

nara roesler

virginia de medeiros



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## virginia de medeiros

b. 1973, Feira de Santana, Brazil

lives and works in São Paulo, Brazil

**Virginia de Medeiros approaches her artistic practice as a life process, seeking to reveal the complexities of insurgent micro universes, according to curator Beatriz Lemos. 'Her work transitions between documentary language and fabulation, and the presence of her body when experimenting with technological, photographic, and audiovisual resources,' adds Lemos. Medeiros resorts to documentary methodologies to break from hegemonic narratives, proposing new ways of understanding and representing realities and otherness.**

Medeiros' images usually originate from the artist's immersive practice involving research and experiences, seeking to minimize a potential excessively ethnographic or preconceived gaze while strengthening the bonds between the portrayed and the artwork. Art, in Medeiros' understanding, is a place for creating new ethical forms of interaction.

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### selected solo exhibitions

*Clamor*, Instituto Tomie Ohtake (ITO), São Paulo, Brazil (2019)  
29º Programa de exposições, Centro Cultural São Paulo (CCSP), São Paulo, Brazil (2019)  
*Studio Butterfly e outras fábulas*, Galeria Fayga Ostrower, Complexo Cultural Funarte, Brasília, Brazil (2018)  
*Jardim das Torturas*, Ateliê Aberto, Campinas, Brazil (2013)  
*Faille*, La Chambre Blanche, Montreal, Canada (2007)

### selected group exhibitions

11<sup>st</sup> Berlin Biennale, Germany (2020)  
À Nordeste, Sesc 24 de Maio, São Paulo, Brazil (2019)  
3<sup>rd</sup> Chicago Architecture Biennial, Chicago, USA (2019)  
*Histórias da sexualidade*, Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), São Paulo, Brazil (2017)  
Jogja Biennale 14, Indonesia (2017)  
31ª Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil (2014)

### selected collections

Associação Cultural Videobrasil, São Paulo, Brazil  
Instituto Itaú Cultural, São Paulo, Brazil  
Instituto Inhotim, Brumadinho, Brazil  
Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), São Paulo, Brazil  
Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil

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## spirituality and ancestry

Religion is not only an exercise of spirituality but also a means of developing one's subjectivity due to the beliefs, precepts, and taboos that it involves. Recently, Virginia de Medeiros has been focusing on this theme, especially on religions and their connections with issues related to gender and sexuality.

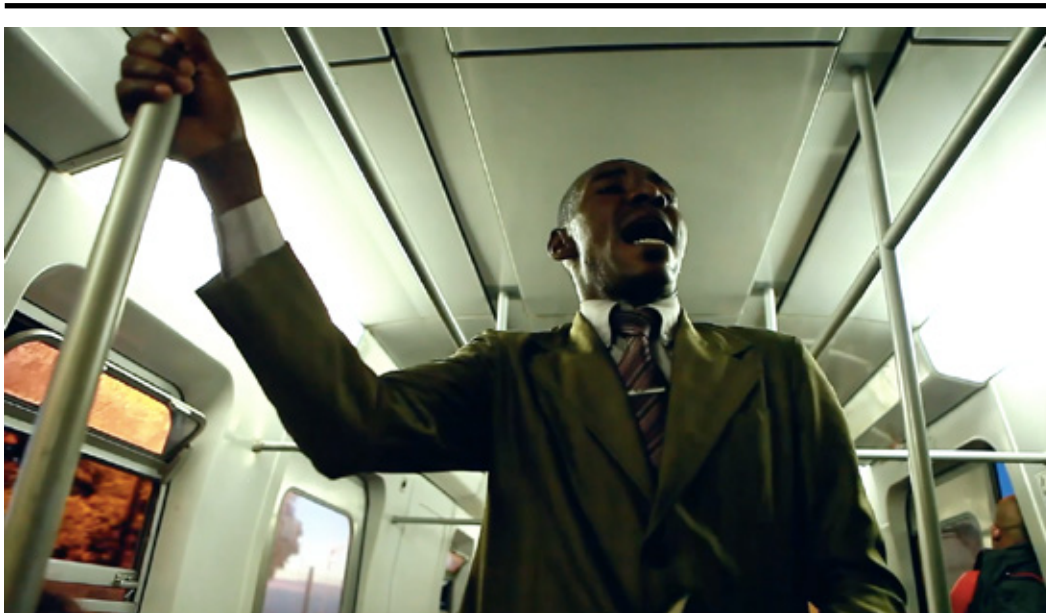
*Iyá Agbára* [Iyá Agbára] (2020) is the name of the project that Virginia de Medeiros presented on the occasion of the 11th Berlin Biennale (2020); in fact the institution commissioned the work. The work emerged from a collaboration with the community of Ilê Obá Sileké, the first and only Candomblé house in Germany, and in particular with Gilmará Guimarães and Virginia Borges, who share authorship of the project with the artist. *Iyá Agbára* [Iyá Agbára] focuses on matriarchy in Candomblé and the connection to one's body as a form of female empowerment. The title of the work derives from two words in the Yoruba language: *iyá* means mother; and *Agbára* means strength, potentiality, and power, and is also one of the names of Exu, an orixá that refers to the principles of movement, communication, and creativity in Candomblé.





