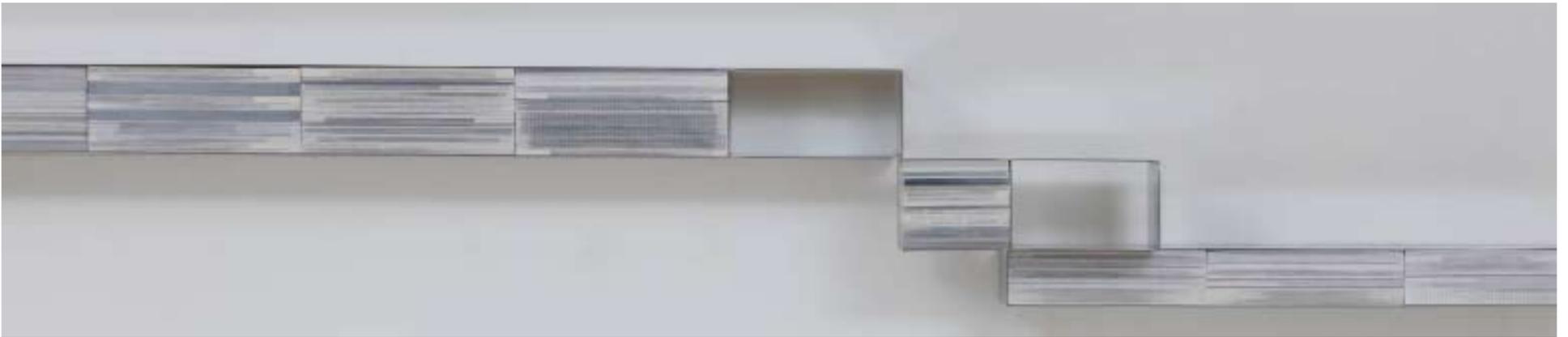


fernanda fragateiro

Deep Space, Shallow Space

opening: thursday, 15th september of 2011
september - october 2011



Books are a form of technology, and like all technologies must at some point face the prospect of possible obsolescence – and judging from the direction and speed of the digital tide that is sweeping us, that point does not seem so distant nor the possibility so far-fetched. Google is fast supplanting Gutenberg. Movable type is moved aside, superseded by quicker, lighter and cheaper means of reproduction. Libraries, once vital repositories of learning, are becoming ghost-ridden temples of nostalgia.

This changing role of books within the overarching and likewise fast-changing structures of information and power is central to Fernanda Fragateiro's exhibition *Deep Space, Shallow Space* at the Elba Benítez Gallery. As is characteristic of all her work, Fragateiro here displays a highly developed concern for form, surface and space. But at the same time, and in keeping with the way Fragateiro partakes of the larger contemporary art discourse in which art history is mined as a rich source of material from which to create new art, *Deep Space, Shallow Space* is criss-crossed by an intricate web of inner references to art theory and architectural history. The combined result is a questioning, in form and in concept, of how knowledge is produced and distributed – a question that remains as relevant in the age of Google as it did in the age of Gutenberg.

In all the works on view, Fragateiro converts books into *materia prima* from which to fashion sculpture. Text becomes object: what was once background is now foreground; what was once to be read is now to be seen. The process at work here is that of repurposing – in other words, of assigning a new function to an object, of shifting it by force from one into another cycle of use, of lending it a new identity – that applies as much to the materials at play as it does to the concepts they represent. But latent within Fragateiro's repurposing (and perhaps all repurposing) lies a *de*-purposing: in order for these books to acquire a new purpose, what, if anything, remains of their old purpose must be done away with. This is a key part of Fragateiro's operative process. Books have sometimes been called containers of knowledge, but in *Deep Space, Shallow Space* the container is itself contained; moreover, it is contained hermetically, sealed and therefore silenced. Even whether these things can still be defined as books is a question that might be better discussed in philosophical terms.

Instead, they have been repurposed into art, and more specifically, sculpture. Using books and magazines that deal with art and architecture, Fragateiro has created a series of abstract sculptures in *Deep Space, Shallow Space* that display all the coordinates of her own architecturally-oriented aesthetic: they are meticulous and precise in form; their surface textures are essential to their perceptual presence; they relate intimately to their setting. For instance, in *An Archive that is Not an Archive: Accumulation and Destruction of Printed Matter on Contemporary Art* Fragateiro intervenes in a collection of art books by cutting their edges in a draughtsman-like fashion, and then encases the manipulated books in carefully configured sculptural containers. Or in *Building Blocks* Fragateiro uses architectural magazines to create a work that refers to the modularity that is fundamental to architecture as well as to publishing, and even to language itself. And in *(Not) Reading Ways of Seeing*, Fragateiro takes on one of the most influential books on art of her generation only to convert it (as the title suggests) into something which can no longer be read, but can be seen and appreciated as art.

In her wide-ranging work, Fernanda Fragateiro (Montijo, 1962) explores space in its various phenomenological manifestations -- architectural, sculptural, private, public, temporal, socially determined, gender-defined – via works of sculpture, installation and outdoor interventions. While varying frequently in scale and drawing on a wide range of reference material, Fragateiro's work maintains a clearly defined style, born of a minimalist aesthetic of form, color and surface texture. Her work was featured in the 2010 Lisbon Architecture Triennial and she has exhibited the Serralves Museum, IVAM, MEIAC, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and elsewhere. This is her fourth exhibition at the Elba Benítez Gallery.

George Stolz

November 2011: exhibition curated by CARLOS GARAICOA