



Luiz Roque

República

Like oracles, many authors have imagined fantastic, dystopian, or utopian scenarios that eventually became a reality. Jules Verne and Georges Méliès fantasized about the trip to the Moon long before the “first step” onto our satellite in 1969. George Orwell described the society of Big Brother in the novel, *1984* — ultra-safe and totalitarian. Visual artists have always contributed to the imagining of alternate realities. Luiz Roque’s work echoes the ideas articulated by

science-fiction writers from the early twentieth century and forwarded by contemporary theorists who propose alternative futures. His films evoke a world after, but also a return to ancestral traditions, often appealing to a world shaped by the cultures and traditions of non-white Brazil.

Luiz Roque: República is punctuated by five recent works that combine affect and simplicity.

In *S* (2017), Roque coded a message in the choreography based on the manifesto, *Towards a Gender Disobedient & Anti-Colonial Redistribution of Violence*, by Jota Mombaça. Mombaça, an artist from northeast Brazil, writes, performs, and investigates the relations between monstrosity and humanity, combining queer studies and decolonial studies to productive ends.

The dancing in *S*, hypnotic and magnificent, conveys a violent message, which counterbalances the poetic and graceful gestures ... “we will invade your houses, set your cars on fire, stone your malls and banks, swear at your police forces, curse your safety, empty your fridge and mock your illusions of ontological comfort.” Thus, the film becomes dichotomous, and the beauty becomes brutal.

As described by Roque:

In *S*, spoken language is transformed into body language. The characters — in sign language — use a militant slogan, evoking class and racial struggles... I was inspired by the work of Mombaça and the title of a Brazilian science-fiction film whose words are quite explicit: *Branco sai preto fica*. In English this means ‘White Out, Black In.’ In *S*, we are witnessing the birth of a new civilization, which escapes from the depths for a solar world. There is latent violence; a revolution is coming.

In *S*, we witness the emergence of a new human who comes out of the depths towards the light, like the workers in Fritz Lang’s film *Metropolis* (1927), who rise up against the leading intellectual families — idle, rich, living in a part of the city inaccessible to the plebs.





Urubu (2020) is a short reverse loop video with no sound. In the video, a bird flies without stopping or changing course. Roque is a fan of nature documentaries, and a number of his works are informed by the genre. *Urubu* conjures the notion of infinity in the visual poetry of a bird in perpetual flight. The architecture of São Paulo, and its layered and complex history, is the subject of the video, which was

made during the spread of COVID-19 in Brazil. Roque—who was in a government enforced lockdown in his apartment for many months on end—filmed his surroundings, representing the view from his window. For him, as for many others, time has stretched endlessly this year.

The film that gives the title to the exhibition, *República* (2020), is an exploration of migration and discrimination set within the LGBTQI+ area of São Paulo known as República.

República is a kind of documentary. [In this work] I evoke the topics of desire and sexual migration. The circle marks the idea of a continuum, a never-ending loop of discrimination, but also something that will never stop because gay people like me or *travestis* like the narrator, Marcinha do Corintho, will always run away from small cities moved by fear but also by desire...

In *República*, Roque portrays life at night, representing the urban and architectural context of the neighborhood. The use of Super 8 film creates a dichotomy between an outdated old technology and the representation of the digital city of the twenty-first century. The narrator describes the concept of “sexual migration” — that is, a relocation process motivated by the sexuality of those who migrate, and specifically members of the LGBTQI+ community. Roque’s works refer to topics close to his heart and that motivate his practice, from questions of sexuality to modernist urban architecture to the representation of the human body as sculpture. However, *República* is atypical because the film is built around an a priori testimony of a personal experience rather than a fictional narrative.



Avenue (2005/2021) pictures a banal concrete building in Roque's home town of Porto Alegre. It is the type of architecture one could easily expect to find in a mid-sized city anywhere in Brazil. However, this building is significant because it is located in an area known for sex workers. Roque's photograph neither conceals nor discloses this information, and yet it problematizes the phallogentric and masculine markers of the built environment by simply picturing this building in this neighborhood.



A dog rules the world from his private jet–spaceship in *Zero* (2019). When the dog awakes, he eats pills reminiscent of those in *Soylent Green*, an iconic sci-fi film from 1966 set in the year 2022 in New York City. In *Soylent Green*, the Earth's flora and fauna have almost disappeared, and the remaining inhabitants consume synthetic food, which consists of corpses pulverized into powder — soylent green. *Zero* doesn't mention *anthropophagy* — the idea of eating human flesh — however, the relative absence of humans suggests that we are now extinct. Only architecture marks the presence of humanity. In *Zero*, we've arrived the day after humans have disappeared.

Roque writes:

I was really affected by the rising of new populisms around the world. I decided, here, to forget the human being for a while. I shot this film during a residency in Dubai, and I began to think of the city as a Mars space station. I wondered how I could represent aliens and their environment. This is how the dog entered my mind. I remember that the cyberpunk novel *Idoru* by William Gibson impressed me deeply. The description of liquid architecture in a post-apocalyptic megacity was really influential for me when I was in Dubai making *Zero*.



Luiz Roque's practice shifts marginalized voices from the periphery to the center, imagining futures that are defined by multiplicity and radical liberation from an oppressive past. In Roque's films and photographs, the present rubs up against Brazil's colonial history and its legacies in the present. Drawing upon sci-fi aesthetics and the radical ideas articulated by the genre, Roque's work makes space for alternative futures.

COVER	Still from <i>República</i> (featuring Blessed Boy), 2020. HD video and Super 8 film transferred to video, color, sound. 7 min. Courtesy of the artist and Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, New York and Brussels.
3	Still from <i>S</i> (featuring Felix Pimenta, Ivy Monteiro, and Lucas Abe), 2017. HD video, black and white, sound. 5 min. Courtesy of the artist and Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, New York and Brussels.
4 / 5	Still from <i>Urubu</i> , 2020. Super 8 film transferred to video, color. Loop. Courtesy of the artist and Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, New York and Brussels.
7	Still from <i>República</i> (featuring Marcinha do Corinho), 2020. HD video and Super 8 film transferred to video, color, sound. 7 min. Courtesy of the artist and Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, New York and Brussels.
9	<i>Avenue</i> , 2005/2021. Archival pigment print. 64.5 × 43.3 in. (164 × 110 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, New York and Brussels.
10 / 11	Stills from <i>Zero</i> , 2019. 4K video, color, sound. 5:30 min. Courtesy of the artist and Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, New York and Brussels.

Luiz Roque: República

Visual Arts Center
The University of Texas at Austin

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Luiz Roque: República is the artist's first solo exhibition in the United States.

Luiz Roque: República was previously shown at CAC Passerelle, Brest, France and Pivô, São Paulo, Brazil. The presentation at the Visual Arts Center is organized by MacKenzie Stevens, Director, Visual Arts Center and Loïc Le Gall, Director, CAC Passerelle, with Donato Loia, 2020–21 Curatorial Fellow, Visual Arts Center.

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