

Carlos Noronha Feio and Yvette Greslé in conversation, March 2016.

Time speeds up or slows down. Beneath Perspex umbrella-like structure sound is disorientating. Only prior knowledge tells me the source of this sound, national anthems obscured by an accelerated tempo. Carlos Noronha Feio's exhibition at narrative projects - discursive *foundations of sunlight* - builds on his ongoing preoccupation with questions of nation, nationalism and identity. Preconceptions of belonging and not belonging – whether imagined through historical, geographical, social, cultural, political or ideological discourses and fields of inquiry - are deliberately undone. I encounter objects, images and sounds displaced from the points in space and time to which they are imagined to belong. Like many artists working today, whose practice embodies an art historical and theoretical relationship to conceptual and experimental lineages in art, Noronha Feio deliberately disrupts any kind of linear or causal conception of time. An object such as a male child's Japanese Kimono whose iconography, meaning and usage is embedded in Second World War propaganda may, through his curatorial and aesthetic process, find itself in proximity to a woman's belt from the British Arts and Crafts Movement. The objects he collects and lives with in the personal and imaginative space-world of his studio or home are reactivated through his art practice (objects also include a wooden shelf with the carved head of an elephant, a Byzantine hairpin, early twentieth century spoons from India, an eighteenth century European cannon ball). These things have utilitarian and/or decorative functions but are also imbued with historical, social, cultural, political and ideological significations. Noronha Feio's paintings and drawings are situated in proximity to the arrangements of objects that he calls assemblages. These playfully suggest, even as they do not exactly replicate, a mode of abstraction that can be associated with aesthetic developments in twentieth century modernism. Noronha Feio applies paint to raw linen canvas, the edges of which remain unpainted and exposed, drawing attention to the process of constructing an object that is to become a painting. They refer also to his own personal trajectory as an artist experimenting over time with abstracted marks, lines and uses of colour and the act of drawing and painting over photographic images reproduced in collected texts weighted with historical and political significance. Noronha Feio is acutely aware of the ways in which objects, sounds, images, and, indeed, lines, colours and marks exist in a critical and historical relationship to bodies of knowledge and modes of thought. His practice refers consistently to multiple geographical and historical sites of inquiry, which he places in relation to one another through his own configurations.

The exhibition - *discursive foundations of sunlight* - also builds on Noronha Feio's artistic and theoretical research and, in particular, his interest in the social and political capacities of art to initiate not revolutions but rather slight but

potentially transformative gestures. He is compelled by the process of drawing attention to the ways in which language can naturalise and reinscribe historical assumptions about the world. The “Sunsight” of the exhibition title is from the work of the American innovative thinker and inventor Buckminster Fuller (born Richard Buckminster Fuller, 1895-1983). Famously the inventor of the geodesic dome, Fuller was committed to the development of design technologies that would improve human living conditions. He argued that “sunset” and “sunrise” - terms that reinscribe a pre-Copernican perspective of the world - should be replaced by “sunclipse” and “sunsight” and explained his neologisms in a 1966 article published in *The New Yorker*. Here Fuller recounted an address delivered at the fourth Dartmouth Conference, which was held in Russia in 1965:

Many of you think of yourselves as scientists, and yet you go off on a picnic with your family, and you see a beautiful sunset, and you actually see the sun setting, going down. You’ve had four hundred years to adjust your senses since you learned from Copernicus and Galileo that the earth wasn’t standing still with the sun going around it. I’ve made tests with children—you have to get them right away, before they take in too many myths. I’ve made a paper model of a man and glued him down with his feet to a globe of the world, and put a light at one side, and shown them how the man’s shadow lengthens as the globe turns, until finally he’s completely in the shadow. If you show that to children, they never see it any other way, and they can really understand how the earth revolves the sun out of sight. But you scientists still see the sun setting. And you talk about things being “up” or “down” in space, when what you really mean is *out* and *in* in respect to the earth’s surface.¹

Noronha Feio explores the critical and imaginative possibilities of language and of historical and geographical constellations that may not necessarily be anticipated. The obfuscation of linear conceptions of time - of what is past, present and still to emerge - underpins his creative and intellectual process and methods of working. He stages visual, sonic and associative worlds where time and space are malleable and porous as he journeys backwards and forwards, a kind of time-traveller, across space and time.

Yvette Greslé: How do you imagine the objects you collect and then variously reconfigure within the spaces of home, studio or gallery?

