

## Photo-essays: reflections between the education, academic and artistic spaces

Mirian Celeste Martins/ Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie/UPM

Olga Egas / Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora/UFJF; UPM

Rita Demarchi – Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia/IFSP; UPM

Photo-essays were born as ways of thinking, investigating and arguing, inserted in researches master and doctorate researches. The dimension of *poiesis* in the authors' thinking and making photo-essays that were not initially thought to be exposed break the frontiers of academia and gain the space of cultural institutions. Thus, they were exhibited at the Historical and Cultural Center of the Mackenzie Presbyterian University (São Paulo, 2016) and at the Museum of Image and Sound / MIS (Campinas, 2017). In the first, Rita Demarchi's photo-essays enter the spaces of art exhibitions to "see who sees", Vanessa Galvani presents new lenses for the teacher and Olga Egas, highlights the use of photography as a power of invention in teaching future teachers. In MIS, they are amplified with photo-essays by Estela Bonci provoking the forgotten trait of students of Pedagogy course; Stela Aguillera presents the experience at the course Youth and Adult Education during and after the visit to the 32nd São Paulo Art Bienal; Débora Rosa at the same Bienal, accompanying visits from educators, subjects of her research and Filippa Jorge focuses children and contemporary art. Both the research and the experience of creating the exhibits allow reflections on some of the possible processes and spaces of these ways of doing / thinking research.

### Visual Abstract



Image 1. Rita Demarchi. *Spaces, silences, meetings*, 2018. CHCMackenzie and MIS/Campinas. Overview, pairs of images consisting of four digital photographs from Martins, Areias and the author.,

## Introducing questions

In the beginning there was image... On the rocky walls of Lascaux, Altamira, Serra da Capivara/Piauí/Brazil. On the earth, transformed into Willendorf's Venus and the Carajás dolls of Brazilian indigenous peoples. Then came the word. They lived together in medieval scrolls. Then they nearly split in academic work, where image so often appears shyly as an attachment or merely as a documental record.

Visual texts and the growing visual culture and technologies enable possibilities in the contemporary age, but do we just consume images or do we actually read them, going beyond documentation or illustration? How do images contribute in academic research? Why show them in artistic and cultural spaces?

## Brief conceptual panorama

In regards to academic studies and research, images started occupying a different space in research, as art-based methodology. Researchers sensitive to their research objects started creating strategies, finding new perspective, breaking barriers.

Eisner (1998) points out an active and positive view, breaking with old models or false beliefs. He considers that literature, movies, poetry and video exist in our culture in order to help us see and understand important events, and therefore should be part of qualitative research. There is a learning to see and learning to experiment, leading the researcher to realize the qualities that are embedded in what he observes. In order to do so, he says, you need to cultivate perception, understand the variety of ways in which you can describe the world and acquire the capacity to use theory to better understand what perception was capable of capturing. These ideas are fleshed out in *Arts based Research* (2012), written in partnership between Eisner and Barone, consolidating paths for other theoreticians who think about research.

For Eisner and Barone (2010, s/p): "The aim of arts based research is not to replace traditional research methods; it is to diversify the pantry of methods that researchers can use to address the problems they care about". Even without intending hegemony of art-based research, they encountered heavy resistance in some areas that considered that aesthetics could be a biased and tainted source of research. Among various synthesis, Eisner and Barone (2010, s/p) claim:

In ABR, the aim is to create an expressive form that will enable an individual to secure an empathic participation in the lives of others and in the situations studied. In a certain sense, it is like a travel card, something one can use to get somewhere. Where one is to get when doing ABR is varied, but despite the variance among examples of ABR, there is a common feature. That

common feature, as we can indicate earlier, has to do with the creation of an expressive form.

The use of ways of thought and representation or “presentation” common in artistic languages (LANGER, 1980) expand the mind to better understand the world. By communicating meanings through “expressive qualities of the form”, they value contributions of the poetic use of language, expressive use of narratives, the creation of films, videos and digital and electronic images. Any mode that is used to create a work of art can be employed. “It is the conscious pursuit of expressive form in the service of understanding”, say Eisner and Barone (2010, s/p).

As reverberations, there are the contributions of A/r/tography headed by Rita Irwing (2008, 2013). In it, the artist, researcher and teacher are fused, driving new ways of researching. The artistic methodologies of investigation by Ricardo Marin Viadel and Joaquín Roldán (2012, 2017) are considered as Visual A/r/tography.

