nara roesler

marcos chaves
blue blood

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ginevra bria

Blue Blood sparks from a 2013 intervention at Fundação Eva Klabin, in Rio de Janeiro. Marcos Chaves (1961, Rio de Janeiro) in *I Only Have Eyes for You* presents six installations in six domestic spaces of the Casa Museu in Lagoa. In the entrance hall, the carpets were photographic replicas of fabric details from the Foundation's collection. In that part of the house, Klabin acknowledged human nature and beauty in her home, welcoming them from those carpets on as a nocturne Amphitryon. Chaves re-signified and metaphorized Klabin's life path as a Gesamtkunstwerk through that floor installation. A work of art that mesmerizes and uses all or many art forms. Disposable, everyday objects included.

Considering this intuitive attitude, Chaves alters the original meaning of objectivity through daily life nobility. Such a perception of hyperbolic irony introduces *Blue Blood*. An institutional-range survey composed of three unedited series of works, leading through a conclusive, immersive intervention.

In complete admiration of the painting practice, which Chaves has rhizomatically approached and formalized, *Blue Blood* intertwines photographs, installations, and sculptures. But as an exhibition pivot, photography borrows the work titles from the supremacy contradictions of nobility, politics, and unions of historical raison d'être (quoting venues of nobiliary power such as Palazzo Pamphilj, the Opéra Garnier, and Château de Fontainebleau, between Italy and France).

Through them, the wear of pictorial matters praises flawed surfaces and aristocratic times. As a non-representational means, the red color enhances the belief in innate rights to wealth and property that painting has always conveyed in art history, expressing aesthetics and canons of pure or noble lineage. But, in *Blue Blood*, the red color subverts and emphasizes the pure abstraction and the geometric shapes in ancient velvet patches or their surgical, linen sutures.

Concerned only with form and the purity of shape, Chaves reveals how even imperial stains and holes are embodied as canvas and pigments, hierarchic falls, rejecting symbols and forms of abstraction. *Blue Blood*, through the focus on nonobjective objectivity, intends to liberate, through photography, sculpture, and floor interventions, painting from the burden of recognizable colonial identities, turning the still life portrait of a decayed era into powerless living forms.

In *Blue Blood*, photography and sculpture preserve the decadent temporality of a coalescence effect unearthed by the surface of canvases and patterns. The different spectrums of red bestow depth and glow, underlining how the appearance of the painting could not be considered conceptually uniform without shadow or tone. *Blue Blood* does not aim to attach any symbolic relevance to matters, colors, and shapes, which, in Chaves' oeuvre, sarcastically and semantically acquire their own language. In this project, between the slow erasure of vertical and horizontal dimensions, each element represented, or magnified, is hypostatized into a time motion, while the noble dynamic of reds is timeless. And ennobled.

Red blood became blue

There is no dispute about a universal dimension to blood. But why does blue, antithetically, bolster the symbol of blood signifying the noble sovereignty of European royalty and monarchy? The concept likely originates in medieval Spain as *'sangre azul'*, and is attributed to the rich, powerful families of Castile.

As part of their pure Gothic descent, they would claim never to have intermarried with another race by drawing attention to their pale skin, which made the blueness of their veins visible. In the IX century, Spanish military noblemen reportedly proved their kinship by displaying their visible veins to distinguish themselves from their darker-skinned Moorish enemy. Throughout Europe, it came to express the difference between the upper and lower classes: the former prizing their courtly-fashionable marble-like skin complete with visible veins, in contrast to the tanned skin of those toiling in the sun.

But how did the notion of *Blue Blood* become a sign of unfading, heralding power? The historian Ernst Kantorowicz, in *The King's Two Bodies*, explains the ambiguity present in the meaning of the term sainthood. The concept of two bodies, in the theological and political sense, developed from the Christian and religious explanation of Christ and his Mystical, Celestial Body. *Blue Blood*, in addition to other concepts, can be extracted from this metaphor as a metonymy of a transcendent presence on earth.

