

ADRIANO COSTA

Selected Press

ArtReview

Adriano Costa Between the High and the Low



Adriano Costa, *ax-d. us. t.*, 2024 (installation view, Emalin, The Clerk's House, London). Photo: Stephen James. Courtesy the artist and Emalin, London

Costa's show at Emalin's new space in London enlivens the critical tension between his scavenger sensibility and references to more refined modernist and minimalist forms

Adriano Costa struggles to take off his pyjamas to a soundtrack of nonsensical chants and grunts, pausing to flex, twerk, stand on one leg and imitate a rabbit. Then he gets on his knees amid a pile of Tesco shopping bags, chewing them, stuffing them in his pants, waving one angrily at the camera, putting another over his head. Ever-present behind him is a version of Eero Aarnio's spherical white 'Ball Chair', a slick late-modernist design. Clean and still among the commotion, it becomes the straight man in a strange double act.

This film, *The way my grandma taught me how to kill a chicken (the future)* (2024), is projected in the first room of Emalin's new space, the eighteenth-century Clerk's House in East London. Staged in Costa's messy studio, it offers one image of his practice: in a passionate frenzy, he sifts through discarded materials – towelling rags,



Adriano Costa, *ax-d. us. t.*, 2024 (installation view, Emalin, The Clerk's House, London). Photo: Stephen James. Courtesy the artist and Emalin, London

clay offcuts, a single black feather – rearranging and transforming them in ways that affirm their value and stress their expressive potential. For one series, displayed across the show, he salvaged little moulds that were scrapped at a foundry and cast them in bronze, turning ephemeral tools into precious bas-reliefs. And his carefully crafted installations are charged by the critical tension between his scavenger sensibility and references to more refined modernist and minimalist forms: between the pyjama dance and the stylish white chair.

By the front window is a large white plinth modelled, we are told by the gallery text, after the curving elevation of Oscar Niemeyer's iconic *Edifício Copan*, one of Brazil's largest residential buildings, in São Paulo, the artist's hometown. On the plinth's top sit dozens of small *Casas* (2023–24), quirky architectural mockups made from reworked household rubbish: blocks of wood and scraps of sandpaper, a takeaway box and a Heineken keg, a jerrycan and a few wilting flowers. The grand modernist ordering of social life represented by Niemeyer's building is confronted with the chaos it cannot suppress. Here the architectural icon becomes a mere plinth and the shantytown an assortment of delicate sculptures.

On the floor in a corner upstairs is *Chorus* (2024). Three rectangular pieces of particle board, branded 'Eucafloor', are propped upright by a swarm of wedges and twists of clay cast in bronze and buffed gold. Each plank is placed at a sharp angle to the next and tilts towards the lefthand wall. In this precarious formation and animated by the florid fixings, the panels appear to waddle like a Disney candlestick up the slanted floor.

Carl Andre's grids of metal tiles – which Costa has referenced more explicitly in previous works – reject the pretensions of 'high' culture, of pedestals and decoration. Costa also incorporates flooring as an archetypal 'low' object, swapping crisp metal for battered particle board, but with strikingly different results. Andre admired mechanical production and disdained traditional cultural values, meaning and metaphor, asserting that 'there are no ideas under those plates, those are just metal plates'. In Costa's art, matter does seem to think, animated by some mysterious vitality, breaking free from the imperatives of human industry – the grid Andre so loved. The late minimalist created floor sculptures you can walk over; Costa makes the floor walk.

Scattered with such lively things, the wonky domestic interiors of *The Clerk's House* feel haunted. A bent sawblade sticks out of a rough bronze mount, a black pot lies smashed by the fireplace. These discarded objects – the marginalised of the material world – seek their revenge.

ax-d. us. t at Emalin, The Clerk's House, London, through 13 July

– Michael Kurtz

The best exhibitions this week in London, from Shanti Panchal to Jodie Carey (May 30 to June 6)

We pick the best art shows to enjoy this week



ADRIANO COSTA, FRANGO ASSADO (YOU WILL ALWAYS BE MY BABY I WON'T TELL ANYONE), 2024
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND EMALIN, LONDON. PHOTO BY STEPHEN JAMES

Brazilian artist Adriano Costa uses everyday materials to create his sculpture, installation and painting works. His minimalist and modernist work is here presented in – and draws from – the historical Clerk's House in Shoreditch High Street.

Emalin, to July 13; emalin.co.uk

– Elizabeth Gregory



London Gallery Weekend 2024: our critics pick their top shows

As 130 galleries take part in this year's fourth edition of the event, Ben Luke and Louisa Buck roundup some of their exhibition highlights, from John Baldessari to Michaël Borremans, Nan Goldin to BLCKGEEZER

Not surprisingly for what is the largest event of its kind in the world, London Gallery Weekend offers an eye-watering variety of work in all media in spaces ranging from the gritty to the glitzy.

But it's a reflection of our turbulent, troubled times that there is a noticeably more sombre critical spirit to much of what is on show, whether Nan Goldin's searing elegy to her late sister in Gagolian's pop-up in a former Welsh chapel; Jacqueline de Jong's paintings exploring the human cost of the conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine at Pippy Houldsworth or Harminder Judge's ritualistic funereal Ghost Dance at both Sunday Painter and Matts Galleries.

This year's headline performance comes from the radical Turkish Feminist artist Nil Yalter, the winner of a lifetime achievement Golden Lion at this year's Venice Biennale and known for her work relating to immigration and women's experience, while there's also an undertow to John Akomfrah's specially commissioned LGW banners, which carry over diasporic themes and images from his British pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

But as our roundup of the best shows in central, south, east and west London confirms, seriousness comes in many and various forms...

Clerk's House: Adriano Costa; ax-d. us. t. Emalin, until 13 July

Over at Emalin's other gallery in the historic Clerk's House in the cemetery grounds of St Leonard's Church in Spitalfields, the Brazilian artist Adriano Costa blurs boundaries between trash and treasure, and the precious and the throwaway by casting bronze sculpture from discarded moulds retrieved from his foundry in Sao Paulo.

– Ben Luke and Louisa Buck

FRIEZE

What to See Across the UK This May

From Dean Sameshima's vulnerable silhouettes to Danica Lundy's carnal paintings of the female body, here's what not to miss

Adriano Costa | Emalin, London | 12 April – 13 July



Adriano Costa, *Uma montanha fodendo sua própria metade* (A mountain fucking its own counterpart), 2024, bronze, 27 × 28 × 24 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Emalin, London; photograph: Stephen James

Adriano Costa's exhibition 'ax-d. us. t' is littered with perishable goods. The front room at Emalin is taken up by *Casas* (2023–24), a series of assemblages made from various detritus – a beer keg, a tulip and a square of sandpaper, among other things – brought together to form clusters of vaguely architectural forms. Together, they give the impression of a fragile cityscape.

