



Matheus Rocha Pitta, *Reintegração de posse (Repossession Suit)*, 2018, taipa, secondhand furniture, chain. Installation view. Photo: Matheus Rocha Pitta.

Matheus Rocha Pitta

CASA DE SERTANISTA

Modernist architect and urbanist Lúcio Costa considered *taipa*, or rammed earth, used in the construction of Brazilian colonial houses, an expression of authentic rural life. He considered these structures made using this technique to be “legitimate things of the earth,” like anthills or fig trees, and thus connected to the very soil that gave the rural family sustenance and meaning. But he also considered taipa predecessor of the reinforced concrete that he and his peers would put to use in some of the country’s most revered architectural landmarks. In São Paulo, moreover, the rediscovery of such colonial houses also fed into an idealized image of the seventeenth-century fortune hunters known as *bandeirantes*, remembered less for their brutal oppression of indigenous populations

than as daring pioneers who braved the country's dangerous backlands in order to find riches and open the path for Portuguese settlers.

Casa do Sertanista is a case in point, having been restored as part of the celebrations of the Fourth Centennial of São Paulo in 1954. This is where Matheus Rocha Pitta installed *Reintegração de posse* (Repossession Suit), 2018, as part of the three-venue exhibition “*Morumbi, Caxingui, Butantã*,” curated by Douglas de Freitas and titled after the neighborhoods where it took place, whose names all derive from the language of the indigenous Tupi-Guarani. Rocha Pitta's title is ambivalent. On the one hand, it refers to the legal process whereby squatters or the landless are evicted so that a building or farmland may be returned to its legal owner. More often than not, such events are marked by police brutality. On the other hand, and more abstractly in this particular context, the title points to the artist's proposal to peel back the layers of symbolic and ideological monumentalization that have been imposed on these rather modest types of buildings, not in order to return to a myth of origin but to reflect on the uses of history.

Rocha Pitta's intervention was very succinct: The whole house was left empty except for two rings of objects lying in the middle of the floor of the main hall. The outer circle consisted of banal household items such as a mattress, a disassembled kitchen sink, chairs, and an old, broken television set. They were all chained together, perhaps signaling their residual value to a dispossessed person, but also suggesting coercion and violence. Each object in the inner ring was mirrored by a solid cube of taipa of the same dimensions. These blocks had been built in situ and bore the marks of the wooden planks used in their making, leaving one with a palpable sense that they had emerged from the ground itself. One felt this might have been a model of an ancient city or an archeological site, with the blocks morphing into monumental ziggurats. Both literal and uncanny “things of the earth,” the taipa sculptures seemed impervious to the controlled historiographic operations of modernist architects such as Costa.

Returning from their explorations of the dark, empty rooms of the historic building, viewers were necessarily forced once again to face this strange ensemble, somehow made all the more solemn by the light of the fluorescent lamps hanging low from the high ceiling. The disquieting pairing of precariousness and obdurateness in the doubling of the



objects in the taipablocks was reminiscent of the disjunctive overlaying of historical mythmaking with everyday use and social struggles in the urban arena. The exhibition's strength lay precisely in the skill and concision with which it evoked such contrasts, offering, as it were, a sculptural snapshot of ideology under construction.

— Sérgio B. Martins