

Adriano Costa  
*MILK OF SLUMS – RUA DOS CACIQUES*  
March 23 – April 29, 2023

Written by Colin Ledoux, with words from Adriano Costa in italics

I am Arnaut who gathers up the wind,  
And chases the hare with the ox,  
And swims against the torrent.  
—Arnaut Daniel

“...crista do desejo, o destino deslinda-se em Beleza.”  
—Caetano Veloso in “Outras Palavras”

Adriano Costa walks through the city, as in the world, and lets himself be transfixed by rhythms, visions, cultures, and people that become part of a global work, a kind of *fictional flaneur marked by fatality* that speak of us and the vibrant energies of our contemporaneity.

Costa navigates the slums. [*There is no accurate translation for favela, probably the best indicator about our inequalities in Brazil. “Slums” means mess, confusion... when we talk about “favela,” we have all of this, of course, but mostly, we have families, communities, that didn’t choose to live in the morros (small mountains or hills)... Morro is also the first conjugation of the verb morrer, as in eu morro (I die). This way, living in the favelas, seems more like a curse than any other fetishistic vision of Brazilian reality...*]. He navigates these areas as he crosses the city, and his acute eye finds, in these streets, the objects, gestures, and signs of an emerging world, *like a flower that arises from struggle, class struggle, you name it...* With minimalist elegance, his works evoke the new cultures that form around us, their origins, and their future.

For his exhibitions, at first, Costa finds a rhythm: the flow of blood; the pulse of a neighborhood; an arpeggio of materials, thoughts; the repetitive beat of a haunting image, drugs, relationships; a variety of forms and desires; the places where he is, their histories, their populations. *MILK OF SLUMS - RUA DOS CACIQUES* dances on a rhythm, one of Brazil and its universality, built upon a permanent present, part-dream, part-nightmare, part-promise. [*Another curse: Brasil, país do futuro! Which future? I’m interested in the now and its baroque idiosyncrasies.*]

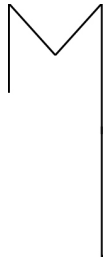
In Costa’s work, the materials live as they circulate in the mess of the slums, like fluids or crowds, *like the sap that gives life to plants such as bromeliads. It has been said the favelas look like this plant, with resilience and strength against adversities of any kind.* The Milk of Slums is what springs from these places, a spirit, an approach to things, a mental construction. *Endless fecundation, or we can say, anti-fecundation, all growing in rhythm, passion, and craziness.*

“*MILK OF SLUMS*”: for those not familiar with the porn industry (a theme often called forth in Costa’s work), “*MILK*” here is slang for sperm.

[*I do the same thing that people do when they are building a place, a community... It doesn’t matter what the material is. They have to be functional and strong. As in the morros, everything is about to fall—completely. On the one hand, there is pleasure (geographical situation, seaview), on the other, tragedy, as recently seen in the foreseeable destruction, however unprecedented, of the sea coast in the state of São Paulo... In MILK OF SLUMS, the mythic presence of the pieces cast in bronze is obliged to survive side-by-side with works on fabric and paper.*]

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The idea for *MILK OF SLUMS* comes from an event, when the now-congresswoman of São Paulo, Carmen da Silva Ferreira, announced that *favelas* should be a part of world heritage, as they are the most visible Brazilian architecture. Like a bromeliad, the *favela* arises from physical necessity, violently overlapping with housing systems of the Brazilian metropolises. It is flawed, following the colonial model and, above all, the differences between social classes.

The rhythm of the exhibition is contained in the title. *Rua dos Caciques* is a street in São Paulo, where the artist's seamstress lives. Yet, *Cacique* is also the title of the authority figure in an Indigenous group or community. *Cacique* is the director of the anteroom of Brazilian hypocrisy. [*The owner of the "maloca" (Indigenous collective house), the man (or woman) responsible for the dance that creates and destroys. They are the maestro, never a dictator!*] Placed together, the two terms, *MILK OF SLUMS* and *RUA DOS CACIQUES*, form a statement, give new perspective, and create a groove upon which all the works will come to life.

In what the eye lost sight of, or perhaps never did, the artist is inspired to reveal his poetic power. At the crossroads of Pier Paolo Pasolini's fascination with working-class neighborhoods, and Guillaume Dustan's testimony of marginalized gay circles, it is the daily life of the *favelas* that lends Costa his constructive technique, sap, and nourishment.

