

SOL CALERO

El barco de barro (The Clay Ship)

Contemporary Copenhagen, Copenhagen

10.10.2020 – 30.05.2021

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THE SHIP AS A METAPHOR FOR CULTURAL MOVEMENTS

El barco de barro takes place inside of CC's building, which used to house B&W, a ship-building enterprise operating on the Refshaleøen island during the height of industrialism.

The Spanish word *Barro* translates to *mud* as well as to *clay*. One is the raw material that emerges from a combination of soil and water; the other one implies a use for moulding and drying or cooking in order to make ceramics or pottery. *Barro* means dirt, muddiness, uncleanness. It's soft, it can easily dissolve and disintegrate. The idea of a ship made of mud or clay conveys a notion of impermanence and change in motion. Similarly, culture is not static, but dynamic. Narratives that we constantly create about one's own culture or other cultures also change the way we perceive them in the present and will perceive them in the future.

Ships were the first human devices that allowed for cross-continental movement. They represented the potential for trade, travel, and expanding the horizons of the world known to Western societies. But that expansion was inevitably also a conquest, a colonization. Ships transported ways of looking at the world. They carried taxonomies with them: ways of classifying both people and things, social systems of organization, justice, belief, and power structures. They transferred biological data: moving genetics, diseases, and new species around the globe.

Likewise, the notion of cultural movement is somewhat of an illusion: culture doesn't just *move*, it is either imposed, absorbed, or at the very least transformed. It mixes, it gets entangled and contaminated. We can't trace cultures back or keep them isolated, and we can't restore them to an idea of an original state. Hundreds of years after a shipwreck, we recover pieces of pottery that tell us stories about the past: clay, once hardened, becomes an everlasting remnant from the past. We take the pieces, whole or broken, and put them in glass cases inside of museums, so that we can repair an image of an era, a lifestyle or a civilization, making it forever fixed.

Sol Calero's *El Barco de Barro* urges us to look at our ideas of culture as if we were all participating in the construction of a perpetually unfinished museum that is always both in progress and in motion.