

Fields of Power, Visual Culture, and the Artistic Practice of Two 'Unseen' Women of Central Brazil

Authors : Carolina Brandão Piva

Abstract : In our visual culture, images play a newly significant role in the basis of a complex dialogue between imagination, creativity, and social practice. Insofar as imagination has broken out of the 'special expressive space of art' to become a part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people, it is pertinent to recognize that visual representation can no longer be assumed as if in a domain detached from everyday life or exclusively 'centered' within the limited frame of 'art history.' The approach of Visual Culture as a field of study is, in this sense, indispensable to comprehend that not only 'the image,' but also 'the imagined' and 'the imaginary' are produced in the plurality of social interactions; crucial enough, this assertion directs us to something new in contemporary cultural processes, namely both imagination and image production constitute a social practice. This paper starts off with this approach and seeks to examine the artistic practice of two women from the State of Goiás, Brazil, who are ordinary citizens with their daily activities and narratives but also dedicated to visuality production. With no formal training from art schools, branded or otherwise, Maria Aparecida de Souza Pires deploys 'waste disposal' of daily life—from car tires to old work clothes—as a trampoline for art; also adept at sourcing raw materials collected from her surroundings, she manipulates raw hewn wood, tree trunks, plant life, and various other pieces she collects from nature giving them new meaning and possibility. Hilda Freire works with sculptures in clay using different scales and styles; her art focuses on representations of women and pays homage to unprivileged groups such as the practitioners of African-Brazilian religions, blue-collar workers, poor live-in housekeepers, and so forth. Although they have never been acknowledged by any mainstream art institution in Brazil, whose 'criterion of value' still favors formally trained artists, Maria Aparecida de Souza Pires, and Hilda Freire have produced visualities that instigate 'new ways of seeing,' meriting cultural significance in many ways. Their artworks neither descend from a 'traditional' medium nor depend on 'canonical viewing settings' of visual representation; rather, they consist in producing relationships with the world which do not result in 'seeing more,' but 'at least differently.' From this perspective, the paper finally demonstrates that grouping this kind of artistic production under the label of 'mere craft' has much more to do with who is privileged within the fields of power in art system, who we see and who we do not see, and whose imagination of what is fed by which visual images in Brazilian contemporary society.

Keywords : visual culture, artistic practice, women's art in the Brazilian State of Goiás, Maria Aparecida de Souza Pires, Hilda Freire

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