

## What we always did

We always did.  
Travel.  
Stayed.  
A while.  
Set up a house.

Built.

a chair  
a table  
a lamp  
a vase

Left....

Stay.

## LABINAC

"Is this art?"

Recurrent in the context of contemporary art, professionals in the field often receive this question with resignation and an air of superiority. As if such a basic question were, in fact, just a testament to the inability to understand something that should be obvious and self-evident. Personally, I've always found the question thought-provoking. Is this really art? Does it make any difference whether something is art or not? And what is art, after all? For different social groups and cultures, throughout different time periods and space, art has meant and means different things, just as, strictly speaking, almost everything we see in the world can mean different things to different people. And that's a good thing.

LABINAC was co-founded by artists Maria Thereza Alves and Jimmie Durham. Their work ethic, their tireless action in defense of the rights and the culture of originary peoples, and their constant questioning of tense binomials, unavoidable for a real understanding of the world we live in (natural-artificial; autochthonous-exotic; pure-contaminated, among others): all this makes them essential artists and thinkers of the second half of the 20th century and this

beginning of the 21st. LABINAC was not conceived by its founders as an artistic project, but as "a design collective started with the dual purpose of designing and making things, and supporting the craft works of indigenous peoples in Latin America".

The poem reproduced above implicitly places the genesis of the project within an understanding of life as a choreography of movements and pauses. And what most immediately characterizes these pauses – which for individuals and peoples under constant threat often become temporary – is the construction of a house and, above all, of what makes us feel at home: "a chair, a table, a lamp, a vase". The objects that accompany us when we eat, write, think, dream, perhaps of another life and another world. What we always did. The poem, although unsigned, seems to be carved in stone or wood in the unmistakable style of Jimmie Durham's poetic writing (he was an extraordinary poet as well as an artist). It projects LABINAC's objects into a realm that transcends the boundaries of what we usually call design because it is charged with an authentically philosophical, universal and timeless dimension. LABINAC – *What we always did* is an exhibition that takes place in two vastly different spaces, where these very special objects are placed in relationship and friction with contexts that allow them to be read differently. At Casa Zalszupin, the dialog is mainly with objects produced by the architect and designer himself, and with a domestic environment, familiar yet clearly extraordinary. At the Galeria Jaqueline Martins, on the other hand, in the relatively aseptic space of an art gallery, the main conversation is with works in which "a chair, a table, a lamp, a vase" appear, but often in the background – in other words, as objects that we don't usually look at, or that we consider merely "furniture".

In 1917, Erik Satie introduced a hitherto almost inconceivable expression: *musique d'ameublement*, or furniture music, as it would become better known internationally. These compositions were conceived to be played live in varied and unconventional contexts, in which Satie hoped the audience wouldn't pay attention, and that the music would blend into the background, as something that just exists, like a piece of furniture. From a certain point of view, the experiment was a failure: people were stopping to pay attention. Perhaps there is some kind of lesson here, which involves the importance of noticing things that we haven't seen for a long time, of stopping using expressions that we have been using for a long time, of understanding that what is around us, even when invisible, is never neutral, but always carries messages and powerful meanings.

This text began with the stereotypical question of the perplexed visitor facing a work of contemporary art: "Is this art?". It makes sense for it to end by reversing the question: "Is this furniture?"

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