

Alma Allen: Some Eyes  
MWDM Sao Paulo  
May 27 2023 to Aug 12 2023

Mendes Wood DM is proud to present *Some Eyes*, the first solo exhibition of the celebrated US artist and sculptor Alma Allen to take at the gallery's Barra Funda space in Sao Paulo. Additionally to this being his first exhibition with the gallery in Sao Paulo, it is also the first solo presentation of his work in Brazil, and a much-awaited opportunity for South American audiences to engage with Allen's practice.

Widely known for his dexterity in handling materials as disparate as bronze, wood and various types of marble sourced from all over the world, Allen has turned his focus for this exhibition on bronze and on parota wood, also known as the Elephant-ear tree, native to the tropical regions of the Americas. Furthermore, the exhibition showcases Allen's recent interest in creating sculptural wall-pieces, rather than the free-standing floor sculptures that he is perhaps best-known for.

Allen's creative impetus for this series of works was put into motion during a recent trip to Egypt, where he was confronted with the country's monumental artistic heritage and ancient culture. He found himself particularly drawn to the visual symbolism of the eyes and the moon, which are ubiquitous throughout ancient Egyptian art. The eye, a universally recognized symbol of intellectual perception, enjoys a broader formulation in Egyptian culture: a pair of eyes, for example, would be painted on sarcophagi so the dead could see at the world outside. In Egyptian mythology, the moon is connected with Osiris, the god of the dead, and its phases are linked to the cyclical rhythms of birth and death.

Parota wood, which the artist has already incorporated into his practice before, appears in larger, essentially circular works, drawing on gestures that evoke organic forms. Meanwhile, the works made of bronze seem to mimic natural formations, archeological patterns, and evoke a mythological pantheon of references from as Egyptian murals to Pre-Columbian art. To a certain extent, the bronze reliefs in the exhibition are a continuation of Allen's work for his solo show at Museo Anahuacalli – a space designed by Diego Rivera as a "living" repository of primitive and modern artifacts – and further highlight the artist's deep interest and engagement with ancient cultures.

Allen's forms are first made by hand in clay or wax models. They are shaped according to the artist's desires and then put through a 3D scanning process. The final pieces are developed in his studio in Tepotzlán, Mexico, in which a robot helps to finalize the large-scale process – but prior to that, it is the artist's hand that configures the relief, the formal arrangements, and the works' sense of fluidity.

\*\*\*\*

Spanning a wide range of materials including bronze, parota wood, various types of marble, obsidian and stalagmite, Allen's work retains a singularly unique energy and original aesthetic. From sinuously thin bronze shapes to magmatic and smooth marble outpourings, Allen's biomorphic forms seem to rise up effortlessly from the artist's chosen material. Allen's artistic trajectory has seen him progress from humble origins, selling hand-carved miniatures on the street in Soho, NY, to his breakthrough moment of recognition after his acclaimed presentation at the Whitney Biennial of 2014.

Largely self taught, there is a spontaneity and energy to Allen's work that seems to bear little connection to the artistic movements of this time. In fact they have more in common, formally and perhaps spiritually, with the vast expanses of territory and the monolithic natural formations that seem to have punctuated his life: Utah, where he grew up; Joshua Tree, California, where he lived for several years; and Tepotzlán, Mexico, where he currently has his studio, about 50 miles out from Mexico City. Rocks,

branches, and unspecified biomorphic entities that exude a kind of prehistoric energy dominate his shows, their size and mass undermined by their apparent levity and effortless presence.

Alma Allen (1970, Utah) lives and works in Tepoztlán.

His most recent solo exhibitions include Mendes Wood DM & Van Buuren Museum & Gardens, Brussels (2021); Kasmin Gallery, New York (2020); Blum & Poe, Los Angeles (2019); Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago (2016); Heath Ceramics, Los Angeles (2009); Hoodoos by Alma Allen, Play Mountain, Tokyo (2009).

Additionally, his work has been included in group exhibitions such as Days of Inertia, Mendes Wood DM at D'Ouwe Kerk, Retranchement (2021); At The Luss House: Blum & Poe, Mendes Wood DM, and Object & Thing, The Gerald Luss House, Ossining (2021); Collective /Collectible, MASA, Mexico City (2019); In Conversation: Alma Allen & JB Blunk, Palm Springs Art Museum, Palm Springs (2018); Handheld, organized by Elizabeth Essner, Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield (2018); Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2014).