

De-Colonizing Art Institutions

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Casa da Xiclet

Question mark!

Zou Zhao

**ONCURATING
PROJECT SPACE**

Question mark!

Casa da Xiclet Gallery introduces itself to OnCurating.org



*“True democracy is not just an institution.
It is also a spiritual exercise or askesis of forfeiture.”*

Leela Gandhi

“There cannot be real democracy without a ‘mess’. If we want to be free – all of us free. I mean, not only some of us – we must not only tolerate but welcome lack of discipline, ‘laziness’, spontaneity, fantasy and improvisation.”

Robert Filliou

“Any hegemony is a dominant rather than a total system; one virtually ensuring – because of its selective definitions of reality – the coexistence of residual and emergent forms resistant to it.”

Raymond Williams

We are certainly happy to be invited to express our views on a subject that we see as a crucial one in the field of cultural production: decolonizing art institutions. But we feel at the same time that our statute is ambiguous in regards to the topic. Because if we can really be considered an art institution, it is certainly not in the conventional sense of that word.

Our motivations, activities, and way of doing things are against the idea itself of what an institution is. We have always worked with disdain towards the institution idea and their subsequent consequences. We have not worked with a hateful disdain but with a critical one – critical to the hegemonic sameness – and with a humorous disdain. Informality was and is our *lingua franca*, our antidote or vaccine against institutionalization, a process that would quickly turn us into a cultural space like any other.

Who are we? Adriana Xiclet is the head of the project, the person that came up with the idea, the algorithm, the *modus operandi* of the house. She counts on many collaborators and friends (including the author of this text). Adriana's project is – to put it simply and straightforwardly (but putting it insufficiently...) – the mixture of someone's house and art gallery, the latter being a kind of anti-gallery (since it is democratic, non-restrictive and having a contaminated 'whitenedness') and the former, a kind of non-house (since the private ends up turning into public...). A blend, thus, of house and gallery.

But... Why define it? Why explain the project like that? A project with so many layers! Maybe decolonizing an art institution begins when we abandon linear, rational, pretentiously totalizing explanations of what a given project is or might be. In our case, that makes sense: the European colonizer brought the specific linearity of its own mindset and society, foreign to the natives' spirituality. It is true: I am not an Indian. I am *mestiço*. I cannot, therefore, speak on behalf of the natives. I cannot claim that the logics of Casa da Xiclet is an Indian one. Casa da Xiclet's logic is *mestiça*, informal, anti-institutional. Decolonized? What does it mean, to function in a decolonized way? This text is an attempt. Casa da Xiclet is an attempt, for 15 years now. An open process, an experiment, an urge to say "I exist!". I exist in my own terms, I refuse to follow predictable, questionable, square-like, oppressive, top-down guidelines. Inhuman guidelines. There is many ways of being beyond the establishment and what it considers the legitimate ones. This is an important premise of decolonial thought, isn't it? Casa da Xiclet wants to exist in its own terms

and participate of the cultural programme of São Paulo. To participate in the production of discourse. To make contemporary art less of an elitist phenomenon, more open to the world. To question, to participate of the discussion, of the debate. Casa da Xiclet does participate of the cultural programme of the city and many times have revitalized it just by being there as an option, at times when the cultural programme was absolutely tedious. A common thing, still...

But Casa da Xiclet has no plan to save the world. It doesn't have this ambition. Casa da Xiclet simply exists and it's there. If Casa da Xiclet can contribute with the discussion of how can we decolonize institutions, is from the perspective of the following quote:

“Once again today there is an effort to justify the arts politically, direct them, oppress them, make them serve a cause or a State policy. It is useless. Free art [...] will always resurface because its ultimate motivation lives in the depths of the playful soul.”

Oswald de Andrade, *The Crisis of Messianic Philosophy* (1950)

Casa da Xiclet is this kind of phenomenon – this ‘free art’ that Oswald de Andrade is speaking of –, and it's a decolonized proposition in so far as it is uncompromising. It does not institutionalize itself in alien terms – where the playful soul would be compromised.

As we said earlier, to Explain Xiclet's project is difficult... Maybe fallacious. Thus, we invite everyone to visit or come regularly to our space in Fradique Coutinho Street, no. 1855, at Vila Madalena neighbourhood in São Paulo.

LUCAS REHNMAN

Friend and regular collaborator of Casa da Xiclet Gallery