



PSM  
Schöneberger Ufer 61  
10785 Berlin

PHONE +49 30 246 492 00  
EMAIL [office@psm-gallery.com](mailto:office@psm-gallery.com)  
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**Prophetic Complaints / 69 Rooms H&V**  
**Dudu Quintanilha**  
30.06. – 02.09.2023

The poetic potency of a work of art consists of its openness to multiple reading possibilities, sensory fluidity, imprecision, and "systematic derangement of the senses"<sup>1</sup> that broadens the general understanding of reality. Unlike science, which usually demands concrete solutions for its research objective after intense speculative exercises and empirical experiments, art is historically seen as a practice which is more driven by questioning than by solutions. Therefore, defining the work of an artist through precise arguments that serve as a means of explain a work of art to a certain public is, in many cases, an intellectual exercise that reduces the potency of the work, since this limits the multiplicity of interpretations of the work and its ability to disrupt the established order of things. In this respect, not only its poetic potency is reduced, but also its political capacity of pointing to new directions and destabilizing concepts and ideologies consolidated by hegemonic narratives and epistemologies.

When I was invited to write about the works of the Brazilian-Argentinian artist Dudu Quintanilha exhibited at his solo exhibition *Prophetic Complaints* at PSM, I was tempted to scrutinize and systematize his artistic practice by making a theoretical analysis. In principle, this would not be hard work, but it would also be reductive for Dudu Quintanilha's work, since his practice excels precisely in its fluidity and the crossing of several languages, materials, and media. For this reason, perhaps, when realizing the fluency of the transdisciplinarity of his work, in one way or another, my soul of a poet made me remember the words of the Brazilian poet Hilda Hilst published in her book *Cascos & Carícias & Outras Crônicas*:

*"It's sad to explain a poem. It is also useless. The poem cannot be explained. It is like a punch. And if it is perfect, it feeds you for life. A punch certainly wakes you up and, if it's a perfect punch, it makes your mask fall, that frivolous, repulsive, blistered mask that we try to keep to attract or frighten. If at least one lover of poetry has been hit and got up barefaced after reading my mumbled lyrical evidence, write, just that: 'I have been hit'. And then I will drink, because there is to be feasting on what on earth seemed to me an exile: the poet's craft."<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> The famous quote by the French poet Jean-Nicholas-Arthur Rimbaud (1854-91) is taken from the influential letter the poet sent to the publisher Paul Demeny on May 15, 1871, in which Rimbaud defines his vision of poetic creativity.

<sup>2</sup> This passage was freely translated into English by the author of this text, since the book cited does not yet have an official English translation.



Perhaps, explaining a poem, or a work of art, is not always "sad" and "useless" as Hilst argues. However, it is in fact an unnecessary task when the artwork is conceived through a profusion of emotions, ideas and feelings that arrive like a "punch" which bewilders you. And it seems that this is precisely Dudu Quintanilha's objective: to deconstruct, unbalance and de-structure the spectator's perception, removing its masks that "attract" and "frighten", even if this is done by revealing irreducible symbolic and systemic violence rooted into society and the collective consciousness. Or even through the exposure of the fragility and vulnerability of his own and in his collaborators' bodies, in the face of the brutality of life in society, especially when it is structured by heteronormativity, masculinism, racism, and classism, such as in Brazilian society and all Western capitalist societies. For this reason, this text is not a totalizing explanation of Quintanilha's practice, but a suggestive comment that aims to invite the audience to open his work to more possibilities of understanding.

The exhibition *Prophetic Complaints* which is on view at PSM and has already been installed at the Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst (GAK) in Bremen between January and March 2023, features mostly videos that debate on the (im-)possibilities of living together, generating belonging, recognition and social responsibility through a research on verbal complaints. On the occasion of his exhibition at PSM, Quintanilha reformulates the exhibition, adapting it to the gallery's exhibition space. In the new version, the works are the result of performative collaborations and the interaction that he established with people, mainly with members of the Blaumeier-Atelier from Bremen, a project that since 1986 has been developing art projects with neurodivergent people in diverse fields such as theatre, music, painting, photography and literature. In addition, he invited the group MEXA from São Paulo – which Quintanilha is a founding member to occupy the gallery's "Loggia" and set up their own exhibition *69 Rooms H&V* into *Prophetic Complaints*.