One might be tempted to describe these materials as found objects, but Costa wouldn't; he has said that the idea erroneously implies an essential difference between everyday ephemera and the special items we choose to designate as art. The works on show here are displayed according to this principle of non-hierarchy. Bronze sculptures like *Uma montanha fodendo sua própria metade* (A mountain fucking its own counterpart) (2024) sit plainly on the floor: after all, why elevate the historically esteemed medium of sculpture? *Sampa* (2024), a torn-apart and bolted-back-together coffee cup that sits on a window-level surface with the *Casas*, is equally worthy of reverence. In the grand scheme of time, all objects will turn to dust eventually. – *Phin Jennings*

FRIEZE

Must-See: Adriano Costa Worships Non-Hierarchy

In a new show at Emalin, London, the artist invites viewers to reassess their own preconceptions about what constitutes art



Adriano Costa, 'ax-d. us. t', 2024, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and Emalin, London; photograph: Stephen James

This review is part of a new series of Must-See shows, in which a writer delivers a snapshot into a current exhibition. Adriano Costa's exhibition 'ax-d. us. t' is littered with perishable goods. The front room at Emalin is taken up by Casas (2023–24), a series of assemblages made from various detritus – a beer keg, a tulip and a square of sandpaper, among other things – brought together to form clusters of vaguely architectural forms. Together, they give the impression of a fragile cityscape. One might be tempted to describe these materials as found objects, but Costa wouldn't; he has said that the idea erroneously implies an essential difference between everyday ephemera and the special items we choose to designate as art. The works on show here are displayed according to this principle of non-hierarchy. Bronze sculptures like *Uma montanha fodendo sua própria metade* (A mountain fucking its own counterpart) (2024) sit plainly on the floor: after all, why elevate the historically esteemed medium of sculpture? *Sampa* (2024), a torn-apart and bolted-back-together coffee cup that sits on a window-level surface with the Casas, is equally worthy of reverence. In the grand scheme of time, all objects will turn to dust eventually.



Adriano Costa, *Uma montanha fodendo sua própria metade* (A mountain fucking its own counterpart), 2024, bronze, 27 × 28 × 24 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Emalin, London; photograph: Stephen James

Costa's philosophy is anything but nihilistic. It's not that nothing matters; in fact, it's precisely the opposite: everything matters, nothing is more valuable or significant than anything else. Materials that might usually be ignored are placed at the centre, while traditional sculptures play second fiddle. Like someone listening to a conversation in a language that is not their own, enjoying the interaction simply for its uniquely composed phonetics, Costa has found his own uninhibited way to appreciate the world and its contents. Adriano Costa's 'ax-d. us. t' is on view at Emalin, London, until 13 July

– Phinn Jennings

The Ultimate London Gallery Weekend Itinerary

London Gallery Weekend is almost here, and Phin Jennings has been busy crafting the perfect itinerary for the weekend. With over thirty recommendations, Phin has compiled suggestions from the city's most clued-in gallerists and artists, alongside his own, on how to do London Gallery Weekend just right. Start making notes!

London's sprawling gallery landscape can be a stressful place. With close to 150 participating galleries and 100 events taking place, navigating the fourth annual London Gallery Weekend alone might be a dizzying prospect. Luckily, I have compiled intelligence from the city's most clued-in gallerists and artists, alongside a few of my own recommendations, to bring you an itinerary containing exhibitions, events and experiences, from mega galleries to museum gardens to enjoy over the weekend.

SUNDAY, 2ND JUNE

The final stop of our odyssey is Shoreditch. First, a stop-off at Haroun's gallery, Hales, to see more work by Carole Gibbons, who joined their roster earlier this year. Then to The Clerk's House, Emalin's new space that once served as a lookout post to spot body snatchers in the neighbouring St Leonard's churchyard. At 4pm, experimental music and poetry duo [something's happening] will perform in response to the current exhibition, Adriano Costa's 'ax-d. us. t'.

When I asked Adriano for a local recommendation to end the weekend, he suggested simply looking at the sky. It wasn't quite what I expected but, after 48 hours of gallery-hopping, it might be just the moment of peace and reflection that you need. Find a quiet spot in the churchyard, stretch out and take in the nothingness above you. Congratulations, you did London Gallery Weekend right.

Written by Phin Jennings



Installation view, Adriano Costa, 'ax-d. us. t', The Clerk's House, 2024. Courtesy of the artist and Emalin, London. Photo by Stephen James.

ArtReview

Adriano Costa talks to Ross Simonini



Adriano Costa, from AR May 2018 Simonini Adriano Costa

Over 24 hours, Adriano Costa and I exchanged a flurry of emails. Back and forth, we volleyed with the kind of freshness that is usually absent in correspondence interviews. Throughout the day, I responded on my phone, wherever I happened to be: doctor's office, market, car, studio. The process seemed appropriate, since Costa's art

is an accumulation of the moments of his life: an expanding catalogue of his ever-wandering attention.

Costa seeks observational freedom. He absorbs the forms of his world – tiles, bottles, slabs, skis, umbrellas – sometimes integrating them into his work, sometimes

making new work informed by their humble energy. Nevertheless, he rejects the notion of 'found' materials, seeing all things, from bronze to plastic, as equal.

Primarily a sculptor, he also brings his material sensitivity to painting, drawing, collage and writing, all of which fill his vast, meticulous installations. Much of Costa's work is in the act of arranging. A wall of bricks lays flat on the floor; rugs hang from the ceiling; a constellation of detritus crawls across the corner of a room. His environments suggest an idiosyncratic, anarchic culture of his own making, where he can do whatever he wants. He is both careful and sloppy, minimal and busy, highly formalist and crassly lowbrow. Often, he slips subversive humour into his gestures. He engraves the phrase 'I see a penis' into a chunk of marble. He casts ratty doormats in gold and stick-figures in bronze.

Based in São Paulo – where he was born in 1975, and where he studied – Costa has the optic wit and haptic awareness that has come to define much of contemporary Latin American art. As we corresponded, Costa was putting the finishing touches to his show *wetANDsomeOLDstuffVANDALIZEDby- THEartist* at the Kölnischer Kunstverein. Between our exchanges, he posted to Instagram pop-cultural images, street scenes from Berlin (where he was staying) and work underway for the show: wild collages and permutations of colourful tiles, accompanied by poetic comments and titles. (From a recent post: 'Have Another Little Piece Of My Heart N.O.W. You Know You Got It If It Makes You Feel Good – You Wanna Piss On Me, BritNy.')