The video installation was composed of portraits filmed on 16mm Kodak color negative film. Through multiple exposures, the artist combines elements of change and unpredictability to create each picture. The method generated images with multiple presences, inviting us to reflect on possibilities for new ways of constructing reality, ones notably based on ideas of multilateral existences, times, and dimensions, all of which constitute the universe of Candomblé.

*Iyá Agbára*, 2020  
16mm film transferred  
to HD, color, sound  
11'32"  
Virginia de Medeiros, Gil DuOdé  
and Virginia Borges



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Filmed on a city train in Subúrbio Ferroviário in Salvador, Bahia, *Trem em transe* [Train in Trance] (2019) follows Sérgio Costa dos Santos, a neo-Pentecostal pastor. The artist has documented this individual for fourteen years, having also made him the protagonist of her film *Sérgio and Simone*. Standing in the train aisle, with the bible in hand, Sérgio expresses his spiritual and physical transformation after embracing the religion. After testimonies of faith, the missionaries begin singing songs of praise to the sound of the drum and the tambourine, played live on the train. At this moment, a physical manifestation begins, a kind of trance that, according to the practitioners, is a sign of God's Holy Spirit. A sense of ecstasy spreads through the train, and passengers also dance, twist, and fall into a trance. The movements can be easily related to those found in worship manifestations of Afro-Brazilian religions, stretching the boundaries between these religions.

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*Trem em transe*, 2019  
single channel video, color, surround  
sound  
23' 26"





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## portraits and accounts

In Virginia de Medeiros' work, images are often made to become inseparable from words, or rather, from the stories told by the individuals portrayed. The artist elaborates collaborative processes that seek to amplify voices, breaking from hierarchical relationships between artist and subject.

The project *Alma de Bronze* [Bronze Souls] (2017) developed following a period whereby de Medeiros lived in close proximity the female leaders of Movimento Sem Teto do Centro (MSTC) in São Paulo. The artist's contact with the movement began in 2016, when she participated in an artistic residency at Ocupação Hotel Cambridge, where Medeiros lived for three months. There, she experienced and recorded the daily activism of MSTC women in a series of photographs and video testimonies. The following year, the artist participated, together with MSTC, in the process of establishing Ocupação 9 de Julho in São Paulo.

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*Joana Pereira da Conceição,*  
*Guerrilheiras, from Alma de*  
*Bronze series, 2017*  
inkjet print on Hahnemühle  
Photo Rag 308  
90 x 60 cm | 35.4 x 23.6 in



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The series resulted in a set of portraits of thirteen activists, entitled *Guerrilheiras* [Guerrilla Women] (2017). The photographs proposed a body of images portraying the women of MSTC as warriors and heroines, whose conflict is often, daily life itself. In the video installation *Quem não luta tá morto* [Those Who Don't Fight Are Dead] (2018), we see videos of these women sharing their stories. They talk about their subjectivities and relationship with the activism that not only provides for their life but also offers their existential and affective territories, allowing them to assert their strength and, above all, their uniqueness. Both the photographs and film were part of the exhibition *Alma de Bronze*, presented at Ocupação 9 de Julho in 2018. Virginia de Medeiros' artistic process revealed her commitment not only to portray a situation, but also to actively engage with it, introducing into the realm of contemporary art, a fruitful dialogue with the complex reality that surrounds us.