Carlos Noronha Feio: The objects appear because I search for them. Sometimes I search for something specific. For example, I became aware of propaganda war kimonos from my research. I buy objects that I find interesting as part of my art practice. All of the objects that I collect are objects that are going to inform my practice. You could say I am building a collection but it becomes quite a random collection because I am not focusing on one particular kind of object. I am interested in trying to create connections and dialogues between objects. When I began to think about transforming objects through my work I had an idea about a project, which I called “The Growing Museum”. A museum is a really strange word for me and there is, of course, a lot of discourse around museums. They preserve and record history and they ennoble everyday objects or those deemed to have aesthetic or historic value. There is also the idea that the human need to preserve in the late twentieth, and now the twenty first century, is linked to innate fears attached to the Nuclear Age. We can vanish at any time.

For this show I am making temporary assemblages that can always change and the objects I use are also from my day-to-day life, my domestic life. At home, I play around with possible relationships between objects. In the exhibition, I

¹ Calvin Tomkins, “In the Outlaw Area”, *The New Yorker*, January 8, 1966 Issue
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1966/01/08/in-the-outlaw-area> (accessed 29 March 2016).

place the objects in the same spaces as some of the work I've been producing: paintings, drawings and a sound work. I try to put objects together that are not from the same place of origin and I am interested in the kinds of dialogues that might be generated. I always put three objects together to open up a more complex and multi-layered conversation. The objects I collect are useful but they can also represent different historical or ideological perspectives. There is always something that undermines the other and there is always something that complements the other. You can see connections or parallels between objects. I love the idea that the objects that might surround you in your everyday life - and that have a certain domesticity to them - can also have meanings that go beyond a basic utilitarian purpose. For example, objects might also have functioned historically as forms of political propaganda in everyday life. I am interested in producing dialogues that may otherwise not occur.

YG: How do you imagine your relationship to being an artist and a collector of objects? Research is an important aspect of your practice, and you also curate your shows very carefully considering the relationships between objects, images and sounds.

CNF: I think that being an artist is more than just producing the final work. I see curating as a form of art practice. Research is part of my art practice. In my case I feel as though I have an innate need to do all these things. I actually feel the need to collect in the same way that I would never be able to make the decision to stop producing work as an artist.

YG: How do you think about the ethics and politics of collecting? Things have a particular history that is not necessarily benign.

CNF: I like the idea that the objects I collect are not necessarily benign and I am interested in the kinds of conversations they can have with each other. This process might help us to understand things that because of history we are not able to perceive in a straightforward way. We could see something good in something really bad or something bad in something good.

YG: The assemblages and the paintings exhibited with them don't prescribe how it is we are to read them. They invite an imaginative response.

CNF: The assemblages invite dialogues between objects. I am also interested in the discourses that occur between the objects themselves. Their meaning is also dependent on the viewer and how they imbue the objects with their own knowledge. The paintings invite the same kinds of relationships and responses. You might imagine points of connection between different art historical periods or movements when you look at the paintings. Images, colours, lines and marks are vessels that can be filled with different meanings.

YG: The sound work is a collection of national anthems, which you have rendered obscure. Sound is so ephemeral, so difficult to pinpoint, so immediate and sensory.

CNF: The sound work speaks to my interest in the construction of nationalities and how it is we imagine relationships between Self and Other through this lens. The title of the work is: "All the anthems in the world by countries that are recognised by at least one other". I collected, through the Internet, all the

anthems in the world and I went through all the official lists of countries that I could find. I put all the anthems in alphabetical order and changed the tempo. I sped up 6 hours of anthems until I ended up with a 20-minute sound work. The individual traits of each anthem are no longer audible. From these anthems I have produced a single sound work to be heard by one person at a time. You hear the work through a sound dome, a Perspex umbrella. Only one person can stand under the dome at any given time. You as the listener will be in the same space as other people in the gallery but they will not be listening to the sound in the same way that you are. That is really interesting to me. It's a nice metaphor for a country. You are having a totally different experience from everyone else sharing the same geographical location as you, at a specific moment in time.

YG: What is the impetus for your ongoing interest in ideas about nation, nationalism and identity?

CNF: Feelings of belonging or not belonging. It may just be because of my own experience to do with the history of the country where I was born (Portugal). Because of the history of the country to which I moved (the UK). Perhaps it is to do with how people have reacted to me because of the way I look (I am made to understand that I am not stereotypically, in a visual sense, Portuguese). I have always been aware that there is this otherness from within the space that I personally inhabit. In Portugal people think I am a foreigner and start to speak to me in English and then people try to deflect the fact that I am Portuguese by asking about my ancestry. This complicates matters as both my parents were actually born in Angola.

YG: It's so interesting what you are saying about the intimate, personal space of difference (your articulation of your own subjective experience of difference).

CNF: In thinking about the idea of difference or otherness through proximity you might start questioning broader ideas of similarity and difference, the "us and them", the Other as far away. I think more intimate experiences of difference allow you to question broader, more generalised narratives. Ideas of nationality and nation are so problematic in day-to-day situations. There are so many ways you can think about points of connection with people without having to indoctrinate them into being homogenous just because they occupy the same geography.