REGINA SILVEIRA

(b. 1939 Porto Alegre, Brazil; resides São Paulo, Brazil) is one of those internationally-known artists whose name surfaces in art classes here at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). Drawing and printmaking classes discuss her work as exemplary for its innovation and visual excitement. One of the assignments for my exhibition practices course each semester is to conceptualize and plan a hypothetical solo exhibition for an artist of global importance for the Stanlee and Gerald Rubin Center for the Visual Arts (Rubin Center); in fall 2009 student Miranda Alvarez focused on one for Silveira. Alvarez’s presentation was amongst the best that I had witnessed during my seven years of teaching at UTEP. Plus, one of the Rubin Center’s curatorial foci is art that responds to our location in the desert on the U.S. border with Mexico. Many artists who reside in Latin America are interested in addressing this region and because of this showcasing their work is one of the Rubin Center’s programmatic strengths. I added Silveira to the list of artists who I wanted to work with someday.
About a year later Mónica Ramírez-Montagut, curator at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum (The Aldrich) and a valued colleague, told me about her interest in featuring a series of solo exhibitions by Brazilian artists. Brazil’s economic and cultural impact in Latin America and the world is increasingly strong. Ramírez-Montagut wanted to develop the Portuguese-speaking community in Danbury, Connecticut, which is near The Aldrich, as an audience for the museum. She and I committed to exploring the possibility of collaborating on an exhibition for Silveira.

Silveira visited both museums in the spring of 2011 and developed a unique exhibition for each one. The artist addresses each museum, gallery, public or private space as a distinctive site for exploration. She is committed to being present for every stage of the art’s creation, from concept to planning drawings to the final installation. Therefore the exhibit cannot be simply packed up and sent from the Rubin Center to The Aldrich. Both museums are privileged to host a creative effort that has not appeared in the same way before, nor will it again. Visitors in both El Paso, Texas and Ridgefield, Connecticut will experience an individualized and pioneering exhibition.

Thank you to Alexander Gray of Alexander Gray Associates, Silveira’s representative in New York City, for his support of Silveira and her art and for being a vital point of communication at every stage of this project. Thank you also to the employees and supporters of the Rubin Center and The Aldrich for their continued commitment to these two important contemporary art museums.

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Regina Silveira has been exhibiting her art in Brazil since the late 1950s and internationally since 1967. Now, more than fifty years later, she has a vast body of artwork, most of which is monochromatic. The exhibition Limits presents only five works of the hundreds Silveira has created, but it captures some of the main ideas and methods underlying her creative practice, and specifically focuses on her manipulation of optical perception and architectural space.

The largest of the five works, Gone Wild Reversed, blankets three walls and the floor of a 2,000 square foot gallery with oversized, black, cut vinyl graphic representations of the footprints of galloping coyotes. These animals are most active after dark and they avoid human contact; we are more likely to see their tracks in the desert than the animals themselves. They move quickly at a gallop in circumstances of aggression when they are either hunting or being hunted. The vinyl cutouts are compressed at the top of the west wall of the gallery, the one closest to the Mexican border, and become more elongated as they approach the floor, where they finally converge near the baseboard on the opposite side of the room. Silveira designed this as a point of congestion and conflict and as an ideal viewing position for Gone Wild Reversed. It is the moment and locus of attack.

But visitors are encouraged to walk around the room, too, and to tread upon the vinyl traces of the coyotes’ existence. Ambulation
is a nearly hallucinatory experience due to the optical effects of the patterned footprints. The floor seems to shift, the walls to close in. Silveira’s choice of the coyote as subject has additional resonance here on the southern border of the U.S. because it references the human “coyotes” that illegally traffic Mexicans north. Some of their clients die attempting to cross the vast and unforgiving desert that divides the two countries; others give up and return home. In this context Silveira’s tracks are substitutes not only for hidden life, but also for extinguished life. They allude to beings that are no longer here, innocents who have met an unjust end.

*Gone Wild Reversed* was designed specifically for the Rubin Center but is based on a previous work *Gone Wild*, exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, in 1996. There the footprints pointed towards the top of the room, and escaped up and away. The political climate and border policies have changed since then.

