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## Maria Trabulo

### *Fragile Stones*

13.05.23 – 24.06.23

Maria Trabulo's sculptural installation *Fragile Stones* draws from the documentation in Raqqa's archaeology museum and the Syrian Heritage Archive about the architecture of the space's exhibition rooms and the exhibition devices that existed there before their quasi-total destruction during the city's occupation by the Islamic State, or Daesh, from 2013 to 2017.

The title of the project suggests that the stones mentioned in it "are not just stones". They are a metaphor for speaking about cultural legacy, i.e., archaeological artifacts and sites which, despite being made of stone, having survived for thousands of years and being apparently robust, are after all vulnerable to political upheaval and wars, and can be destroyed and vanished in the blink of an eye. The work confronts us with the impact that the conflicts have on the disappearance of cultural artifacts and wholesale destruction of museums.

In the particular case of the archaeological museum in Raqqa, the focus of this project, thousands of pieces disappeared and were then trafficked on the black-market, making it extremely difficult, or even impossible, to trace them. The installation integrates a video projection with volumetric structures alluding to staircases, mosaic patterns that used to cover the museum's floor, doors, windows, pedestals, and display devices for artifacts. Covered in sand, clay and soil from archaeological digs and sites in Syria and Portugal, those structures suggest that despite having disappeared, partly buried, the collection may "resurface from the ground" and its history can be shared.

In preparation for this project, the artist contacted Syrian archaeologists and historians, both in Syria and in exile in Europe, who continue to follow the trail of these objects, from their pillage to their transaction, rescuing what is possible for the present, often through vague memories transmitted as oral accounts and images. Women have been pivotal in this transmission and register process, becoming the guardians of memory – an aspect that Trabulo's work attends to, namely through the voice of Ola Salman, the young Syrian who narrates part of the video.

From these contacts, particularly with the former directors of the Aleppo and Raqqa museums and archaeologists who founded archives of cultural heritage documentation, she recorded the voice and the account of the processes of devastation that ravaged these places of history: stones, foundations, museums – belonging not only to the Middle East, but to all humanity.

The artist continues to work with heritage documentation archives, as well as with workshops specializing in creating facsimiles and replicas of destroyed artifacts so as to



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think how these works, of which only absences and partial memories remain, can survive through time. The outcome of the recovering and connecting of spaces produced by the transit of objects and images is a potential dialogue on geopolitical issues that still lack an appropriate response.

From the research materials that Trabulo assembled as a basis for this work in video and sculpture – which included video and audio recordings, oral and visual testimonies, interviews and conversations, accounts, and other documental typologies – one stands out as particularly touching. It is the account by the then director of the Aleppo Museum, according to whom, in order to ensure the security of the museum and its personnel from the war and prevent other armed groups from occupying and ransacking the museum, it was decided that the team (including the directors, curators, conservators, archaeologists and historians) would remain in the museum day and night.

“We worked, slept, and ate there, the museum became our home. ... Each worker was entitled to a room for their family, and we managed to improvise a kitchen and a shower and bathroom facilities for everyone. We could of course leave the museum from time to time, on days when the fighting outside had subsided, but it was safer to remain inside the museum.”

Highly representative of our time and the current geopolitical issues, Trabulo's topical project speaks of the irreversible loss of heritage, confronting us, as humanity, with what we want to do with our cultural patrimony.

For teams working in museums in war zones, there is no doubt. Stones carry voices that are both ancient and contemporary. “Every stone should cry”!

Fragile Stones exposes the process of reuniting collective memory through the rescue of cultural heritage: a story of resistance to oblivion, to destruction and to the violent political turmoil that caused them.

