

# cartazes para o museu do homem do nordeste

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## PROJECTION

*Posters for the Museum of the Northeast Man*, Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisbon, PT: June 21, 2013–August 17, 2013. A publication by the artist is associated to the exhibition (published by Kunsthalle Lissabon, Tijuana and *Mousse Magazine*). To see the project's further developments, visit: <http://www.galeriavermelho.com.br/pt/exposicao/6977/museu-do-homem-do-nordeste>.

### *Inside, Immediately Outside*

The impression that Jonathas de Andrade's exhibition at Kunsthalle Lissabon begins or expands outside depends on one's physical location: on the stairs of the building where the art space occupies an apartment, or on the street, if one looks up at one of the gallery's windows. The ambiguity of borders defining an inside and an outside is first perceived spatially, via one's own itinerary in, through and out of the exhibition space.

Making reference to an existing institution, the Museu do Homem do Nordeste in Brazil, de Andrade's posters explore the possibility of creating an imaginary visual identity for the museum. Through this process, they open a literal, multilayered space to question not only how the museum historically participated in the construction of specific representations of the "Man of the Northeast",<sup>1</sup> but also how it could hypothetically choose to represent itself today as an institution. Who is the "Man of the Northeast" in the museum's name? Who could he possibly represent? Who articulates this representation?

Vânia Brayner observes that the Museu do Homem do Nordeste, a museum of anthropology and history created in Recife in 1979, is associated with Gilberto Freyre's museological ideas and is historically linked to his engagement with the preservation of regional culture.<sup>2</sup>

1 For a historical analysis of representations of the Brazilian "Northeast" as a specific region in the first part of the twentieth century see: Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior. March 2004. "Weaving Tradition: The Invention of Brazilian Northeast", trans. Laurence Hallewell. In *Latin American Perspectives* 135, 31 (2): 42–61.

2 The museum, linked to the Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, results from the union of the Museum of Anthropology of the Instituto Joaquim Nabuco (1961–1979), the Museum of Popular Art (1955–1966) and the Museum of Sugar (1963–1977). See Vânia Brayner, "Uma gota de sangue no Museu do Homem do Nordeste", in Angel Espina Barrio, Antonio Motta, Mario Helio Gomes (org.), *Inovação Cultural, Patrimônio e Educação* (Recife: Massangana, 2010), 313–327. Consulted online: [campus.usal.es/~iiacyl/MAI/images/publicaciones/livrocongressoRecifecompleto.pdf](http://campus.usal.es/~iiacyl/MAI/images/publicaciones/livrocongressoRecifecompleto.pdf) (August 26, 2013).



Jonathas de Andrade, *Cartazes para o museu do homem do Nordeste*, 2013. Photo: Bruno Lopes, courtesy of Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisbon.

Freyre's desire for the constitution of regional museums in Brazil and more specifically in the Northeast (which would be, in his own words "[...] museums of a new type: gathering expressive values of the culture and *ethos* of people who are regional in a Brazilian way"<sup>3</sup>) is first expressed in the twenties at a time of regionalist struggles to affirm a specifically "Northeastern" identity within the national context.<sup>4</sup> Drawing

3 "[...] museus de um tipo novo: que reunisse valores expressivos da cultura e do *ethos* de gentes brasileira regionalmente regionais". Gilberto Freyre, "Que é museu do homem? Um exemplo: O Museu do Homem do Nordeste brasileiro", in *O Museu do Homem do Nordeste* (São Paulo: Banco Safra, 2000), 14. Translation: Giulia Lamoní. The text was written in the mid-eighties.

4 Although the Museu do Homem do Nordeste was created in 1979, its conception and development by sociologist and writer Gilberto Freyre, as well as other contributors, have an extensive history whose main lines I can only sketch in this context. As underlined by Freyre in his text, "Que é museu do homem? Um exemplo: O Museu do Homem do Nordeste brasileiro" (see note 3), as early as 1924 he promoted, in a newspaper article, the foundation of regional socio-anthropological museums in Brazil. These museums should document, in the author's view, the everyday life and culture of regional populations in Brazil, and specific local industries such as sugar production. At that particular time Freyre, as an intellectual based in Recife, engaged in regionalist debates on the preservation of Northeastern local culture and traditions within the national context (see Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior, trans. Laurence Hallewell, 2004). Freyre's position in favor of safeguarding and valuing Northeastern cultural traditions is affirmed, along with the idea of the institution of regional museums in the context of his *Regionalist Manifesto*. Dated 1926 and strongly defending a regionalist perspective, it contains a specific remark on the desire for museums that display not only traditional historic objects but everyday local objects, popular creations and local productions, and more specifically, a remark on the desire for a regional museum. When, in 1948, as a federal deputy, Freyre proposed the creation of the Instituto Joaquim Nabuco in Recife, the project included the creation of a museum of regional ethnography, "popular art" and "cottage industry" ([www.fundaj.gov.br/geral/didoc/gf-ddc-ijn.pdf](http://www.fundaj.gov.br/geral/didoc/gf-ddc-ijn.pdf) September 23, 2013). The Museum of Anthropology of the Instituto was finally created in 1961 and in 1979 the gathering of three museums (see note 2, above) gave rise to the Museu do Homem do Nordeste whose varied collections include photographs, objects related to the sugar industry and slavery, domestic objects, tiles, works of visual art, ex-voto, objects associated to Afro-Brazilian religions and the Orixás, local craft, Indian objects, and related material. The exhibition of long duration was inaugurated in 2008, and was titled "Nordeste: Territórios Plurais, Culturais e Direitos Coletivos" ["Northeast: Plural and Cultural Territories, and Collective Rights"]. It opened a space for questioning regional identity, and made space for difference, complexity and reciprocity in its museological discourse. Vânia Brayner