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Maria Luiza dos Santos e Adriana Santos Menezes, *Guerrilheiras*, from *Alma de Bronze* series, 2017  
inkjet print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag 308  
90 x 60 cm | 35.4 x 23.6 in





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*Daniela Santos Neves, Guerrilheiras,*  
*from Alma de Bronze series, 2017*  
inkjet print on Hahnemühle  
Photo Rag 308  
90 x 60 cm | 35.4 x 23.6 in



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Leonice Penteado Lucas,  
*Guerrilheiras*, from *Alma de Bronze* series, 2017  
inkjet print on Hahnemühle  
Photo Rag 308  
90 x 60 cm | 35.4 x 23.6 in



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Maria das Neves Pereira,  
*Guerrilheiras*, from *Alma de Bronze* series, 2017  
inkjet print on Hahnemühle  
Photo Rag 308  
90 x 60 cm | 35.4 x 23.6 in



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Elizabeth Afonso Pereira,  
*Guerrilheiras*, from *Alma de Bronze* series, 2017  
inkjet print on Hahnemühle  
Photo Rag 308  
90 x 60 cm | 35.4 x 23.6 in

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→  
exhibition views  
*Alma de Bronze*, 2018  
Galeria Reocupa,  
Ocupação 9 de julho,  
São Paulo, Brazil







SAÍDA

3 andar



GALERIA REOCUPA  
APRESENTA  
ESQUIZOFRENIA  
DA FORMA  
E DO ÉXTASE  
NELSON FELIX



OCUPAÇÃO  
9 DE JULHO  
rua alvaro de carvalho  
427

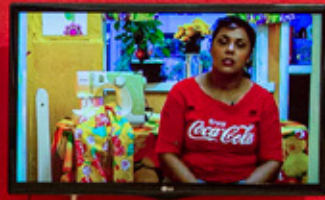
**ALMA  
DE  
BRONZE**  
virginia de medeiros  
exposição 1 set - 4 nov

427



427  
← GALERIA REOCUPA









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*Clamor* [Clamor] (2019) is a development of the series *Alma de Bronze* [Bronze Soul]. It was presented at Tomie Ohtake Institute (ITO) as part of the Arte Atual program in 2019. The video installation featured 13 video portraits of MSTC activists, who were recorded with music played by the percussion maestro Beth Beli and the musical producer Guilherme Kastripe. Medeiros also organized three events with the portrayed activists and guests from different fields, such as philosophy, architecture, and urbanism, to discuss housing issues. The drums stopped playing during these conversations exclusively, in order to provide space for the people's voices. Ultimately, *Clamor* [Clamor] captured the act of communicating as a strong desire, an essential need.

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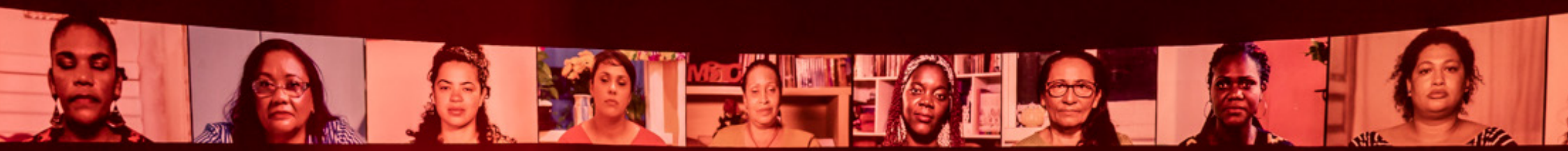
←  
exhibition view  
3<sup>rd</sup> Chicago Biennial, 2019  
Chicago, United States

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*Clamor, Guerrilheiras*, from  
*Alma de Bronze* series, 2019  
13-channel video installation,  
color, surround sound and  
archival material  
1'37"

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→  
installation view  
*Clamor*, 2019  
Instituto Tomie Ohtake,  
São Paulo, Brazil  
Photo © Erika Mayumi





CLAMOR

*Fábula do olhar* [Fables of the Gaze] (2012-2013) resulted from a project whereby Virginia de Medeiros installed a photographic studio in two cafeterias for homeless people in Fortaleza, Ceará, during a month and a half. During this time, the artist portrayed 21 individuals and recorded their video testimonies, in which they answered a fundamental question: How would you like to see yourself or be seen by society? The images were edited by the photo painter Mestre Júlio dos Santos, who the artist invited to color the portraits according to the responses of each individual, giving rise to fabled-image that play with the boundaries between reality and imagination. The photo paintings are accompanied by texts of the corresponding life stories and an audio piece that captures a cacophony of voices, and consequently request total attention if one is to comprehend what is being said.



