

Nuno Nunes-Ferreira

Dois anos e meio

[Two and a half years]

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Two and a half years was the time required for research and production for the body of work Nuno Nunes-Ferreira puts forward in the exhibit that takes on this amount of time as a title. And the protagonist subject-matter of *dois anos e meio* is, firstly, time. The amassing of printed news is also a central aspect in the make-up of this exhibit.

Let us begin with time. *Dois anos e meio* is inscribed simultaneously at the center and the antipode of a culture in which speed is king, where there is an imposed need to do it all at once, and pay little attention to details and to anything that begs for time. The ability to manipulate time as matter, of making it slower or faster, was only possible in modernity. The first break from the traditional understanding of time in visual culture, as something fixed and unchangeable, took place with the arrival of photography in the 19th century, which brought with it the possibility of freezing time (T.J. Demos, 2007). As modern art responded to the mechanization of time (the mecanomorph figures of Duchamp and Picabia would be the most recognizable examples), the dadaists and surrealists recreated and suspended the notion of time, 1960s Pop Art expanded the duration of viewing of an art piece (the eight hours of the same shot in *Empire*, 1964, by Andy Warhol), conceptual artists, like On Kawara, explored the theoretical limits of stretching time and, in the art of the 1980s and 90s, the replication of the immediacy of the universe of news and advertising came to take center stage (like in the appropriations of the realm of advertising by Barbara Kruger).

Nuno Nunes-Ferreira's work brings precisely these last two traditions of investigating temporality together - on the one hand it challenges the limits of extending time and on the other it appropriates printed news and advertisements, belonging to the realm of the immediate, that he gathers and archives.

At the very entrance to the exhibit we are confronted with a year's worth of newspaper clippings that the artist gathered daily from the cafe nearest his home. The four canvases that take up the side wall of the first floor of Galeria Balcony – *Primavera*, *Verão*, *Outono* and *Inverno* [Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter] (all 2016-19) – each take form as a black and white smudge of words (at a distance, monochromatic) with the same type font taken from the titles of news pieces in different sections of daily papers: front page (*Primavera*); center pages (*Verão*); sports section (*Outono*); other pages (*Inverno*), having the last pasted word provide the title to each canvas. With these titles, Nuno Nunes-Ferreira stretches the immediacy of the newspaper titles to one year, in an exercise that alters the durability of the impact of these words.

Also featuring newspaper clippings, the set *Arquivo VII*, *Arquivo VIII*, and *Arquivo IX* [Archive VII, Archive VIII, and Archive IX], and the artist's book *Chegar aos cem* [Making it to a hundred], all from 2016-19, abide by a structure reminiscent of the performances *One Million Years (Past)* and *One Million Years (Future)* (1969) by On Kawara, in which two people read aloud each of the listed years (998031 AC to 1001992) in the books throughout the course of seven consecutive days, in a kind of memorial to all those who have lived and all those who will live still. Formally, *Arquivo VII*, *Arquivo VIII*, and *Arquivo IX* are made up of, respectively, seven, twelve, and twenty-four dossiers in archive folders with pages (clear plastic sleeves with newspaper clippings over graph paper), each of them laid out on a bookshelf with a side table next to it. *Arquivo VII* presents time as measured from one minute in 60 seconds to a millennium in 10 centuries, going through an hour in 60 minutes, a day in 24 hours, a month in 31 days, a year in 12 months, and a century in 100 years. *Arquivo VIII* presents a year in twelve dossiers, each corresponding to a month, with each page dedicated to a day of the respective month. Lastly, *Arquivo IX* presents a day in 24 hours / dossiers, with each dossier dedicated to an hour of a day in 60 minutes / pages, in a total of 1440 pages corresponding to the 1440 minutes in a day. *Arquivo IX* also features a television in which each minute is presented with a detail from a page of the dossiers corresponding to the real minute of the moment in which the screen is being viewed. The artist's book *Chegar aos cem* (2018) is, in turn, a dossier of one hundred pages, with each page dedicated to a newspaper clipping of an anniversary, from the first to the hundredth, in a celebration of longevity.

Each of these pieces thus implies several methodologies in order to understand time. On the one hand, the use of a rigorous mathematical structure to translate time (seconds in minutes, minutes in hours, and so forth), on the other hand, the invitation to a subjective interpretation and the performativity that time implies (the tables that beckon to the consultation of the dossiers); and, lastly, the materiality (the newspaper clippings that make up the pages of the dossiers on the shelves, which, as objects, can

be understood as sculptures) that is bestowed on time. And the conceptual dimensions that these pieces carry in them are, most likely, just as relevant as the methodologies: the way in which our contemporary western society, a culture of the immediate, understands time; the intangibility of time; and the subjectivity implied in the understanding of time, with the margins for interpretation that this subjectivity entails, regardless of the rigor of all the mathematical formulas that one could apply.

These dimensions are particularly clear in the television of *Arquivo IX*, with a sequence reminiscent of the film *The Clock* (2010), by Christian Marclay. Each frame puts forward the image of a clock at a given time of the day, always corresponding to the real minute of the moment in which the piece is being viewed. To be able to access all the images of all the minutes / clocks we would have to give 1 440 minutes (that make up 24 hours, or a day) of our time to the exhibit. While *Arquivo IX* investigates how time, narrative, and duration are portrayed in the news in newspapers and magazines, it can also be used, in itself, as a clock that tells the exact time. However, what each of us sees in each image entails different narratives, pointing to a multiplex understanding of time. In other words, *Arquivo IX* tells us what time it is at the same time that it breaks with time's chronological coherence.

This kind of understanding of time is also patent in the video *Tennis Match* (2018) which is, in fact, a set of 365 amateur videos making up one year. The title of the piece, like the sound that takes up a large part of the space of the bottom floor of the exhibit, leads us to think that the corresponding images will be that of a game of tennis. However, when we access the images of the 365 videos, we are confronted with another narrative: people practicing the art of *sabrage*, a technique to open bottles of champagne. Depending on each person's personal references and knowledge, the experience lived in *Tennis Match*, after the oddness resulting from the conflict between sound and image is overcome, may be that of recognition of the technique that dates back to the celebrations of Napoleonic victories, or of disturbance in face of the violence implicit to the act of beheading bottles of champagne with swords.

Using a rigorous mathematical structure, but also recognizable elements from the immediate universe of the news (in the set of archives) and of the videos that we all have access to on the internet (in *Tennis Match*), Nuno Nunes-Ferreira transposes the temporal existence – of immediate but indirect absorption – of the printed news and online videos to the direct experience lived by those viewing the piece.

As a whole, the exhibit *dois anos e meio* – that could be read as an expanded installation – plays with the modes in which we experience the narratives built through

news that are presented to us as facts, examining the conventions and strategies of the media in their interpretations and constructions of a durability of time. In face of the news, we are removed from our time to be immersed in a new register, that corresponds to a given narrative that is (re)told to us in a realm at the same time real and fictional.

The installation transforms this condition of the news: time, in this case, corresponds to the immateriality that exists beyond the printed dates and the physicality of the thousands of pages of the archive folders, of the four canvases, and of the hundreds of television frames of *Arquivo IX* and of the video *Tennis Match*. What we can experience here is a fictional event or an uncountable set of fictions in multiple times put together in the time, simultaneously measurable and immeasurable, that each of us will take to go through *two and a half years*.