upon this set of histories and representations, de Andrade’s project invites the public to temporarily occupy an ambiguous and shifting position. One is not inside the *Museu do Homem do Nordeste*, but one is not completely outside of it either. The artist’s work engages with the symbolic space associated with its name and history.

*Distance and Proximity*

Instead of obliterating stereotypes, Jonathas de Andrade’s project sets them in motion.<sup>5</sup> The posters juxtapose the museum’s name to photographs of a variety of male participants in different poses and locations, performing everyday activities. As a consequence, they ironically de-universalize the word “man” and reduce it to a marker of masculinity. How have these “men” come to participate in the project? The methodologies adopted by the artist in the making of the work are disclosed by a set of framed newspapers pages and the projection of slides on which he took note of his interactions with potential participants. Ethnographic writing, in the form of field notes, is ambiguously convened by these texts. Their accurate listing of dates and places, in addition to their descriptive writing style suggest a distant positioning, possibly framed by a scientific perspective. At the same time, the announcements in the newspapers, which are meant to find “candidates” for the photographs in the posters, draw on some of the features stereotypically associated to men of the Northeast: a strong *moreno*<sup>6</sup>, a worker, someone who works with his hands, a descendant of slaves.<sup>7</sup>

interprets this process in her text, “*Uma gota de sangue no Museu do Homem do Nordeste*”, 2010. Yet for an extensive reading of Freyre’s museological ideas, see: Mário de Souza Chagas, *Imaginação museal — Museu, Memória e Poder em Gustavo Barroso, Gilberto Freyre e Darcy Ribeiro*, PhD Thesis, PPCIS, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, 2003.

5 “[...] What I really want,” said de Andrade in an interview, “is to dive into this stereotype and implode it from the inside”. Trans. mine. “[...] o que eu quero mesmo é mergulhar nesse estereótipo e implodi-lo a partir de dentro”. In José Marmeleira. June 28, 2013. “Corpos que deslizam num museu clandestino”. In *Ípsilon*, O Público, 12.

6 Brown, miscegenated but also black, depending on the context of enunciation. On the ambiguity of this term, see Livio Sansone. 1996. “Nem somente preto ou negro. O sistema de classificação racial no Brasil que muda”. In *Afro-Ásia* 18, 180. Consulted online: <http://www.antropologia.ufba.br/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/NEM-SOMENTE-PRETO.pdf> (August 26, 2013).

7 These are some of the words used by the artist in the announcements. Trans. by the author.

The formulation of the announcements is, I suspect, also meant to instill doubt. One particular message does not mention the museum’s poster but an anthropological research project that seeks men for an archive of nude photographs. The distance implied by the subjective position produced by the field notes is destabilized here, inferring an emotional or even a sexual proximity. An article by José Marmeleira on the exhibition suggests “a sexual ambiguity”.<sup>8</sup> This palpable effect is produced, in my view, by the spatial interplay of photographs in which male bodies—dressed entirely or only partially, facing towards or away from the camera—are portrayed in a variety of positions ranging from distant to close proximity, from the whole to the fragment. Similarly, close proximity to the stereotype (operated through processes of selection and (self-) identification) appears to compromise the identity of the “Man of the Northeast” as the product of an “*anthropological imagination*”,<sup>9</sup> thus engendering both visual heterogeneity and spatial dissemination.

*Negotiating with a Legacy*

Rather than shaping a plural or more inclusive image for the “Man of the Northeast”, the artist’s project primarily confronts the very strategies of representation of cultural identity embedded in museum practices. Visually juxtaposing the name of the Museu do Homem do Nordeste itself to heterogeneous images of masculinity, and symbolically mobilizing it in an art space located in a different geographical and cultural context, effectively dislocates the museum. The institution is thus rethought of as a place where representations and identities are negotiated through a multiplicity of perspectives involving various degrees of reciprocity. This “contact zone” to use James Clifford’s terminology,<sup>10</sup> is crossed by a complex net of relations that engage, among other factors, specific historical legacies and power geometries associated, for instance, with class and gender.