The video *Mirror* (2022), which was part of *Prophetic Complaints* in Bremen, and is also on view at PSM, presents a group of people who communicate with each other in front of a mirror by constantly moving and shifting within a space limited by the video. Each movement made by the participants of the video affects the composition of their image as a group. Thus, *Mirror* proposes a way of codifying and listening to different registers of gestures and images created by this group of people in movement. The spoken words of the narrator direct the participants by suggesting small actions and gestures that also become a means of non-verbal communication. Language, especially spoken language, and behaviour become two constant concerns in the work. The interaction between words and behaviour is closely linked to the need to communicate where human interaction is made impossible by social constructions that generate differences and divide people. Communicating here is then applied as a means of re-establishing social relations and belonging. But for this to happen, one also needs to establish a pedagogy of listening, because in a time when everyone is supposedly speaking about everything, especially on social media, no one is listening to anyone. So, more than focusing on speaking, Dudu Quintanilha invites us to listen. Learning to listen to the Other, especially marginalized social groups, is the key to see invisible social malaise and to understand that the Other exists and deserves to be recognized.

The need to acknowledge the humanhood of marginalized individuals is very prominent in the activity that Quintanilha does with MEXA. The transdisciplinary art group is composed of people from various minority social groups which in Brazil are under permanent threat. The group embraces mainly transvestite, transgender, gay, and black people which elaborate performances and theatre plays that highlights their marginalized social condition in Brazil as a means of opposing discrimination and systemic violence against minorities. In the exhibition *69 Rooms H&V* at PSM, MEXA is showing text-based works produced since the group was created in 2015 after violent events occurred in shelters for vulnerable people in São Paulo. Among the exhibited works is the text that gives the title to the exhibition *69 Salas H&V* (*69 Rooms H&V*), which was



created as part of a series of workshops, experiences, and experiments that sought to create discussions on issues related to HIV and marginality based on accounts and personal stories of MEXA's members. Nevertheless, more than a mere attempt to present the collective's archive to a passive public, as it usually happens in retrospective institutional exhibitions, MEXA and Quintanilha aim to establish an intimate mediation between the collective and the public in which an exchange of knowledges and perceptions can germinate. It is evident in the work *Oficina Oratória* (Oratory workshop) from 2016, which is composed of text that includes only questions to be asked, and, if possible, answered by the visitors. Thus, MEXA's practice and social demands will find a place to resonate and generate new contents, simultaneously, in contrast and consonance with the audience.

Creating connections and emotional ties between people without reducing individual identities, desires and needs to a predetermined homogenous model of sociability and identity is a challenge that Quintanilha aims to overcome. As Dudu Quintanilha himself mentioned in a conversation we had on his exhibition:

*'There are several reasons that pushed me to put together this MEXA's show with Prophetic Complaints. MEXA from its genesis uses texts as a means of recording of collective practices of listening. The group originated following encounters between people who were living on the street and in vulnerable situations at shelters. On the occasion of the exhibition at PSM, the main text is accompanied by other texts such as Ao Conselho Municipal da Asistencia Social (To the Municipal Council of Social Assistance), a letter written in 2017 in which the group presented itself before different public institutions, claiming MEXA's participation in the construction of what was the first exclusive shelter for transgender women and transvestites in the Bom Retiro neighborhood in the center of São Paulo.'*

In addition he argued:

*'I would like the two exhibitions (Prophetic Complaints and 69 Rooms H&V) to be able to talk about the phenomenon of groups, of being part of groups, or what happens when our desires start to deviate from an individualistic perspective. Then, I invited MEXA, so the two exhibitions find a common ground based on works created by groups of people who are not defined by a common identity.'*

It is relevant to consider that the collective life that takes place in the same shared social space must not necessarily be harmonious, once common and democratic spaces are also established through conflicting relations and divergent desires. In a democratic space, individuals create bonds by taking into account their prosaic differences and respecting their contradictions, creating collective affections, identities and belonging where there is a multitude of divergences. It is only when this space is fractured that difference is instrumentalized in order to generate exclusion and oppression. Would it not then be up to any individual to articulate the contradictory possibilities of human relations to establish new social textures and ways of life? Would it not then be the moment for us to build a shared space where collective ordinary activities receive the poetic potency of a work of art which is capable of creating the elements of a heterogeneous and non-oppressive coexistence?