Costa's writing often makes its way into his work via philosophical declarations and cynical musings. Over email, however, his communication felt intimate and open, emotional and self-effacing, but always with a cryptic overtone. His blazingly typed, second-language English required that I reread and decode whatever he had just sent my way, jarring me out of my mindless email routine and into engagement. 'Man,' he wrote at the end of our rally, 'I go buy some bread is 7:10 Rewe [his local Berlin supermarket] is open. Speak later... Where are you?'

ROSS SIMONINI I've heard you use the term 'pre-sculptoric' to describe what you do. What does that mean?

ADRIANO COSTA This pre-sculptoric thing comes from a peculiar moment from my work, around my first series of 'carpets' [Tapetes, 2009–12, a collection of fabrics Costa arranged on the floor], when I was living a very delicate period of my life. I was just getting out of my first crack crisis (yes, I was addicted to crack) without a single penny and I suddenly started – I don't know why, exactly – paying attention to the organisation of clothes, pieces of paper, etc. It was extremely beautiful.

I still think the spiritual way is THE WAY, the only way for changing something deeply, including the arts

And so: in a very meditational, serious, reverential way, I spent every single morning from 2013, I guess, making geometrical compositions with all sorts of things I found in my house, my friend's house and my parents' house. It became a kind of delicious obsession. Every day, even if I tried really hard, it was absolutely impossible to repeat the same forms and dynamics. I went deep into the peculiar geometry of Brazilian artists from the late 1960s and 70s, when art was really close to meditation or therapy. When I look to them, I cry. It is so sophisticated, human, honest. C'mon, Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica are still playing with our heads like kids, making fun. Haha. Love them.

So, my carpets were completely free, without anything to make them fixed. That was the reason I called them pre-sculptoric. Antispeculative works, stillborn works. Some collectors bought them. My position was and still is the same: do what you want. They live without me. Hahaha.

RS Why did you lose interest in meditation and therapy?

AC I still think the spiritual way is THE WAY, the only way for changing something deeply, including the arts – I just don't know how to do it and I am sure the way all those shows, big shows, have been doing it, calling it 'shamanism', is pure, outrageous bullshit. At least they are trying, perhaps. We are humans. We do bad things. Me, myself: I go for sculptures and paintings and drawings and videos. No messing with the Gods for now. Too many problems here in my kitchen. So many predators.



wetANDsomeOLDstuffVANDALIZEDbyTHEartist, 2018 (installation view). Photo: Simon Vogel. Courtesy the artist and Kölischer Kunstverein

RS What 'big shows' are you referring to?

AC All the should see shows from the last four or five years have one or two works or a 'segment' dedicated to spirituality in Europe, in Brazil. In my country, it is a shame because the curators install indigenous houses inside of museums and galleries, but actually did not contribute or try to make something against the genocide – physical and cultural – that the indigenous communities are victims of. Seriously, they will disappear SOON, REALLY SOON.

It's terrible. Once I was in a group show at the Modern Institute in Glasgow and the work was hundreds of white T-shirts printed with the word 'ayahuasca', 'cause I was so mad with the exploitation of ayahuasca tea by white middle-class people. This was in 2014. After this, someone [Noah Baumbach] made a movie [While We're Young, 2014] of Naomi Watts and Ben Stiller drinking the tea in Williamsburg in a pretentious and stupid hipster New Yorker commune. Ha ha. In 2017 there were [ceremonial ayahuasca environments] at the Venice Biennale. I am

not judging any artist or curator. I'm just asking why the magic, the hallucination, the exoticism is so interesting, but it's not permitted to talk about and count how many indigenous people (the owners of the Amazon forest where the plant, the tea grows) were killed today. Closing our eyes to the pile of bodies is very easy. Again: we are humans, we do wrong, but c'mon, leave the forest, leave the indigenous alone.

RS How did crack affect your work while you were using it?

AC Crack, like all other drugs (as I am addicted to all of them), doesn't have any direct effect on my work. As I do respect my profession, I don't mix the things. When I am high I prefer to not even look to my babies [meaning his art]. They don't deserve my evils.

RS Do you find that your work has changed significantly while being in different places, such as Berlin or Brazil?

AC I love working in different places. Confronting myself with different realities, going to shops, always buying the wrong kind of glue 'cause you don't understand Flemish. It is really nice to not have a house. I don't have one. Just the planet.

RS What function does Instagram have for you as an artist? You post a lot of work. Are there certain pieces you wouldn't post?

AC I post everything on Instagram. Absolutely everything. I always have to hear friends saying, hey, keep your works secret blah blah blah. I don't give a fucking shit. This is about sharing. What's the point of having diamonds if you can't go to a gay club, take MDMA and shine with them?

RS Do you think much about the perception of you as an artist?

AC Ross, people are mean, 'specially the close ones. Hope it is different with you. I was a DJ and 'owner' of a venue in São Paulo called Torre do Dr Zero. An amazing, surreal, barbaric place. Really wild. All Thursday, every week, for 12 years, we had an amount of cocaine that even Miami cannot imagine. It was beautiful. I'd guess 75 percent

of the good artists from Brazil were there. We were all friends. I went to art school [1998]. I quit. I almost died. As soon as I started working properly, selling, living just with art, being the first and only South American punk working with Sadie Coles, for instance, I had lost almost all my former lovely friends. Brazilians are jealous. They have so many fears. They don't like people like me 'cause I am openly mean. I might be aggressive. They prefer working behind curtains, making gossip, spreading all the middle-class cowardice shit behind your back. Come in front of me and talk. Be a real person. I am very patient. Seriously, I am up to hear it. As a typical Gemini, you can convince me. But you can make me just fucking hate you if you bitch me. Man, it is a tough life.

RS Would you rather people pay attention to your objects than the idea of you as the artist?

AC An idea is an object.

RS After a show, do you destroy your work? Do you keep it? Do you recycle it into new work?

AC No, I have hojerizah [Costa translates this as 'more than scared'] of destroying my stuff. Losing it. It feels like failure. I am obsessed with keeping pieces of drawings and paintings, small parts of metal, wire. Sometimes I find them again four years later and they change my life. Such a feeling. Very special. My studio in São Paulo is one of my favourite places in the world. It is magic there. But I hate studio visits.

RS Why is that?

AC In general, curators, collectors, 'visitors' come to my place to see themselves. Or something that fits in their bags or curatorial projects, as they call them. A Frenchwoman, for instance, came to my place 'cause she was – I guess – curating a biennale somewhere. She was late, almost missing her flight. I invited her to leave 'cause her face was scary. She broke my vibe. I'm also horrible when I visit other people houses.