8 Marmeleira, 2013.

9 Arjun Appadurai. 1988. “Putting Hierarchy in Its Place”. In *Cultural Anthropology* 3 (1), 39.

10 See James Clifford, “Museums as Contact Zones”, in *Routes, Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 188–219.





Jonathas de Andrade, *Cartazes para o museu do homem do Nordeste*, 2013. Photo: Bruno Lopes, courtesy of Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisbon.

Jonathas de Andrade’s take on regional stereotypes cannot be dissociated from the participants’s identification with some of the features of the representation, but also from the way that the men imagine they are interpreting regional identity when posing for the camera. “I seek a worker capable of representing the Northeast [...]”,<sup>11</sup> says one of the announcements. “He imagines himself in the museum’s poster taking care of closing a burst pipe,”<sup>12</sup> writes the artist in one of the slides. The possibility for the public to intervene in the material configuration of the exhibition adds another layer of complexity to this dialogic process. A simple display system allows for changes in the positions of the posters. Some of them, selected from stacks laying on supports placed on the floor, will eventually replace others, and the slides can be placed on the overhead projector in whatever configuration best suits their reading.

The role of the Museum of Anthropology at the Instituto Joaquim Nabuco, which would in 1979 become part of the Museu do Homem do Nordeste, was described by Freyre in 1960 as being “[...] a *synthesis* of rural life of the rural North of Brazil or of the culture—culture in the sociologic or anthropologic sense—of the region thus characterized.”<sup>13</sup> Jonathas de Andrade’s negotiation with the historical and cultural legacy

11 “Procuro trabalhador capaz de representar o Nordeste [...]”. Trans. mine.

12 “Se imagina no cartaz do museu cuidando de fechar um cano estourado”. Trans. by the author. My interpretation of the artist’s handwriting.

13 Italics and trans. by the author. “[...] uma síntese da vida agrária do Norte agrário do Brasil ou da cultura – cultura no sentido sociológico ou antropológico – da região assim caracterizada”. Gilberto Freyre, *Sugestões em torno do Museu de antropologia do Instituto Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas* (Recife, BR: Imprensa Universitária, 1960). Consulted online, Biblioteca virtual Gilberto Freyre: [http://bvgf.fgf.org.br/portugues/obra/opusculos/sugestoes\\_torno\\_museu.htm](http://bvgf.fgf.org.br/portugues/obra/opusculos/sugestoes_torno_museu.htm) (August 26, 2013).

of the museum involves the creation of *zones of tension* between this imagined synthesis of regional identity and the material processes of the making of representations, which is always a conflicted and multiple one. If the first supposes an idealized position, the second engages entanglement, ambiguity and close contact.

*Post-scriptum: On Translating and Writing, from Lisbon*

I recall seeing works by Jonathas de Andrade on display in various cities throughout the occidental world: in New York, at the New Museum’s 2012 Triennial, in Lisbon, and in Venice for the Future Generation Art Prize at the 2013 Biennial. It strikes me how strongly these works relate to their context of production and to specific historical material. The diary of *Ressaca Tropical* (2009),<sup>14</sup> found in the trash in Recife and the heterogeneous photographs to which it is associated, is one example; the 1970s educational posters in *Educação para adultos* (2010)<sup>15</sup> that were used by the artist’s mother when she was a teacher, is another.<sup>16</sup> The works travel relatively easily considering their geographical, historical and cultural rootedness. It is as if their complex structure somehow prepared them for it, as it is multilayered and often inhabited by tensions and ambiguities.

The ways in which cultural decontextualization may negatively affect the articulation of the meaning of an artwork were the subject of an article by Nelly Richard, who commented on Latin American art in an international context in the mid-1990s. Envisioning this process of transplanting as a form of intercultural “translation”, and the

14 *Tropical Hangover*. This work is an installation composed of pages of an intimate diary found by the artist in Recife and a variety of photographs taken from different personal and institutional archives. See: <http://cargocollective.com/jonathasdeandrade-eng#tropical-hangover> (September 22, 2013).

15 *Education for Adults*. In this work, the artist experienced Paulo Freire’s alphabetization method with a group of illiterate women. He started with posters from the seventies that had been used by his mother when she worked as a teacher. Both interaction and dialogue led to the creation of new posters. The posters are displayed in a panel that mixes elements that date from different periods. See: <http://cargocollective.com/jonathasdeandrade-eng#education-for-adults> (September 22, 2013).

