

Angelus Novus*

By José Sousa Machado

“... I was carried away in spirit. I saw a throne in the sky and on the throne there was someone sitting. The one who sat was in appearance like a jasper and sardonyx stone, and a halo like an emerald surrounded the throne. (...) From the throne came lightning, voices, and thunder. In front of the throne there was also a kind of sea of glass transparent as crystal (...) and around the throne were four living creatures covered with eyes before and behind...”
(Apocalypse, 4, 2–7; “The throne of God”)

Carlos Henrich’s current exhibition at Sá da Costa, entitled “Esperançar” – a term used by Paulo Freire that means actively promoting gestures of hope and not waiting! – is organized around a sculpture, placed in the center of the gallery, which presents formal affinities with the excerpt from the Apocalypse of John, reproduced as an epigraph to this text.

This sculpture can also be perfectly read as a throne – the throne of the nine choirs of the celestial orders, fixed by Pseudo-Dionysius (Areopagite) at the end of the fifth century, in his work “Celestial Hierarchy”. Its ethereal manifestation derives from successive descending processions or hypostases from the “Unnamable.” A quadrangular iron top rests on 16 undulating ribbons, also made of iron, which wind down to the ground. At the base they draw small fingers. On the top is placed a circular mirror and on the mirror are arranged nine angels: five in lioz stone of variable color, three in white marble and one in glazed limestone. At the base of each of these angelic sculptural entities, Carlos Henrich sculpted, in bas-relief, the facial organs that, when properly grouped, depict the face of an angel – eyes, nose, mouth, ears. Something calamitous is about to happen: the sixth angel weeps, has tears drawn at the base; another sports an Amerindian feather; and the last one has the letter alpha inscribed, announcing the imminence of an eschatological, messianic

event, which will close the current historical cycle to begin a new cycle, pregnant with the strong time of the origins.

The face of the angel reflected in the circular mirror is that of the angel of history, perhaps the same one that Walter Benjamin told us about, commenting on a painting by Paul Klee. This angel looks into the past and is astonished by what he sees. He is stupefied, stunned! A dreadful maelstrom blows violently from there, throwing at his feet the wreckage and ruins of all times gone by and pushing him with his back turned towards the future. This metaphorical whirlwind is, strictly speaking, what we call “progress” and “History” is, after all, also a tremendous infamous repository of oppression, destruction, manipulation and silencing of disinherited peoples and human groups – as seen today in Ukraine, in Gaza, and in the strictly utilitarian way in which we relate to nature, in the name, too, of this same “progress” – “The astonishment that the things we see ‘still’ can be like this in the twentieth century (and twenty-first, we say) is not a philosophical astonishment. It is not at the beginning of a process of knowledge, except that the idea of history from which it comes is not sustainable”, said Walter Benjamin (“On the concept of history”, thesis VIII).

Around the throne of the nine angels, Carlos Henrich also presents two large-format paintings, about a dozen and a half monotypes on paper, a smaller marble sculpture and four marble wall sculptures – sculpted and painted bas-reliefs that were previously used as matrices for the partial realization of monotypes (manual lithographs in monotype). All the works on display deal with the same theme, on angeology, in a versatile and, let’s say, syncretic style, which combines references from the European cultural melting pot with the animist culture of the indigenous people of South America, who are also currently surrounded by the vertigo of neo-liberal progress.

The angels who now populate Sá da Costa, these “shadows of God”, as they were originally called, constitute the spiritual army that Carlos Henrich summoned to his aid in this artistic, spiritual and political battle, active and committed, fighting immobility and conformism, because, as the prophet said: “... I know thy works: thou art neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm – and you are neither cold nor hot – I will vomit you out of my mouth...”

(Apocalypse, 3, 14–17; “To the Church of Laodicea”).

*Title of a painting by Paul Klee, dated 1920, which Walter Benjamin renamed, in thesis IX of his essay “On the Concept of History”, “Angel of History”.

INTERVIEW by DAVID EVANS

DE. 1. Carlos, the theme of this show will be a surprise for some of those who have followed your career. Where did the inspiration for this series of works come from? You told me it’s an idea which has been in the back of your mind since childhood.