Many Brazilian researchers have worked with methodologies that expand research and value expressive forms both in doing field research as well as in the way of writing it. We can cite here Sonia Tramuja Vasconcellos and Marilda Oliveira de Oliveira, with whom Mirian Celeste organized a Symposium about artistic methodologies as part of the 24th Meeting of the National Association of Researchers in the Visual Arts/ANPAP in 2015. Before this date, we had the opportunity to bring to Brazil and the Mackenzie Presbyterian University Ricardo Marin Viadel in 2012 and 2015, as well as Rita Irwin in 2015.

Considering the *poiesis* of the researcher and the production of photo-essays, we are aware of the paths that bring us to this communication: *Photo-essays: reflections on the educational, academic and artistic space*. After all, why exhibit? What are the learnings of the researchers and advisor who became curator?

### **Advising and productions building expressive forms**

Among the multiple challenges of advising academic work, certainly the clear definition of research object and choosing the adequate methodology are fundamental issues. By working with a phenomenological perspective and believing in the *poiesis* of each researcher, the advisor perceives the potential for research development through Artistic Methodologies. This potential, jointly analyzed by advisor and advisee, is expanded with theoretical readings and productions, which have led us to the careful use of images understood as visual thinking, based on Arnheim (1985), Berger (1974), and particularly on Marin and Roldán (2012, 2017), that expands the possibilities of research having photography as methodology that reveals the object of investigation, proposing other complexity visualization modes. Descriptions, questions,

arguments, hypothesis, they determine choices and assemblies in the search for conceptual clarity. “This is the new paradigm in qualitative research related to education: the Methodology itself generates other types of problems” (EGAS. 2017, p.254).

This is the perspective that drove the photo-essays in the studies advised by Mirian Celeste Martins. At the end of 2015, three advisees worked with photo-essays. Expressive creations with care and aesthetic sensitivity revealed the poetics of each researcher. Three very different solutions showed that advisement was not a mark, but rather support and incentive so that individual choices could be revealed in all their potential. Therefore, as curator and advisor, a curatorial project was written for an exhibit in December 2016 at the Mackenzie Historical and Cultural Center. Conversation circles were organized and a catalogue expanded understanding.

The success and positive publicity surrounding the three studies led to a new curatorial project for December 2017, including four additional researchers and their photo-essays at the Museum of Image and Sound in Campinas.



Image 2. Mirian c. Martins. *Spaces and meetings: CHCMackenzie and MIS/Campinas*. Overview, consisting of pairs of images from Huminick, Areias, Nogueira and the author..

Two paths are opened in this communication from the two exhibits (Image 2). In the first one, the presentation of the seven exhibitors and in the second the curatorship: its concerns and decisive choices. Continuing...

### ***Captured Meetings: photo-essays in research***



Image 3: Mirian C. Martins. *Captured Meetings: photo-essays in research, overview*, consisting of five digital photographs from the author.

In the listed building, constructed in 1924, the Mackenzie History and Culture Center received the exhibit *Captured Meetings: photo-essays in research* in the period from December 1st, 2016 to February 2nd, 2017 (Image 3), highlighting eight photo-essays from each artist/researcher.

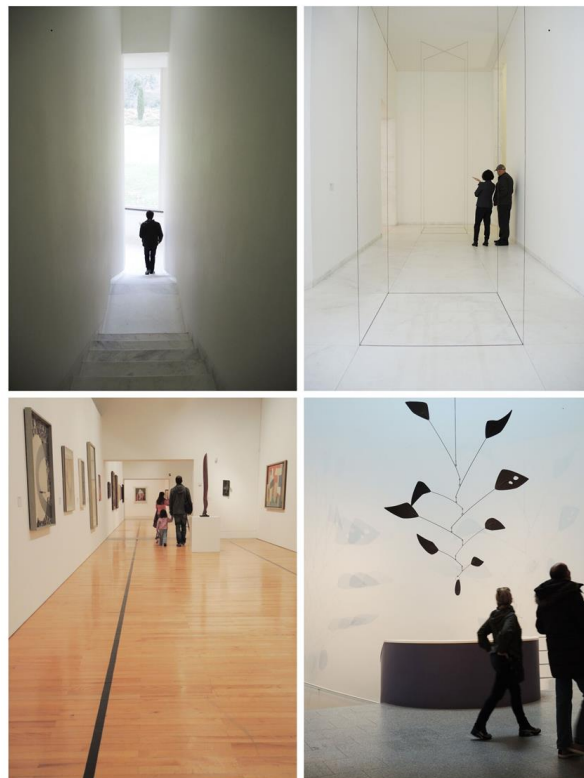


Image 4: Rita Demarchi. *Between the artist, tourist and pilgrim*. 2016. 83x60 cm. Photo-essay consisting of four digital photographs from the author taken at Foundation Serralves and Berardo Museum/Portugal.

