

advancement, and to what extent they're unchanging with time, seems to be the conundrum at the heart of this thoughtful body of work.

— Steve Pantan

LOS ANGELES

Solange Pessoa

Blum & Poe

Dictionaries define a fetish as a spirit attached to a material object; if nothing else, the oddly configured, misshapen, and obsessional pieces made by the Brazilian artist Solange Pessoa count as such. Her sculptures look as if they have a job to do in the service of divination or magic. The work is deeply suffused with metaphysics, mystery, loss, and sorrow. Pessoa combines the conceptual and philosophical with the quasi-anthropological, fabricating her own permutations of a "primitive" sublime. Engaging the machinery of primitivism, her work embraces myth and psyche, resurrecting the bonds that tie the present to a now exotic, primal past.

These extraordinarily romantic and expressionistic works underscore Lévi-Strauss's idea that "every effort to understand destroys the object studied in favor of another object of a different nature." The objects that Pessoa studies—fossils, ancient tools, cave paintings, glyphs, indigenous artworks—come to have a "different nature" via multiple influences, including Arte Povera, Art Brut, and the work of Ana Mendieta. Pessoa's work is a record of gestures, the shapes themselves smoothed but unfinished and non-geometric, with softened, rounded edges and

labial indentations. Many pieces bear feathers or yam leaves—emphasizing kinship with ceremonial objects. The imagery originates in Pessoa's interest in rebirth, growth, and the movement between the inner (intuitive and intangible) world and the outer world of matter.

In this show, the multi-part installation *Origo* (2010–17) dominated a large expanse of floor and colonized the walls with four wall-mounted objects. Constellations of irregular, egg-shaped clay spheres were placed randomly on the floor alongside biomorphic bronze mini-islands nested within yam leaves and human hair. In another space, the floor was covered by nearly a dozen hollowed-out, vessel-like shapes carved into wavering, snake-like spirals and coils. The warm-toned soapstone is common in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, where Pessoa lives. The most extraordinary objects—five cloth, feather, and bronze sculptures collectively titled *Ão-Ão* (the name of a Guarani mythological monster)—recalled feathered, chimerical creatures hung by their necks from the wall.

There's an immense irony at the heart of this work. The pre-contact, nearly extinct place that was the "New World" of the Southern hemisphere seems fated to be constantly mined and re-imagined by subsequent generations of the Europeans who hastened its demise. What barely remains seems to be the source of a profound truth. The now unexceptional shifting of indigenous objects from natural history museums to art museums had the artist's studio and new-age mysticism as its way stations. This is not a criticism, only an observation of just how strange and pervasive primitivism is as a phenomenon. Everything that has made the pre-contact era so seductive to artists, anthropologists, and writers in the Americas is visible in Pessoa's work. Over 300 years of literary and artistic culture have emerged from the dissonance and

Top: Jason J. Ferguson, *Awakening: Replica of an Existing Space*, 2017. **Wood, concrete, large-format print, altered door, hardware, soot, and speakers, 8 x 5 x 7 ft.** **Left:** Jason J. Ferguson, *Inanimate Dissection*, 2008. **Altered shoe, wax dissection tray, T-pins, and video projection, 3 x 13 x 9 in.**



Above: Solange Pessoa, *Origo*, 2010–17. Clay, bronze, and yam leaves, dimensions variable. Left: Solange Pessoa, *Ão-Ão*, 2017. Bronze, fabric, feathers, and hair, dimensions variable. Below: Andy Zimmermann, *Rebar*, 2017. Welded rebar and steel, digital photographs, Plexiglas, and aluminum, 9 x 20 x 17 ft.

in Boston, Zimmermann visiting construction sites with Nikon DSLR in hand, sometimes challenged by suspicious foremen on the lookout for OSHA or immigration officials. Although a sculptor, Zimmermann displays a sophisticated eye for pictorial composition and texture, lingering on the contrasting strata of crumbling concrete, old brick, soil, antique stone foundations, frayed wiring, and the bent rebar that once formed the core of a structure.

Rebar is the textured steel rod used to reinforce poured concrete. Much of Zimmermann's past work has taken the form of geometric abstractions lined primarily in welded rod. Here, he turned a corner, literally and figuratively—the rod took on a utilitarian role, bracing photographic components but now and then calling attention to itself as it sketched triangles and pathways through the space.

In the central image of the installation, workers in white hard-hats and orange vests swarmed a construction site, an unpeopled framework rising nearby. Already dazzled by the size and scope of the frontal visual, we wandered into the maze to find another expansive landscape sites, doors to nowhere, and crumbling arches. Zimmermann cropped his photos to odd dimensions and had them printed, hugely enlarged, on vinyl, then laminated and glued to aluminum panels. The panels were supported by welded frameworks of metal bar, mostly rebar but occasionally an oddball bit of threaded bar or stainless steel rod.

Frosted Plexiglas paired with mirror-like aluminum panels created

friction between past and present, colonized and colonizer, the "raw and the cooked," all expressing the longed-for simplicities of the never again to be.

—Kay Whitney