CH. Words can be powerful, especially if, in some way, we are their target.

When I was about eleven or twelve years old, a colleague at school tried to offend me by calling me a “nazi German”. At that age I had no idea what a “nazi” might be. I went to the library and asked the librarian if they had a book which could enlighten me.

She advised me to read “Treblinka”, about the german death camp in the Ukraine.

It was a terrible shock and an awakening to the world around me, which until then I had not seen in this way.

Later, when I went to study in Germany, I realised that the the narrative, in history lessons, about the time of the “Third Reich” had too many logical failings, which led me to continue looking for an answer to this question which made some sense.

DE. 2. In our conversations the name of Walter Benjamin has cropped

up frequently . What is the connection between these works and the thinking of the great German philosopher?

CH. Regarding my German side and my experience in Germany as a “hybrid” in terms of nationality, Walter Benjamin describes and understands his native country well and has helped me in my pursuit of historical understanding.

The repetition of a civilizational and political error is still an error, and will inevitably lead to the same result, or worse.

I am going to quote a brief excerpt from Ricardo de Luis Carballada’s book “ El Concepto de História de Walter Benjamin:

-”Benjamin ´ s text was written against the immediate background of the crisis of the Thirties which led Europe into the barbarism of Fascism.

Horrified, Walter Benjamin, observes, from his Marxist viewpoint, the establishment of National Socialism in Germany and the failure of the workers ´ movement to prevent it...”

DE. 3. We are at a moment in History- of Europe and the World- in which we are living in an atmosphere of collective insecurity and constant confrontation. Is this exhibition based upon your reflections concerning the threats we are facing?

CH. Almost a hundred years have passed by since the events which affected Walter Benjamin and the similarity between historical events is astonishing, without requiring such extreme right-wing Governments, to take advantage of the crisis we ourselves have provoked, to grow with every day that goes by.

In effect, we are all puppets of a hegemon controlled by Capital.

I am equally horrified by the institutions of power. They all talk about human rights when we are losing rights and freedoms with every day that passes and they have re-imposed duties which require us to place our lives on the line; morals, honour, nation, all above the right to life itself.

Charles de Gaulle said “Patriotism is whn the love for your own people comes first, Nationalism is when the hate for other nations comes first”

Walter Benjamin's text on Paul Klee's painting "the Angel of History" has therefore become, in my view, timeless.

DE. 4. It is likely that many of those who come to see your exhibition will be unfamiliar with your creative process and may ask themselves about the connection between work which is carried out in such different techniques as monoprinting and sculpture in stone. I was privileged to look at a small sketchbook with pencil drawings, annotations of your first steps in the creation of the works on show. Can you explain how these works in two and three dimensions relate to each other?

CH. The creative process of the work in this exhibition follows Paulo Freire's idea which also gave me the title for the show: "ESPERANÇAR" or "TO HOPE ACTIVELY"

Freire explains that *esperançar*, unlike *esperança* (which has a passive sense), implies the pro-active involvement of the subject or *esperançador*.

My journey began with the drawings and some written notes, which in the form and development of my works always means tri-dimensionality and creative freedom.

If I speak about being free to demonstrate or pass on an idea related to historical awareness, such freedom, at an aesthetic level, has to be very great. The monoprints allow me to repeat images or gestures in different ways using the same matrixes in stone, whether low-relief wall hangings or small sculptures.

The small ANGELS if the sculpture "Throne" suggest interdimensionality as they float over a mirror which offers the strange perception of a fourth dimension.

What links them to Earth is in a schizophrenic state between the ground and air, seeming to choose the ground below them as the only way, with their feet upon resting upon it.

The angels are subject to gravity, no breeze draws them to Paradise. The mirror reveals part of the face of an angel which cannot be seen in its entirety, offering many different angles of vision.

Perhaps it is this gravity which keeps us on the ground, the fatality of lack of vision and the fragility of human existence.

As a civilisation, we would have to see ourselves from outside to understand the madness with which we are moving forward to nowhere. In evolution there are no constants.

The Anthropocene era is very recent.