The look of Rita Demarchi (2016), today a PhD professor of the Federal Institution of Education, Science and Technology in São Paulo, chasing the visitor, tourist or pilgrim in the exhibit spaces like a careful angel watching over paths and meetings, brings clearness, shadow and reflections, approaches and withdrawals, angles that place us closer, in a corner, far, from behind the showcase glass, in the “between”... A pilgrim, clever look, in creative and sensitive vigil. In the set of four or image pairs (Image 4), silver and gold and shaded by silence, almost solemn.



Image 5. Olga Egas. *Blues*, 2016. 71x50.5 CM. Photo-essay consisting of seven digital photographs of the author taken during the visit of students to the exhibit *Tears of São Pedro*/ Cultural Space of Correios/Juiz de Fora/MG.

Olga Egas (2017), PhD professor at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora/MG, brings color and movement (Image 5). It is action! Actions of bodies and hands in the experimentation of matter and space. Bodies that in the fog discover other ways to be and to live. You can feel the mist and freshness in the space that is made cinematic. Bodies dance in the roundness of the circle or do a twirling escape in the composition, read as lines in a text that ends in party and exclamation. The blues, yellows and reds from two very distant exhibits – Juiz de Fora and Granada. The compositions lead the eye to wander and understand processes consolidated in each photo-essay. Our look is driven by the look of the teacher who regards her students, and gives her another way of looking at herself.





Image 6. Vanessa Galvani. *Sagú*, 2016, 35.8x27.7 cm. Photo-essay consisting of eleven digital photographs by the author taken at the Ateliê Carambola/SPI.

Vanessa Galvani (2016), teacher of Children's Education, perceives and photographs (Image 6) the discoveries of the children with a look that reveals by composing each photo-essay with the care and softness of someone who helps us find the way for reading, between black and white, sepia and color. The teacher's actions can only be seen through the actions of the children, who do not pose, distracted in enchantment and searching, in curiosity and challenge. She says she learned to listen with her eyes, perceiving what she had failed to perceive before.

***Meetings in art spaces: photo-essays in research***



Image 7. Miran C. Martins. *Meetings in art spaces: photo-essays in research, overview*, consisting of five digital photographs from Amanda Areias.

The Palace of Tiles is an historical building with insufficient preservation, previously the home of a Count and headquarters for City Hall, and is currently occupied by the Museum of Image and Sound of Campinas, 100km from São Paulo and a university center. A large room on

the second floor (Image 7) enabled the possibility of expanding the photo-essays of the first exhibit performed with four other researchers.

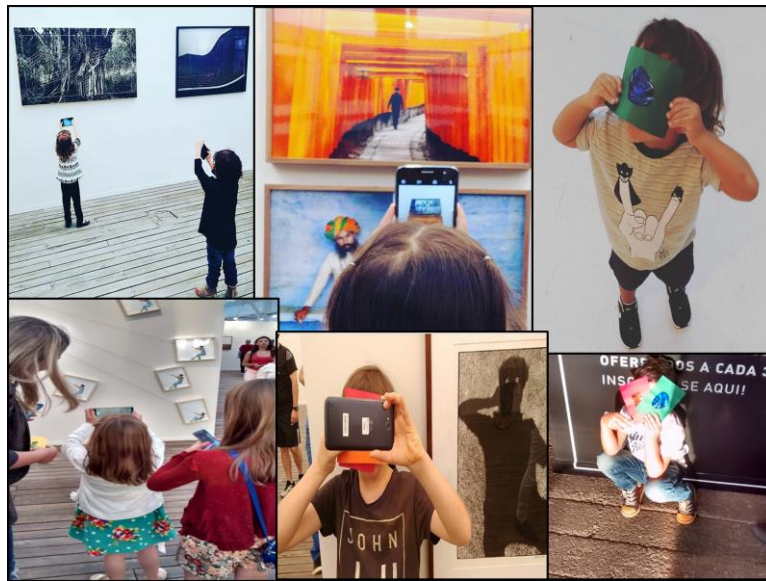


Image 8. Filippa Jorge. *#tracks*, 2017, 40x32 cm. Photo-essay consisting of the author's digital photographs, taken in the workshop *Ways of seeing*, SP\_photo/SP Brazil.