RS Why do you resist terms like 'found' and 'trash' when talking about your work? I think of a piece like Osso e Ovo [2015], a wall installation of string, cord, scraps – how



Novos Contemporâneos / New Contemporaries – tea time, 2015, print on fabric, dimensions variable. Photo: Max Slaven. Courtesy the artist and Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, New York & Brussels

an artist. We don't need to be a good person. We can be boring. But it is a show. Never forget we do shows. Ha ha! I just love it.

RS Do you have a style? Or do you reject that?

AC I don't have any problem with style. I have style. Mine is free. I suffer and fight a lot, but I work essentially with freedom. That is my base.

RS When did you stop thinking about objects as temporary and start thinking of them as heavy and permanent?

AC Well, I guess it was a very natural progression and, obviously, it changed when I had the money to pay someone to cast something in bronze. Or to cut wood in a good way. I am not a tool guy. I am very stupid with things like money (people love that), sex (people love that), drugs (people love that), ha ha, and tools. Last month I bought a drill – that machine that makes lots o' things! – and I am enchanted by it, 'cause I hate asking another person to make things for me. (It is a very difficult move to find a partner, in all senses. And there is an important thing: I like touching my stuff. Even the temperature of concrete, steel, bronze or a pair of Nike sneakers turns me on. I am gay cliché.) Perhaps this progression is related to the fact I just crossed the border. [Costa turned forty in 2015.] I am living the second half of my life. From here to death.

RS Has ageing affected the artmaking impulse for you?

AC I think everything affects me. It is a jelly of just everything getting dense with the everything on the top of it. You plus you. I'm making a show next week in London in a gallery in a basement of a pub in Haggerston, East London [Lungley Gallery]. I never met the guy and probably I won't do so very soon. He invited me from Facebook, saying he likes my stuff. The name of the show is THIS ME ME ME IS US. I think it gives you an answer. It is so delicate 'cause the artist has to deal not just with their own evils but the viewers' also. That is pure beauty. You affect me. Art breaks barriers. It doesn't look like it sometimes, but c'mon, last year during the Documenta opening week in Athens, I was doing Pane Per Poveri, a project with Supportico Lopez's crew from Berlin, and we were dancing with refugee people, having fun, connected with the city, the city Gods. This me me me is us.

RS When do you consider something to be finished?

AC The work is never finished. Even when it's in your house or the Guggenheim, it is not finished. When it's good, it's on an endless journey. Imagine an Ancient Greek pot. Is it finished? No.

Ross Simonini is an artist and writer living in New York and California

else would you talk about these materials?

AC I don't use found materials. As soon as they are part of a sculpture, painting, video, etc, they are another thing. If you take a look to my production over the last four years, the most significant parts are constructed, or at least, transformed. My production changes a lot and I don't really want to repeat myself as I am alive, so my work is supposed to be the same. I don't do objets trouvés.

I do sculptures in bronze, fabric, concrete, paintings, and I don't care about the difference between an oil painting or a piece of fabric my poodle used to put in my schoolbag when I was going to college in São Paulo. They are all magic.

RS Why don't you want to repeat yourself?

AC Artists have a duty. I feel myself so blessed for being

TERREMOTO

We Chose Life . What Now, Georg? Tshirts ? ?: Adriano Costa at Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brazil



Vista de instalación, Adriano Costa, We Chose Life . What Now, Georg? Tshirts ? en Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo. Imagen cortesía de Mendes Wood DM

To define Adriano Costa's (São Paulo, 1975) artistic practice as "free" is as much an understatement as a trap. *We Chose Life . What Now, Georg? Tshirts ?*, currently on display at Mendes Wood DM in São Paulo, attests to this fact, crowning a decade of production whose essence lies in an intimate conversation between the artist and his objects—found, borrowed, appropriated from the most diverse sources and origins. Taking on the main hall and the back room of the gallery, Costa exhibits close to thirty new pieces in which he combines and juxtaposes objects in ingenious compositions, including carpets, shower curtains, bicycle wheels, and an array of personal and household accessories.

The artist opts for an installation arrangement of his works, lending a studio atmosphere to the sterility of the white cube. *Todos são ele* (2018), hung on the wall of the main hall, reads like an introduction (or an epilogue?) to the show: Adriano's objects are all there, entwined, sagaciously entangled in a schizophrenic visual fabric of personal and political narratives. With sarcasm and wittiness, the artist sculpts the contradictions and complexity of the contemporary political plot in Brazil and beyond. In the Brazil of 2018, the masculine subject of identity not revealed in the title of this work, suggests a regime of alterity surrounded by fear and insecurity. "Ele", "He", the other, the one we do not know for what reason he is who he is, but for whom we feed incomprehensible fear.

On a sunny Sunday afternoon following the show's opening, thousands of protesters have



Adriano Costa, *Baile De Favela*, 2018. Madera. 100 × 103 × 30 cm. Imagen cortesía de Mendes Wood DM

gathered on Avenida Paulista, the city's main road—just blocks away from the gallery—to demand a military intervention to reclaim the executive branch. Since Dilma Rousseff's impeachment in 2016, Brazil has seen mounting political upheaval that even the edgiest of historians would have a hard time describing. Far from the old dichotomies between left and right, the ongoing political conflict in the country encompasses an extensive and diverse range of issues, with conservative forces weaving a horizon of hopelessness and ambiguity over the near future. Between prayer circles and impassioned renditions of the national anthem, the protesters on Paulista Avenue that Sunday gathered at the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP in Portuguese) to promote the political campaign of Jair Bolsonaro.

The senator—who is currently at the top of some of the polls for this year's presidential elections—is a synthesis of reactionary political forces, known as much for his political positions of fascist colors as his insensitive public statements regarding topics such as racism, homophobia, and the indigenous situation in Brazil.

In the exhibition text, Costa writes: "I see this moment, where it seems that we are going back 50 years, full of rules, people wanting a 'cure for gays' or a dictatorship, extremists openly screaming in the street at minorities... people like me: an artist and a fag... the title of the exhibition draws us all to a big AND NOW WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING." Costa attributes the title of the exhibition to the famous T-shirt worn by English pop icon George Michael in the 80s, with the phrase "CHOOSE LIFE" printed on it. Marcelo C. (2018), gives form to the dystopia suggested by the artist: it is an (inactive) LSD tab in which the figure of Joseph Beuys appears next to the inscription "The revolution siamo noi: cats n dogs from Facebook!" In a historical moment in which political debate is limited to social networks, the artist puts his finger on the wound by pointing precisely to the idiosyncrasies of contemporary habits. Today in Brazil, in the context of Michel Temer's controversial presidency, there is extensive conversation and organizing in the virtual sphere, but we still haven't figured out how to develop and realize efforts to move off Facebook and into the streets.



