

# Arthur Bispo do Rosario beyond the walls of the asylum<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This article proposes a perspective on Arthur Bispo do Rosario's work that assigns a secondary role to the pathology and prioritizes his experience. The comparison with Marcel Duchamp is usually made due to the formal similarity among their works of art. However, the heterogeneity of their trajectories challenges the audience to reflect carefully about the experiences of each one. In Arthur Bispo do Rosario, his status as an inmate clearly entails heavy constraints of the material and contextualizes his work. In his inventive and unusual project, he establishes less an aesthetics of ugliness but much more – by its strength of truth – one of artistic beauty, not as a formal and plastic law, but as a result or achievement of an aesthetic experience that becomes an artistic experience. The standpoint pursued in this article does not follow the usual paths – like the recurrent comparisons between these two artists –, and it searches to see beyond the discernible limits of the work volumes, highlighting a truth interposed like “almost-subjects”, in accordance with Georges Didi-Huberman's theoretical framework. To examine the textile work of Arthur Bispo do Rosario by the gaps of perception is to assume its indeterminacy and to put it into the category of the unstable, in which stand the objects of art that mediate the lived realities. To emphasize its magnitude is also to emphasize its importance as a possible tool to decontaminate and eradicate the prejudice on the look that categorizes and penalizes artists and their works of art by diagnosing them.

**Keywords:** Arthur Bispo do Rosario, *outsider artist*, phenomenology, aesthetics reception, Marcel Duchamp.

*What is the color of my aura?*  
(Arthur Bispo do Rosario)

What attracts us in a work of art and justifies that some of the most exuberant and rich forms of artistic expression emerge from the most miserable human conditions? Would be beauty allegedly founded in a morbid attraction to ruin? Adhering to this position fatally would imply a deterministic sense of the work of art, validating its strength as if it was emerging from explicit episodes of decadence, technical inability or psychic tropism. Maybe what intrigues us in artistic expressions is an index of humanity printed on the work by the power of misery or by the joy of the experiences lived, always ready to inhabit it. In some cases, it is the very “escape from the human world, the alienation of their humanity” (Merleau-Ponty, 1984, p. 114). Some works have a completeness of senses – and are paradoxically inserted in an incompleteness –, that exist in numberless postponed possibilities, full of indecision, between success and failure, in the various attempts predestinated to abandonment or in the recovering that is offered to the indeterminacy that rises in new investitures. In a way, my world view makes the world, as put by Merleau-Ponty (1984), and thus the work of art is a vision, a very particular position, it is how I leave a personal trace, imprinting the footsteps of my journey throughout the world.

The endeavor between my exploration of the world and the sensory responses requested results in a measure of things that sustain a pure thought, of seeing or feeling. Maybe the grandeur of some artists reside in the very amazing capacity of finding beauty in places where most people just not even look at.

## Taste: between opinion and examination

When Marcel Duchamp thought the ready-made, he tried to find anonymous objects that, emptied of their original function under the artist's gesture, only by the fact of selecting, would convert them into works of art. His interest was more philosophical and ironic than plastic. Marcel Duchamp, one of the greatest art thinkers of the last centuries, not necessarily opposed himself to beauty but questioned it. In search for conceptual accuracy, he used the term “an-artistic”, because to think about anti-art is to refuse something that, by contrast, asserts its double. Duchamp considered that the art object goes beyond the notion of traditional beauty: works are not beautiful or ugly; they are signs, instruments whose denial or contestation falls on thoughtless beliefs. To transit between good and bad taste is almost like faddism or following recipes. Taste is mere opinion, it refuses to be examined; it is an

epidermal notion of art, in the sensual and social sense: a rash and a sign of distinction. By the first one reduces art to sensation; by the second one introduces a social hierarchy established in a reality

<sup>1</sup> As a methodological procedure, I assume the date of birth as imprecise and the name of the artist Arthur Bispo do Rosario without the accent mark, as established by Hidalgo (1996).

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so mysterious and arbitrary as the purity of blood and skin color (Paz, 1977, p. 23).

