

## I

You never quite know what Ilê Sartuzi has in his pocket, let alone in his mind. For an artist known for his sleight of hand, creation (and use) of replicas, and particular way of studying and navigating the web of protocols and theatrical mechanism of institutions, the encounter between Sartuzi's practice and the story of Richard Serra's *Equal-Parallel: Guernica-Bengasi* disappearance+substitution seems like a match made in heaven. When the subject is the relation between individual and institution, Sartuzi has developed the skill of turning his practice into a grain of sand in the institutional engine, small enough to get by unnoticed, yet disruptive enough to force the mechanism to reveal itself. As thoroughly explored by Merleau-Ponty's, all perception is contextual.

The work of Richard Serra is unquestionably a testament to the complexity of perceptual encounter. In this scenario, Sartuzi offers us various extensions of the problem beyond phenomenology alone. Even if a replica can become the original by having the artist's will and blessing, perception remains irreversibly bound to the whole opera of power at play, institutional authority and the production of "aura". Nevertheless, what solidifies the gambling proverb "the house always wins" is that, even when there's an event that upsets an organization such as a big museum, it's the sudden impression of finitude of an object that grants its new added value, so the institution eventually profits from it. For example, part of the experience of going to St Bavo's Cathedral to see *Ghent's altarpiece* is witnessing the apparatus that protects "the world's most stolen art piece", famously taken by both Napoleon and the Nazis. Nowadays the amazing work stands behind a state-of-the-art bulletproof glass worth 5 million euros, operating not only as a beautifully engineered high-security protective translucent glass case, but also as part of the visual and contextual infrastructure that shapes perception.

## II

David Copperfield's first tricks/illusions, when he was the youngest person ever admitted to the Society of American Magicians, involved a coin and a board. A coin is a solid metal object and a board is a plain. A metal piece, be it a coin or a sculpture work, by the nature of its material condition, doesn't bend, crumple or vanish by human force alone. The other element, the plain, is the X-Y axis, or floorplan, of any given scale. It is only natural that, as ambitions grow, the magician (or artist, or architect) will want to test out the results of adding scale to the conception of something.

Testing and mastering a model allows for new possibilities. In the short video piece *SERRINHA* (2026), Ilê Sartuzi presents us with a paper model of *Equal-Parallel: Guernica-Bengasi* and the artist himself standing beside it. One gets the impression that a crime scene reconstruction is about to be suggested – an implosion? A hidden tunnel? As an essay and demonstration of making something disappear, Sartuzi takes the model qualities for what they allow and folds up the paper sculpture into his pocket, proposing an impossible and somehow silly solution to the disappearance of the insanely heavy 38 tons of corten steel. In his later self-exposing era that would not have happened if there wasn't a train of lawsuits following various accidents, David Copperfield was once asked how he was certain that the massive rotating turntable platform that changed the viewer's perspective on the Statue of Liberty would not be felt or even suspected – making them believe the statue had actually vanished – and the answer was: loud music and high emotions. Emotions cast a big shadow on perception.

### III

Strategies to make a *Richard Serra disappear* (2026), is a true to size replica of *Equal-Parallel: Guernica-Bengasi* that the Brazilian artist presents on the ground floor. Technically, for something to be considered a replica and not a model, the basis it's that scale matches. A replica allows for a relation to the original without the constraints of its singularity. While a replica aims to be close – and at times even pays homage – to the original, a counterfeit is made with the malicious intent to deceive. Apart from artworks, certain objects cannot be freely replicated. Prop money must be one sided.

Toy guns, under US federal law, must have a blazing orange tip (at least 6 mm) or be entirely brightly colored to distinguish them from real weapons. Because emotion is part of the context that informs perception, fear, for example, that comes with the perception of danger, makes a replica gun very close in practice to a real gun. So a replica as mediator between viewer and “true experience” is subject to subjective rules. For those of us who take pleasure in lingering at the peripheries of a plot, there is something almost comical in picturing the Spanish police carrying out a search warrant for four enormous blocks of steel.

The policemen looking for art, having received only a physical description of the missing object, if faced with the replica that would later take its place, could quite reasonably point to it and say: “Here it is!” and enjoy the experience of the aura of a massive, magnetic work of art. The artist, as mediator between his replica – with no malicious intent towards the one that is at Reina Sofia – and the audience, substitutes material fidelity with new layers of information that allow for many entry points towards an experience of context as content and form as phantom.

### IV

A blocked room inevitably becomes the most desired room. Restriction produces attraction and scarcity generates value. When Ilê Sartuzi dissects a circuit and plots a route through it, whether or not a live performance ultimately takes place, the effects tend to radiate outward. Reactions may range from a renewed awareness of space and its contents, to outrage at the newly discovered fragility of a system once presumed stable, to the sudden realization that even a grain of sand can possess agency inside an engine.

There is also the secondary spectacle and watching others react. It was only via a kind stranger's email that Sartuzi got familiar with the fact that a while after he performed the coin trick at the British Museum, replicas of his replica began circulating as souvenirs. The power in the tutorial, in the “how-to,” is not to provide recipes for repetition, but to simply demonstrate a stated possibility. And when the fool does something the rest of us wouldn't even care to evaluate the consequences, what we get is a revealed mechanism as a byproduct of sheer curiosity.