Adriano Costa, Baile De Favela, 2018. Madera. 100 × 103 × 30 cm. Imagen cortesía de Mendes Wood DM

Costa's new body of work takes to the extreme a sculptural practice that encompasses error and chance, resulting in a visual schizophrenia that seems to update the old problem of the idea of a "Brazilian image." [1] In 2017, dozens of questionable celebrations were held around the 50th birthday of Tropicalismo, the cultural movement inaugurated by Tropicália, the seminal work by Hélio Oiticica, a Brazilian artist who now occupies an unavoidable place in the most diverse narratives of 20th century Western art history. In Tropicália, Oiticica reconstructed an environment composed of plywood, cheap fabrics, sand, and tropical plants to evoke the precariousness of the vernacular architecture of Rio de Janeiro favelas. In 1967, the work was presented for the first time in the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro. Oiticica sought, therefore, the audacious objectification of the synthesis of a "Brazilian imaginary," highlighting the crisis of national identity that has affected the country since its colonial days, perpetuated in contemporary times. In the main hall, Costa's sculptural installation composes an environment that evokes a contemporary version of Oiticica's piece. His work provokes a diffuse set of questions and urgencies of the now, weaving a visual repertoire that not only gives account of our eternal "vira lata complex," [2] but assumes, in all its strength and potential, our material precariousness just as Oiticica once did in proclaiming that "from adversity we live."

The phantom of the inheritance of the constructivist vanguards of the 1960s, however, does not seem to haunt Adriano Costa's work as it does some of his contemporaries. If there is a strong tendency in Brazilian art to relate contemporary productions to the artistic legacy of Oiticica, Lygia Clark, and other central figures of this period, in the work of this São Paulo artist, the ghost does not appear so tangibly. Yes, it is possible to draw parallels between the question of objectuality in Costa's practice and the historical questions put on the table by Neoconcretism; however, the artist rejects the naivety that usually surrounds this type of revision of a canon of the most traditional narratives of Brazilian art history. Fractured, folded, and stacked, his objects challenge obvious classifications and initial readings. They seem to carry with them an awareness of their existence and of the environment in which they were produced, understanding their limitations while seeking to stress political art and discourse. Rejecting the old primer of an idea

of "political art" that runs through a considerable slice of contemporary Brazilian production, Costa pokes fun at his practice and at the political context at the same time. "Have you met a reliable fist fucker recently? It's not for me. It's for a country," a small rug screams from the floor of the exhibition space.

In the back room of the show, the artist seems to show this awareness of the limitations and idiosyncrasies of the contemporary art sphere in which this work is born and circulates. Arranged side by side on the wall, the objects seem to be domesticated on canvases, doing the reverse way of Lygia Clark's infamous neoconcrete bichos, starting from the space to the confinement (comfort?) of bidimensionality. The artist also seems to be well aware of the abyss that separates his political claims, constrained in a lavish gallery space in the Jardins neighborhood in São Paulo, from the demonstrations just a few blocks away on Paulista Avenue. So close, so far.

Costa's visual grammar seeks to embrace the schizophrenia of the plurality of contemporary patterns. Armed with the typical irony of the Internet age, the artist easily migrates from national ills to foreign news, from the question of refugees to the faint-hearted imagery of consumption in late capitalism. The idea of synthesis posed here goes beyond national boundaries and offers a reflection on the status of the image in contemporary times, in the era of fake news



Vista de instalación, Adriano Costa, We Chose Life . What Now, Georg? Tshirts ? en Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo. Imagen cortesía de Mendes Wood DM

and the pixelated images of Instagram "stories." At the end of the course proposed by Oiticica's Tropicália, a small TV timidly rests intermittently on the gray hiss produced by television sets when it is impossible to transmit an image. The small television closes the path of the penetrable, suggesting a devouring of the images placed therein. Between synthesis and the impossibility of synthesis in the nebulosity of the intense now, the visual syntax of Costa seems to reverse the logic of Oiticica's TV. Irresolute, pixelated, hesitant, the images created by the artist are the ones that devour us, and not the other way around, after all.

– Victor Gorgulho, São Paulo, Brazil

Adriano Costa's Cookies and Cynicism

A cowpat-esque cookie is just one treat at Adriano Costa's *PhilosophicalHat* – a show about *LOVE LOST LET IT GO OR AS U WISH*, which also features splats of iridescent bronze and sculptures constructed from mismatched readymades.

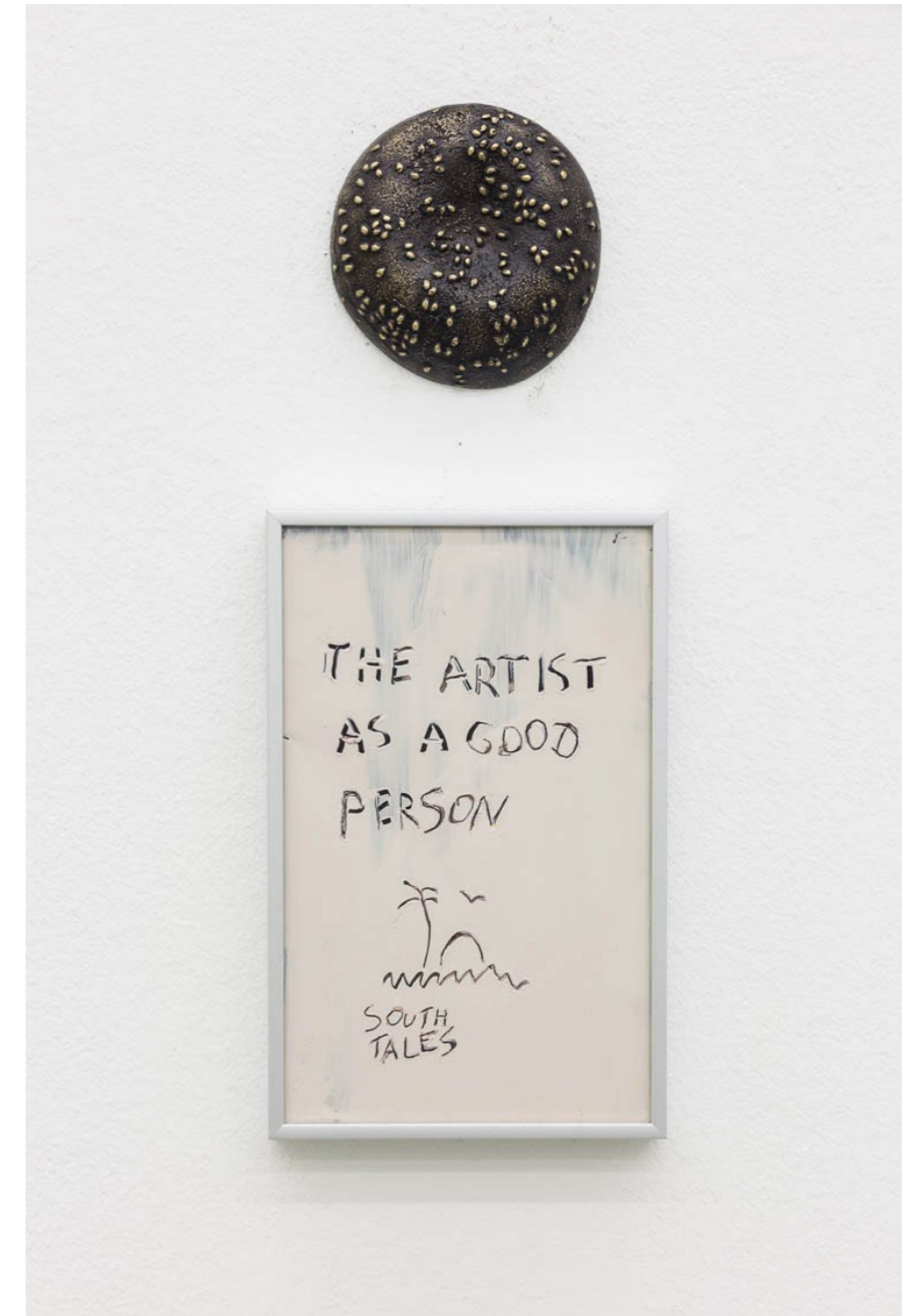
The Brazilian artist has a sense of light humour which threads through the entire exhibition, whether in the comical (and unsuitably friendly) blobs that make up the painting *Malaria* (2016/17) or the two nipple forms that protrude above a weighty, wall hung bronze brick in *Johnny/aNiceGuy* (2016/17).

