



São Paulo
Maurício Ianês
Galeria Vermelho

“The Limits of My Language are the Limits of My World,” said Ludwig Wittgenstein. The adage, engraved in German and Portuguese on four mirrored columns, constitutes *Império*, (all works 2014 unless noted), the piece that best embodies Maurício Ianês’ desire to challenge the public’s understanding of language in this poignant exhibition. A mural on the gallery’s façade that depicts the Brazilian flag’s motto, *Ordem e Progresso*, strikingly rendered in a white Tannenber font on a black background, welcomes visitors. The motto’s original downward glide is emphasized by the absence of the flag’s other elements. The piece is a timely opening statement that starkly contrasts the wave of patriotism brought on by the recent World Cup, which literally painted São Paulo’s streets green and yellow.

Once inside, the show’s title “Ponto Final” (Final Stop), also its leitmotif, opens the saga. Composed of three main galleries, the first is enveloped by black and white wallpaper dotted with repetitions of enlarged punctuation marks in different fonts that give the illusion of a fluctuating space. Superimposed is *(The sound) And the Fury*, two large white flags with the words Flag and Fence, one on each, embroidered in black. The flags continue a journey that questions nationalism and borders at every turn. On the opposite wall a vertical monitor plays *Ilhas*, a video that evokes a moving target practice, but is actually phrases written in Braille, accompanied by a repetitive pulsing sound in tandem with each dot. By converting writing intended to be touched into a moving image, Ianês frustrates viewer’s efforts to decipher his message since the sense of sight is not enough to do so.

More than seventy unmounted images culled from the Internet fill the second gallery. They are affixed directly on the wall with black tape. One cannot remain indifferent to the bizarre juxtapositions, reminiscent of those found in newspapers, as one observes World War II headlines, beer bottle labels, the cover of *Mein Kampf*, ruins at ground zero, tattoos donned by Sureño and Salvatrucha gang members, stills of Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and title credits of Les Blank's *Burden of Dreams* and Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*. At first glance the images seem unrelated, but they were carefully chosen for their inclusion of the fraktur font, a historically charged blackletter typeface that has repeatedly been employed for exclusionary purposes. A mirror sculpture on the floor that spells *Wor(l)d* with a fallen 'L' draws connections between the written word and our perception of the world and reinforces the fragmented nature of the images as they reflect brokenly on the letters. With dark humor this "Artist for all you Surrealist couch potatoes" questions the role of the media in the creation of history and perpetuation of tragedies at the end of the press era and beginning of the digital era.

Ten gigantic periods carved directly onto the gallery's walls and spread throughout the exhibition connect the spaces. They vary in shape and size and are symbolic of the many layers embedded in the work once you chip at the surface. At times they feel whimsical, others tomblike. Their inside is tainted with a black pigment powder that resembles ashes, which is the medium *lanês* used to create a series of wall pieces in the third gallery titled *Cinzas*, ashes in Portuguese. Each piece lists libraries that were set on fire including the archive's name, location, destruction date and the name of the person associated with the book burning. The libraries are organized chronologically, beginning with the destruction of the Royal Library of Alexandria in 48 B.C. and ending with the burning of Tripoli's Al-Saeh Library in January 2014. The series addresses history through the memory of oppressions and rebukes the notion of "Order and Progress." *lanês* presents a cautionary tale for today's rise of right-wing movements and the proliferation of ethnic and sectarian violence. With *Incision*, a massive red flag that droops onto the floor splitting the gallery in two, he seems to suggest that the destruction of language leads to the destruction of life. As the poet Heinrich Heine declared, "Wherever books are burned, human beings are destined to be burned too."

Altogether, the works dovetail into a chilling examination about the inherent limitations of language, be it verbal, constructed or artistic. Nonetheless, *lanês*' vocabulary displays a remarkable clarity in this conceptually pointed, visually engaging and medium cohesive show. Before exiting, the vulnerability of language gives way to its resilience and lyricism as *The Stone Behind the Front*, 2011, offers Paul Celan's poetry encased in blood red vitrines, almost as a remedy offered for respite. *The End?*

- Mónica Espinel