

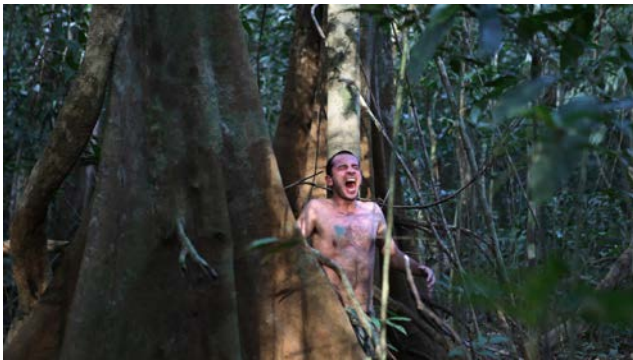
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## THE BOX

April 1–30, 2014

### Rodrigo Braga

*Mentira repetida* (2011)



Courtesy Galeria Vermelho, São Paulo

When Brazilian artist Rodrigo Braga (b. 1976) was just a baby living in Manaus, capital of the state of Amazonas and a city in the very heart of the Amazon forest, a colony of ants invaded his house. As the story was recounted to the artist by his parents (both biologists), the colony of ants was so dense and enormous that it resembled a carpet moving along the forest floor as it approached the house. The ants weren't looking for food or a new home; the house was simply in the way of their migration path. To protect little Rodrigo, who was sound asleep in his crib, his mother very quickly threw a mosquito net over him and ran out of the house, careful to avoid stepping on any of the ants, which she knew would confuse them and cause chaos. As Braga recounts, the carpet of ants marched straight through the house and directly over his crib (and him) while his parents waited outside. Whether truth or family legend, this story gives some insight into Rodrigo Braga's work, which feels driven by an almost mythical relationship with the flora and fauna of the natural world.

Performance plays a central role in Braga's practice, which includes both photography and video. The performances, which all involve Braga himself, recall those of Marina Abramović and Chris Burden, where the artist creates situations that test the limits of his or her own physical, mental, and emotional endurance. In *Tônus*, the 3-channel video installation that is Braga's contribution to *Cruzamentos: Contemporary Art in Brazil* (on view in the galleries until April 20), the artist positions himself in very direct conflict with the natural world. In one scene, Braga ties his hand to the body of a crab and engages in a delicately choreographed battle; in another scene, the artist's body is ensnared by ropes and trapped by two trees. In each situation the artist struggles, quite physically, as he interacts with the natural world. These actions can be

interpreted as a metaphor for man's universal struggle against the monumental forces of nature or as a cathartic exercise for the artist (or both). Regardless of how we view it, Braga's work induces deep, visceral reactions.

This tension between the universal and the personal, between the smallness of man and the vastness of nature, comes to a disquieting crescendo in *Mentira repetida* (*Repeated Lie*). Even though there's only one person in sight in *Mentira repetida*, the frame is teeming with life. Even though the video only lasts just over five minutes, it is in touch with the eternal. Even though Braga expresses pain and emotion throughout the piece, the tone is one of indifference.

Unlike Abramović or Burden performing in an interior environment where the human figure is the sole focus, Braga is filming in a remote archipelago within the Amazon rainforest, his body dwarfed by the ancient trees that render human-scaled emotions and time insignificant. Even the most primal attempt at communication—a scream that would send sentient creatures rushing to aid or flee—receives no response in a forest without end. The sense of disregard is so expansive that no echo greets Braga's cries: they are silenced by the void. The great Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector wrote about the author/reader relationship, "My voice falls into the abyss of your silence. You read me in silence." But this stoic environment doesn't even listen to Braga's voice.

At first Braga's cries seem to be playing out a game. A repeated lie. But a desperation and anguish emerges that turns acting into actuality. Perhaps such total isolation allows an expression of vulnerability that would be unattainable in the midst of society. But even if there is no one around to witness it (if a tree falls in the forest...), to be so exposed is to be filled with terror. The pain is palpable as Braga expends his energy and his resources are exhausted. Futile gestures are the only option—no response will be coming. You read me in silence. It is an exorcism of emotion and meaning. Is he emptied out of emotion at the end—rendered prostrate, raw, mute, and spent? Or is there a sense of acceptance of the emptiness of emotion?

Jennifer Lange  
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#### Rodrigo Braga

*Mentira repetida* (*Repeated Lie*, 2011)

5 mins., video

Courtesy Galeria Vermelho, São Paulo

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