Sara Antónia Matos,

in catálogo “Prémio Novos Artistas Fundação EDP 2022”, edição Museu MAAT Lisboa

Aknowledgments:

maat – museum of art, architecture and technology, Lisbon; EDP Foundation; Syrian Heritage Archive – Museum of Islamic Art Berlin; School of the Arts – Catholic University of Portugal; FCT – Foundation for Science and Technology; Presença Gallery; ArtWorks; Amr Al-Azm (The Day After – Heritage Protection Initiative); Anas Al-Khabour (Raqqa Museum, Syria); Ayham Al-Fakhry (Museum of Raqqa, Syria); Issam Ballouz (Syrian Heritage Archive – Museum of Islamic Art Berlin); Kareem Kousa (University of Damascus, Syria); Ola Salman (University of Damascus, Syria); Youssef Kanjou (National Museum of Aleppo, Syria); Yaser Shouhan (Hiraqla Archive, Syria); Ana Maria Trabulo; António Trabulo; Inês Coelho; Isber Sabrine; Jorge Lourenço; Maria do Rosário Santos; Sara Antónia Matos; Sofia Lemos



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## BIOGRAPHY

Maria Trabulo is a visual artist and researcher based in Porto (PT). Her multidisciplinary practice is research based and extends from visual art to the fields of art history, science, technology, and conservation techniques. Her work is deeply multi-disciplinary with a focus in installations that include sculpture, painting, video, sound and photography. Maria's practice examines notions of remembrance, of personal and collective histories, of free speech, of community and resistance, as well as the impact that political events have in communities and the role that art and the artist have in political changing landscapes and how art can have an important impact in diplomacy, particularly in times like the present, in which public participation and community unity have given rise to polarization and misunderstanding, both at the local and international level.

Trabulo holds an MFA from the The University of Applied Arts Vienna (AUT), and she previously graduated in Fine Arts at the University of Fine Arts in Porto and the Academy of Fine Arts in Iceland. She is currently a Ph.D. Candidate at the School of the Arts – Universidade Católica in Porto, Portugal and at Humboldt Universität in Berlin.

Maria has developed a multi-disciplinary artistic career since 2013, exhibiting her work in various formats at relevant institutions and spaces. She has participated in artist residencies in Austria, Germany, Iran, Italy, France, Greece, Portugal, and Spain, and regularly presents her work in the context of publications, seminars and talks. Her artistic work has been recognized with the attribution of important awards and prestigious grants.

Her path is marked by the interdisciplinarity, and throughout her artistic career, Maria has developed artistic projects in collaboration with practitioners from other fields such as: theatre, circus, architecture, music, science, curatorship, architecture and literature. In addition to her work as an artist and researcher, she has also founded and programmed independent cultural spaces in partnership with fellow artists. Trabulo directed the artist-run-space InSpiteOf in Porto, active between 2018-20 focused on the collaboration and exchange between the local artistic scene and artists and curators based in Europe. Previously, she Maria co-founded Expedição (2012-15), an artist-run space with a multidisciplinary formate, focused on supporting artists and reviving Oporto's art scene during the 2011-2015 European debt crisis.

Noteworthy commissions, investigations and projects with the following institutions and museums: EDP Foundation's New Artists Award 2022; Galerie nouveaux deuxdeux Munich; L'Atelier d'Aubervilliers Paris, Towards Gallery Toronto, CAA Águeda, Porto Municipal Gallery, Kunsthalle Wien Vienna, Deegar Platform Tehran, Serralves Contemporary Art Museum Porto, Galeria da Boavista Lisbon, Walk&Talk Festival Azores, Almada Municipal Gallery, BoCA Biennial of Contemporary Arts Lisbon, Tiroler Künstlerschaft - Neue Galerie Innsbruck, Pedro Cera Gallery Lisbon, Museum of Contemporary Art Elvas, MAAT Museum Lisbon, Karat Cologne, Super Tokonoma Kassel, Kluckyland Vienna, Quartier General La Chaux-de-Fonds, Presença Gallery Porto, Reykjavík Arts Festival, Porto Municipal Theater, Oliva Contemporary Art Center São João da Madeira, MNAA National Museum of Ancient Art Lisbon, EDP Foundation, PLMJ Foundation, ArtWorks, Bode Museum Berlin, Hangar - Center of Artistic Research Lisbon, among others.