Until Romanticism, the art law was beauty, says Pareyson (2001). Then, canonical beauty was gradually replaced by the beauty of expression of a real interiority feeling. With Modernity, the concept of beauty allowed incorporating ugly and disgusting objects, and this earned more consideration in the field of art, in addition of detaching more and more from a lay and subjective knowledge on the term. A huge range of predicates that tend more towards a doctrine of sensibility than to plasticity was adopted – “beauty is not the law, but a result of the art: not its object or end, but its effect and outcome; it is not that the work of art is artistic for being beautiful, but it is beautiful because it is artistic” (Pareyson, 2001, p. 138). If the beauty had been adhering to the truth of lived experiences, on the other hand the understanding of these concepts have become too much complex.

Consumerism has affected the field of art and, to a large extent, exacerbated the problematization. It was in the modern period, in the middle of the 20th century, that artists and audiences have become more intensely mediated. Modern Art emerged in an industrial economy, in a society that, before the omnipresence of consumerism reaching all instances of life, assumes this dynamic unconditionally. And so producers and consumers, each one in his role, collaborated to develop the machine of capital:

the positions of these actors, responsible for the work's aura, by its power of seduction and, therefore, by its value in the aesthetic judgment and in the economic area, are themselves dependent on what a society assigns as the value of its production, by the way in which this society wants to use it, the place its hierarchized system of the distribution of goods establishes for the art (Cauquelin, 2005, p. 28).

Gradually, the art dealer – and later the specialized criticism and the art market – was consolidated as an essential link in the circulation of artistic production. As an opinion maker, the art dealer collaborated to the refining of the image of both the artist and the work. He had the power to integrate or to isolate artists and attract the audience. Like a judge of taste, he became a central element in social gatherings acting, when necessary, to separate, distinct and in the hierarchization. Criticism assumed ideological content in relation to artists independent from the romanticism legacy, or transgressor and outsider artists who, in many cases, had not even their projects considered as art.

Despite outsider art – with all the beauty of its freedom – democratizing creation to every man, being still an introjected aspect as we all have been led to believe –, it makes us to search for language when a disconcerting work of art is presented. The fact that some works have formal similarities – exclusively formal, we must stress – leads us

to the comfort of the easiest way: a relational reading, which weakens the real vocation and establishes by approximation or comparison of works and artists – for example, the feeling of familiarity between *Roda da Fortuna* [Wheel of fortune] and *Vaso Sanitário* [Toilet Seat] by Arthur Bispo do Rosario and *Fontaine, Bicycle Wheel* and other ready-made by Marcel Duchamp. In the same way, the works by the artist from Sergipe – in which the emphasis is on the inventory – are compared to Pop Art, due to the collecting aspect, when this is not related to schizophrenia. In an interview, Marcel Duchamp has said: “The painter has already become completely integrated with actual society, he is no longer a pariah” (Paz, 1997, p. 54), but history has shown that some artists seem to defy his words.

### The chosen one, the elected . . .

Arthur Bispo do Rosario lived 50 of his 80 years in a mental institution diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. The experience as a cabin-boy in the Navy seemed to be relevant for his work, as an example of a testimony of an improvised sociability, the “excluded” people that walked around the elegant city of Rio de Janeiro, capital of the Republic at that time, and who sought insistently to transgress the standards imposed by the recent capitalism. But, in fact, the practices from his hometown Japarutuba are the most important for his art. Each thread unweaved and embroidered is impregnated by the memory of the sacred and profane joy of the local craftsmanship festivals and “rustic Catholicism” (Sevcenko & Novais, 1998) – paradigmatic aspect for the conformation of Sergipe. This repertoire is essential for tracing his personal and missionary mythology, materialized in the unweaving process of the uniforms and blue sheets he found at Juliano Moreira Asylum (mental institution), raw material that served for his assemblages, tunics and uniforms.

A hard path victimized him, inmate of an asylum, inside and outside the walls of a psychiatric institution, socially and economically excluded. Even facing a great material and psychological discomfort, he knew how to project himself and to create a work above any questioning – even under hegemonic intellectual references. Arthur Bispo do Rosario brought out new and unusual meanings in his “ugly dejecta” (Coutinho, Carvalho, & Moreira, 2007) that he used in his inventory. It was not an easy life, and so is to retake his steps. The compelling beauty of the works acquires a meaning that is reinvented by his hands and surprises us when in contact with a language that is not obvious, as art is not as well. The works intermittently produce the infinity of knowledge, the renewed meaning. We live with things and they live in us. The work requires the other, integrally and impliedly.