*Andrade, from the series Fábula do Olhar, 2013*  
digital photopainting on cotton paper, printed statement, sound  
120 x 90 cm and 40 x 50,5 x 5 cm  
47.2 x 35.4 cm and  
15.75 x 19.8 x 1.96 cm



*Maria da Penha, from the series  
Fábula do Olhar, 2013*  
digital photopainting on cotton  
paper, printed statement, sound  
120 x 90 cm and 40 x 50,5 x 5 cm  
47.2 x 35.4 cm and  
15.75 x 19.8 x 1.96 cm



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*Jéssica*, from the series *Fábula do Olhar*, 2013  
digital photopainting on cotton paper, printed statement, sound  
120 x 90 cm and 40 x 50,5 x 5 cm  
47.2 x 35.4 cm and  
15.75 x 19.8 x 1.96 cm



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*Alexandre*, from the series *Fábula do Olhar*, 2013  
digital photopainting on cotton paper, printed statement, sound  
120 x 90 cm and 40 x 50,5 x 5 cm  
47.2 x 35.4 cm and  
15.75 x 19.8 x 1.96 cm



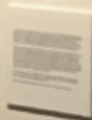
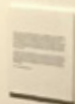
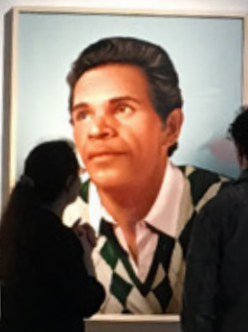
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*Zé Carlos*, from the series *Fábula do Olhar*, 2013  
digital photopainting on cotton paper, printed statement, sound  
120 x 90 cm and 40 x 50,5 x 5 cm  
47.2 x 35.4 cm and  
15.75 x 19.8 x 1.96 cm



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→  
exhibition view  
*Behind the Sun*, 2016  
HOME  
Manchester, United Kingdom



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## body and sexuality

Body and sexuality are among the themes that compose Virginia de Medeiros' artistic world. As part of her process, the artist investigates how subjective experiences are intertwined with broader social contexts.

*Sérgio and Simone* (2007-2014) is one of her most iconic works on the subject. For 14 years, Medeiros documented the life of Sérgio Costa dos Santos, who lives in Salvador, Bahia, creating a work-in-process open to life changes. According to the artist, "When I met Simone, a transgender woman, she had recently moved in with her partner to a house in ruins on Ladeira da Montanha, an old connection between Cidade Alta and Cidade Baixa. Like most residents in this impoverished neighborhood in Salvador, Simone was a drug user, but she also spontaneously used to take care of a fountain there, the Misericórdia Fountain,







which she treated as a sanctuary for worship of her orixás. About a month after the first filming session, Simone had a convulsion due to a crack overdose, followed by a mystical delirium, in which she believes she met God, an encounter that would have saved her from death. After this episode, Simone renounced her trans identity, returned to her parents' home, reclaimed her baptismal name, Sérgio, and, in a surge of fanaticism, began to consider herself one of the last people sent by God to save humanity.”

Sérgio is recorded telling his story of physical and spiritual transformation as a neo-Pentecostal pastor while demonizing the deities of African-based religions. The latest version of the film takes the form of a single channel with three projection frames that simultaneously present his story, creating a non-linear narrative. This format requires the viewer's engagement with the work, as they can freely associate images and sounds, and draw their own conclusions.

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installation view  
*Sérgio and Simone*, 2014  
31<sup>st</sup> Bienal de São Paulo  
São Paulo, Brazil