Those who have followed my previous exhibitions are already familiar with my habit of introducing social, political and environmental criticism in an unequivocal way. without compromising my creative method, which has always been multifaceted and free in its use of different materials.

DE. 5. This year has been for you particularly intense from the artistic viewpoint, with important shows both at home and abroad. With your inexhaustible creative capacity, I am sure that you are already involved in a new project. Is it still too early to reveal the details?

CH. ESPERANÇAR will continue to be at the heart of my working method.

As I mentioned at the beginning, words and to those I add acts, have power and can target those who seek the truth and those who try to become the sole owners of it.

I want to ESPERANÇAR or to HOPE ACTIVELY to preserve PEACE even if it means only peace of mind.

Maybe I will continue to develop an earlier work of mine. Works to be seen by humans and which will be understood by human eyes.

I question the ability of machines to understand. They are statistical calculators with highly sophisticated programmes which can simulate human understanding.

As understanding is a feature of humanity which in itself is inconstant, machines inevitably lead towards dehumanised absurdity. Machines do not hope actively, do not fear, do not understand the sense of loss that death brings with it.

The distress and horror of being in the midst of war, with its arbitrariness and destruction, is incomprehensible to anything which does not possess the sense of mortality.

The angels have their feet on the ground attracted by the planet's gravity.

The angels with their wings do not fly through the air, their flight is the environment- the only important thing to preserve in our brief existence.

Perhaps the last of the angels are the Indians isolated from civilisation, what we call savages who walk barefoot over the dry leaves... this is why they know nothing of “ the pile of destruction which extends from the Earth to Heaven”

More humility and humanity would do us good.

CARLOS HENRICH

Carlos HENRICH is an artist of double nationality (Brazilian -German) currently based in Lisbon (Portugal). Henrich was born in 1965 in Baden (Switzerland) and lived in São Paulo (Brazil) from 1966 to 1982. He attended the course in Mechanical Process Engineering - specialization in Plastic Injection Molding in Durlach (Germany) between 1982 and 1985. He was a student of **Painting and Sculpture** under the tutorship of Prof. Rainer Küchenmeister at the **Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste Karlsruhe - Germany** from 1985 to 1990 and at the same time developed marble sculptural works in Vila Viçosa and Évora - Portugal.

He received the **Meister Schüller** (*Master Degree*) in Painting from the *Art Academy of Karlsruhe* (DE) in 1988.

From 1993 to 2012 was represented by the gallery *gAD - galeria Antiks Design*, Lisbon, where he moved to in 1990.

Henrich's work is part of private and public collections in Angola, Brazil, France, Germany, Holland, Japan, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain and the USA.

Awarded in different occasions, among which the 1st Prize for the marble sculpture “LIQUIDAÇÃO TOTAL”, 5^o Salão de Primavera, Casino do Estoril Art Gallery and Estoril Sol 1990; Third prize for iron sculpture “TETRAHEDRON”, EDP - Edinfor Sculpture Awards CYBERSPACE’96, Casino Estoril 1996; *Best Media Award* for his sound sculpture “RESONANCE 7.84” (with Kazike), *Black Raven Awards - THE NEW ART FEST’17*, MUNHAC Lisbon 2017.

He begun developing **SOUND SCULPTURES** in 1986 at the IWKA Ateliers (nowadays ZKM - Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie), Karlsruhe (Germany) with Georg Schalla, Uwe Lindau and Ralph Büller.

Sound projects (selection):

GLOBAL ART PROJECTS with Uwe Fisher, Jörg Fischer and Roland Bauer, Maulbronn’s Monastery (DE) 1986, 1993;

KUNSTRAUM IWKA - as assistant of Georg Schalla, Karlsruhe (DE) 1987.

INFILTRA SOM - by João de Barros, Gil Eannes Ship, Viana do Castelo (PT) 2009.

Sound sculptures solo shows:

RESONANCE 7,84, with special participation of Kazike, texts by Rajele Jain, Elonor Jain and Axel Heil, 2009; *THE SITTING WOLF*, 2015, both at the Travessa da Ermida Belém, Lisbon.

ETHNOSFERE, 2018, with Vincent Martial, exhibition and performance, Ruins of the Roman Theatre Museum, Lisbon.