Arthur Bispo do Rosario is challenged to use his boxer fists to unweave, embroider and re-embroider gently, but also to collect scraps and leftovers from the world to transform them into artifacts dedicated to the divine. The work follows the script of a rite of passage and the world's reconstruction

from a normative that he had assumed. He never intended to be an artist, and being such a presager, he spoke.

The high point of his production is *Manto da apresentação* [Presentation Cloak] (Figure 1), for which he had enormous estimation and involved in a sacredness aura. The anthropometry of some of his works indicates optical evidence as in-person evidence, which brings to light his anthropomorphic trace. There are several records – photos and videos – in which he is wearing the cloak or one of his uniforms. Rosario was chosen by God for the Judgment Day, the day he would wear the Cloak<sup>2</sup> and would assist the other chosen ones to cross through a world where everything would be equal, valleys and mountains.



Figure 1. *Manto da apresentação* [Presentation Cloak] (detail), Arthur Bispo do Rosario, no date. Fabrics (cotton and wool), thread, cardboard and metal. 118.5 x 141.2 cm Museu Bispo do Rosário Arte Contemporânea.

Source: *Manto da apresentação* [Presentation Cloak] (detail). Personal archive/2012 Bienal. Copyrighted

The receptacle was manufactured from an embroidered blanket and adjusted as clothing. The inner side is completely covered by a spiral of names embroidered with blue threads from the unweaving of sheets and uniforms found at the mental institution. The spatial concreteness

2 Arthur Bispo do Rosario unweaved the threads of uniforms and blue sheets from the institution; he collected the threads for then use them to embroider his sacred pieces, recollecting the traditional handicraft practices from Japarutaba, Sergipe, his hometown.

of the *Cloak* has the volumetry of a case, shroud, encloses and involves in an experience of emptying places, absence, extended to individuals whose names settle on the inner face, and also the other names, hidden by the fringed texture on the other side, on the outer sheath of the Cloak:

death as iconographic figure, it is in fact the absence that governs this disconcerting *ballet* of images always in contradiction. The absence, considered here as a dialectical engine both for desire – of life itself, we would dare to say, the vision of the vision – and for grief – it is not ‘the same death’ (this would make no sense), but the psychic work of what ones confront with death and moves the look-at point with this confrontation (Didi-Huberman, 2010, p. 128-129).

A bodily experience has amplitude to bring the light to a universe of pictorial meanings that, according to Frayze-Pereira (2010), exist since the beginning.

Man has an uncertain relationship with his own image, retouching, mutilating or ornamenting the body through tattoos, makeup or surgery:

man is born prematurely, with a very thin skin, very fragile, very pure and that for this, asks for an artificial protection, which is not only physical, but above all symbolic. That is, at birth man is exposed in a double sense: to the danger, but also to the eyes (p. 62).

It is through the body that it is possible to perceive oneself and the others. The body is reflective and it is – at the same time – psychic and visible, “the body is the concrete expression of an ambiguous existence” (Frayze-Pereira, 2004, p. 22), and this reflection spreads to the things around as if they were its extension or attachment.

In the dialectic of the looks, the aura of religious or artistic objects is challenged. The inaccessibility of cultic image, which is essentially to be unachievable, depends on it. The value of the cult is what gives the aura its experience power, focusing the convergence of the look that believers dedicated to the object, as says Benjamin (1987). He who does not believe do not dare to look because he feels that is been observed, memory of all the images that appeal to the Memorial of the Passion.