*Wild Book* has a black, fake fur cover and felt pages printed with black, overlapping footprints of a variety of animals. Silveira has created three-dimensional objects over the course of her career that vary in scale from hand-held, such as *Wild Book*, to over eight feet high. *Wild Book* employs another format for conveying imagery that recognizes that which is left behind. Before *Limito* at the Rubin Center it had been exhibited only one other time in the context of other works based on animal imagery, in 1997 at Galeria Triangulo in São Paulo. In an interview with Kevin Power in 2005, Silveira stated, “by using the tracks of absent animals, the reaction I want to provoke is the degree of amazement of the unexpected, which can take you to an imaginary realm…footprints and tracks have constituted a significant part of the indexical imagery whose meaning I have..."
been investigating over the past few years. Their accumulation particularly interests me for its allegorical potential to allude to a “ghost” event that took place and left a mark.

_Irruption_ projects a group of black, patterned and overlapping children’s footprints and conveys an inexplicable irruption. The artist engraved the image on a 3-inch diameter, thin glass “gobo” and transmits light through it to create a mural-sized expression of chaos. _The Art of Drawing_ is a series of ten digital prints in black on white. In 1982 Silveira purchased a book of academic exercises demonstrating how to draw hands. Published on each page of the book were reproductions of drawings of several hands in varying stages of completion, and on many of the pages the artist painted the silhouette of a gun, representing it as if it were held in one of the hands. In 2011 she scanned these paintings on book pages to create the series of prints exhibited here. Both _Irruption_ and _The Art of Drawing_ reference tragedy, violence and the disruption of innocence and learning.

It is tempting to associate these allusions to Silveira’s experience in her home country of Brazil during the military dictatorship that began in 1964 and continued at varying levels of oppression for about twenty years. (The artist lived and taught in Puerto Rico during the most tyrannical phase from 1969–1973.) But the artist claims an allegiance to the conceptual tendencies and subversive attitudes that emerged in the international art world at that time, rather than to political representations of specific regimes. She also allies with the history and pictorial strength of “typography and the graphic mark” which is evident in _Gone Wild Reversed_, with its repeated black image on white ground that references words on a page. It also evokes the possibility of being “read” left to right like most languages, right to left like Arabic or Hebrew, or top to bottom like Chinese, Japanese or Korean. It is therefore a cross-cultural pictorial narrative that alludes to written narratives. Silveira believes that images in general are political because they have the capacity to mediate and transform existing perceptions of reality and in doing so they can oppose the status quo. Hers is an alternative, enduring and complex system of resistance that harnesses the power of non-rhetorical visual production.

_Highs Lunar_ as installed at Stanlee and Gerald Rubin Center for the Visual Arts, 2011.
The spheres used for the two-channel video projection Lunar were originally commissioned in 2002 by Anita Cheng Dance in New York, NY to be a stage set. In a darkened room two bluish-grey spheres rotate slowly and steadily on abutting walls and hover at the juncture between the wall and the floor. They also shrink and recede, grow and approach. When both spheres are at their largest they are about the height of an average viewer, and their edges touch at the corner of the room in a rare moment of connection. Sometimes the viewer’s shadow overlays one of the spheres. Overall, Lunar alludes to the infinity of the cosmos and the inevitability of natural cycles and ongoing processes. A quiet soundtrack enhances the contemplative ambiance and emphasizes the mysteries of inner and outer space. Whereas Gone Wild Reversed is terrestrial and places the viewer in a specific time and location, Lunar is celestial and its enigmatic atmosphere displaces the viewer. But both reference movement and change. In Gone Wild Reversed it is sudden, unexpected and implied. In Lunar it is gradual, dependable and actual. Together the works in this exhibition offer a snapshot of Silveira’s artistic trajectory because her two foci have been the political and the poetic and her two important media, at least in the last decade, have been vinyl and video. They also manipulate architectural space and perceptually expand it and in doing so ask viewers to consider the world in new ways.

ENDNOTES


2 Regina Silveira during a conversation with the author, El Paso, Texas, October 7, 2011.
Working drawing for In Absentia Series (MD), 1983, pencil and ink on paper, 26-13/16 x 37-3/8, courtesy of the artist.

Colombian curator José Roca explains that Silveira’s appropriations of renowned works relate directly to images we have visually inherited from modern art, “specifically those that reference the world of the absurd, the subliminal or the paradoxical as in the case of works by Duchamp, Meret Oppenheim, or Man Ray.” The emphasis on Duchamp’s icons and the use of disproportionate (and impossible) shadows similar to those portrayed by Giorgio de Chirico in canvases such as The One-day Enigma or Gare Montparnasse (The Melancholy of Departure), both from 1914, is not casual. Art historian Jennie Hirsh explains that quoting them is Silveira’s postmodern strategy of paying homage to these two masters. The artist is inserting them in a dialogue with one another and over time, that is, bringing them up to date until they reach our era. From de Chirico, Silveira brings to the present his propensity for enigmatic and metaphysical atmospheres that are destabilizing and unsettling. From Duchamp, she resorts to the contextualization of mundane objects in an art milieu. By revisiting the same objects/shadows during her career, Silveira has constantly re-contextualized her own work, creating new meanings with each iteration.

