

BY JACOPO CRIVELLI VISCONTI, 2023

Juraci Dórea's background is unparalleled when it comes to the Brazilian art scene. Born in 1944 in Feira de Santana, BA, where he still lives, he lived and studied in Salvador in the early 1960s, where he came into contact with a vibrant, dynamic scene across all fields of culture. He returned to Feira de Santana with a cosmopolitan outlook on artmaking. In the decades that followed and until this day, with utmost autonomy and independence, he has created a radical output that is aware of contemporary trends and debates, yet deeply and programmatically rooted in Brazilian Backlands living and culture.

One of his most iconic series, known as Estandartes do Jacuípe (the Jacuípe Flags) and initiated in 1975, sees Juraci appropriate leatherworking techniques and decorative motifs often used in saddles and cowboy attire, yet sublimated here into objects devoid of utilitarian or practical purposes. A few years later, in 1982, Juraci kicked off a project that would take on near-mythical overtones: Projeto Terra (Project Earth) once again saw him employ leather, this time in conjunction with tree branches and other landscape elements, to create sculptures to be installed within the Bahia hinterlands. A video and photographs, some of which are featured in this presentation, are the only existing records of these actions and works. These were designed to be given away to the area and the local population (which would often become involved in the work or even question the artist), without any ambition as relates to market placement or visibility.

Around that same time, also influenced by Brazilian Cordel literature, in addition to the paintings on canvas and plaques in the series Histórias do Sertão (Stories from the Backlands), Juraci created a series of interventions featuring similar motifs directly upon the façades of houses in different villages. Through these gestures (painting up stories in an accessible, captivating language onto house façades; creating sculptures and allowing them to merge with the surroundings), Juraci questioned the Brazilian contemporary art scene and opened up unprecedented vistas as relates to artwork insertion into the landscape, on the one hand conversing with international experiments such as the Land Art movement, with which his work has been associated, and on the other hand reaffirming his belief that “the Backlands are a big museum.”