In these works, materials lose their status—bronze is dotted with cereals in the aforementioned cowpat cookie, *Sucrilha* (2016/17)—and the line between high art and garbage is blurred. Aside from the artist's characterful approach, which leads to a coherent body of work, the pieces are not held together neatly formally. Many conversations can be formed between the works—often, one would imagine, at the whim of the viewer, rather than because of an intrinsic link—and as a group, these disparate works and objects begin to take on life beyond their individual presentation and connotations.

The lighthearted nature of much of the work highlights a side to Costa's practice, however, which avoids this falling into pure cynicism. The show, at its most lofty, aims to tackle a "financially ostentatious bourgeoisie" and to "mine the tradition of morality and the prevailing taste of established power." Plus, it takes a jab at the rigid nature of gallery display. But it's also joyful.

The show's Portuguese title (*ChapéuFilosófico* – a show about *LOVE LOST LET IT GO OR AS U WISH*) refers to the unlikely muse, Brazilian snooker player Rui Chapéu, who, while being an elegant and enjoyable player to watch, has never been a national champion. It is this element of elegance and pleasure, as and for themselves, which adds the essential playful spark to Costa's work.

'PhilosophicalHat – a show about LOVE LOST LET IT GO OR AS U WISH' is showing at *Múrias Centeno, Lisbon until 25 February. Images courtesy Múrias Centeno / Photographs: Bruno Lopes*



FalaSeMuito3/Combo, 2016/17. Acrylic on paper and bronze 18 x 12 cm + 8 x 8 x 2 cm



Exhibition Challenges the Notion of the Brazilian Outcast

Through his subversion of capitalist and consumerist objects, artist Adriano Costa challenges society's tendency toward exclusion.



STORYTELLINGCAIPIRA INSTALLATION VIEW, ADRIANO COSTA. ALL PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND SUPPORTICO LOPEZ

Caipira is the Brazilian Portuguese equivalent to a redneck or hick, a pejorative term for a rural individual often assumed to be uneducated, uncultured, and generally ignorant. Unlike redneck, a title some people attempt to wear proudly as a reaction to being labeled, caipira is an exclusionary term that doesn't band people together, promoting isolation and a sense that you belong to nothing.

Brazilian artist Adriano Costa takes the idea of the caipira as the point of departure for his current solo exhibition at Berlin gallery Supportico Lopez. *StorytellingCaipira* is a cacophony of enormous hanging drawings, sculptural arrangements of found objects, and bronze calligraphic markings made from coat hangers that feel both primal and sophisticated, rudimentary but intelligently organised, apt metaphors for the misunderstood cultural outsider.

The most visually condensed and overwhelming piece in the exhibition is *OptimisticGardenzzz/GreenJuiceBomb*. Upon a patch of artificial grass lies a plethora of mundane tools, consumables, and cultural artifacts, most of them heavily used and disconnected from their original contexts. The sea of scissors, coconuts, bottles, and dozens of hoarded objects blend into one another and become part of a hulking mass, occasionally broken up by pristine and unfitting commercial signifiers like a Uniqlo shopping bag and a luxury Pro Line blender filled with green juice. Here capitalism feels like the ugly social divider that it often is, a mass of useless objects that are consumed in a hope to fit in.

The wall works *HardOn/TheBelly*, *PopTitsToTheHitzzz*, and *Porn* use capitalist symbols for purposes devoid of their original function. *HardOn/TheBelly* brings together a cock ring on a plunger, a vacuum cleaner tube, and splattered make-up as something entirely decorative and non-functional. *PopTitsToTheHitzzz* is a sculpture of an empty Coca Cola bottle resting on steel-cast seeds of a tree native to Brazil, subverting something natural and full of life into a shelf. An Adidas tracksuit jacket becomes a canvas for the Costa's discontent with Post-internet art in *Porn*.

"Caipira is me. Caipira is what doesn't belong to the 'center' of the world. It is the banished, the refugees, the non-English speaking. I stay in these places but don't belong here, because belonging is not allowed to me as my grammar is another, my language is different," Costa tells *The Creators Project*. "My piece *ThePeople* is a huge line of dead flies that says 'NOT WELCOME', but I also freed 500 live flies into the gallery. So beware, we [the caipira] are here to stay!"

- Andrew Nunes



POPTITSTOTHEHITZZZ, 2016, ADRIANO COSTA

Flash Art

Accomplished Things

Bruno Dunley: *When I first started to think about this conversation, it occurred me that a common ground I perceive in both your work is the notion of the boundary of an art object. Both bodies of work seem to exist in a frontier where this boundary is at the same time questioned and demarcated, although in distinctly different ways and with almost antagonistic points of departure.*

Paulo Monteiro: When I first saw Adriano's work, I realized it had some connection with what I do. I did not know exactly what, but it made me think of some works I made back in 1986. That was the year I stopped painting and started doing sculptures. Those works no longer exist, they have been dismantled, but there is still some photographic documentation. I used wood, metal, caulking compound, rubber, which then I nailed together or leaned on the wall. I did it basically with everything I could find. At the time I had in mind a quote by Philip Guston in which he talks about being in his studio and looking at loads of paint on the floor, and he asks himself why it was considered "dead" on the floor but gained life on the canvas. This transition of something dead to something living was interesting to me. I kept thinking: "I'll do something about it!" And as I did, I asked myself: "Is it already something or not?" So, I think there was something of these boundaries you mentioned, which remains part of my work yet today, because their transient aspect turns them somewhat into a dance: it is a gesture you make and no one else will ever see it again.