16 See [cargocollective.com/jonathasdeandrade-eng](http://cargocollective.com/jonathasdeandrade-eng) (September 22, 2013).

inconsistencies it could engender as “failures of translation”, Richard considered that “There is no reason to think that these failures of translation can or have to be eliminated [...] By multiplying ‘translation experiments,’” wrote Richard, “these failures will emerge as a way to call attention to the *problematicity* of meaning.”<sup>17</sup> Many of the visitors of Jonathas de Andrade’s exhibition in Lisbon have probably neither read about nor visited the *Museu do Homem do Nordeste* in Recife. In Portugal books about the museum are hard to find (though one exhibition catalogue can indeed be found in the National Library). Yet one may consider these words from the artist’s website, referring to the panel of *Educação para adultos*: “This final collection detaches itself from the process that generated it, and it can be read according to the spectator’s repertoire [...].”<sup>18</sup>

In this sense, it seems to me that it is precisely Jonathas de Andrade’s determination not to erase incoherencies, failures of translation and ambiguities that facilitates the circulation and intercultural reading of his pieces. These explorations are envisioned as significant to the very functioning of the artwork, to the articulation of meaning, and to its communication. While walking through the artist’s exhibition in Lisbon, or in writing about it, its very material construction reminds one of the “situatedness” of her/his own perspective. It is from this specific position that one begins to articulate relations between objects in space, objects and one’s own body; words and images, and images and memories, and to weave together a narrative—but one of many.

Author’s note: I would like to thank Jonathas de Andrade, Kunsthalle Lissabon, and Cristiana Tejo, for their generous support.

17 “No hay por qué pensar que esas fallas de traducción pueden o deben ser eliminadas.” “Al multiplicar ‘experimentos de traducción’, estas fallas se pondrán de manifiesto como una manera de llamar la atención sobre la problemática del sentido.” Translation Giulia Lamoni. Nelly Richard, «La puesta en escena internacional del arte latinoamericano: Montaje, representación.» In *Visiones comparativas: XVII Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte*, Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1994, 1013. Consulted online: <http://icaadocs.mfah.org/icaadocs/>. Richard’s argument takes the subject further, having referred to work by James Clifford.

18 <http://cargocollective.com/jonathasdeandrade-eng#education-for-adults> (October 22, 2013).

# Of Umbrella Terms and Definitions: Diversity Within a Framework?

*Sakahàn* is an ambitious exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada (NGC), which opened on May 17 and closed on September 2, 2013, and was conceived of as the first of the NGC’s planned quinquennial surveys of international indigenous art. The scope of this article will not permit discussion of the artworks featured in the show, so I will instead attempt to assess and place *Sakahàn* within the narrative of exhibition histories.

In theory, a curatorial selection process for a themed exhibition might deliberate on what is to be included, but in practice, it often begins by determining what to exclude from within a broad framework. *Sakahàn*’s principal concept is the “indigenous”, a term that is most frequently understood to mean “original inhabitants native to a land”. Notwithstanding the fact that the non-indigenous are rarely identified as such, those excluded at *Sakahàn* were metropolitan artists of non-indigenous descent. *Sakahàn* also excludes rural and folk artists who in some instances may share enmeshed histories with indigenous artists, such as India’s Kalighat and Bengali *patua* (scroll) artists whose art shares a genealogy with that made by the indigenous Santal peoples. When an exhibition focuses on indigeneity<sup>1</sup>, the curatorial process is potentially contentious because it must necessarily negotiate issues of race, identity and tangled histories. Each presents its own conceptual challenges. These complexities multiply when the term “indigenous” applies to “art”, itself a much debated and progressively ambiguous term, referring to bewilderingly varied objects and practices that engage with distinct concepts and make use of wide-ranging media. Traditionally, the inclusion of indigenous cultural objects and practices within Establishment or White Cube museum and gallery spaces has been problematic because of the seemingly oppositional approaches of Western<sup>2</sup>

1. Despite the fact that Merriam Webster’s dictionary recognises only the noun “indigenouness”, “indigeneity” is preferred here. At the most basic level, I think myriad attributes make up the state of indigeneity and it seems to me that indigenouness appears to suggest that a single quality or attribute qualifies the indigenous; I therefore prefer the term indigeneity. For an argument focusing on the distinctions between indigenouness, indigeneity and indigenism, especially one that takes into account post-colonial debates, see Jace Weaver’s chapter “Indigenouness and Indigeneity” in *Companion to Postcolonial Studies: An Historical Introduction*, Eds. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Malden (MA): Wiley-Blackwell, 2004).

2. I use the word Western here, despite it being a problematic term to use in this context. It connotes predominantly White Anglo-American museum practices, which have traditionally excluded or at the very least marginalised cultural objects and practices by indigenous peoples within the West as well as non-Western practices elsewhere, whether indigenous or otherwise.