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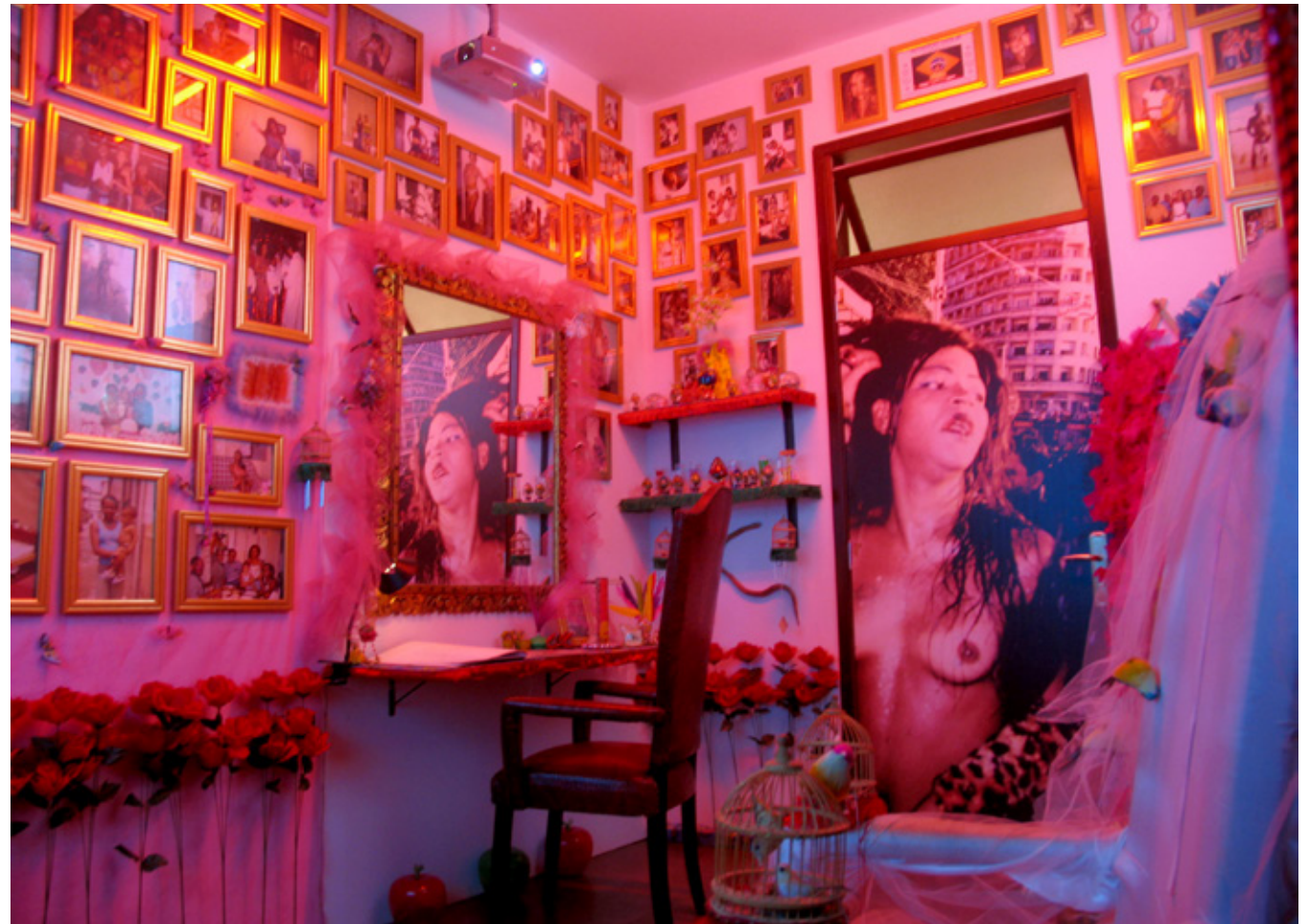
→  
exhibition view  
31<sup>st</sup> Bienal de São Paulo, 2014  
São Paulo, Brazil



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As the curator Luisa Duarte wrote, “When we get to see the entire repertoire that comprises *Studio Butterfly*, we sometimes forget that we are facing transgender women, but rather facing Patrícia, Thalia, Sendy, Michelle, Baiacu, and so many others, each of their characters, not treating trans identity as a homogeneous territory. If we think that the maintenance of normative, prejudiced views perpetuates intolerance and discrimination, the new perspective offered by this artwork would also bring an ethical point of view. Instead of the ‘other,’ it would be ‘us.’”

Virginia de Medeiros produced *Studio Butterfly* over the period of a year and a half, in a commercial building in downtown Salvador. Based in what was in fact a meeting place for transgender women, the project called for them to contribute by bringing visual traces of their trajectories and experiences, such as old and recent photos, together with relatives, friends, and lovers. Seated on the “chair of affections,” they told stories of their lives, which were recorded on video. The project was created with the collaboration of Silvana Olivieri and is documented in a homonymous book.



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installation view  
*Studio Butterfly*, 2014  
video installation  
24'7" (3 simultaneous  
video projections)

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→  
*Baiacu*, from *Studio  
Butterfly* series, 2015  
lenticular print, wood and  
silkscreen on plexiglass  
65 x 50 cm | 25.6 x 19.7 in



### Baiacu

Eu me descobri eu tinha treze anos. Eu fiquei meio confusa sem saber o quê que eu queria de minha vida. Mas, aí, eu via um homem passar, um outro passar... Eu achava bonitinho. Vi que era aquilo que eu queria, que eu não sentia atração sexual por mulher, mas, sim, por homem.