Refusing the art’s sacredness, Marcel Duchamp since the beginning waged a crusade against the aura attributed to artistic works. He was one of the first to realize and has denounced in his works and attitudes the destructive capacity of modern mechanical activity. In his brilliant calculation, Octavio Paz explains how this destructive process has made the modern man to step back gradually from his historic childhood, from the old gods and nature, denying them. The defiance gesture and negativity are in

the election of useless households, manufactured objects, the ready-made:

For the ancient nature was a goddess and, even more, a place of the gods – manifestations of vital energy at its three times: birth, copulation and death. The gods are born and their birth is the universe itself; they fall in love (sometimes with our women) and the earth is filled with demigods, monsters and giants; they die and their death is the end and the resurrection of time. The objects are not born: we manufacture them; they do not have sex, and do not die: they deteriorate becoming useless. Their grave is the wastebasket or furnace. Technique is neutral and sterile. Technique is the nature of modern man: our environment and our horizon. Yes, all human work denies nature; likewise, it is a bridge between nature and us. Technique transforms nature of in a radical and decisive way: displacing it. . . . the ready-made is a double negative: not only of the gesture, but the object itself is negative. Duchamp does not have the slightest nostalgia of paradise or hell and definitely does not worship technique. Introducing irony denies the technique because the manufactured object becomes a ready-made: a useless thing (Paz, 1997, p. 26-27).

Arthur Bispo do Rosario, in recovering these values and beliefs, search in the urban waste the source of inspiration for his work. He follows, in the opposite direction, the steps of Marcel Duchamp. He seeks to recover the natural divinity of technical objects that have become dejecta. And gives back to them their divine nature. Bispo do Rosario takes it from the grave-trash, relocating it and overcoming the barriers between humanity and divinity. The lived experiences in the work of these artists are absolutely heterogenous. One focus on the dialogue in an ironic, sarcastic way. The other is a silent soliloquy: with himself, with God and his ghosts.

The critical reception usually approximate their works, which are repeatedly compared, but at what cost? An artist transforms ordinary objects into works of art by the simple act of choice; the other, plunged into the vulgarity of everyday objects, rescues them from their worldly life and make them sacred. The insistence on inserting Arthur Bispo do Rosario in a “rupture tradition” (Paz, 2014) or in post-modernity due to this parallelism is only possible under the condition of alienation or the contingency that victimized him – and this, in fact, only makes him to participate in the criticism towards the avant-garde that oppress him (a condition against which he cannot fight).

A way to relate with the world is through a pre-established experience. And this is very common in the comments about works of art, situation in which there is the prerogative of reason above expression. This reveals the disembodied gesture and affront the close relationship between language and thought. Neither the history of art nor

testimonials about Rosarios’s works authorize the access to his expression. The meaning of a work of art is not determined by the life of the artist or by its context, even considering that both are indispensable elements for the work itself. The sense is not at place established; in the same way conception cannot precede the execution of the work (Merleau-Ponty, 1984, p. 120-121). The sense demand from the work its existence. The power of the artists is in their hands, in their own way of living the work and in stimulating the experiences that will root in other consciousnesses.

The approach often follows an easy way and establishes itself through theories that put works and artists into previous categories, justifying them in a deterministic way, as happened with Marcel Duchamp – some tried to classify *The Large glass*:

Among all the interpretations, Psychoanalysis is the most tempting and the easiest: onanism, destruction (or glorification) of the Virgin Mother, castration (the Scissors), narcissism, retention (anal symptom), aggressiveness, self-destruction, and so on. A well-known psychiatrist concludes his study, not without brilliance, with the expected diagnosis: autism and schizophrenia. The disadvantage of such hypotheses is that their authors consider works only as symptoms or expressions of certain psychic tendencies; psychological explanation converts reality (the painting) into shadow and the shadow (the disease) in reality . . . . Psychological and artistic realities live at different meaning levels: Freud give us a key to understanding Oedipus, but the Greek tragedy cannot be reduced to psychoanalytical explanations (Paz, 1997, p. 34-35).

If we have erroneous interpretations about the great art, what to expect in relation to outsider artists? The production of mental institution inmates has been evaluated by elitist and biased criticism, which underestimate its expression and plastic qualities. Arthur Bispo do Rosario barely could suppose that he would provide important contributions for the benefit of others who, like him, did not see themselves as artists but influenced the art world. In a way, for not being included in the movement started by doctor Nise da Silveira, his work was rigorously recognized for its expressive value, without any lenitive provided by his situations as an inmate. It is undeniable that such condition has deep influence; however, we believe that this perspective must not be based on any judgments or analyses, except as circumscription and contextualization, creating parameters and clues about the work, the artist and his creative processes. Borrowing the words of Merleau-Ponty (1984) about Cézanne: art, when successful, is transmitted *per si*. Notwithstanding life does not explain the work, certainly they communicate with each other. Lived experiences and contexts, even though not imposing their guidelines, provide elements and creative possibilities of reinvention, a loose exercise of free beauty :

