

l
i
m
e
n

Catriona Whiteford

LIMEN

INTRODUCTION

Paving and pine

Each sequence of action has its own complex consistency of repercussion, revelation, resistance and release. As we adapt to personal and social restrictions, both physically and internally, we are often left immobilised - without structure, mute.

Interested in the foundations and construction of Graça and the local history, I approached the residency looking toward systems of communal autonomy and transformation that can be applied in a resurgence that follows natural disaster. I intended to explore the 1755 earthquake, specifically, the reconstruction of the city, the population, routes of connection and the consequent industrialisation of Graça.

As a Scottish artist based in London, I am interested in the relationships between British and Portuguese culture, and the histories of civic and urban dismantling and construction.

As an entry point to the residency, I intended to begin by creating a series of works steered by the geographical paving of the area. The cultural and communal effects of the formation of pavements that emerged post 1755 to finally connect the neighbourhood with central Lisbon hold social, political and historical narratives that I wanted to examine.

My intentions were to research broadly, on a macrolevel, but what happened was a smaller, intimate microscale of material investigation into little natural interruptions that caught my eye and held my attention.

I kept noticing the dead pine needles fall in dense crowds onto the calçadas near the Miradouro da Graça, and each day I would watch calceteiros sweep, clean and rebuild the paving surrounding the space where they had planted themselves.

To me there was something about their natural disruption and the reordering of the city's cartography post 1755 that seemed to connect - both transformative and activated by the viewer.

Equivalent to the Greek word *anabasein*, meaning both 'to embark and to return', the work uses lostness as a process to employ forms of assemblage, revealing material emergence and extraction where the image reabsorbs itself.

Working across mediums (sound, moving image, sculpture, and painting) I have used processes of transferral and transformation to align newly formed narratives that graft experience across matter and language.

The pine needles produced a pink dye the colour of the building outside my window, the small weed rupturing the adjacent roof

shared a palette with a small resin sculpture mixed with the same dye, the needles neatly grouped together perfectly resembled the brush bristles of the calceiteros' brush, and so, each material led the narrative of the following poem through simple and small transferral and transformation.

In hindsight, the materials did all the work.

I didn't do much.

|

Ah, meus pequeninos

There you are,

out beyond the limen

Where lamps of knowledge

hang themselves in the paths of

velhinas a janelas

Communing on ledges

boundaries blossom around your bed

You are small

and smaller still

migrating maroon over

surface

Your shadows soar like bird's lungs

as open as estuaries

bending language in the contours of meander

to ply prickling pink from pine

Your open touch,

a colourful panic

Ah, little ones

You're taking off now
Raising congregations like wildflowers
Rustling to their knees
for floral tributes
Swallowing the songs of calceteiros
they dive
deep
within the water field

Old bones gulping clean,
sweeping solitude only to bring it back up again
and send it on the winds
off balance
green branch abandoned

Nothing is still

and yet everything
is fixed like the sun's stare,
its ledges
commending views of your departure

Ah, meus pequeninos
We promised to never let go

Like the seeds that planted us here
High beyond the limen

where leaves rattle like shoppers' bags
blown back into the blue
and we spend ourselves
casting about on walls

||

Little ones

Capital is no passive consumption

Stillness sets in your mouth - small circles of awe

On the table,
a dish of cherries.

Pits in a white ashtray
like grapes plucked from wine
between thing and event,
like fire

Meus pequeninos

How many labours disclosed from stone have
scrubbed the city clean from argument?

For miles,
between your hands, the flowers of
your quilt have stormed

Listening
through fingers
to digest words on their edges

Over there,
communing on aromatic fall
to make a cartography of the hours
and press close to mouths
Chapping like light on lips
To show themselves shyly
to the breeze

Little ones
We're all tired.

Limp,
like freshly washed hair
heads lean
silent in vow
to pour themselves solid
sweating limestone into lineages
- oh, how we would starve without them!

Turning
like tidy avenues pursued by placid smiles
Hungry slowness inflicting sky's monotony
on the night

Our mouths
threads of dying grass
We let them stare

Meus pequeninos

You want to live forever
and I don't

When winter comes will we become a
frieze?

Or are we already here,

carved beneath feet,
armouring ourselves to the elements
Cool

and expectant

Tell me, can basalt breathe like clouds do?

Little ones

How did you get up there?

