

Matheus Rocha Pitta

(Minas Gerais, Brazil, 1980)

It is night time: two men are near a chain-link enclosure, beyond which an old Volvo is parked, its headlights on. They dig in the ground with their bare hands, freeing a series of rectangular packets wrapped in cellophane. Background noises indicate a nearby highway, or perhaps an airport. The first frames of *Drive Thru #1, 2007*, by Matheus Rocha Pitta capture the viewer's attention, presenting an action that has the sense of something illicit. We seem to be witnessing the transfer of a drug shipment in a frontier area, perhaps between Mexico and the United States, judging from what one can glimpse from the car's license plate. Over the course of the subsequent scenes, one gleans that what is being loaded into the vehicle and exposed to view is the enclosure itself, along with a pile of mere earth, which the enclosure ends up being insufficient to contain. The work, which includes a table on which the packets, seen in the video, are arranged, was created while the Brazilian artist was serving a residency in Austin, Texas. He describes its genesis as follows: "My first inspiration was police procedures. In Rio, the police confiscate everything: drugs, money, guns, contraband. Sometimes the police build huge displays and call the press. It is a form of self-advertisement. In these operations they use the car as a support for the display; they place the objects on the hood and photograph them. What strikes me in this procedure is that there is a circuit of circulation of goods that is related to the market and when the police apprehend it, they take it out of one circuit and put it into another, which is the media circuit. There is a sort of destruction between image and object, because the object is taken out of circulation, but its image is widespread. And no one really knows what happens to the drugs after that." "When I applied for the residency," he continues, "my project was very broad. And when I knew that I was coming to Texas, I started to do research." The analysis of the surrounding context led Rocha Pitta to develop the work, also reflecting on the idea of boundary and landscape. In fact both concepts were particularly pertinent for the artist while in Texas, in the context of a state with vast panoramas but also partially delimited by strong containment barriers built with the intention of obstructing drug trafficking and illegal immigration.. "In order to make the landscape into an object," Rocha Pitta continues, describing the way he created the work, "I packed it with transparent tape, which added another layer, because the packs of dirt look like drugs. It makes the dirt into a commodity. As the packs go through the car, passing through the fence, they are unpacked, so the dirt returns to its natural state. In the end, the dirt and the fence move through the car, so the car 'crosses' them without moving." (MB)