The In Absentia series has been partially incarnated on several occasions prior to the exhibition at The Aldrich; this will be the first time all the collection is shown together. The idea for this body of work was initiated as early as 1983 and materialized a decade later as a project for the LedisFlam Gallery then located in SoHo, New York. Hirsh explains that the several iterations and repetitions of these works should be considered originals in today’s age of mechanical and digital reproduction. Considering a reproduction an original work of art is a strategy explained by

Working drawing for Masterpieces (In Absentia) Series, 1993, pencil and ink on paper, 18-7/16 x 36-15/16, courtesy of the artist.
Walter Benjamin in 1936. Hirsh uses it to affirm that it is precisely because infinitely reproducible works are subjected to a powerful transformation by Silveira that she is able to infuse them with an aura of their own. Let us also remember that Silveira is transforming the shadows and not the objects. Her interaction with the object is minimal, which comes back to Duchamp’s strategy for creating readymades. In his mind, simply by choosing an object and placing it in the context of art it became art. Silveira, however, chose to contextualize the shadow and not its object, but its calculated and rational projection in space is clearly stated in her drawings and scale models for the project. “I always understood quite well his [Duchamp’s] ironic and philosophical approach to perspective and his pseudo-scientific allegories,” explains Silveira.

There is a geometrical rigor in Duchamp’s work that Silveira admires. Yet geometry was also the main concern of the Brazilian Concretismo; this abstract geometry movement that was inspired by Concrete Poetry originated in 1956, at a time when Silveira was studying painting at university. Both characterized the mid-century Brazilian modernism sensibility prevailing at the time. Concrete Poetry encouraged a poetic yet rational experimentation by means of a synthetic and dynamic language that made sense in an industrial society. The poets placed paramount importance on the visual communication of a piece, making the words (mainly substantives and verbs) the same as the content, and utilizing a new and revolutionary visual format. The poem had to consider the white page as part of the graphic space for the work; hence, the back and forth between the written words and the white space allowed the piece to be seen and read simultaneously.

With those guidelines in mind, we can revisit Silveira’s vinyl shadows. We can consider that their language is synthetic since, today, the Duchampian wheel and bottle rack are immediately recognizable, “unmistakable shadows…even in highly distorted perspectives,” as she describes them. They are dynamic
and imply movement around the space as their distortions take over the walls, floor, and ceiling of the gallery. They are made of adhesive vinyl, an unlikely material for artworks—like Duchamp’s wheel—yet one that is pertinent to our industrial society. The adhesive vinyl is less relevant in terms of its own materiality, so the idea of the shadow—more immaterial than material—is the work. In addition, the indissolubility between the support (vinyl and gallery wall and floor) and the idea—that is, the artwork—provide a new form, one where appearance, content, and context are inextricably linked. Silveira takes this new format to a different scale, to that of the gallery space.

Silveira uses the white page space, all of it, as a white cube. The notion of the ubiquitous modern and contemporary space has been described by Brian O’Doherty as the paradoxical White Cube, a space that, while it presents art-objects that extend consciousness, is itself devoid of specificity (all art galleries look the same), and lacks sounds and smells; it is an abstract space designed for the mind. In a white cube without windows, lighting is designed to avoid shadows, which engenders a certain lack of a sense of gravity. This is the pristine, ascetic space that Silveira powerfully inhabits by reinserting the shadows that are not only a gift of nature, but also a memory of the absent object—in this case a whole collection of them. If a white cube museum had to creatively imagine its own contents with the very best collection possible, it would perhaps look very much like this phantasmagoria that Silveira has created for The Aldrich. As we walk into the gallery space we may well be entering the mind and memory of the quintessential contemporary art museum, one without a collection.

