



REVIEW - 21 APR 2017

‘Neither.’

Mendes Wood DM, Brussels, Belgium
BY ELLEN MARA DE WACHTER

The inaugural exhibition at the Brussels branch of Brazilian gallery Mendes Wood DM is a group effort. A partnership with curator Carolyn Drake, who also runs the non-

profit space A Tale of a Tub in Rotterdam, the new venture already has the air of an enterprise that values collaboration and experimentation. Its first show, 'Neither.', is curated by Fernanda Brenner, director of the independent art centre Pivô in São Paulo.



'Neither', 2017, installation view, Mendes Wood DM, Brussels. Courtesy: Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brussels, New York

Brenner has installed works by 47 artists throughout the four rooms of the gallery, which occupies a house built by Belgian art deco architect Adrien Blomme in the Sablon area of Brussels. Hung by a bay window is a small painting by Brazilian artist Patricia Leite depicting a colonial-style church, its modesty striking in contrast to the grandeur of the 15th-century gothic church visible through the window across the

street. In the same room, slabs of sandstone appear to hover on the floor in a deconstructed grid. On one of them rests a felt bowl, its interior coated with sand, apparently on the verge of rolling over and spilling its contents. This is Katinka Bock's *Winterlandschaft mit Hut* (Winter Landscape with Hat, 2011), a work that evokes the ordered disorder of a Japanese garden. The stone is reclaimed from historic buildings: a memento mori to structures like the church outside. In an alcove, Nina Canell's *Brief Syllable* (2017), from a series of works made with segments of high-voltage electricity and communications cables, is an upward curve perched on thin metal stilts. It resembles a torii, a type of gate found at the entrance to a Shinto shrine. On either side of the fireplace, Dan Coopey's *Untitled (Xia) | Untitled (Sinai)* (2017), twin hand-woven rattan baskets enclosing organic materials, evokes a museological display of ethnographic treasures.



'Neither', 2017, installation view, Mendes Wood DM, Brussels. Courtesy: Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brussels, New York

Brenner says she was guided in her selection of works by Roland Barthes's writings on the neutral – a notion he understood as describing that which evades categorization or, as he put it, 'baffles paradigm'. It's a seductive way to think about intriguing works of art, but because we often expect contemporary art to defy conventions, the concept's critical capacity is somewhat diminished here, especially in the unambiguous context of a commercial gallery. The question, it seems to me, is one of taste. I didn't view anything in the exhibition that exceeded or even baffled my understanding of the paradigm of contemporary art, but I did see many works that held my attention and pleased my senses.



<<https://goo.gl/hBJQA7>>

Upstairs hangs a life-sized portrait of Drake, shot in 2009 by Dutch photographer Rineke Dijkstra. The gallerist's frank expression and casual pose, with hands tucked into jeans pockets, connote a relaxed demeanour. On the adjacent wall, *Fair Trade* (2015) by Alexandre Da Cunha, refers to the working processes of an art gallery. The work is part of a series made by Da Cunha in collaboration with his dealer Luisa Strina, in which he charged her with the task of cross-stitching jute canvases that she would then put up for sale in her gallery, implicating her in both the creative and commercial aspects of production.

Brenner told me that she wanted the show to evoke 'the time between bringing boxes into an empty house and it becoming a home.' The multiple aesthetic, conceptual and anecdotal components of this exhibition indicate that the unpacking is already well underway.

Main image: 'Neither', 2017, installation view, Mendes Wood DM, Brussels. Courtesy: Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brussels, New York

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