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Under the Veil of Resolution

In my research, I seek to problematize the traumas present in images that cross the contemporary political universe and cultural imaginary in Brazil. I trace the impact of power asymmetries and confront historical narratives with contemporary realities. My research discusses the role and limitations of the archive to reflect upon memory, as well as its potential to project the future. Thereby, I investigate images as a way to confront discourses that deny the existence of the civil-military dictatorship between 1964–85 and to explore how this denial has a strong relationship with the rise of the right wing in current Brazilian political and cultural debates. Most of the documentation and images of the Brazilian dictatorship has been destroyed and some of it has only recently been discovered or made public. However, beyond their existence as traditional archives, the images of the dictatorship exist in the everyday imagination, immersed in the collective unconscious of visual culture, as poor images that are hidden under the veil of resolution.

Thus, in my artistic work, I use images in low resolution or that have a restricted circulation to produce prints. “Official Portrait (2017)”, “Manipulations (2016)” and “Bandeirantes (2019)” are constituted as traces and vestiges of other images, while manifesting the conflict under their representation. “Official Portrait” is a detail of the mouth of a dictator’s photograph downloaded in low resolution from the official website of the Brazilian Government. “Bandeirantes” is a low resolution photograph that was appropriated by hacking a newspaper website database. And the “Manipulations” piece starts from a photograph that I downloaded from another internet newspaper about the storm of protests in Brazil.

“Official Portrait”

This work presents official portraits of presidents that ruled Brazil’s civil-military dictatorship (1964–85), more precisely, zoomed pictures of the leaders’ mouths printed on steel nails spiked on a wall. Each nail contains a small fragment of the portraits. The contrast between the mouths and nails addresses the violent relations between the dictatorship supposedly less official and the silence (and silencing) of an authoritarian state. None of the Brazilian dictators wore military uniforms in official portraits. Four leaders wore white suits and the last of them, Figueiredo, a suit and tie. This strategy aimed to avoid a repressive aesthetic and to present military leadership as civil politicians. An official portrait is a construction of visibility, power games, manipulations, plots, and intrigues. It also builds the legitimacy of a government as an ideological construction. The ties between military leadership and civil society during Brazil’s dictatorship created the foundations of the country’s current reality.