Journeying borders like shadows
accelerating toward moon fall

Like birdsong and the leaves,
everything invests in your path
where being and saying
swarm quietly,
show themselves to neighbours
and rupture on their own reflection

111

Stay still little ones

On Sundays we sit in like weather

Where wind plants us

Scattered on angles,

tangled free inside a thousand voices

and sturdy the colour of heavy

Toughened by hope

we overlook the still air of summer

and fix like telescopes on

some enlargement of ourselves

Fiquem quietos, meus pequeninos

The wind's rushes are eager

Throbbing pink and blue -

so tough their silken wearing's begin

and end

in stillness

And quiet interventions fizz with disaster

unsponsored

in the isolation of the sky's throbbing

Stay still little ones

Tell me again of the
point where you turned in on
yourself like wildfire?

Your rough spruce forming colonies of
hands birthed from the brush's bristle

Look at you

blindly clinging to the basalt
needling emotion as though you were a family
album paved in it's wet

IV

Meus pequeninos, vem agora

Render me colourless and blank as extraction
dye turning in on itself
dusty-rose,

like the window view

Come now little ones

I need you to sweeten me like cherries

To paint a cartography of pine so sweet it's
woodiness shatters blossoms
Confessing the taciturn
over the still boughs of bird call

Meus pequeninos, vem agora

I've watched you long enough

speaking through
vehicles only in details
of earth

No longer juvenile green

but burnt,
like padrons left in the pan

What disappointment did you play
to change so quickly
into an image, an odour-
You turn yourself on the hours of summer's
wisdom and anguish
and make us blush

Come now little ones
Let's rest
upon the stone's
slow disclosure
well-rosed at the edges of virtue
And empty ourselves into the anchor
where time thickens

Meus pequeninos, vem agora
Dry your tears in pockets
performing pleats and punctum
to prime time for lostness.
Here in this little Laguna
we can ride days on threads of claim
or promise,
and contract in on one another, happy,
like ice cubes in the glass

V

Meus pequeninos

Stillness glints through you erratic
Like someone hitting the side of the glass with a
spoon
A clarity of address so sharp
it leads flat expanses stupefied
tendering mute scripts
for emotion

Little ones

Everything is cyclical
On every miradoura, a tree
 Sap
 frothing and rising
To archive the whirr of slowing
 Bark cracked, with the strength of the
calceteiros sentence

Meus pequeninos,

Your embers become something more akin to the
softness of a cloud

Intense as the Atlantic

coals

bleed rosy-soft

below the threshold

warming walls between passions

VI

Ah, little ones

How clean the sun is when observed in its idea
In the swag of your border
it holds voices like thick emulsion
seeking slow syllables to read in its sound

Ah, meus pequeninos

At night
the walls hold us
like the membrane
around a day-old yolk
Milky and clouded
we spread through a series of
eternal returns
Edging the clock
Sun rising
To cast a roadmap on the walls

Are the hours trialling platforms for our emotions or
are we simply drowned in their washes?

VII

Stay still now

whistling little paradigms of failure
barely audible –
on their edges
so uncertain, nearby walls lose the
on sound's friendly wave

Stay still now

it is not earth that is lasting,
not the abrasive reasonings of needles
turning
deepening their colour on adversity
to stain skins the dusty yellow of sun –
but your fiery self, a
whole posture of dwelling
embedded in journey
like a lost star

Stay still now

Are you sad that the cherry tree spits at you?

I heard you cry

Was it a cry against the laughter
or against the stains of the cherries?

I did not look up so you came down to me
where skins cement into floors
I like memories

Stay still now

your body is as tense as urgency

firmed by emptiness

as all things

edges and endings

challenge borders and absence

as full as the elements,

the eros,

the day break

where bones need no ground

to fall upon

stone after stone, placed in limbs

to show themselves to tourists

keen and uncanny -

and there sat our shadows facing each other
were you behind the stone or the needle?

Stay still now

your shoulders tie themselves together

 blades kissing,
 with frantic focus

to dig

where privacy once sat

 engraved in calçadas

and brush against one another

 under mattresses of lacuna

your mouth is dry

Stay still now

 this wave began as earthy fissure

bubbling colloquial

 breaking notes on beds of basalt

 a dance

 tread

across seven hills

 watching blue tongue itself as wide as

oceans

and as narrow as the tap

 lungs filled in fado

 lit

like dead fire

and cold at the edges

to catch before the boil

© 2021 Catriona Whiteford

International Artist Residency: Hangar

LIMEN

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency.

Catriona Whiteford