It is as an interlocutor of ideas and a moderator of encounters and social relations that Dudu Quintanilha places himself throughout the exhibition. In this regard, he states:

*'The research on verbal complaints has as its central axis identifying the place of the interlocutor, and the place of listening and observation as actors participating in a scene. How an event that often seems to be personal and private is translated into something public, and what is produced in such procedures. What it*



*would be like to do a prophetic listening of a complaint with the tools and knowledge we have available: a complaint can be elaborated to end up archived or else in a euphoric discussion in the street and values imposed on how we listen and to whom we are going to organize such a scene, even if it is for a complaint to be de-archived. What can this kind of listening teach us about the society in which we “participate”? I clarify that the quotation marks exist because there is an explicit idea that we all participate equally and it is not on this basis that this research thinks. The idea of equality takes other directions when one begins to broaden perceptions about issues that remain invisible or implicit in our ways of relating to each other.’*

In this sense, Judith Butler's reflection on self-narration, precariousness, vulnerability, and recognition seems to guide the way the narration develops into the whole exhibition. In her book *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (2004), the American philosopher articulates how power is re-produced through social relations, actions, and performances which occur in specific spaces. In this context, relationality and performativity categorise individuals according to social norms, human interactions, and power relations which oppress and marginalize specific social groups. This calls for a closer look at how the vulnerability and precariousness of marginalized social groups are grounded in society and how we can create means of making social minorities be heard so that their suffering can be recognized. However, as Butler also clarifies in her *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2009), although narration and self-narrating are fundamental in undoing established oppressive social norms and in creating new social relations and ethics of recognition, we are not able to give a coherent account of ourselves due to a broader social scheme that has preceded us and shaped us beyond our full understanding. I believe that by considering the presentation of a coherent and complete narrative of one's life is an impossibility, Dudu Quintanilha tries to articulate several voices and performances in order to overcome this situation. Thus, bodies collide and voices intersect perpetually until we learn to coexist.

In 2006, the 27th Bienal de Arte de São Paulo *How to Live Together*, curated by Lisette Lagnado and a team of curators including Cristina Freire, Rosa Martínez, Adriano Pedrosa, José Roca, and Jochen Volz, problematised social coexistence based on Roland Barthes' seminars at the Collège de France (1976/77) and also on the writings of Hélio Oiticica and Marcel Broodthaers. The exhibition proposed, at that time, a reflection on how social spaces of coexistence are constructed and shared, and questioned themes such as difference and collaborative practices as an attempt to achieve an ethical sense of coexistence. Many things have changed since 2006. The intensification of environmental devastation, the pulverization of human relations, economic crises, the precarisation of labour, endless wars, mass migrations, pandemics, and the rise of far-right politicians, parties, and organized groups in most societies are some of these 'changes'. For this reason, learning to live together, beyond the inevitable tensions and dichotomies that occur, remains as a possibility we have to continue to exist. In my conversation with Quintanilha, he clarified that for him 'complaint is a medium for emotional, socio-political, and personal issues to be shared orally, but complaints do not appear in the works'. And that his 'ultimate' question is 'what could a prophetic listening to a complaint teach us beyond language?' I hope *Prophetic Complaints* and *69 Rooms H&V* can give us some insight into how to listen to each other and to live together without self-destructing.

Filipe Lippe



**Filipe Lippe** is a poet, artist, and researcher born in 1986 in Duque de Caxias, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He is a PhD candidate in history and theory of art at HFBK Hamburg, researching historical trauma, racism, and (de)coloniality in the context of neoliberalism. He is particularly interested in Marxist theory, epistemic disobedience, decolonial thinking, Afrodiasporic music, pop counterculture, and political theory.

**Dudu Quintanilha**, born in 1987 in Bauru, São Paulo, Brazil. He studied audio-visual at IUNA in Buenos Aires and at the Städelschule in Frankfurt. His works have been shown more recently at Kunstraum Riehen (Basel, 2021), Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen (Düsseldorf, 2019), Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, (Buenos Aires 2019 ) and at Musée KANAL – Center Pompidou (Brussels 2018 and will be on view in Museum Folkwang (Essen) later this year.