There is an exchange between the schizoid constitution and the work of Cézanne because his work reveals a metaphysical sense of the disease – schizoid as a reduction of the world in the totality of static appearances and suspension of expressive values – because the disease is no longer an absurd fact and a fate to become a general possibility of human existence, when consistently face one of its paradoxes, the expression phenomenon, and in this sense there is no difference between being Cézanne or a schizoid (Merleau-Ponty, 1984, p. 122).

Every artistic object opens a crack, a performance space in which the indeterminacy defies the infinity that only great works rise. A work is more powerful as more possibilities it requests and attends. According to Escoubas, it is a kind of symbolic border between the perception of two lived experiences: “the thing while thing and the thing while painting” (Escoubas, 2005, p. 164) that determines the “to see according to” or “to see with”. In other words, the pictorial space does not simply create the real, it constitutes an expression space, but not a representation one. In the work, the artist put the work in a situation, in movement, and operates a sense of being, making its emergence. Thus, art is not merely an illustration of something, or the beautification of existence – it is not a “copy” from nature, nor an “allegory” of a supernature or sensitive manifestation of beauty (Escoubas, 2005, p. 167). The work must be lived beyond the thing itself and be indivisible in parts (form × content; sensitive × spiritual). It must be sought as unity and unveiled truth.

The establishment of links between Arthur Bispo do Rosario and Marcel Duchamp is frequent – the question is whether it is also licit. An inevitable provocation emerges: relating the works ignoring the lived experiences by artists that belong to such diverse worlds would be, perhaps, to view outsider artists under a strange referential. To compare them only by their formal attributes, subordinating them, can consolidate a shortened and partial perception. On the other hand, how the works of Arthur Bispo do Rosario and other artists that do not belong to the system would have won such visibility? Highbrow culture and the Great Art would have “eyes” for such disturbing works under the perspective of the visuality paradigms provided by this artist/thinker called Marcel Duchamp, thus definitely shaking *status quo*?

In any case, we are all influenced by a given culture or tradition. We are constantly in relation with it. We do not have to turn the back on it, and it is not necessary to use to regulate other fields that does not belong to it. That would be presumptuous. It is clear that these works say different things to different people, in different socio-historical moments. It is evident that these meanings are deconstructed and reconstructed based on these differences. Arthur Bispo do Rosario reinterprets the banal, everyday objects, and we reinterpret him. What was initially just a technical object becomes sacred stigma. The perspective of contemporary viewers

returns the work to the laicity and, finally, it becomes an artistic object, but one need to respect the work’s life and not to betray it, because art “by revealing the sense of things, make it in a particular way, teaching a new way of recognizing reality. This new perspective is revealing because it is constructive, that is, formative. To that extent it is a perspective that stretches itself during the process” (Frayze-Pereira, 2010, p. 56-57). Art, the most democratic of all events, has no meaning. It is a meaning and a process of knowing.

### The image that escapes through the door opening

Borrowing the words of Didi-Huberman (2010): what do you see in these works of art and what look at us? One sees beyond the concreteness of threads and fabrics, and it look at us from the walls of Juliano Moreira Asylum, from its stones impregnated with the inmates’ pain and from the paving of Japarutuba, from the walls of the missions and from the weaving of local handicraft. However, we may stay in a zone beneath of the visible things and pay attention only to what is seen, disregarding the rest, believing this is all. We may even ignore the residual that look at us and deny what every work of art demands: “But there is also in this attitude a true horror and a denial of the void: a willingness to stay at the discernible edges of the volume, in its simple and connected formality” (Didi-Huberman, 2010, p. 38-39). The rich experience of seeing must be a broader exercise of belief. Concerning Arthur Bispo do Rosario, his condition, his pain:

Be that as it may, a man of belief will always see something beyond when he faces a grave . . . . A man of belief prefers to empty graves from their putrefied flesh, desperately amorph, to fill it with sublime bodily images made to confront and to inform – i.e., to fix our memories, apprehensions and desires (Didi-Huberman, 2010, p. 48).