## Patrícia

Você é travesti, você enfrenta preconceito da sociedade. Você enfrenta o mundo, praticamente. Aí a minha mãe olha pra mim e diz assim: "Eu te amo. Você é a única coisa que eu tenho na minha vida." Então, isso marca a vida da gente.





### Rose

Gosto da prostituição. Tem momentos na vida que a gente fala: "Não! Ah, isso não é vida pra mim. Não tá certo esta vida de rua, de noite." Mas depois nada melhor do que um dia após o outro, né? Você já sai com uns clientes maravilhosos! Você se alegra e você já diz: "Não, este é meu meio." Então são coisas que acontecem em qualquer vida de gente, do ser humano, né? Não importa quem seja, tem o momento bom e o momento ruim.

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←  
*Patricia*, from *Studio  
Butterfly series*, 2015  
lenticular print, wood and  
silkscreen on plexiglass  
65 x 50 cm | 25.6 x 19.7 in

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*Rose*, from *Studio  
Butterfly series*, 2015  
lenticular print, wood and  
silkscreen on plexiglass  
65 x 50 cm | 25.6 x 19.7 in





## Sentry

Porque eu acho que já trouxe de berço. Já nasci pra ser uma menina, só que deu alguma coisa de errado. Tem horas que eu me sinto travesti, tem hora que eu me sinto uma menina. Às vezes até esqueço que sou travesti, mas quando eu tiro a roupa eu me lembro.

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*Sentry*, from *Studio  
Butterfly series*, 2015  
lenticular print, wood and  
silkscreen on plexiglass  
65 x 50 cm | 25.6 x 19.7 in





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*In Jardim das torturas* [Garden of Tortures] (2013), Virginia de Medeiros deals with the sadomasochistic universe. She produced photographic images—video and installations—, engravings, and a performance, all of which emerged from her interactions with Dom Jaime, a dominator, and his two ‘submissives,’ who had been living together for six years. In this work, the artist focused on the following question: How to enter this universe breaking from the stigmas that consider sadomasochism a disorder? Medeiros found the answer in the submissives’ intimate diaries, in which, after the sadomasochistic sessions, they described everything that they had experienced, asserting their subjectivity.

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*Jardim das Torturas*, 2012–2014  
single-channel video installation  
with peephole, color,  
hsurround sound  
8’55” (loop)







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Self-portrait from *Jardim das  
Torturas* series, 2012–2014  
photograph  
67 x 200 cm | 26.4 x 78.7 in

... e assim a ...  
só tanto por não ter aguentado ' mais tempo cor

Diário Íntimo de senhora SM

Delicadamente humilhada com os pés

Agora a memória me falha depois de tanto sofrer  
usar, neste exato momento, para descrever  
e de sentir dor com o orgulho de pertencer  
Don Jaime, em mais uma noite

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Virginia de Medeiros is also interested in addressing prostitution, a marginalized profession that plays an important social and economic role in society. *Em torno dos meus marítimos* [Surrounding my sailors] (2014) was the artist's first body of work on the theme, and Medeiros centers it on the figure of Marinalva, the owner of a brothel in the port zone of Salvador. The project was commissioned by Paulo Herkenhoff and Clarissa Diniz for the exhibition *Do Valongo à Favela* at Museu da Arte do Rio (MAR), in 2014.

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*Manilas Bar – Casa da Marinalva*,  
from the series *Em torno dos meus marítimos*, 2014  
digital photograph on cotton paper  
50 x 70 cm | 19.7 x 27.5 in

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→  
*Manilas Bar – Casa da Marinalva*,  
from the series *Em torno dos meus marítimos*, 2014  
digital photograph on cotton paper  
50 x 70 cm | 19.7 x 27.5 in