Within the emergence and the meaning of certain medieval theoretical metaphors, the term *Blue Blood* originates from political and historical representations. By this, Professor Gil Anidjar touches upon the issue of *Blue Blood* in his book *Blood: A Critique of Christianity*. In one note, Anidjar writes: "What the blood carries and preserves, in other words, is still what we would call a system of beliefs." Anidjar shows that many speculative prerogatives can be interpreted by the inheritance of the blood, not just the body. In a way, it implies that, besides the religious motives, blood can be ideologized just as if a politicized body and its *Blue Blood* may transfer inheritance.

From this basis, political theology could be considered as a forming figure of speech, whose strength comes not from the genealogy of the state, but instead from the persuasive force of theological metaphors as the *Blue Blood* elliptical analogy. Theological metaphors persist in the modern age not because they are structurally necessary, but because theological metaphors serve political ends. Also, *The King's Two Bodies* draws a history of representation in the political sphere in which the relationship between the person and the office plays a crucial role.

The mortal king, indeed, was God-made, but the immortal king was representatively man-made. This paradox considers the notion of persona from a political and legal viewpoint. And Kantorowicz emphasized the understanding of the juristic person, which is the main element in understanding his idea of political theology.

In *The Two Faces of Personhood: Hobbes Corporate Agency, and the Personality of the State*, Sean Fleming reminds us about the duality of persona, which is similar to Kantorowicz's discussion of the medieval meaning of persona. In discussing artificial persons, Fleming claims: "The distinction between *representative* persons and represented persons becomes crucial when we consider artificial persons (…) True artificial persons are those that are simultaneously natural persons, in sacred flesh and blood: on the *representative* side, state agents; on the represented side, their submitted vassals." The concept of two bodies, between the human body and the body of the state, turns the notion of *Blue Blood* into a threshold blue, in contrast to ordinary citizens whose blood is red.

In the theory of authorization, which has been recognized by the Political Economy Professor Mark Neocleous, for Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), this concept of persona was a very important source of medieval canon and civil law that would gradually invalidate the negative principle of Roman law, which prevented direct representation. In medieval jurisprudence, the term *repraesentatio* took on the meaning of representation based on delegated powers. With the action of agency, *actora* starts to describe the verb rapraesentare. It represents not only concrete individuals, but also personae fictae, the collective body that is a recognized legal person. In fact, this collective body is a figurative fixation, which has been addressed here through the notion of *Blue Blood*. Before the modern world of politics could arise, it was necessary not merely to deprive the emperor of any shadowy claim to supremacy, but also to establish the development of the modern conceptions of person, authorization, and representation. Person, authorization, and representation conveyed through Painting, within portraits of power, created associations with a decadent reality existing beyond the limits of its stage, as the creation of a new reality. I treated space not as illusory but as an ostensory pedestal of dynastic powers.

One might wonder how the expression '*Blue Blood*' nowadays functions, in which one can also find speeches on the freedom of the lower nobility and citizenry. '*Blue Blood*' primarily denotes the inheritance of medieval imperialistic prerogative, or membership in a royal or noble family. Evoking the relationship between ecclesial and secular authorities. By transposition, the concept of '*Sangue Azul*' in Marcos Chaves' unpublished new series of work expands some of the ideas of Kantorowicz in *The King's Two Bodies*, where he develops a political theological concept, which follows the appropriation of bodily celestial metaphors and its imperialistic secular questions. Such an approach marks a new beginning of rational understanding of the human being, state, and sovereignty, where the topic of blood is not directly put into question but is transfigured in the liminality between terrestrial body and mystical bodies. In *Blue Blood*, the topic of nobility necessarily implies the topic of blood in addition to that of the body.

In the series introduced by *Blue Blood*, in adopting the terminology of personification, the state is thus abstracted as an entity which shares in the discourse of subjectivity, it produces a chromatic political effect, the corporate identity of the state, and it facilitates the process of incorporation so central to the trope of order of representation. The person of the state, within the venues of Château de Fontainebleau, Palazzo Pamphilii, and the Opéra Garnier, through their emblems of faded power, thus not only forms the basis of the convergence of domination and unity but also figures imperialistic domination as unity. And the celestial body, in *Blue Blood* signified by the historical definition of *Blue Blood*, establishes the development of the modern conceptions of person, authorization, and representation, portraying the signs of time as an ideology of abstraction through a demanded-silent, mystified reverence.