Group shows exhibiting Sound Sculptures.

In 2017, *CARMO, CHIADO e a República Litterária - Arts in the Public Sphere*, organized by José Quaresma, Carmo Archaeological Museum, Lisbon; Casa de Portugal Maison André Gouveia, co-curatory Elsa Bruxelles, Paris; University of Auckland Gallery, curator Mark Harvey, New Zealand; Łódź Art Accademy, Poland.

THE NEW ART FEST’17, by António Cerveira Pinto and Ocupart, Picadeiro MUHNAC - Natural History and Science Museum, Lisbon.

Best Media Award - Black Raven Awards for sound sculpture *RESONANCE 7,84* (sp KZK).

PICADEIRO OSCILLATED sound performance with Kazike, *The New Art Fest's finissage*, MUHNAC, Lisbon 2017.

2019 *ETHNOSPHERE* with Vincent Martial, Festival LISBOA SOA'19, by Raquel Castro, Estufa Fria Lisbon.

Sound publication: CARLOS HENRICH SOUND SCULPTURES Art Catalogue, Lisbon 2019, by Zambeze Almeida and Rajele Jain.

Among all exhibitions and participations throughout his career, the theme of “continuity” has always been present in his work, whether through the use of seeds and footprints as material, or the macro and micro aspects of themes such as the erotic, resonance, smile, action and reaction, sound and communication. His painting and sculpture **solo exhibition** *SEMENTE/ SEED* of 2008 dealt with the subject matters reflected in the work titles like “Literate Heart - Flowery Mouth”, embedded in the discipline of art education, “Seed’s Maternity” opposed to “Mil” and “Connected Isolation” (a sculptural work composed of iron wings incessantly spouting foam which represents the individual’s delicacy and richness in the diversity of connected cultural identities). Besides, the title of his 2011 **solo exhibition** *NOOSPHERE* was based upon the concept of philosopher and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard Chardin about the phosphorescence of thought. On the other hand, his work “Pai Sambava”, at the **AFRICANDO group show**, curated by Adelaide Ginga at gAD galeria - which integrated the *Art Biennial of São Tomé and Príncipe in Lisbon 2012* - showed a video-canvas installation with projections of the artist’s family dolls’n’teddies resonating his interest in the idea of children as the seed for the future in connection with the continuous global expansion.

SEEDS OF LIGHT, **solo sculpture and painting exhibition** - 2019, with the support of Galeria Rattón Lisbon and text by Júlio Moreira, brings us the importance of “beauty” in it’s essence for the sustainability of our souls upon distinct civilizations. After being started in Japan, is

exhibited in a beautiful catholic convent in Lisbon, the Convento dos Cardaes, highlighting the importance of cultural resistance and the gains of new ways of seeing and feeling different culture's aesthetics (in the same way Japanese or African art has strongly influenced impressionism or modernism).

ESPERANÇAR (the act of practising HOPE), **solo show** inspired in Walter Benjamin, in the "Angel of History" by Paul Klee and in the historical facts repetition, curatory Manuel Costa Cabral, texts by José Sousa Machado and David Evans, Galeria Sá da Costa, Lisbon 2024.

Group exhibitions

In 2010 *CONFRONTOS (Confrontations)*, organised by Rajele Jain at gAD galeria, and in 2012, his work was commissioned by Prof. Fernando Rosa Dias (CIEBA - Art Academy of Lisbon), to be part of the group exhibition *SPECTRUM - The New Artistic Functions Of The Image*, at the gAD galeria and at Museum/House Medeiros de Almeida, Lisbon (PT).

In 2013 the exhibition *Trippy Hippy Pastorale - Friends and Lovers in the Underground*, curatory Dirk Meinzer, Austria.

2018/19 *DACH Schutzbekleidung*, by Axel Heil, Rastatt - Karlsruhe (DE)

2019 *People who want to be happy... just like everybody else*, by Maria Miguel Lucas, Espaço Santa Catarina, Lisbon

2024 *CARMO, CHIADO and the SALGUEIRO MAIA paths - Arts in the Public Sphere*, organized by Prof. José Quaresma, Carmo Archeological Museum, Lisbon; Maison du Portugal André de Gouveia, Paris; CCRS Santarém; Arraiolos City Hall; Castelo de Vide City Hall: (all in PT); Accademia de Belle Arti di Bologna (IT); Łódz Art Accademy (PL).

