



TOMIE OHTAKE: IN MEMORY OF THE CITY

From Sé Cathedral to the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP), through the Monument to the Flags and *Borba Gato* statue, São Paulo is marked by construction works that bear something meaningful in them. Even though these landmarks and constructions – produced at different times – generally fail to cover all the many transformations of the city, which makes it most remembered as a generic metropolitan landscape, the landmarks that exist and are reminded convey peculiar memories through them. Their recognition by the population might stem from their symbolism, the presence they impose on the place where they are located, or the representativeness they have acquired out of their features – from grandeur to sheer strangeness of their characteristics.

A great deal before the completion of public works by Tomie Ohtake, the *Ladeira da Memória* and *Avenida 23 de Maio* were already places associated with different times in history. The first one takes us to the beginning of the nineteenth century, when a new city was taking shape and truly demanded another way of access, a new gateway to the central region. The wide intersection marked by a water fountain and an obelisk turned into something different over time and memory – in short, it stood as a reference to the path, which would be crossed from there, as an incontrovertible boundary between the former city and the upcoming one. More than a century later, in the 1960s, the full extent of Avenida 23 de Maio was opened, a direct circulation route across the north-south axis of the city, directly related to the logic of a modern metropolis. A broad way deployed on a marked bottom of a valley, as the city's bet on the car as the vehicle and the engine for the city's growth.

Imbued with such different narratives and importance, these two sites received significant public works by Tomie Ohtake. Rendered within a four-year break and located in central areas of the city, about only 5 kilometers far from each other, these two works are part of in the early stages of Tomie's urban production, and bear relation to her most characteristic languages: painting and sculpture. Put close together, one can analyze them in view of the definition of monument.

Typically, it is thought that monuments refer to relevant historical events or the heroic deeds of a character, usually elected by ideological and political criteria, to have them engraved in the memory of a population. In the case of Tomie Ohtake's mural painting on the blind gable of an office building at Ladeira da Memória, toward Anhangabaú valley, its shapes and colors reinforce the symbolic character of the space, yet dodging from properly clarifying what exactly it celebrates or recalls. Monuments underscore this 'pass-through', which daily greets and bids farewell to employees at the central region without conveying any type of propaganda, common to so many other monuments.

The work positioned in the central site of Avenida 23 de Maio, in its turn, fully acts as a monument upon celebrating 80 Years of Japanese Immigration in Brazil. Its shape and its colors, however, thwart any literal interpretation, as it avoids directly representing any character or situation. The concrete curves have no imposing presence, excessive adornments or other figures that would suggest a limited reading. In no aspect whatsoever does it look like a classical or academic statue. Its direct connection with the immigration anniversary ultimately ends on the artist's nationality and the Japanese generations symbolized by the four arches, that is, through details that go beyond the synthetic materiality of the piece.

Thus eluding the conventional aspect, the two works by Tomie are closer to the concept of monument for their large scale, for the change they manage to accomplish in the urban landscape and their identification and integration to the metropolitan image and space.

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