variations, time and time again, has rapidly become a rhetorical resource. It does entail, however, an easily verifiable analysis of History that cannot play hostage in the realm of demagoguery. It is this urgency of remembering that Daniel Moreira and Rita Castro Neves reflect upon in *of fiery land*.

The artistic duo visited the ancient mines of Peirão where coal, following the soil's overheating caused by last year's forest fires, started combustion veiling the surrounding villages in a thick smoke cloud for weeks. "The coal at Minas de Peirão is still burning", so it read a Público's headline from January 2018. In May, a new article mentioned the same phenomenon. Months later the air remained toxic, the land hot, life stagnated.

of fiery land departs from the perplexities that arise in the face of tragedy and what it, irreversibly, leaves behind to make us think about its immanent predictability. Because forest fires are, year after year, a familiar episode, and because the causes, whether accidental or criminal, offer an explanation for the consequences, last year's events beg to question if their extension might have been reduced through political and civic will.

The exhibition is grounded in an almost scenic device constituted by a fake wall dividing the gallery, blocking the access to part of the room, only visible from the street through the gallery's windows. A landscape surprises us. From the floor smoke emanates: representation of representations forming memory, desolate images that were stamped on newspapers, on television, on the internet. Thus, unaccessible and unaudible, sterilized by the frame, the landscape invites contemplation.

On the opposite side of the fake wall a corridor, its width no bigger than a door's, fosters a feeling of enclosure, which naturally evokes the idea of underground, the "real space" of the story unfolded here. The works presented showcase the wounds of Pedorido's landscape following a narrative that goes from recording to representing and/or from objectivity to abstraction, the burnt matter being the common denominator. Thus, in a video that keeps being played, its sound reverberating throughout the exhibition, someone produces sounds with carbonized sticks. The hands of musician Gustavo Costa become darker with charcoal as he attempts a melody. It is the same coal black that we find in the drawings representing the details of the burnt landscape, which, in turn, is registered in photographs. Nature thus imposes herself, in its permanence, as a scar.

Vera Lúcia Carmo