2024 *DESFORRA*, organized by Flávia Germano Barra, Valada do Ribatejo (PT).

In 2010, under the invitation of Sandro Resende for doing an exhibition at Pavilhão 28 - Júlio de Matos (former psychiatric hospital in Lisbon), he conceived the artistic residency/occupation/exhibition project **ART OCCUPIES LISBON, PARIS, ... AND ALSO HAMBURG** - an ongoing

project of urban psychotherapy that involves the communal experience of foreign and local artists in a interaction between their artistic practices, a specific city and its inhabitants. Co-curatory for Lisbon-Rajele Jain, Paris-David Hardy (*dit Le Suisse Marocain*) at 59 Rivoli and Hamburg-Gora Jain at the Gangenviertel.

In 2014, the show **PRÊT-À-DÉCOLLER** started it's itineracy for the *Arte Ocupa Lisbon, Paris, ... and also São Paulo*, at 59 RIVOLI Galerie - Paris and Epicentro Cultural - São Paulo, curatory Veruscka Girio, followed by the parisian festival *Les Parfums de Lisbonne'15* launch show, the **TIMBRÉS - VOIX D'ARTISTES, HERÓS PLURIDISCIPLINAIRES**, exhibition organized by Zambeze Almeida, 59 RIVOLI Galerie - Paris. 2015 *BIICHU ART BRIDGE - ART OCUPA PROJECT*, Okayama **JAPAN**, local curatory Raku Gaki and Kazuhiro Korenaga. Artistic residency sep-oct, and until april 2016 exhibition at SHOKA IKEGAMITEI MUSEUM - Takahashi OKY (JP).

AVAV(36), live painting, by Veruscka Girio - Astronauta Mecanico, Roppongi Basecamp, TOKYO, 2015.

He's participated in **stone sculpture seminars and biennials** in Portugal: *IV Biennial of Sculpture and Drawing of Caldas da Rainha* 1991; 1st Sculpture Symposium of Pêro Pinheiro 1994; *Sculpture's Encounters*, Verney Gallery, Oeiras 2000; *2nd Stone Biennial - International Sculpture Symposium*, Alpalhão - Nisa 2003.

Sculptures in the garden, exhibition with Nelson Cardoso, Penamacor City Hall gardens 2018.

Public works:

He has produced large-scale outdoors sculptural works, such as "Hyper Realistic Man", Hofgarten, Ettlingen (DE); and in Portugal "Birth, Life and Death", Cascais; "The Guardian", Maceira-Liz, Leiria; "The HUG", Sabugal; "The Swan", Évora; "Family", Oeiras; "As Jans", Amieira do Tejo, among other public sculptures.

His latest Public Sculpture is "Der Engel", Schwarzach Monastery - Baden Württemberg, Germany 2022.

The Ratthaus Kunst Museum of Lippstadt (DE), EDP, Ermida de Belém, EFCIS and MACAM (all in Lisbon); Estoril Sol Hotel, Estoril; Tróia

Design Hotel and Casino, Tróia (PT); Musée Igor Balut, Paris; Okayama Prefecture (JP) or Shoka Ikegamitei Museum, Takahashi (JP) are some of the public collections that hold indoor paintings, sculptures and installations.

Filmography:

2003 *Carlos Henrich 1985-2003*, by Olho de Sardinha - Fine Art Documentaries, Raphael Schmid, Ronaldo Bonnacchi e Cláudia Chaves, Lisbon.

2006 *People of Europe - BIENVENUE CHEZ ZAMBEZE*, 27' min documentary for the 50th European Community anniversary "Visage d'Europe", director Ciro Cappellari, ARTE TV France and German TV network.

2007 *Carlos Henrich* by Cloves Mendes, Jucutuquara Filmes, Vitória, Espírito Santo, Brazil.

www.carloshenrich.com