Dialoguing with Vanessa's photo-essays, the images produced by Filippa Jorge (2018) also reveal the curiosity and creation of children in visits to art exhibits (Image 8). Her look is one of someone who lives art as mediator in large art exhibits as well as a teacher. The focus is on the children's creation. Creation in the experience of photographing, in the experimentation of the body that explores, feels, listens, plays, facing something new. In the juxtaposed images, the children discover together, they draw attention from the others to what they discover. Interactions brought by the sayings retrieved in the written text and the photo-essays that populate her dissertation.





Image 9. Débora Rosa. *A math professor taught me*, 2017. 110x89cm. Photo-essay consisting of the author's digital photographs, during a workshop for visitors at the 32nd Bienal of São Paulo/Brazil.

Débora Rosa (2018) has been working as educator and supervisor in large exhibits and also at schools. The focus of her masters research was the mediation work of six educators at the 32nd Bienal of São Paulo, with focal groups, interviews and observation of visits and workshops (Image 9). Her photo-essays revealing processes constitute major exercises, both in the production of the photographs as well as in the selection for building photo-essays and in the reading of images revealing something that was clarified in the intense relationship between image, reflections and texts. Dialogues are revealed in her photo-essays, composing the dynamic life of the researched educators.



Image 10. Stella Aguilera. *Art with the body 1*, 2016, 65x120 cm. Photo-essay consisting of five digital photographs by the author taken in the classroom after visit to Rosa Barba's work at the 32nd Bienal of São Paulo/Brazil.

Stella Aguilera (2017) researched students. As teacher in the Education of Youngsters and Adults learning to read, Stella, who is not an Arts teacher, has the task of working with artistic languages, and this became her own research, involving the history of this segment and constant analysis and evaluation of her project provoking meetings with art. Even without personal aesthetic experiences or previous involvement with art, she presents her sensitive look towards harmonious compositions (Image 10) narrating the processes of these meetings, both of her students as well as her own, showing how transformative approaches qualified with art can be.



Image 11. Estela Bonci. *Artexperience*, 2017, 56x122 cm. Photo-essay consisting of overlaying the author's digital photographs, taken during the classes in the Pedagogy Course at the Mackenzie Presbyterian University/SP.

The meetings with art and culture of students in the Pedagogy course are the focus of Estela Bonci's thesis (2018). In her photo-essays (Image 11), movement is viewed through juxtaposition of images. The living dynamic appears in the precise selection of potential images. Here, as with everyone else, the selection indicates a sensitive and exploring look in the search for visual synthesis capable of contaminating the look of the watcher. Through the lost stroke, it realizes and makes us see the rescue of the forgotten freedom, the synchrony between hand, gesture and instrument, and the awakening of body/mind to expression through words and images.

In a different manner, Estela reworks on the photos, creating her own dynamic. Could we also call it a photo-essay? The question remains, but reveals the same concerns and intentions of all other photo-essays that make up the exhibition path: Photographs as expressive and intentional forms that argue, question, conceptualize ideas. The poetics of each of the seven visual a/r/tographers is manifested in the authorial, diverse and singular mode, driving doing and thinking that is also powered by the very artistic methodology, bringing to the surface

discoveries and reflections through other angles. Why leave them quiet and solitary in the pages of dissertations and theses?

### **The curatorship exercise**

What is the function of curatorship, her task and tools? How did the curator employ to create and assemble the exhibits, with potentials, unforeseen things and the difficulty of the spaces? How did the work in academic, teaching and research spaces impact the curatorship?

Before answering these questions, the first and more pressing one was questioning if the photo-essays, which had been made with enough resolution quality for printing, would also present a good graphic quality for an exhibit. What type of printing would be best to use?

This was a crucial point for the curatorship, but the support of photographers Nancely Huminhick and Amanda Areias was essential, and with the decision of sizes and supports and the map of the spaces, it was possible to think about the expography.

Eder Chiodetto (2013, p. 67) states: “Preparing the project of a montage is to imagine the construction of a parallel world. It is like foreseeing the landscape that will greet the visitor, taking him out of his daily universe and into another dimension”.

