



revealing the point of view from which the images were taken. This highway, which connects Rio's north zone to its downtown, is slated for destruction as part of the urban-renewal program initiated by the city in preparation for the 2014 World Cup and the Olympic Games in 2016. Across the photographs' surfaces, one observes variations in color and composition. Shifts in grain and focus reveal unexpected similarities to the formal conventions of historical maritime etchings and paintings of Rio, thereby creating a temporal parallax also echoed in the work's formal juxtaposition of a modern urban construction with a colonial vessel.

Looking at the photographs, I could easily imagine the road's demolition and the attendant clangor, an urban cacophony that is all too familiar around Rio today. Yet on the exhibition's opening day, September 7, Brazil's Independence Day, I was confronted instead with dissonance of a different order. Protests—about, among other things, the city's rampant gentrification in advance of the sporting events and an increase in police aggression—had turned violent: The police fired tear-gas bombs and rubber bullets at protesters. It is in this context that one must also understand Rocha Pitta's work. The artist confessed as much in a public conversation at the gallery: "We need to shatter that narrative, to intervene in that narrative of progress, of Rio as a city that is improving."

Even as the exhibition was going on, the artist was in the midst of negotiations with the family of Amarildo de Souza. On July 14, this forty-three-year-old bricklayer had been stopped for questioning by police near his home in the Rocinha favela. He never returned home. And since his body has never been found, his presumed death cannot be legally recognized. Rocha Pitta constructed in his honor a tombstone made of concrete, intending to site it near the family's home. (The tombstone's twin was recently on view at the ArtRio fair.) On its raw surface, one sees fragments of cement bags, the material of this man's trade, and newspaper images of Souza. While the photographs from the highway engage a proleptic commemoration of what will soon disappear, the tombstone proposes to serve as a site to mourn a disappearance that the state apparatus cannot acknowledge. A spectral logic thus emerges: Ghostly presences, human or architectural, confound our conventional oppositions between what is absent and present, dead and alive. Rocha Pitta ever so subtly weaves together images of the past and present, and in so doing, poses the question of Rio's future.

—Kaira M. Cabañas

## RIO DE JANEIRO

### Matheus Rocha Pitta

GALERIA PROGETTI

Using space normally left unoccupied best describes the strategy at the heart of Matheus Rocha Pitta's recent exhibition "*Nau*," whose title is an archaic Portuguese word for *ship*. Rather than deploy the existing architecture to display his work, the artist installed scaffolding topped off with a plywood floor in Galeria Progetti's atrium space, creating a surface level with the building's second floor. Viewers had to climb some stairs to this provisional viewing platform in order to access twelve framed photographs, each ten by seven-and-a-half inches and taken with a cell phone. All of them show the mast of the *Nau do Descobrimento*, a replica of the ship whose crew "discovered" Brazil, together with the elevated road that borders Guanabara Bay, thereby



Matheus Rocha Pitta, *Nau (Ship)*, 2011–13, framed digital C-print, 12 x 16".