### ENDNOTES


2. Ibid.

3. Roca, p. 115.

4. In the 1960s, Regina Silveira studied under Ibiê Camargo, whose teacher was de Chirico.


6. The general idea for this series originated in 1983 with *Projeto A* (a project never realized). Several perspective drawings depicting four empty bases were laid out in a radial disposition, projecting shadows of works by Man Ray, Picasso, Duchamp, and Boccioni. The project partially materialized at the 1983 São Paulo Biennial, when Silveira presented exclusively the Duchamp works (the bottle rack and the bicycle wheel), painting the shadows directly on the wall and calling the installation *Absentia (M.D.)*. In 1986, for the exhibition *Ephemeral Sculptures* organized by sculptor Servulo Esmeraldo for the Ministry of Culture of Ceará in Fortaleza, Brazil, Silveira presented a Man Ray shadow of his *Cadeau*, also painted directly on the wall. Some years later in the Pampulha Museum in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, Silveira added one more work to her roster by painting a Calder shadow, supposedly hanging from an empty hook. In the 1990s Silveira re-made the Oppenheim and the Ray in more permanent materials, fabricating the first in a wood laminate covered in fake black fur and the latter in modules of black polystyrene. Around that time, she decided to work with vinyl as a way to give more permanence to the work. The shadow drawings exist in a digital format that can be transferred to vinyl versions that generally include an edition of three works. In recent years, different vinyl versions of the works have been exhibited, but never all of them together. The exhibition at The Aldrich is the first to feature all the *Absentias* in one place. 7. Hirsh, p. 118.


9. Ibid.

About the Artist

Regina Silveira was born in Porto Alegre in 1939 and resides in São Paulo, Brazil. Her photographs, videos, objects, installations and prints have created a place for her as one of the most prominent Latin American artists in the international art community. Since the beginning of her career in the 1970s, Silveira has been renowned for her parodic explorations of space through geometric constructs. Her work is celebrated both for its conceptual rigor and formal impact. Utilizing technology and graphic manipulation, her art examines the ephemeral nature of its conceptual rigor and formal impact. Utilizing technology and graphic manipulation, her art examines the ephemeral nature of

CHECKLISTS OF THE EXHIBITIONS

All dimensions height x width x depth in inches unless indicated otherwise
All works courtesy of the artist unless a collection is identified

REGINA SILVEIRA: LIMITS
at the Steuder and Gerald Rubin Center for the Visual Arts at The University of Texas at El Paso
October 6–December 18, 2011

VINYL
1. Gone, 2011
Digital image, self-adhesive vinyl cutout 12 foot X 3 foot X 3.5 feet

PROJECTIONS
2. Enquetes, 2009
Projected image Dimensions variable
3. Luna (Moonspace), 2002–3
Projected digital video animation in collaboration with Ronaldo Kiel 8-minute loop Dimensions variable
Projected image Dimensions variable

PRINTS
5. R.S.O., 1997
Silkscreen on felt, animal fur, 11 X 10 ½ X 3 ½
Collection of José Marton

REGINA SILVEIRA: IN ABSENTIA (COLLECTION)

VINYL
1. Masterpieces: In Absentia (Calder), 1993
Digital image, printed as self-adhesive vinyl cutout, wood pedestal Dimensions variable
Collection of Museum of Modern Art, São Paulo; gift of Galeria Brito Cincoos
Arte Contemporânea e Moderna, São Paulo
2. Masterpieces: In Absentia (Duchamp), 1993
Digital image, printed as self-adhesive vinyl cutout, wood pedestal Dimensions variable
Private collection
3. Masterpieces: In Absentia (Miro Apodicea), 1995
Digital image, printed as self-adhesive vinyl cutout, wood pedestal Dimensions variable
Collection of Museum of Modern Art, São Paulo; gift of the artist
Digital image, printed as self-adhesive vinyl cutout, wood pedestal Dimensions variable
Collection of Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin; gift of the artist
5. Masterpieces: In Absentia (Cabe), 1993
Digital image, printed as self-adhesive vinyl cutout, wood pedestal Dimensions variable
Collection of Museum of Modern Art, São Paulo; gift of Galeria Brito Cimino Arte Contemporânea e Moderna, São Paulo
6. Tropel, 2009–11
Black adhesive vinyl Dimensions variable

DRAWINGS
Pencil and ink on paper 26-1/16 x 5-7/8
8. Working drawing for In Absentia Series, 1995
Pencil and ink on paper 26-1/16 x 5-7/8
Pencil and ink on paper 19-1/16 x 26-5/16
Pencil and ink on paper 18-7/16 x 26-5/16
Pencil and ink on paper 19 x 26-1/8
Pencil and ink on paper 20-5/8 x 26

SCALE MODEL
13. In Absentia (LedaFluxa), 1993
Painted wood and silkscreen 14-9/16 x 20 x 2-3/16