Adriano Costa: I have the impression that dancing must be another common ground between us. You do dance, right?

PM: I do classical ballet classes with my sister, Zélia Monteiro, who is a dancer.

AC: Well, I recall having seen a spectacle by Lucinda Childs that really impressed me. The presentation had a progressive sequence of movements. I see

something of that dynamic in my work. Many times, I make works that are destroyed, but after a week or a year, they become something else. I am truly terrified of discarding things. In my studio there are pieces of cropped-out brush strokes that are kept for whatever reason, which might fit in as a solution or departure point at a given moment.

PM: Once I went to the streets holding a sculpture with a loose structure that I wanted to weld. It was a piece of iron with two tips, two barrels, and I wanted to do something with it. I took it to the welding guy and he said: "What are you going to do with this? Is it an antenna? An exhaust pipe?" Then I thought it could actually be an exhaust pipe, indeed. If I gave it to him, what would it be? An exhaust pipe. It really encompasses an ambiguous condition.

BD: *When I mention this antagonism in reaching the boundary condition of the art object, as I see in your works, I am not only referring to this aspect in the finished work, but also in its point of departure. In Adriano's case, the bottom line is accumulation. The work emerges through the articulation of mundane, apparently disposable artifacts that have predefined roles in society, as well as the remains of failed attempts at previous works. These junctions are delicate and often retain a sense of craftsmanship, which reinforces the meaningful, fragile aspect of a human presence while simultaneously activating a perception of strength and assertion when the work is finished.*

I have the impression that Adriano's works are always posing the question: "What is a sculpture? What is an art object?" They do it at the same time they claim autonomy and thoughtfulness in order to exist. This is where I see the idea of the boundary. His works are always struggling to remain alive, walking a tightrope.

AC: Many times, I do things that do not work out, but the issues you mention do exist. I think my subject is



Adriano Costa, "International Division of Labour – 1" (2014). Courtesy of the Artist and Peep-Hole, Milan. Photography by Andrea Rossetti.

art itself, its procedures, whether it is a painting or a sculpture. But for me, to think or analyze the work as a form or object is not enough.

PM: Also because your work travels through other contexts.

BD: *Exactly. It reflects the ideological system of values in which it takes part due to its artistic legitimation, its conditions and work divisions, as well as its monetary value. This is so strong in the world we live in that it makes me think that many people go to art exhibitions simply to contemplate money. After all, what are you seeing? What is at stake? I see that in works like Straight from the House of Trophy – Ouro Velho [Old Gold] (2013), and in part of your exhibition "La Commedia dell'Arte," held this year at Peep-Hole in Milan.*

AC: The work in Milan departs from my need to try to figure out my role as a South American

artist working in Europe. My bottom line was the illegal work of African immigrants who sell purses, especially products from Italian fashion houses that are considered fetish objects, as well as the work of countless Brazilian transvestites in Italy — some say that up to 70% of prostitutes there come from Brazil. My position in the art system is not actually that different. And I obviously do not mean that sadly; there is a specific humor to my work.

Three works comprised this exhibition: International Division of Labour 1, International Division of Labour 2 and How to be Invisible in High Heels (all 2014). All talk about boundaries that should not be that stiff. I usually panic, for instance, when I read something about "Brazilian art" in the foreign media. This specific division bothers me.

BD: *But for me what binds the power of the exhibition's content is the sign saying "Brazilian wax." "International division of labor" indeed! We export a*

waxing model!

AC: Actually, this is one of our most successful products in the entire world.

BD: Back to Monteiro's work, the bottom line is to build a work whose aspect, in my opinion, questions the boundaries of an art object — basically what it is made of, the raw material. He takes wood, clay, lead, copper or paint, and by articulating them they are tempered. In the lead sculptures, for instance, it's translated through the traditional features of language itself: weight, tension, materialness and gesture are the protagonists, thus producing an autonomy of thought. In this regard, I notice that the gesture is cardinal in the sculptures, as in the drawings and paintings. Concentrated gestures simultaneously edify fragile aspects. Such gestures convey resistance, the weight of things. This ambiguity of defining and annihilating adds an evocative element of exhaustion to the works. Hence the idea of the boundary once again.

PM: Indeed, I think like that as well, but my gesture is not an expressionist, heroic one. My work does not claim for transcendence or sublimation. It is not idealistic in this sense.

BD: I agree. It is not idealistic because the idea of lyricism does not exist like that. When I talk about gesture in your work, I refer to a remnant of the gesture and its collapse. I think that neither of you make idealistic works. They are rather mundane, more tied to the vulgar aspect of things. The vulgarity of Adriano is different from yours, Paulo, because the material he uses brings along several layers of social usage, function and behavior. You, on the other hand, use iron, lead, leftover paint. A lot is made from the intrinsic properties of materials. It is from the brutality of the matter and the dimension of an "accomplished thing" that the work acquires presence. There is no reverie, but rather a statement of "this was done!" and all the radicalism that suggests.

PM: It is different because, in my work, it is as if there was a shapeless shape. I always use the same

construction. There is not much difference or formal variation; it is always a mound, something lengthy or an oval shape.

BD: Besides the inner space of your works, another important dimension is the space you establish when setting up an exhibition. I refer, for instance, to the set you presented in the collective exhibition "Where Were You?" at Lisson Gallery in London.

PM: This might as well be another point of convergence between my work and Adriano's. When I set up an exhibition, I do not merely take into account the physical result of each work. For this London exhibition, for example, regarding the wall where I placed the reliefs, each work was always in relation to the surrounding space while also preserving its own body and identity. This makes the works themselves and the relationship between them acquire new meaning.

BD: The works incorporate a dimension from outside of their strictly physical boundary.

PM: Exactly. I'm interested in empty spaces and the differences between them. How does the work occupy the surrounding space? This suggests an external dimension to the object without relinquishing its internal dimension.

BD: What do you mean precisely by "internal dimension"? Does it relate to the intimate character of the object?

