

Carandiru, 2009–2013 / Luiza Baldan

It is difficult to associate Carandiru to anything other than São Paulo's penitentiary. In 2009, little is seen or known about the Carandiru in Rio de Janeiro, a site built by RFFSA, connected directly to the Leopoldina Station, which nowadays lodges the headquarters of samba schools (called *barracões*). Located next to the Novo Rio Bus Station, the complex goes unnoticed by most passers-by.

At the main entrance, people drink Coca-Cola and play dominoes amongst parked food carts. The tall grass covers the railway line and it is necessary to walk a bit to find the *barracões*. The first one I identify is a roofless ship. It is the remaining structure of a huge train storage, which also accommodates a family and at least eight dogs. They say Pretinha ate the rabbit.

The weather washes away the past carnival decorations, which now appear to be from 1985. Objects have their shiny fabrics lacerated and faded to pastel tones, revealing their cork carcass. Even decadent, the idea of revelry is still present in everything that is left, not because the scenery is particularly beautiful, but because it stirs the imagination. Scraps from the previous year serve as raw material for the subsequent productions, ensuring that the fun never ends. Rather, the accumulation in a single ornament brings enrichment, at least regarding history and memory.

I intend to deviate from the negative aspects of decaying. Instead, I am interested in the endurance of those *barracões* and their linear history, as well as the latent and frantic movement during the pre-carnival work, involving both disintegration and gathering of materials. I think about the train garage and its employees who were replaced by these *barracões* and samba schools; the dirt floor that gets recycled every day without ever losing part of its original composition; the intensity of the four months in which all efforts are focused on the arduous task of producing carnival floats and complex costumes for a one-day show, or two at most, in a ceremony that lasts less than one hour; the concentration and dissipation of human presence; the abandoned garments, and the waste that is revealed when the floats depart and leave a drawing on the floor; a space contracting and expanding.

I linger on the overlapped layers of time and architecture. The main warehouse is monumental, as well as most of the apparel and floats spread in its interior. It is like a factory of giant puppets, a fictional world where fake doors connect nothing to nowhere.

On the outdoor plain, plastics, rubbers and sequins huddle and build corners. Large objects stand alone like sculptures in the void. Shipwrecks and angels. Rusty wagons covered by vegetation camouflage themselves in the landscape. The landscape turns them into hills. A long trail leads to a distant civilization.

Carandiru is an inhabited place distinguished by routine and multiplication of time, impregnated with residues. I sought to photograph it in the recess of the carnival, focusing on found remnants, which could tell stories about the place. The photography, in its ability to combine pasts and presents, embodies an instant, a lightning bolt, exposing a scene where time is suspended.

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Carandiru no longer exists. It was demolished to make way for the 'Porto Maravilha' project.