Red becomes Blue Blood

In *Blue Blood* the synthesis of power and abstraction occurs between two beacons: in the physiology of vision and in the conundrum of a de-objectification of things. Through photography, the purist ideology of hegemony and abstraction is constantly disrupted, then, by impurities and contradictions of the fabrics, within its own rhetoric of the canvas medium, within the practice of political or religious points of view, and from without, from the concrete world of historical circumstances. Chaves, since 2015, throughout nine years, has been analyzing these factors between Rome and Paris, two historically imperial capitals.

In 2015, in Rome, Chaves visits Palazzo Pamphilj, a palace facing onto the Piazza Navona, built between 1644 and 1650 by Pope Innocent X, and since 1920, the location of the Brazilian Embassy in Italy. In this building, Diego Velázquez (1599-1660) composed one of the most remarkable portraits in the history of art, depicting Pope Innocent X. The painting encompasses a fascinating and profound revelation of the psychology of one of the bitterest Popes ever to haunt the Vatican. Inspired by Titian (1500 c.a. – 1576), Velázquez abandons the browns and blacks of his earlier paintings and submerges his composition in various tones of red, allowing the Pope's traditional costume to dominate the scene.

This tonal choice infuses the painting with an atmosphere of oppressive power and potential danger. A haunting atmosphere captured by Francis Bacon's (1909-1992) *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, 1953: although he scrupulously avoided observing the original painting, Bacon collected reproduction after reproduction of Velázquez's *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, becoming intimately familiar with the painting. Condensing the missing fragments of such an intricate genealogy, Chaves portrays the red pigments of the theological power, preserved at the level of forms and fibers, as an apt focus for the by now traditional discourse of *ut pictura theoria*, with its metaphysics of purity, flatness, and anti-illusionism.

Between 2021 and 2024, in Paris, the physiology of the *Blue Blood* vision, for Chaves, grounds on the red velvets of the 1821 Napoleon III (1808-1873) style Opéra Garnier. A Parisian, highly eclectic symbol, borrowed from many historical sources. The opera house was conceived right after the emperor's assassination attempt, and reveals merging mannerist elements from the Baroque, the classicism of Palladio, and Renaissance architecture. These were combined with axial symmetry and modern techniques and materials, including the use of an iron framework. While Chaves horizontalizes the focus of his camera on a specific portion of the indoors, the whole auditorium, designed like a jewelry box, is the highlight of the Palace. It is covered with gold and red velvet, and the vivid colors of the ceiling painted by Marc Chagall (1887-1985) give it a warm tone, allowing the audience to sink into a dream-like atmosphere.

Almost sixty kilometers southeast of the Opéra Garnier, in the commune of Fontainebleau, there's one of the largest French royal palaces: Châteaux de Fontainebleau, settled in the Middle Ages and developed in 1528. It served as a hunting lodge and summer residence for many of the French monarchs, including Napoleon I. As portrayed by François Bouchot (1800-1842), Napoleon spent the last days of his reign at Fontainebleau, before abdicating there on 4 April 1814. Two weeks later, after failing to commit suicide, he gave a last farewell to the soldiers of the Old Guard, assembled in the Court of Honor. In this palace, Chaves shoots secretively at the red podium of Napoleon's throne, to trace the wounds of time, among suture stitches and worn-out discolorations.

In these three different museal architectures, the pictorial conquest of the external visual world, in *Blue Blood*, for Chaves, is intrinsically intertwined with the history of spaces, materials, and matters, where countless narratives that preserve the ontological context of certain periods and cultures lie. Both the origins of the material and the way or period in which it was used were responsible for defining associations that spring to the mind of the artist and the observer who knows part of its history. It's worth mentioning that from Rembrandt (1606-1669) to Raphael (1483-1520), artists in Europe used paints containing red pigments extracted from brazilwood bark, formally *Paubrasilia echinata* (pau-brasil), the origin of the name Brazil.