To make the “exercise of looking at” into a shallow truth is refusing memory. It is refusing the work by which time engraved the objects or the obsession in looking. In his book *The Visible and the invisible*, Merleau-Ponty (2000) starts proposing a reflection about the belief commonly disseminated that we see things themselves and that is it. In a way, this faith is not totally wrong – the world is really what we see; however, we need to learn to see it. It is not a question of merely search for words to give meaning to it, but to believe that there is something beyond the evident materiality, that there is something that rescue a metaphysical meaning. Therefore, what we see is forged by our expectations, beliefs and yearnings, and look at us – in the case of Bispo do Rosario, with the strength of the memory from the Asylum. In this elements are impregnated the voids of his history, and the several exclusions and abandonments. These senses are obsessively impregnated in every unweaved and embroidered thread. The objects are

placed beyond to the evidences of their volume; they look at us and disturb our ability of seeing them. Objects are variables from varied situations (Didi-Huberman, 2012) – they have a way of being and presenting themselves as quasi-subjects, in the sense that, once interposed, the work of art becomes an established truth.

The millenarian I Ching Contemplation hexagram (Wilhelm, 1982) says that the vision through a breach in the door is restricted. This suggests that every contemplation is limited by certain perspective. The opening changes everything: situation, contours, how we look. The opening edits the scene. The vision is deformed by the opening but it is also conformed by personal experience. Let to see is always disturbing, since it is operative for the subject, it is a cracked operation, open, because every look carries its own fog. The one who realizes the manifestation and also realizes who has manifested, in a very particular interpretation. It is the apprehension of the manifestation. But this is an external perception, since the observer has not lived these experiences. This is how works of art are constantly re-created in the eyes of every observer, a re-creation that is the result from the mediation among the proposal, the proposition, the proponent and the interpreter.

The sense emerges in the openings and in the intersection; the work is truly carried out not as a thing, but in its capacity to reach the spectators, inviting them to retake the creative gesture. Beyond the cultural world, if the word satisfies oneself, it is due to a hidden balance defined by its own coherence. If we always seek a correspondence among elements; if we refuse to bring forth the spontaneous sense of things from a renewed experience, then the spectacle of the world has been denied, and the bilateral relations of the subject with the world – which found a primordial unity – have been weakened or disintegrated. The expression is not an adjustment. The reflective analysis relinquishes the prior, essential and constituent power, and establishes itself in an unshakable but also naive subjectivity, for it has lost the consciousness of its own beginning. It is curious to reflect on how the word “criticism” has gradually gained preponderance over the works of art. Would the word be more susceptible of being imprisoned by a straightforward sense, of being strictly mental? That would not be possible, we have the art of literature, showing its beauty and denying this conjecture. In any case, the irrefutable word “criticism”, master of the habit of translating – and to translate is essentially to betray – achieved range wideness in the leading role of the tradition that established itself after modernity.

All expressive manifestations – such as speech, the arts and so on – do not lie on a particular concept or reflection that adorns them, but they have a meaning that imposes itself over the object and, at a given moment, consummates it. Naturally, there is a distinction between

a primeval speech that is spontaneous and authentic – because it rises a primordial experience that surpasses any tradition – and the other, which establishes itself as a speech about speeches: retaking of the thought according to somebody else, which abdicates to think it with one’s own thinking. The first is essentially identical to the thought (Merleau-Ponty, 1999, nota VI. 4, p. 636).

And this is the condition of the artist; to be represented in the work he must simply do it. In the case of a work that has an essentially mnemonic character, such as the Bispo do Rosario’s has, what is expressed is rather an operation constituted in the furrows of a past time from its implications in the present, and it has an integral bodily experience – what was lived – as a mean of relating all these elements; in our way of understanding it, something that has a peculiar resonance in those who face it in order to complete it, and do this according to his own way of experiencing it. As if this work would be settled as an organ of senses in those who propose to live it.