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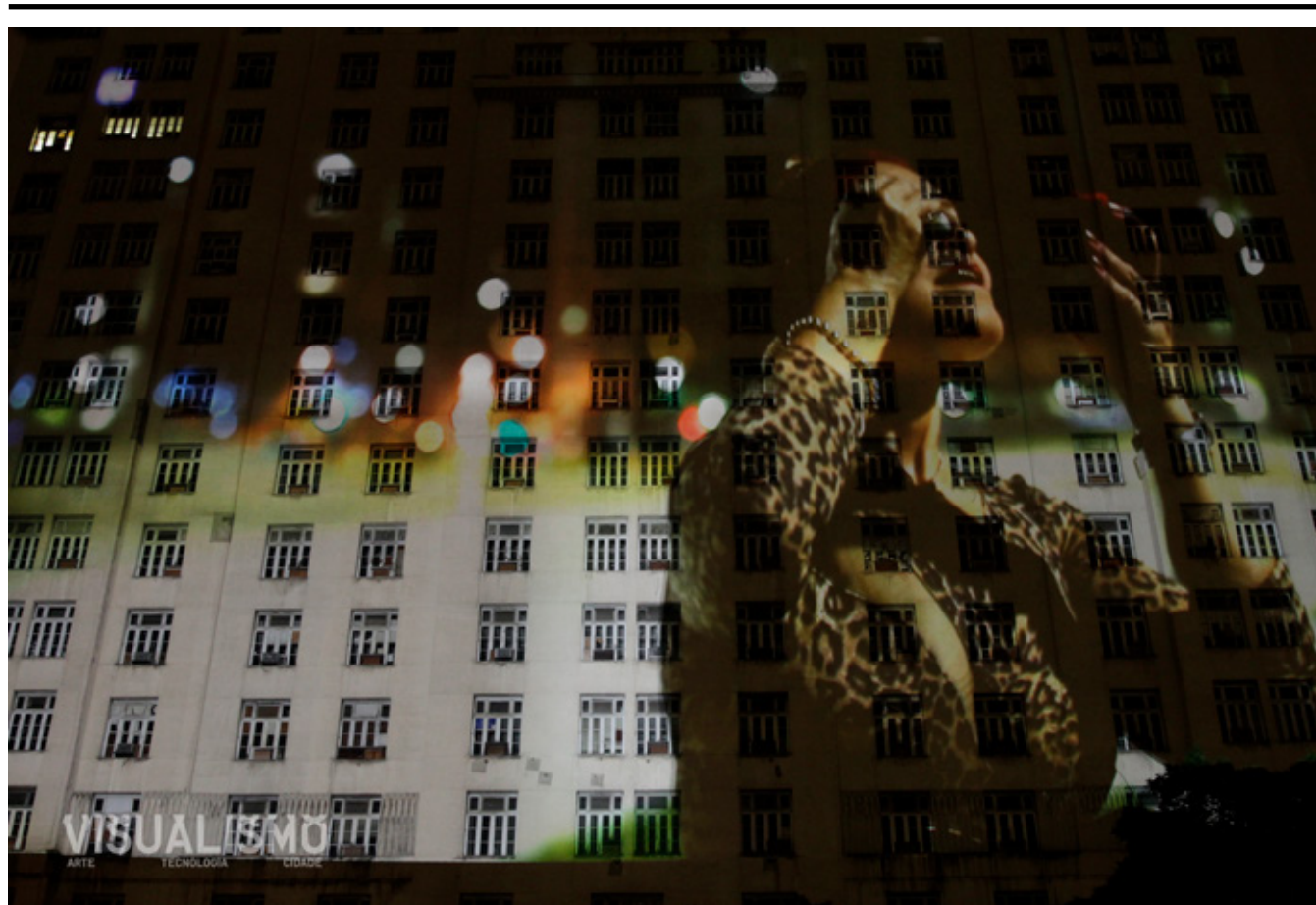
→ →  
exhibition view  
*Studio Butterfly e outras fábulas*,  
2014–2015  
Galeria Nara Roesler  
São Paulo, Brazil  
Photo © Rafael Adorjan











The artist continues this research in *Cais do Corpo* (2015), reflecting on prostitution and gentrification in Mauá Square. The film was recorded during the final stages of revamping this public space located in the port zone of Rio de Janeiro. According to curator Gabriel Bogossian, *Cais do Corpo* is a sort of record of the last days of the world of prostitution in this place, which has existed since the 1930s. Approaching the phenomenon of gentrification from a critical perspective, the artist denounces urban projects that gentrify entire urban areas without proposing any social inclusion initiative. The artwork looks at the prostitutes' performative character as a social and political practice that communicates, sometimes in subtle ways, eroticism and resistance.

