

Venancio Filho Paulo, 'Routine and adventure'.

## ROUTINE AND ADVENTURE

Routine has its challenges. Here, space is always the simple vertical rectangle of a sheet of paper, the perfect combination of time and space where a line tries to advance; each drawing is like a day in the time of the work. Few artists have found, in such an intense and systematic way, so consenting a unity between time and space. Always the same, equal and challenging. To confront, always, without choice

but to move forward, even though there is no sure path or direction, nothing pre-established. Even success with one is useless for the next; this is not a cumulative process. It is like the destiny of a tiny Sisyphus, for whom the mountain is the daily rectangular sheet of white paper.

The line leaves the paper, not standing on ceremony, going where? And returns attracted by who knows what. A force pushes it out, while a kind of stubbornness in moving forward first stalls and then continues, a tortured back-and-forth that makes movement difficult, like

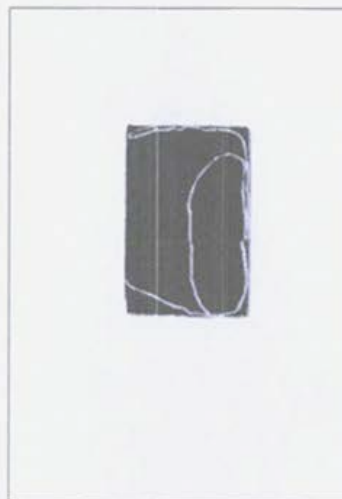
a vehicle struggling on a muddy road. The line creates a faltering, crawling, irritated trajectory that aspires, at all cost, to be continuous and entire. Sometimes it succeeds, sometimes it doesn't. It is not the attempt that matters but the result, the countless and manifold results. Even when these are achieved, one finds no apparent reconciliation or satisfaction.

There is not a single straight line in these drawings. Might that be part of this enterprise, to avoid them altogether? An unswerving line that moves along a previously established direction goes against this work's every ambition. If the precision and decisiveness of a ruler cannot always be followed, line, here, remains no less determined and precise. It may appear abstract but is concrete, and bears the entire, and relentless, conflict with reality. Comings and goings, frustration and pleasure, rebellion and submission, right and wrong, all condensed in a single line. Nothing more, nothing less than the daily Paulo Monteiro line-character. Like him, if we were lines, we would also be like this.

One line, a single movement, a single gesture. All want to impress a tonus upon the inert surface. A surface that is neither the plane of



Untitled, 2000  
Woodcut  
Private collection  
São Paulo



Untitled, 2000  
Woodcut  
Artist's collection  
São Paulo

representation, nor an illusory space, but reality itself, if one can say so; a reality that is always the same white sheet of paper. The line doesn't design, it desires. But desires what? Nothing more than the temporal experience of existing in a specific rectangular white paper space. To risk everything for nothing. In this manner, it is neither just a line nor a blank sheet but a specific drama: a line's daily vicissitudes. As in Mira Schendel's *Monotypes*, Paulo Monteiro has discovered a unique time of permanence on the sheet of paper, a time all his own and, like Schendel's, distinctive and inimitable. These voluble lines undergo varied and successive humors, their pace oscillating between decisive or erratic. Restless, fluent, reticent, although the last thing they want is to be spontaneous and gratuitous graffiti.

A notion currently exists that drawing frequently connotes confession, intimacy, annotation, but there is none of that here. This line, adventurous, provocative, goes out in search of an event, its movement projective, not introspective. The fact that it is a line shows the integral unity of the action, one that does not fragment or scatter but ventures forth, facing the world alone. That is why it is often not content with the available space. It does not give in to limits; it resists confinement and presses against external space. This unity is the same that, inversely, we find in the sculptures. There we find an almost explosive pressure of matter against the limits imposed by form.

In the sculpture, it is as if all the forces at play in the drawings reversed themselves, turning inward en masse, becoming solid and impeding the slightest movement. A compact mass that only ever allowed a single movement; a fracture, a dislocation, a fissure. It would be preposterous to speak of a minimalist Rodin, schizoid, deformed, but maintaining faith in the imperious strength of the mass, in the imposing presence of the block, even within the minute span of a few centimeters. And one could think that this diminutive scale, of pieces that fit in one's hand, was a requirement of the sculptures, themselves, to promote a tactile experience of their strength. Because to hold them is to feel a perfect correspondence between vision and touch; tactile weight and visual weight come together in the same unit.

Like a line, each sculpture is a singular thing, entire and complete, dense and compact. Lead and graphite, materials of a similar nature, malleable and rigid, are perfect vehicles for this work. In the drawings, the thick mark of graphite wants to be more than a scrawl, wants to be incisive, ultimately incised. An incision that, as in the woodcuts, lies not only on paper but against it. The drawing attacks the surface, strongly, without slipping, crawls over it, dissatisfied, a Giacometti-like dissatisfaction. The gesture is not simply directed at the sheet of paper, on the contrary, it intrudes upon it; it begins dissatisfied and finishes dissatisfied, undetermined. Hence the sometimes slow,



sometimes quick movement, cross and tense because it carries a weight that neither dissolves nor comes to rest easily; a weight that the sculptures condense.

What is immediately appealing in these sculptures, besides the indolent drama of the mass, is the oily gloss of lead. The surface is alive and its stillness misleading, because restless – would it be strange to mention Rodin's surfaces? Always, in each, the block's possible unity is ostensibly severed by an arbitrary slit, as if cracked by a violent blow or fall. These sculptures, in fact, did more than abandon the base, they literally fell from it. They are true non-objects. They have achieved the unprecedented quality of our not knowing what they are. If the drawings resemble remnants of drawings, the sculptures resemble remnants of sculptures, as if their only ambition was to be what could not be used, what was cast off. And, even so, they attract us with the discomfort they provoke. If they could make a sound, it would not be a whisper, but an insolent PLOFT – a sound that Fautrier would have appreciated. A shapeless sound, motionless and still, like them.

How can something so shapeless be so solid, imposing and challenging, when it is little more than compact paste? The fact of having undergone a liquid state is still visible in these sculptural masses. They were cast and do not hide it, exhibiting, without shame, an insolent shoddiness. If we found them in nature they would be lava; crude, hard, rough, impenetrable and untreatable like lava, similarly born of some convulsive material violence, containing the traumatic memory of misshapen liquefaction. Or we could find them in our daily routine if we paid attention to the mimicry of form that we deposit on a brush when we squeeze a tube of toothpaste; what the sculptures intend is this intermediate moment between being and not being.

Like the drawings, the sculptures also appear to veer away from each other, as if about to move in opposite directions, like the line that moves here and there. In these works, there is no time for color. Only the absolute black of a woodcut could bring the work to a halt. It is as if absolute black were a paralyzing drug, a narcotic that induces a moment of death in the drawing, a deep and lethargic slumber. The line, when mired in the black matter of ink, loses the restless mobility of the drawings and acquires a negative condition; the incisive line becomes an incision on wood, and the woodcut presents a less ambiguous space, less shaped by indecisions of line. The absolute contrast between ink and the white paper stages a scene, as it were, a single day seen from within, the inverse of the light that the line-being extracts from the blackness of the world.

Here, drawing, sculpture and woodcut present not only a diversity of techniques but the diverse moments of a challenging routine of labor.

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