In the exhibition, some works make unexpected references to Minimalist and iconic (primarily American) sculptures. In *Ana & Andre* (2023) or the *CASAS* series (2000 - 2023), you may notice something peculiar: paradoxes that once seemed absurd have been transformed into works of art by the hand of the artist. As you immerse yourself in this display, prepare to be transported to a world where paradoxes are not only possible, but celebrated as a source of beauty and wonder. Anything is possible in the choreography of *MILK OF SLUMS*.

The *1913* series (2009 - 2023) uses Adriano's works from different eras, presented in their packaging for storage (emblazoned with the gallery logo) and composed inside plexiglass boxes, staging a particular historical relationship. The artist presents the artworks as objects, objects free of romanticism. They represent the materiality of his relationship with contemporary art and its systems. [*"A sign of the times," Costa laughs. "You should not cry over spilled milk." In the same vein, aesthetics, values, and goals are at the same time referential phenomena or, as we might say, simply ornaments. The audience makes their own narrative.*]

Adriano Costa and Mendes Wood DM have been intimate for over ten years. The artist speaks about the relationship through works, testimonies that he assembles to form personal messages, fragmented like excerpts of private conversations. In *MILK OF SLUMS*, Costa breaks the boundary between backstage and the gallery's exhibition space. As did Bertolt Brecht (a figure present in the artist's practice), Costa does not work to deceive the public. Using the distancing effect, like a Brechtian actor, he is what he is, a creator but also an art worker.

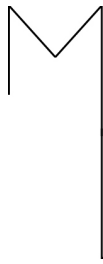
[*What we see, undoubtedly, is the language of love.*]

Each work is a response—or, rather, a replica. They are thoughts, a dialogue with something: a spirit, a reality, an emotion or a proposition, a problem to be solved together.

[*The work that names the subtitle of the show, RUA DOS CACIQUES (2023) is a white elastic ribbon about 35 meters long, where words and phrases are printed in black, creating a poem without a premade logic. These are words written about my work,*

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*such as "random" and "innovative," put together with sentences and other words published about other artists of my generation or about the art system. It speaks about everything except the semantic meaning of what you read. The letters here are equivalent in value to nails or screws or glue. This is how the tape will be installed; what is important is the flight of words in the air and the formation of possible meanings that no longer belong to me.]*

Marguerite Duras once said that an unmade bed is a scream in the room. Adriano Costa's works are this kind of scream, gently emerging from the silence, like strangers coming out of dark streets. His works are dreams of midnight conversations, addressed as prayers.

Costa prays for a world that he might bring to consciousness. Looking at his works over time, one understands the sequential mystery that deals with the repetition and decomposition of his elements. His recent works respond to his earlier ones in the constant elaboration of a language based on materials. Throughout his practice, Costa has often used sneakers or shoes as an element in his sculptures. Each time, the sneakers are more torn and used, mistreated as if they screamed at us, decomposing until we look at their essence. They are an allusion to the passage of time, an analogy for the thin ice upon which the artist has walked for the last twenty years.

Adriano Costa poetizes the materials of our daily life in sculptures and images that form *thought-objects*. They are the faces of smiling monsters, musical keys, objects that invite us to think about the present and its eternity. He creates a political poetics. "Above all, no sentimentality" as they say in *Duet For Cannibals*, the Susan Sontag film, a film the artist considers key to understanding relationships of any kind.

Adriano Costa's works are tales of cruelty and its glossy reverse, elegies of the primitive beauty of thoughts and materials that shape a universal theater, woven by the artist from work to work, over time, and across the world.

This show is a dance of thoughts. This show is for dancing.

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

His solo exhibitions include *CEMITÉRIO*, City SALTS, Birsfelden (2022); *Philosophy of the World*, Mendes Wood DM, Brussels (2022); *ROCKWHORESHOW*, Nuno Centeno, Porto (2019); *wetANDsomeOLDstuffVANDALIZEDbyTHEartist*, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne (2018); *B A I L E*, Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo (2018); *DearMeatCutsDevilMayCry*, David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles (2016); *Every Camel Tells a Story*, Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo (2015).

His work has also been included in institutional group exhibitions such as *HISTÓRIA(S) DA ARTE*, Serralves, Porto (2022); *Breaking The Waves*, Chi K11 Art Museum, Shanghai (2021); *Everyday Poetics*, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle (2017); *Frucht & Faulheit*, Lothringer13 Halle, Munich (2017); *IMAGINE BRAZIL*, Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo & Musée D'Art Contemporain de Lyon, France (2014); *Under the Same Sun: Art from Latin America Today*, Guggenheim Museum, Nova York (2014).

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