## LIST OF WORKS

### Prophetic Complaints

1. Dudu Quintanilha  
*Mirror*, 2023  
1-channel video installation, 4K, color, sound, languages German and English, tot 07 min. 08 sec. (loop)

**Director, scriptwriter** Dudu Quintanilha  
**Camera** Julian Kiesche  
**Assistants** Finn Westphal and Eric Wälz  
**Sound** Christoph Dziallas  
**Sound mixing and effects** Dudu Quintanilha  
**Editing** Dudu Quintanilha  
**Voices** Nazli Kiziltepe, Barbara Weste, Dustin Cwiertnia

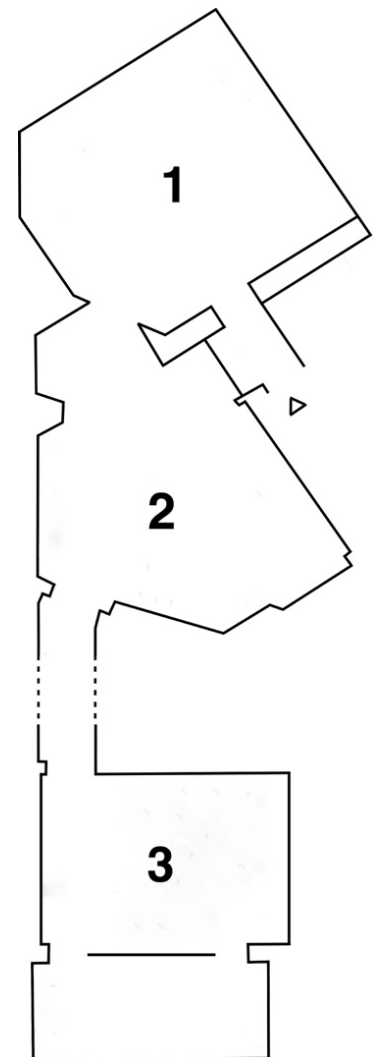
**Commissioned by** GAK, Bremen

**Performers** Dorothe Burhop, Dustin Cwiertnia, Nazli Kiziltepe, Cornelia Koch, Hella Müller, Leonard Ramm, Denise Stehmeier, Ada Helene Weber, Barbara Weste

Germany, 2023.

**Special thanks to** Blaumeier Atelier, Annette Hans and the GAK team, Bremen.

2. Dudu Quintanilha  
*Prophetic Complaint*, 2023





2-channel video installation, 4k, color, sound, languages Spanish and English, tot 11 min. 44 sec.  
(loop)

**Director, scriptwriter** Dudu Quintanilha

**Camera** Julian Kiesche

**Sound design** Erik D. Clark

**Editing of *Prophetic Complaint - Characters film*** Dudu Quintanilha

**Editing of *Prophetic Complaint - Poem film*** Theo Perrot

**Voice and voice recording** Dudu Quintanilha

*Prophetic Complaint - Characters film* is an adaptation of the *Tanzsalon Patella* (2023) theater piece created by Blaumeier Atelier and directed by Andreas Meister.

**Performers** Jürgen Bartels, Ulrike Bauer, Erik Bernsen, Jörne Birk, Ole Bramstedt, Manuela Bonnet, Béatrice Cécé, Johanna Diestelmeier, Heiner Holthusen, Astrid Janus, Henrike Kuhn, Imke Liebetruth, Jutta Liebetruth, Nadine Liebetruth, Lille May, Nina Mews, Rolf Sängner-Diestelmeier, David Scharf, Marie Spellerberg, Annekatriin Stauß, Viktoria Tesar, Ulli, Ulrich, Heike Weidemann.

Germany, 2023.

**Special thanks to** Lille May and Blaumeier Atelier, Bremen.

## 69 Rooms H&V

### 3. MEXA

#### *69 Rooms H&V, 2023*

Room installation including bunk beds, mattresses, bed sheets, table, stamps and booklet with the following texts:

#### *69 Rooms H&V, 2016*

**Published by** Cadernos de Subjetividade year 13 n°19

**Original language** Portuguese

**Translation** Celine Salas Dias

2016, Brazil.

#### *Letter to the Municipal Council of Social Assistance, 2015*

**Original language** Portuguese

**Proof-reading** PSM

2015, Brazil.

#### *Round of questions to the regulation, 2017*

**Original language** Portuguese

**Proof-reading** PSM

2017, Brazil.