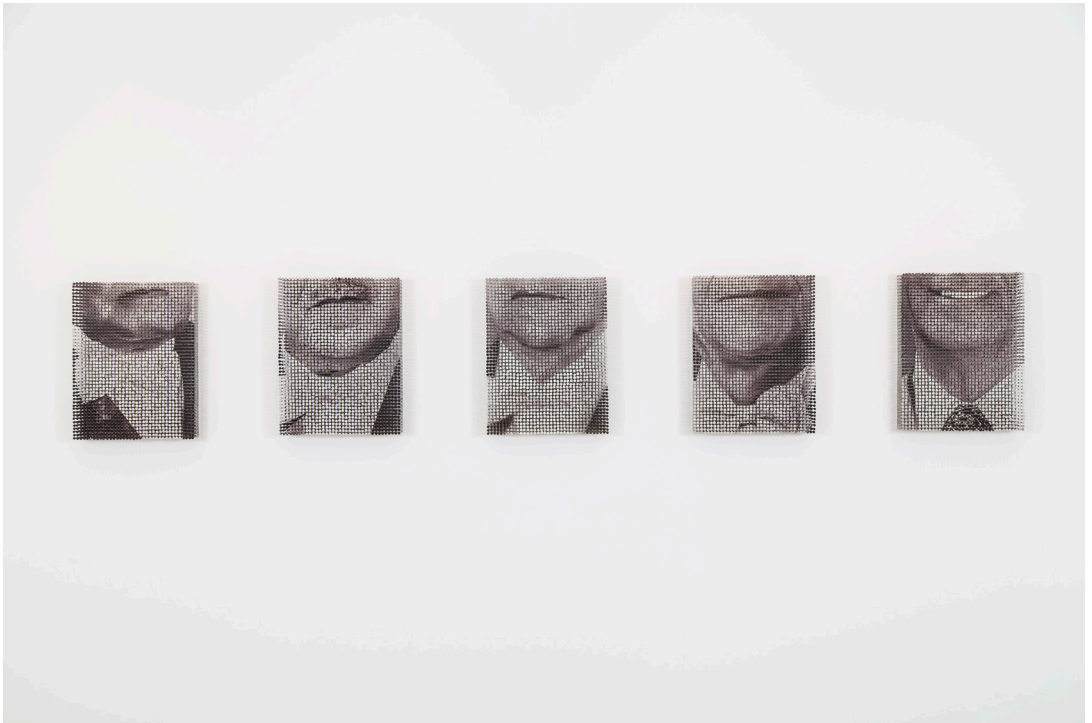


Figure 1: “Official Portrait” (2017), UV printing on 11000 steel nails fixed on the wall of the exhibition space, 5 pieces, 35x45x7cm. Photo credits Rafael Pagatini