The freedom artists have in placing their experiences in the work of art is personal and nontransferable, this means style, in the words of Merleau-Ponty (1991). The French philosopher says we are clearly not determined, but we never change: “we may always find in our past the prediction of what we have become. We must understand both things the same time and how freedom emerges in us without breaking our links with the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1984, p.123).

About the frequent comparison between the works of Marcel Duchamp and Arthur Bispo do Rosario: it is up to us spectators to observe the difficult – but fascinating – exercise of balance between the freedom and fidelity in concluding the works when facing them, enjoying this autonomy with parsimony. The burden for the infinite spectacle of the art to fully and honestly take place is related to our commitment and involvement (Figure 2).

The inspired sensibility of Bispo do Rosario does not depend on his clinical condition. This is a secondary factor. This is so true that several artists who have been in psychiatric institutions did not even achieve a projection comparable to that of Bispo do Rosario, although all these individuals continue, unfortunately, at the margins of society and culture.

His inventiveness cannot be “diagnosed”; it is not the result from delirium or a fever. And it is precisely on the act of choosing, selecting these dejecta, waste and garbage that resides the value of the process of reinventing, reconstructing and resignifying his world in the creation of the unusual, which brings his personal mark, his style. In his particular way of putting things in situation, he sought for coherence through the divine incumbency to which his work is intended. Only the elect have this power. And Arthur Bispo do Rosario is one of them.



Figure 2. In this pavilion in Juliano Moreira Asylum – for the most violent inmates – Arthur Bispo do Rosario spent 50 of his 80 years

Source: view of the hallway from the set of cells where Arthur Bispo do Rosario lived, Pavilion 10 of Juliano Moreira Asylum. Personal archive/ May 2012. Copyrighted

The black man from a freed slave population, inmate of a psychiatric institution, only found a way for

the reorganization of a fairer world. The laws of men were not enough to save him, so he turned to the divine ones. He chose to embroider his own way, beautify it with talent and dedication. Each of these objects chosen by Bispo do Rosario gains new colors, new life. It is a meticulous needlework, in which apparently insignificant things coexist harmoniously, dividing the space in a perfect world. Like him, his objects leave the position imposed and assume a noble and dignified one. The diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia is contextual and the scenario of sociological issues. He was included in all categories of exclusion, and his clinical condition aggravated this. He has tried all forms of escape. His life, his work and his struggle was a great treatise. Borrowing his words: *Registros de Minha Passagem pela Terra* [Personal records of my Time on Earth] embroidered in praise to God, in memory of the many excluded in this country, something that is still happening. Bispo do Rosario's works is a call for help and a cry of denunciation, but, above all, a brilliant survival strategy. He fought as he could, gently refuse to be connivent with all categories imposed to him. And he did this in the most noble and sublime ways that a man has ever experienced: for amusement, religiosity and art. We disagree with those who diagnose the work. It has saved him. It is a unique legacy; in the religious sense, it is a memorial narration of salutary salvation and in the secular aspect, it is a survival report. Behold its beauty.

Arthur Bispo do Rosario, a quasi-anonymous diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia in the beginning of the last century, teaches us with his simplicity how it is possible – with scarce resources, restricted material and precarious conditions – to create the sublime. It is up to us to become men of faith.

### Arthur Bispo do Rosario além dos muros da Colônia

**Resumo:** Este trabalho propõe um olhar sobre a obra de Arthur Bispo do Rosario, que secundariza a patologia e prioriza o vivido. É frequente o cotejamento com Marcel Duchamp por conta da similaridade formal sustentada por algumas de suas obras. Mas a heterogeneidade dos percursos desafia a recepção a uma reflexão mais detida sobre suas respectivas experiências. Em Arthur Bispo do Rosario, a condição de recluso notadamente incorre em fortes restrições materiais e contextualiza a obra. Em seu inventivo e inusitado projeto, funda tanto menos uma estética da feiura e tanto mais – por sua força de verdade – o belo artístico, não como lei formal e plástica, mas como resultado ou êxito de uma experiência estética que se torna experiência artística. Espera-se adotar um ponto de vista que, prescindindo dos caminhos usuais – como a recorrente aproximação entre esses dois artistas –, busque ver além dos limites discerníveis do volume das obras, evidenciando uma verdade interposta como “quase-sujeitos”, nos termos de Georges Didi-Huberman. Examinar a obra têxtil de Arthur Bispo do Rosario pelos vãos da percepção é assumir sua indeterminação e considerá-la na categoria de instável a que pertencem os objetos de arte mediadores de realidades vividas. Evidenciar sua magnitude é também evidenciar sua importância como um possível instrumento de descontaminação e despreconceitualização do olhar que categoriza e penaliza artistas e obras, diagnosticando-as.