PM: I'm not sure how to define it, but there are many works of art in which the parts relate to an external space, the surrounding space. In an installation by Carl Andre, for instance, you are outside it and will remain so, but in dialogue with the space of the work. I feel that in Brazilian art this happens a bit differently, in general. In Hélio Oiticica's works, the Penetrável [Penetrable] (1960s) series or the Nests (1970), for instance, you literally need to enter into it — there is always an internal pulse. This also happens metaphorically, and the titles reinforce this aspect. I do not know why things are like that in Brazilian art — and

even in our works, to some extent.

BD: On the other hand, some of Adriano's works, like *Flag* (2103), lead me to question identity, the demarcation of territories and power. Such questions are reinforced by the titles of the works, which confer other layers of meaning. In *A Place Built to be Destroyed* (2102), for instance, the title is pretty meaningful. It is as if part of his work was raised from a wasteland that is, at the same time, the world we live in and also the territory of art, with all that has been done to its boundaries and definitions over the past century. I also see some of this in *Nós estamos às moscas* [We were left nothing but flies] (2012).

AC: A Place Built to be Destroyed was made with lace, a very common material in handicraft work, which is also widely associated with the feminine universe. The work has these colors — blue, yellow, red — that can lead you directly to Mondrian. But when we think of the role of lace in the world, there is no such thing as this intersection of strong colors. This work has a formal aspect that is a clue, but actually I want to reach something else, which is a perspective of gender and behavioral attitudes.

When you think of the market value of handicraft, it is very low — that is, a work born to be killed. In this world of exchanges it has one of the lowest values. What are the layers of sense you want to be in physical evidence in a work of art? For me, they are countless. I see that in Monteiro's work as well. That thing you mentioned about the material being fragile and tough at the same time, you know?

PM: I think there is this clue, indeed. Maybe the work

Bruno Dunley is an artist based in São Paulo.

Adriano Costa (b. 1975, Brazil) lives in São Paulo.

Paulo Monteiro (b. 1961, Brazil) lives in São Paulo

of art is only a trail of thought, a junction of both material and immaterial natures, some sort of cerebral act.

AC: In my case, it is quite mundane, and becoming increasingly more so.

BD: But this does not make the work lose its reflexive power and commingle once and for all with the other artifacts of the world. It also mistrusts the totality of this mixture and saves a place to return such capacity to the world in a critical and poetic manner.

AC: In reality, when I say it is mundane, this is actually the place I want to reach.

BD: To go back to the store where you bought the materials?

AC: Totally. I feel like there is a beginning that later leads somewhere else and then returns. What are the possibilities of communication of a work of art in the world?

PM: I think nowadays there is a homogenization between the "objects of the world" and the "objects of art." This issue concerns us, but I do not perceive much difference between doing paintings, sculptures or wall pieces. I am not worried about the status of the object — whether it is a sculpture, a painting, etc. What I am interested in is this transition of the common object into something "living." I am interested in transforming a piece of wood, for example, into something that barely looks like a piece of wood.

(Translated from Portuguese by Daniel Lühmann)

It's not easy to gauge the temperature of Adriano Costa's work, for his sculptures conjure varying atmospheric pockets of hot, cold and lukewarm, like those experienced when paddling in the shallows on a summer day. Dredging the waters of the concretist and neoconcretist art history of his Brazilian homeland, as well as those of American minimalism, Costa's works often pointedly arrive already washed-up, used and dirty. *Wish* (2014), a concrete brick floor sculpture with obvious allusions to Carl Andre, included in the artist's solo exhibition at Mendes Wood in São Paulo earlier this year, appears to be held together with chewing gum and cigarettes and covered in scraps of colored paper, marking a relationship with the street rather than the pristine gallery. *House of Trophies—Ouro Velho* (2013), included in "Under the Same Sun" at New York's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum this summer, comprises a number of domestic towels, painted gold and laid out as though according to some geometric pattern or neoconcretist logic. The paint unifies these worn, homely fabrics, while bringing out the reliefs of the textured patterns of cheery florals or stripes on their surfaces. The translation of *ouro velho* is "old gold," an allusion to the remaining vestiges of Brazil's colonial past found throughout the artist's work. Such works have an appealing quality of soiled Modernism or rundown, unmonumental minimalism, lending them a humane, democratic warmth. And yet the golden rugs also seem to self-consciously perform their transformation into art objects — a slick of gold paint and these might even be read as large, terry towel banknotes, an oblique reference to the various forms of economic speculation that

Adriano Costa (Brazilian, b. 1975) lives and works in São Paulo. He is represented by Mendes Wood, São Paulo; and Sadie Coles HQ, London.

Solo exhibitions of Adriano Costa are on view at Sadie Coles HQ, London, through 4 October and at Peep-Hole, Milan, through 8 November.

Laura McLean-Ferris is a writer and curator. Recent projects include "#nostalgia" at Glasgow International (2014) and "Geographies of Contamination" at David Roberts Art Foundation, London.

Lotus, 2014
Courtesy of the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London

Brazil, as one of the growing BRIC economies, has been subject to in recent years. Old gold, new gold: it's just as cold.

Costa often describes his works as pre-sculptural, which perhaps accounts for his attention to horizontal and vertical axes and to the contrasts between slick mass production vs. base materialism. The artist's "Tapetes" (Rugs, 2011-) series, arrangements of various worn out fabrics unfixed on the floor, have at times been destroyed by gallery visitors walking over them, or even thrown away by cleaners. Recent works have also included rather more conspicuous economic or political tensions, such as a recent exhibition at the Zabudowicz Collection in London, in which the artist created an installation *in situ*. Costa, who will have his first exhibition with Sadie Coles in London this autumn, has begun to include tourist t-shirts in larger, sprawling installations that seem aggressive or existentially disturbed in their deployment, featuring phrases such as "I'M IN MIAMI BITCH" in the installation *Empire* (2014), alongside faded Coca-Cola crates, suitcases and stepladders. Whilst a series of new hanging works are incredibly fragile, made of wire, pencils, paper and wood strung with twigs and heart shapes, *Say hello, say goodbye* (2014), by contrast, is exacting and created from mass produced objects. A number of hotel safes is meticulously displayed in a vertical row up the wall in the style of one of Donald Judd's *Stack* sculptures, each with a waving Maneki-Neko cat set on top of it. In their greeting, these too oscillate between hot and cold as quickly as the cats' waving paws. "Hi!" these friendly creatures might be saying, "we're going to take you for all that you've got!" ☺

"PRE-SCULPTURAL WORKS OF SOILED, RUNDOWN, UNMONUMENTAL MINIMALISM"

HIGHLIGHTS

Kaleidoscope, Fall 2014



General Inquiries
info@emalin.co.uk

Leopold Thun
leopold@emalin.co.uk

Angelina Volk
angelina@emalin.co.uk