

REVIEW - 26 JUL 2017

Leticia Ramos

Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brazil

BY LUISA DUARTE

For over a dozen years, Leticia Ramos has been conducting singular research into the principles of the photographic image, producing photo-based works with a high experimental charge. She has travelled to distant locations, such as the Arctic Circle, and built her own cameras to capture dream-like, semi-abstract landscapes. In the four prints, three photograms and film in 'Planisfério' (Planisphere), her exhibition at Mendes Wood DM, which all employ unconventional, yet deceptively simple, techniques. By focussing on the most basic elements of photography – light and paper – Ramos encourages us to question the veracity of the photographic image.



Leticia Ramos, left: *Planisfério*, 2017, fine art prints from microfilm, each: 2.1 x 1.5 m; right: *The Blue Night*, 2017, microfilm transferred to HD video

The film *The Blue Night* (2017) is inspired by entries from the logbook of the São Paulo-based inventor and photographer Hercules Florence (1804-1879), who developed early photographic techniques at the same time that Louis Daguerre was working in France. Ramos has photographed the clouds and stars above the picturesque valleys and bluffs of Chapada Diamantina National Park, which Florence shot one evening in 1827, and animated them using stop-motion graphics, mounted on microfilm. Birdsong, produced by a theremin, serves as a score. The film animates an ancient landscape, and although it references the past, it also evokes a dystopic future. Ramos understands that landscapes, like photographs, are constructed. If today photographs are captured and disseminated digitally, and perceived as an index of everyday life, Ramos's works share no such commitment to reality. Resisting the anxious speed of our contemporary image culture, they demand patient and attentive study. Ramos's search for photographs that are anterior to, or even produce, our perceptions of external reality materializes in the diptych *Bichos* (Critters, 2017), a pair of sculptures that she created and photographed against light-sensitive paper. The photogram process is somewhat unpredictable, and the same form appears reconfigured in the two images; with their hinged geometric forms, the sculptures resemble Lygia Clark's famous 'Bichos' series (begun c.1960). In *Light Fotogram I* (2016), Ramos distils this process to even more ethereal ends: here the sculptures have disappeared entirely, leaving only traces of light recorded on silver gelatin.

Leticia Ramos, *Bichos*,
2017, silver gelatin print
and photogram, each:
40 x 50 cm. Courtesy:
Mendes Wood DM, São
Paulo



The final works in the show are four prints from microfilm. The first, *Panorama Preto* (Black Panorama, 2017), evokes a horizon in a black sky. In the other three, the 'Planisphere' series (2017), curved lines appear to trace the passage of light on paper, delineating a circular image. A planisphere is an astronomical chart that records the constellations and movement of the stars in relation to the Earth's axis – it flattens a celestial orb onto a two-dimensional surface. Ramos performs a similar procedure throughout the exhibition, imbuing her photographic prints with a sense of spatial depth.

With its restrained yet powerful aesthetic, and technical experimentation, Ramos's work carries a subtle political charge. By using simple means to create deliberately ambiguous images, she rejects outright the trends of today's hyperactive image culture, restoring interpretive agency to her viewers.

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