**Palavras-chave:** Arthur Bispo do Rosario, *outsider artist*, fenomenologia, recepção estética, Marcel Duchamp.

## Arthur Bispo do Rosario au-delà des murs de l'asile

**Résumé:** Cet article propose un regard sur le travail d'Arthur Bispo do Rosario, en mettant la pathologie dans un second plan et priorisant l'expérience vécue. La comparaison avec Marcel Duchamp est fréquente en raison de la similitude formelle entre certaines de leurs œuvres. Mais l'hétérogénéité des leurs chemins défie la réception à une réflexion plus détournée sur leurs respectives expériences. Chez Arthur Bispo do Rosario, sa condition de reclus notamment entraîne de fortes restrictions matérielles et contextualise son ouvrage. Dans son inventif et incroyable projet, il fonde moins une esthétique de la laideur que bien plus encore – en raison de sa force de vérité – le beau artistique, non pas comme une loi formelle et plastique, mais comme le résultat ou la réussite d'une expérience esthétique qui devient l'expérience artistique. En adoptant un point de vue qui méprise les formules usuelles – comme le récurrent rapprochement entre ces deux artistes – nous cherchons voir au-delà des limites discernables du volume des œuvres, en montrant la vérité interposée comme «presque-sujets», concept proposé par Georges Didi-Huberman. Dans notre perspective, nous regardons l'œuvre textile d'Arthur Bispo do Rosario par les lacunes de la perception, en assumant son indétermination et la considérons dans la catégorie d'instable à laquelle appartient les objets d'art médiateurs des réalités vécues. Mettre en évidence sa magnitude est également prouvé son importance comme possible instrument de décontamination et comme moyen d'éradication des préjugés du regard qui catégorise et pénalise les artistes bruts et leurs œuvres, en les diagnostiquant.

**Mots-clés:** Arthur Bispo do Rosario, l'Art Brut, phénoménologie, réception esthétique, Marcel Duchamp.

## Arthur Bispo do Rosario más allá de los muros del asilo

**Resumen:** En este trabajo se propone a reflejar sobre la obra de Arthur Bispo do Rosario, dejando en segundo plano la patología y priorizando lo vivido. Es frecuente la comparación de su producción con la de Marcel Duchamp, debido a la similitud formal con base en algunas de sus obras. Sin embargo, la heterogeneidad de los caminos por ellos vividos desafía la interpretación a una reflexión más contenida sobre sus respectivas experiencias. En Arthur Bispo do Rosario, su condición de recluso notablemente incurre en fuertes restricciones materiales y contextualiza su obra. En su inventivo e inusitado proyecto funda mucho menos una estética basada en la fealdad, y mucho más –por su fuerza de verdad– lo bello artístico no como ley formal y plástica, pero como resultado, éxito de una experiencia estética que se convierte en una experiencia artística. Teniendo en cuenta lo anterior, se espera adoptar un punto de vista inusitado, prescindiendo de los caminos usuales, como la proximidad entre los dos artistas, y busque ver más allá de los límites del volumen de sus obras, evidenciando una verdad que se ha interpuesta como “casi-sujetos” en los términos de Georges Didi-Huberman. Examinar la obra textil de Arthur Bispo de Rosario por los vacíos de la percepción es asumir su indeterminación y considerarla como categoría inestable, es decir, a la que pertenecen los objetos de arte mediadores de realidades vividas. Evidenciar la magnitud de su obra es igualmente evidenciar su importancia como un posible instrumento de descontaminación y desprendimiento de los prejuicios de la mirada que categorizan y penalizan a artistas y obras, diagnosticándolas.

**Palabras clave:** Arthur Bispo do Rosario, *outsider artist*, fenomenología, recepción estética, Marcel Duchamp.

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