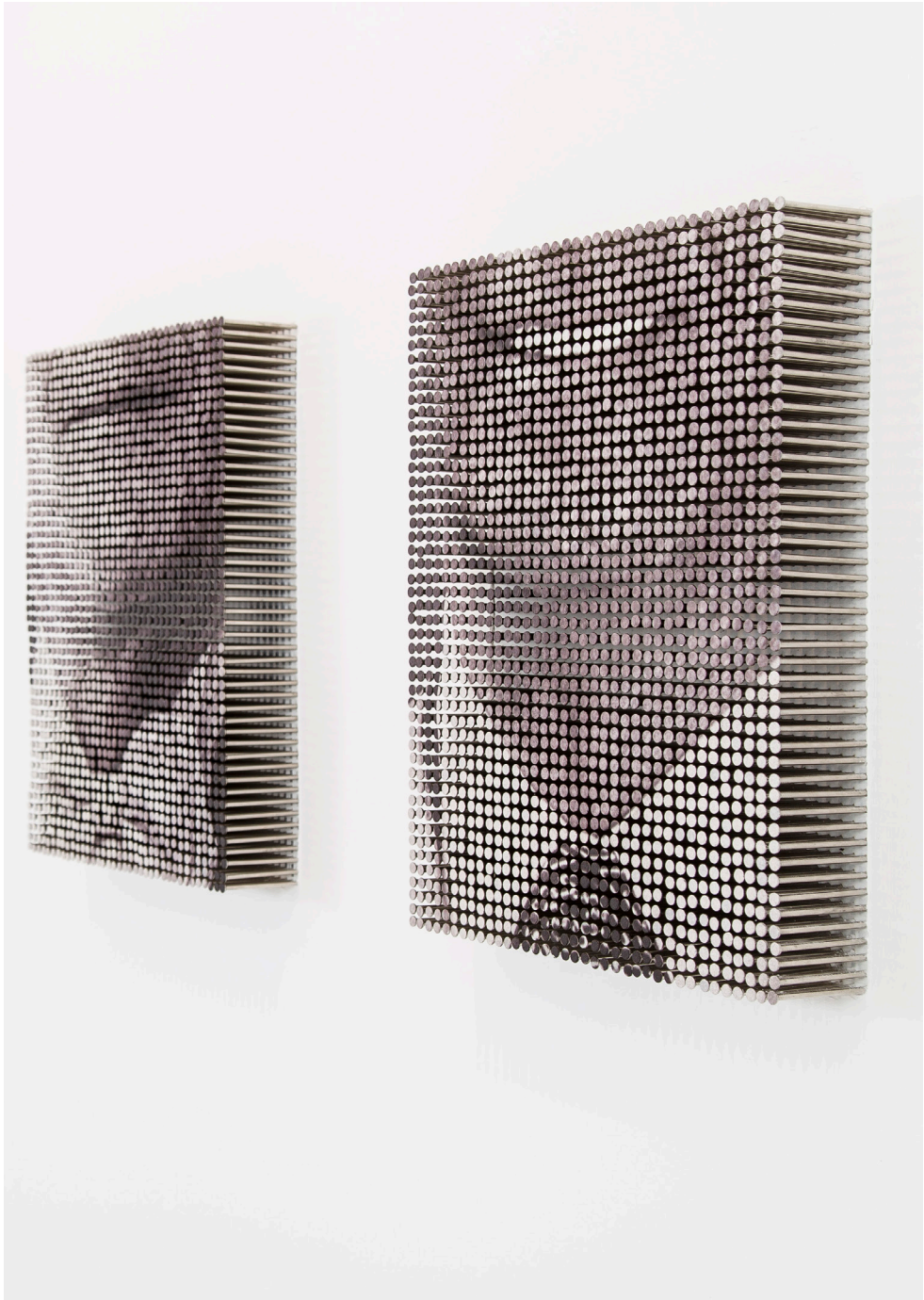


Figure 2: “Official Portrait” (2017), UV printing on 11000 steel nails fixed on the wall of the exhibition space, 5 pieces, detail, 35x45x7cm. Photo credits Rafael Pagatini

“Manipulations”

In Brazil, burned vehicles are recurrent in demonstrations since the dictatorship. Cars are a striking symbol of progress and economic development and seem to incite insubordination when they become a modern machine destroyed by flames. In parallel, images of burned cars build narratives, such as the 1981 Riocentro attack led by the Brazilian military to accuse left-wing movements of terrorism. The image of a vehicle destroyed in the attack became a symbol of the dictatorship’s downfall. Another example is the manipulated photo of guerrilla leader Carlos Marighella’s body inside a bullet-riddled car. Thus, the burning Volkswagen beetle is associated with a recent political imagery that runs through Brazilian social memory. The photograph was appropriated from online news during the June Journeys, a series of public demonstrations that occurred in June 2013. The image was transformed into a reticle, manually carved on a large wooden sheet, and finally printed on paper. The precarious appearance aims to discuss the manipulation of a photo that turns into a woodcut in a process of loss and transformation of visual representation.



Figure 3: “Manipulations” (2016), woodcut on Japanese paper, 200 x 250 cm.
Photo credits Rafael Pagatini



Figures 4: “Manipulations” (2016), woodcut on Japanese paper, detail, 200 x 250 cm. Photo credits Rafael Pagatini

“Bandeirantes”

Archive boxes show details of photos taken in 1978 during the inauguration of the Bandeirantes Highway— a road celebrated until today as one of the best highways in Brazil. Fragments highlight the authorities involved in the opening of the highway between the cities of São Paulo and Campinas. Among them, dictator Ernesto Geisel, his successor, João Figueiredo, and political and business personalities such as Paulo Maluf, Paulo Egydio Martins, Dirceu Nogueira, General Gustavo Morais, and Jorge Ribeiro. The work proposes a slow gaze at the relations between photography, the event, and the construction. The highway’s name is associated with the authoritarian and colonizing imaginary of the *bandeirantes*, men who explored the interior of South America looking for precious minerals, enslaving indigenous peoples, and exterminating black communities. Also, the title refers to the Bandeirantes Operation, an intelligence center operated by the military throughout the dictatorship. Supported by businessmen, this government body was committed to slaughtering opposition groups, which revealed the perverse connections between the authoritarian government and civil institutions. The printed cardboard of the files connect the fragments with the whole, like pieces of a giant puzzle. The work is currently echoed through the association between military intervention, conservative political context, corruption, and the discourse of progress based on economic growth.



Figure 5: “Bandeirantes” (2019), detail, UV printing on cardboard file boxes, 320 x 120 cm.
Photo credits Rafael Pagatini



Figure 6: “Bandeirantes” (2019), UV printing on cardboard file boxes, detail, 320 x 120 cm.
Photo credits Rafael Pagatini