

Anton Steenbock

Anton Steenbock [www.antonsteenbock.net] lives and works in Berlin and Rio de Janeiro. For the past ten years he established a fictitious real estate network called da Silva Brokers which whom he operates in digital and public space. His interventions, consisting of fake architecture campaigns, showrooms and widely spread propaganda where shown among others in solo exhibitions at the Museum for contemporary art MAC – Rio de Janeiro, the Centro Cultural de Sao Paulo and the Biennale SUR – Argentina.

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Robert Luxemburg

Robert Luxemburg [rolux.org] lives in Berlin as an artist, writer and programmer, with occasional ventures into film- and musicmaking. He is the co-founder of Pirate Cinema Berlin, co-author of the pan.do/ra media archive platform, and DJs under the alias FKA FOX.

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Re: Antonio da Silva

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The Canadian rapper Tommy Genesis is on, or slightly off, the record, with an anecdote that takes place in one of Antonio da Silva's sprawling Caribbean properties. At the climax, the host heroically saves a prominent Klimt painting from an even more prominent fellow rap musician's attack by delivering a disarming impromptu rendition of a verse from said musician's back catalogue, the rights to which da Silva has at least partially acquired since. This isn't to say that da Silva really *cares* for the art he collects, or to claim that he himself has musical talent; but if we can go by Tommy Genesis' account (whose 2016 single *Art*¹ is believed to reflect the rest of her short liaison with the host), then the private persona behind the public figure of da Silva sounds significantly more bearable than any shade of the guy Grimes ended up with².

The artist behind da Silva, Anton Steenbock, invited me to his studio last month to look at parts of his sprawling experimental research project. Antonia da Silva, mostly unknown to me until that day, is a billionaire Brazilian entrepreneur, transnational real estate developer and, more recently, president of the Da Silva Brokers Art Lab, one of the best-funded organizations supporting emerging artists in Latin America—including a recent program that tries to help them emerge from the current emergency³.

Quite immediately, Steenbock's work on da Silva appeared significantly more interesting to me than similar projects I had come across in the past: be it Walid Raad's investigative work on the Artist Pension Trust⁴, or the many diagrams of capitalist power structures that Bureau d'études has left us with⁵. I remember the latter, maybe unfairly, as mostly ornamental: a decorative visual language in which we would marvel at our Emperors' new corporations. And I remember, maybe wrongly, seeing Walid



Antonio Da Silva

Raad's work at the Sharjah Biennial (along with Eyal Weizman's piece that put footage assembled by the Dubai Police, later re-released as Chris Marker's very last film⁶ atop an empty tennis court⁷), wondering why in a place where the art market bubbled most wildly at the time, where art shows were opened by princesses and sometimes shut down by kings⁸, institutional critique was not only welcome, but *in fashion*. (The answer turned out to be rather trivial: Israelis appeared at the center of the org charts. In comparison, the Gulf Labor project was less popular in the region⁹.)

Steenbock is not only on the heels of da Silva, tracing the Brazilian's path of destruction and construction across the globe, but sometimes slightly ahead of him. His tendency to fictionalize part of his subject's investments in real estate or the art market has been subject to criticism¹⁰, but to me seems like the greatest asset of his work. The Artist Pension Trust¹¹, for example, was obviously *much more fictional* than some of da Silva's more recent ventures, which Steenbock may or may not have fabricated. And the Emiratis were right: APT was a global conspiracy—to profit a handful of curators, artists, and collectors at the expense of public institutions, plus probably a couple of folks who turned up too late to the pyramid scheme.

What I like about Steenbock's work is quite precisely that, unlike Walid Raad or Bureau d'études, who can only document *existing* networks of global

corruption, he deals, at least at the margins of his work (the Burj Al Arab clone at the Copacabana comes to mind¹², or da Silva's plan to transform the Indian auction house Osian's into a Google competitor¹³), with *imaginary* capital: construction projects that nobody ever had the chutzpah to think up, along with megalomaniacal art organizations whose time to appear, as of today, has yet to arrive. And of course, the stuff that looks the most *fake*—da Silva's involvement in a cluster of international museums located on a to-be-terraformed artificial archipelago off the oil coast of Baku, Azerbaijan—is actually *for real*. Nothing was ever built, but in case some emerging artist wants to explore what would have been, they should ask Vasif Kortun. I don't think anyone is still under NDA ;)



Missing caption

Finally, the politics behind *Antonio da Silva*—assuming, for a moment, that the Brazilian was a work by Steenbock, which several international law firms would of course rather swiftly and vehemently deny—seem preferable to what inspired *77sqm_9:26min*, Forensic Architecture's video piece about the killing of Halit Yozgat that was on prominent display at documenta 14 in Kassel¹⁴. Because there are cases when technical analysis obscures, rather than shines a light on, the nature of power. In the case of the NSU, it doesn't need forensics to

know which way the wind blew that day, and to suggest that it does foregrounds the crime at the expense of the scandal beneath it. I wouldn't be surprised if many international visitors to documenta left with the impression that an artist group had helped solve a political murder case. (To be fair: that's a systemic problem, rather than a problem with a specific work of art.)

What Steenbock does with Antonio da Silva is critical, but his work is inventive rather than investigative, and it doesn't take the form of a tribunal. To me, that day in Steenbock's studio, his work appeared as a utopian fiction about, maybe even from, a possible world of ours in which art spaces—and the occasional real estate fair that Steenbock has enriched with fake *da Silva* booths—display art, rather than power, while the courts do their job and clear the cases. Which in the case of Antonio da Silva, who is not a Nazi, but a wealthy Brazilian who may—disclaimer: or may not!—have made his own seed funding in sectors of the economy that tend to produce dead bodies in depressingly large numbers, will only be a matter of time¹⁵; in other words, it will most likely never happen.

———— July 2020

A short note about the other work Anton Steenbock showed me in June, can be found at rolux.org/texts/antonio_da_silva.

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