In both exhibits, Chiodetto's words gained meaning. Like him, I realized that previous planning must always be reviewed as a function of space and the work itself. In the first one, the curtains functioned as panels for the 24 photo-essays hanging in front, in addition to those that went straight on the wall, always stuck to the ceiling's structures, with well-directed spots. The exhibit also featured a wall text, a base with the catalogue to be handled and a corner for reading the academic work with a table and armchairs. In the second one, the previous planning didn't work, as there was discrepancy between the planned panels and the actual measurements. The precarious structure and restricted time caused some tension, but the result was satisfactory.

The curatorship work is not restricted to the exhibit itself. In addition to the produced catalogues (MARTINS, 2016, 2018), which also enabled taking the proposal beyond the exhibit space, it was important to create conversation circles. In the two exhibits they happened, offering a space to deepen the relationships between the academic work and artistic productions, in a more formal manner or even informally. In the first exhibit, there was also a space that we called a dynamic photo-essay, as people could tag the exhibit pictures in social networks, expanding them with their unique views.

Both the formal conversation circle, as well as the “free” visitors who attended the exhibits, including the dialogues initiated at the vernissages, and the generated publications are creations, dilations, expansions of the “between” that is configured

amidst the academic, educational and artistic spaces. And as it is art, it is freer, carrying the potential of the sensitive, the unexpected and the unforeseen. They are also ways of mediation with the audience!

What can be seen is that there was an expanded look regarding the artistic research methodologies and visual a/r/tography, involving both the academic perspective and the potential of the photo-essays beyond the pages of a dissertation or thesis. The quality of the photographs was also clear to the public, indicating they were worthy of being seen as they were.

Organizing these two exhibits brought to the curator challenges in learning and creative daring. Discoveries and surprises, as well as concerns and pressures, set the tone for this exercise. Curatorship also as concept and poetic uniting in the same production art, theory, research and *poiesis*.

### **Closing and opening doors**

By proposing this text at the 5th ABR&AR, we were able to traverse the time lived since December 2015, when the first exhibit was enrolled in the programming for the next year, until the closing of the second exhibit on February 2018.

It was possible to perceive how readers facing these photographs were invited to get closer to the processes experienced by the researchers and their research objects had the potency to provoke meanings and drive reflections to perceive the look of those who were photographing, seeking intentions. The look that is aimed at the composition of the photos is driven to perceive, beyond the visual narrative itself, the view of those who lived the experienced before others.

Seeing the photo-essays in large dimensions, isolated from the pages of their academic work, with all the care of a quality reproduction, were and are triggers for thinking about the potential and intrinsic relationships between academic and artistic production. In them, the methodologies support the search for other paths of analysis, reflection and dissemination of academic research at the crossroads between Arts, Culture and Education.

Leaving the task of advising and experiencing curatorship, leaving academic production to exhibit as an artist, broke barriers that frequently distance the university and academic production from the aesthetic and poetic breath that can feed research through other paths. Scientific and aesthetic rigor is represented in both spaces with their specificities and values witnessing that both research and the experience of creating the exhibits enable reflections

about some of the possible processes and spaces of these ways of thinking/doing research that can unfold onto faculty training.

The gaps between them were not surpassed, but dialogues provoked by the exhibits that keep seeding ideas through the catalogues, digging other spaces, remaining in the “between”, among educational/academic and artistic institutions, encouraging the look towards the images seeking essences and concepts, creating imagistic and non-verbal paths and discourses.

The exhibition of the photo-essays produced from the researches are opportunities for renewal, wonder and rethinking. For once more refining what was already so decanted into image and word, and still, if we remain alert, we recognize it as inexhaustible, showing that an exhibit is not just mere “repetition” of what is in academic works. In this new context, in a metalinguistic manner, it is the captured images now that take over the exhibition spaces and awaken dialogues with the visitors.

Under coordination of Mirian Celeste, advisor and curator, this series and its relationships also expand by forging relations with the photo-essays, unique creations but also neighbors, as one can see that all of it, researchers and exhibited images, belong to the same community.

Participating in the exhibits opened space for the artists and the curator. It was a striking manner of assuming the foundational bond with art itself. We remember that it was the love towards images and the work of art that led us to study art, and that by becoming teachers we distanced ourselves from artistic production. Working with the artistic methodologies of research and exhibiting the images are ways of recovering this identity, this essential space, it is a means, a road and at the same time, reinforcement of a purpose and aim that were never forgotten.