Dissecting, then, every detail of the colonial history of a pigment, fabric, or stain is here crucial: it is a retrieval of ontological data that allows us to establish new relationships with pictorial works, and why not, new creative directions. This retrieval is of particular interest to painters who wish to develop a dialogue with the art of the past and the alchemical heritage of painting, and in its poetics, it enhances a self-referential discourse (painting that deals with painting), thus safeguarding archaic pictorial traditions and the history of material technology. The use of historical material implies the conservation of Western and Latin American hegemonies; it is an opportunity to rediscover paths that are usually left aside, especially when secular material is labeled as obsolete by the interests of large industries. Part of the rescue intendedlook by *Blue Blood* is the taxonomy of what could be called a *pictorial archaeology* of materials, which refers to the act of recovering and organizing the historical details of a material that is as rare as symbolic.

"[…] For an artist, a painting is as much the sum of ideas as it is blurred memories of dragging paint, sucking in fumes, dripping oils, cleaning brushes, rubbing, diluting and mixing. Pre-verbal thoughts mixed with namable concepts[...] [...] memories of materials are not commonly part of what is said about a painting, and this is a flaw in its interpretation." Such a Professor James Elkins' description accurately illustrates the kinds of mental articulations used to manipulate painting materials. These thoughts operate in conjunction with knowledge of the properties of elements that Chaves enhances as: transparency, opacity, density, coverage, spreading, fluidity, compatibility with other pigments, permanence, chromatic temperature, particle size, elasticity, toxicity, rarity, method of preparation, quantity and an infinity of information that invades the mind of the artist in process, all associated with the properties and the histories of the materials. These articulations are the raw material of the processes, the representation of creation, of the creative process, the philosopher's stone of painters. In the art historian Spike Bucklow's words, the vermilion"[...] was special for artists because its ingredients are related to form and matter, the elementary principles of all creation.

The symbologies and analogies related to the process of making vermilion pigments are complex and numerous, as natural as artificial. Is it possible that all the craftsmen and compilers of medieval manuals and treatises were fully aware of all these symbologies? According to Bucklow, the possibilities are great, as it is justified by the enormous number of recipes for producing vermilion in medieval treatises, he explains: "The totality of the beauty of vermilion was a secret of the painter, but a secret they wanted to share, hence the numerous recipes and experiments." What Bucklow means is that, of all the recipes for producing pigments found in ancient manuscripts, vermilion recipes are the most common and abundant. Therefore, Chaves' gaze, in *Sangue Azul*, suggests that this indicates a need, desire, or effort to convey a genealogical message, portrayed as raw surfaces pierced through by diagonal segments bisecting the composition.

Blue Blood becomes blue

Is *Blue Blood* where the light of unfading powers is the clearest, when fabrics, through photography, turn into canvases? Is *Blue Blood* where the loss of spatial horizons and the surfacing of temporal imperfections is a shift against and towards nonobjective pursuit? What has Chaves done to the theological politics of imperialist pathways through his sardonic irony? Why did he turn them both into the absolutism of red? Whirlwinds of velvet zigzag across fibers and usura like arrogant fire. Carmine tones envelop horizontal planes, eradicating the sense of depth in the environment and suffusing on a single ghostly plane both the feeling of distance and nearness, which makes its features and shades of red unreal as a grotesque stain, an old religious ostension of an absence, a prematurely wilted leaf. But the volumes, enveloped with luxurious fabrics, return the very idea of a dimension beyond the three physical spatial dimensions of known space, and how it attunes nicely with Kazimir Malevich's (1879-19350 mystical world beyond normal intellect and sensory perception. Such a photographic synthesis allowed Chaves to provide a world of un-objects developed purely by his mind, representing this ephemeral, carnal strata. Or the digression of time, impressed on the velvet and expressed echoing the verse of the metaphysical poem To His Coy Mistress by Andrew Marvell (1621–1678): […] our love should grow vaster than empires, and more slow.

