

SÃO PAULO

Fernanda Chieco

SÉ

The six large watercolors in Fernanda Chieco's recent exhibition "Gone" are figurative works on paper inspired by her visits to abandoned cities in the Colorado Desert. While she was on a residency in Fort Collins, Colorado, she discovered that in the state there are roughly 1,500 of these "ghost towns"—settlements abandoned suddenly by their inhabitants, who left all their belongings behind just as they were—and she visited more than twenty of them.

Chieco is best known in Brazil for her drawings: contours of the human body, only sparsely colored, that link it to the outlines of other animals and objects, creating images of strange, unidentifiable systems. She has also made objects from time to time. The six works in "Gone" are the first she has made exclusively with watercolor, which traditionally allows for fast production due to its water base. But Chieco explains that her inexperience with the medium led her to work with the paints in a manner that resulted in images that appear, at first glance, to have been drawn in pencil rather than painted, owing to the evidence of lines and stylized shading as opposed to the recognizable water-washed areas of color. "I used watercolors in the same way I use pencils," the artist told me.

Each of the six works is made up of two or more large sheets aligned at some point to form an irregular shape. All show small groups of faceless people, drawn at about half life size, whose figures are depicted only as contour or negative mass, while their clothes are portrayed in detail and color. Buildings or architectural fragments recur in all six pieces—for instance, a wooden gate in *O urso, a porteira, os espectadores* (The Bear, the Door, the Spectators), 2013; the bottom of a rusty silo and a sofa set on what seems like a wooden floor in *Rei rainha* (King Queen), 2012–13; an abandoned post-office building in *O cachorro, o correio, o casal, o dorminhoco* (The Dog, the Post Office, the Couple, the Sleeper), 2014. The unframed works were attached to foam boards held to the wall by metal cubes, an inventive hanging system created to leave a gap between the drawings and the wall so that the works appear to float in the space.

Sé was a fortuitous venue for these works, as it is located in São Paulo's oldest neighborhood, which suffered a slow but continuous exodus when financial institutions and other companies departed beginning in the 1970s. Although the area has lately begun to regentrify, hundreds of buildings remain unoccupied and maintain the traces of those who passed through; thus, the surroundings echo the theme of the drawings. However, Chieco does not seem interested in emptiness, but in a kind of lingering presence. Like the irregular shapes of her pieces that, paradoxically, suggest missing parts even as they appear to be whole, human bodies are depicted through the contours of negative space; absence reasserts itself in this show through a trace, a remainder, rather than through emptiness; as with death, it is the presence of absence that registers. The death of a place, like that of a person, can be apprehended through what has been left behind.

—Camila Belchior

scroll text to read more

Fernanda Chieco, *O cachorro, o correio, o casal, o dorminhoco* (The Dog, the Post Office, the Couple, the Sleeper), 2014, watercolor on paper, 67⁵/₈ × 97⁷/₈".



Fernanda Chieco, *O cachorro, o correio, o casal, o dorminhoco* (The Dog, the Post Office, the Couple, the Sleeper), 2014, watercolor on paper, 67⁵/₈ × 97⁷/₈".