Both exhibits launched new personal challenges regarding the use of the images, in the transit between the educational, the academic, the artistic, the aesthetic, the poetic, the pause, the silence and simmer of conversation. Would the selected images be powerful enough to build coherent visual thoughts? Would they be instruments, tools capable of connecting, establishing depth of self and dialogue with the Other and with art? Which dialogues? The conversation circles showed that yes, it was possible for the audience to absorb the initial narratives and expand them with their own life references.

If for Chiodetto (2013) the role of museography is also to choreograph the space, we see also that it is to propose instruments, choreography and meetings for bodies, sensibilities, intellects and images in different spaces and, for these expositions, also encourage thoughts and



partnerships to dance with the seriousness and joy of those who dare to experience contemporary academics.



Fig. 12. Rita Demarchi. *Manufacturing*, 2018. Photo Discourse consisting of four digital photographs from Huminhick, Nogueira, Martins e Bonci.

## References

- Arnheim, R. (1985). *El pensamiento visual*. Buenos Aires: Eudeba.
- Arantes, S. A. (2017). *A (re)significação da experiência artística na Educação de Jovens e Adultos*. Dissertação (mestrado). Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie.
- Barone, T. & Eisner, e, (2012). *Arts based research*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Berger, J. (1974). *Modos de ver*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili.
- Bonci, E. (2018). *Formação cultural e artística de estudantes de Pedagogia: constelações potenciais*. Tese (doutorado). Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie.
- Chiodetto, E. (2013). *Curadoria em fotografia: da pesquisa à exposição*. São Paulo : Prata Design.
- Demarchi, R. *Ver aquele que vê: um olhar poético sobre os visitantes em museus e exposições de arte*. Tese (doutorado). Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie. [http://up.mackenzie.br/fileadmin/ARQUIVOS/PUBLIC/user\\_upload/Rita\\_de\\_Cassia\\_Demarchi.pdf](http://up.mackenzie.br/fileadmin/ARQUIVOS/PUBLIC/user_upload/Rita_de_Cassia_Demarchi.pdf)
- Eisner, E. (1998). *El ojo ilustrado: Indagación cualitativa y mejora de la práctica educativa*. Barcelona: Paidós Educador.
- Egas, O. (2017). *Metodologias Artísticas de Pesquisa em Educação e Deslocamentos na Formação Docente: a fotografia como construção do pensamento visual*. Tese (doutorado). Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie. <http://tede.mackenzie.br/jspui/handle/tede/3264>
- Galvani, V. (2016). *Uma nova lente para o professor: potencialidade da fotografia como dispositivo de pesquisa para ações pedagógicas*. Dissertação (mestrado). Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie. <http://tede.mackenzie.br/jspui/handle/tede/2919>
- Irwin, R. (2008). *A/r/tografia: uma mestiçagem metonímica*. In A.M. Barbosa & L.Amaral (Eds.) *Interritorialidade: mídias. Contextos e educação*. (pp. 87-104). São Paulo: SESCSP.
- Irwin, R. & Dias, B. (Eds.). (2013). *Pesquisa Educacional Baseada em Arte: A/r/tografia*. Santa Maria: Ed. UFSM.
- Jorge, M. F. (2018). *Criança, espaço expositivo e arte contemporânea: antropofagia de aprendizagens*. Dissertação (mestrado). Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie.
- Langer, S. K. (1980). *Sentimento e Forma*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.
- MARTINS, M.C. (Eds). (2016). *Encontros flagrados: foto-ensaios em pesquisas*. São Paulo: Uva Limão.
- MARTINS, M.C. (Eds). (2018). *Encontros em espaços de arte: foto-ensaios em pesquisas*. São Paulo: Uva Limão.

- Roldán, J. & Viadel, R.M. (2012). *Metodologías Artísticas de Investigación em Educación*. Málaga: Aljibe.
- Silva, D.R. (2018). *Diálogos Silenciosos: ação mediadora e o desvelar de referências teóricas e vividas*. Dissertação (mestrado). Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie.
- Viadel, R.M. & Roldán, J. (2017). *Ideas Visuales. Investigación Basada em arte e Investigación Artística*. Visual Ides. Arts Based Research and Artistic Research. Granada: Universidad de Granada.