While the beholder brings into focus the fine grain of aristocratic glories with repugnance, the dust of times accumulates in, and we breathe, covering our faces with our hands. It wants to asphyxiate and strangle the lack of a vantage point. Subterranean howling reaches us surreptitiously through the absolutist clouds that envelop and destroy without mercy. Repeated invisible volleys and cunning attacks are indefensible; deliberate microbial pigments; atoms in revolt, defiant against anything that is organized; excess energy of resentful creation that feels of no use; revenge and more revenge of the Porpora, the oldest in the world. The last stage of matter that was born with the blessing of the ancient Greek waters, and through the stickiness of life, is first reduced to the statutory mineral, only to explode and disintegrate into the parts of which it is composed. Microscopy of the elements, road to nothingness, annihilation without glory, the collapse of inertia, entropy, revenge, and revenge of dust, the lowest part of the world. Oh, destroyers of civilizations, woods, lungs, and territories, all inscribed on a ground level!

And you shall see how our own vague memories of Palazzo Pamphilj, the Opéra Garnier e Châteaux de Fontainebleau, will disappear when the histories of empires will come crashing down in the slow, worn-out fabrics of the contemporary debris that shelters blue-blood aristocracies, like a suture caused by a sudden gyrating, red funnel, a whirlwind of refuse. It flies against the attractive sumptuous velvets, the dwellings and the streets, the gardens and the towers, the authoritative ascents of Pope Innocent X, Napoleon III, Napoleon, and even Eva Klabin, the agile, savage troops of ages, with vermilion hooves. Revenge and then more revenge of the *Blue Blood* came blue. Planet condemned to the desert, the red carpets storm threatens to sweep away portraits and paintings. Where geological catastrophes that are playfully waiting are the origin of an art that mocks death to be reborn.

[1] Gil Anidjar, Semites: *Race, Religion*, Literature, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2008, p. 167.

[2] Fleming, Sean, "The Two Faces of Personhood: Hobbes, Corporate Agency, and the Personality of the State", European Journal of Political Theory, 20 (2017) 1, pp. 1-22.

[3]: Mark Neocleous, *Imagining the State*, Open University Press, Philadelphia and Maidenhead, 2003, p. 77.

[4]: William John Thomas Mitchell, 'Ut Pictura Theoria: Abstract Painting and the Repression of Language.' In Critical Inquiry, Winter, 1989, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Winter, 1989), The University of Chicago Press, pp. 348-371.

[5] In ancient times, the term cinnabar was used to refer to numerous red pigments, a word commonly used to identify the natural toxic substance known as mercury sulfide, extracted from mines all over Europe. In turn, the term vermilion has roots connected to the Persian kirmiz, a name originally used in the Middle East to describe a lacquer of animal origin, or the color carmine itself. The term vermilion was later used by Western Europeans to refer to the substance resulting from the artificial synthesis of mercury sulfide, also known as cinnabar, a process probably developed in the Near East or China. Apparently, the Portuguese term vermelho is the only language whose roots are directly linked to this pigment. The existence of a natural version and an artificial version with the same characteristics and the constant confusion between other red pigments have made it practically impossible to discern the origins of all these terms with absolute certainty.

[6] Researchers from the National Gallery in London, the Canadian Conservation Institute, Shell, and the Edinburgh School of Chemistry in Scotland may have solved the problem by identifying a component of the dye that resists light: urolithin C. This chemical compound was extracted from the tincture of brazilwood (Caesalpinia echinata, reclassified as Paubrasilia echinata) produced at the National Gallery following a historical recipe: the wood chips are boiled in water and the liquid, after being filtered, is given a mixture of aluminum sulphate and sodium carbonate until its pH becomes neutral. For this reason, researchers are trying to identify the presence of the Paubrasilia echinata in the paintings to determine the authenticity of contested artworks. But, so far, it's not an easy task, since most of these pigments break down under the action of light.

[7] James Elkins, *What Painting Is*, First Edition, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 2.

[8] Spike Bucklow, *The Alchemy of Paint*. First edition, Editions Marion Boyars, London, 2009, p. 225.

nara roesler

são paulo
av europa, 655
jardim europa, 01449-001
são paulo, sp, brasil
t 55 (11) 2039 5454

rio de janeiro
rua redentor 241
ipanema, 22421-030
rio de janeiro, rj, brasil
t 55 (21) 3591 0052

new york
511 west 21st street
new york, 10011 ny
usa
t 1 (212) 794 5038

info@nararoesler.art
www.nararoesler.art