*Cais do corpo*, 2015  
digital print on methacrylate  
58 x 88 cm | 7.9 x 11.8 in



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*Cais do corpo*, 2015

4 digital print on methacrylate and 1  
video (color, stereo sound)

20 x 30 cm | 7.9 x 11.8 in each photo  
7'03" (video)

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exhibition view

*Nada levarei quando morrer, aqueles  
que me devem cobrarei no inferno*,

2017

Galpão Vídeo Brasil

Photo © Pedro Napolitano Prata







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## the space and the individual

In Virginia de Medeiros' work, one often finds juxtapositions between the public and the private, individual and collective spheres. The artist seeks to challenge these categories in her work, showing how they may overlap and relate, making the audience rethink them.

*Fala dos Confins* (2010) is a video installation that was produced in the Jacuipé Basin, in the interior of Bahia. Over a period of twenty days, the artist crossed the region in a van named Catarina, meeting poets, writers, and ordinary people for whom speaking is a creative act. Based on the premise that the possible and the impossible coexist in oral manifestations, the artist took a recorder and drove in search of sound recordings of countryside "tales" to create an unusual listening space—in which the speakers' interpretations, their pauses, sighs, and inflections end up composing visual matters.

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*Fala dos Confins*, 2010  
video installation  
20"



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*Fala dos Confins*, 2010  
video installation  
20"



With funding from the Open Call to Support Artist Residencies Abroad from the Culture Fund of Bahia, Virginia de Medeiros produced *Mulheres no Timor* [Women in Timor] (2009). The work served as a project for restoring and paving a Square named after Rosa Muki Bonapart, a female icon in the country's liberation. The pebbles used in the process of revamping the square were purchased from and signed by Timorese women, who were invited to partake in the project through a radio announcement. The names of these women, recorded through the writings on the stones, invite the public to reflect on the role of women in creating supportive spaces for society.

*Mulheres no Timor*, 2009  
urban intervention  
Praça Rosa Muki Bonapart,  
Timor Leste  
Photo © Virginia de Medeiros

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*Quem passar por cima verá* [Those Who Walk Over Will See It] (2003) is an installation in which the artist questions stereotypes embedded in images of women. The work comes from the artist's collection of pictures of famous women published in the media. Virginia de Medeiros compares these images with her personal archive in which she found herself reproducing the same poses published in magazines. She then enlarged the photos in black and white and transferred them to cement tiles placed on the floor of the exhibition space. According to the curator Tadeu Chiarelli, "arranged on the floor, taking up the entire space dedicated to the public's circulation, the artist forces the visitors to walk over her intervention. In doing so, the tiles would crack and break, while the printed images would lose their definition. With time, as the work is destroyed, it becomes almost a ritual of symbolic death of female stereotypes that, for decades, have been reinforced by the media."



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*Quem passar por cima verá*, 2003  
installation  
Photo © Virginia de Medeiros





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In *Falha* [Fault] (2007), Virgínia de Medeiros creates a parallel between two different cities: Quebec, in Canada, and Salvador, in Brazil. The artist looks at a geological fault in Quebec, causing a unique topography in the city, resembling that of the capital of Bahia. However, for Medeiros, the fracture is not only a spatial fact but also an metaphorical one, which can be understood as a breach of dominant ideas and values. The project was created with the collaboration of architect and urbanist Silvana Olivieri and visual artist Emilie Baillargeon. Medeiros created a video installation based on her walks around the city and meetings with some of its residents.

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*Falha*, 2007  
video installation, performance  
Contributors  
Silvana Olivieri, Emilie Baillargeon

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→  
exhibition view  
La Cambre Blanche  
Quebec, Canada



Vois, ce soleil qui brille! Ce soleil-là c'est le  
Saint Esprit de Dieu qui nous illumine.

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*Redobras* (2003) is an intervention on the facade of a house located on 423 Sodré Street, in downtown Salvador. The house functioned as a pension for transgender people that Virginia de Medeiros had been visiting since 2000. The owner, the transgender Rosana, died of AIDS-related causes in 2002. Soon after, due to risks of collapse, the pension was closed. The artist brings Rosana's affective memory to the public space by projecting photomontages of her objects, family photos, and personal photographic archives on the house facade. The public was thus made to encounter Rosana's personal affairs, adding depth to trans subjectivities, which are continually marginalized in our society.

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exhibition view  
*Redobras*, 2003  
Festival da Livre Expressão Sexual  
Salvador, Bahia  
Photo © Virginia de Medeiros



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nara roesler

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