

Eine Palme im Haus

by Joerg Bader - Director Centre de la Photographie Genève

The photographer Caio Reisewitz, renowned for his contemporary work on modern architecture in Brazil, is a modern Brazilian driving force in his own right. Oscillating between interiors and exteriors, his body of work reflects half a century of Brazilian architecture. As an artist, he has always explored Brazilian rural and urban landscapes. Working inside Brazilian houses from 1950 to 1970, the typical view from the bay windows would be onto opulent vegetation. Such an uninterrupted flow between the inside and out is comparable to the contrast between a camera obscura and the outer illuminated space.

The artist's observations focus on an ancient Western dualism between culture and nature, indicating the important reversal that lies ahead, in other words no longer considering them opposites. Akin to the mind-body dualism expressed by Descartes, this model has strongly underpinned a dire approach to inhabiting the Earth.

All too often, Westerners associate the Amazon rainforest with paradise. Apart from the fact that paradise is a monotheistic invention, without humans it is inconceivable. The first to inhabit these lands, to be promoted centuries later in travel brochures as "heavenly", did not own them individually. These forests are being erased today, ever more, just as we are busily erasing ourselves from planet Earth along with the indigenous peoples. Giant construction sites have a massive impact on the local climate. All this is at stake with the construction of the Belo Monte dam complex in Altamira.

Reisewitz's refined approach shows a subtle affinity for darkness. Many of his photographs of landscapes display sombre hues, capturing the remaining light amid the shadows, blurring the contours of plants and rocks, like for example Frans Post in his paintings of Brazilian landscapes. In the forests of Altamira, Caio Reisewitz's vision illustrates the evidence of equally aesthetic and ethical relevance. The land of Altamira which belongs to the Indigenous people yet which is destined to be submerged, is undoubtedly a place of subdued light.

The *Altamira* series represents a direct continuation of Caio Reisewitz's book *AGUA ESCONDIDA*, published in 2014 by Bei Comunicação de São Paulo. It is a remarkably complex book encompassing a variety of images, from the montages of sweeping aerial views of urban Brazilian agglomerations constructed on the shore of big water areas, collages of these images and documentary photographs of urban landscapes divided by rivers. *AGUA ESCONDIDA* marks the moment in Reisewitz's work where all elements of water unite, like streams coming together to form a river, one that washes ashore political content.

Colour had been banned from photography for a very long period of time, for example by Henri Cartier-Bresson. Photographers like William Egglestone and Steven Shore made the change back possible. The distrust of colour had been closely related to its irresistible power of seduction. The opinion at the time was to attribute a more visible graphic aspect to black-and-white photography. However, in this context, Caio Reisewitz avoids seduction for example by removing the colour yellow from his photographs, or by using extremely long exposure times at night (for the *Altamira* series), or by taking pictures beneath overcast skies.

The oversized surface of his photographs often invites the spectator to wander into the image by default. These images are overflowing with detail, so we need a lot of time to look at them, much more than we need for images on portable screens. This use of time also reflects the artist's ecological concerns.

At this very moment, as I am writing these lines, I have received news of the fire that has destroyed the National Museum of Rio de Janeiro and much of its archive and collection of 20 million artefacts. The government is to blame for failing to support its heritage. This throws open the doors to barbarism.

Having led the Indigenous people close to extinction, the government of Brazil is now responsible for the massive destruction of the inheritance of its Indigenous peoples. Valeria Piccoli refers in her text to Félix-Emile Taunay's painting *Brazilian Forest Being Reduced to Charcoal*, in the collection of the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes. This painting is now not only a metaphor for how the Indigenous people are threatened in Brazil, but in the meantime has become a fact.