

Luana Vitra
Mineral Rising
April 30 – May 25, 2024



Mendes Woods DM presents *Mineral Rising*, the first solo exhibition by artist Luana Vitra in New York. Born in Contagem, in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, Vitra has become one of the most prominent artists of her generation. With a background in sculpture and drawing, her work ranges from installations to sculpture and often features metals, iron ore and copper, as well as the use of ceramics, wood, and fabrics. Her practice places her work in critical dialogue with the histories of the exploitation of natural elements and the traditions of the region in which she grew up.

Her work emerges from walks around her neighborhood and from observing the transformations of the landscape around her, often taking its cues from childhood memories. During those walks, Vitra pays attention to the chromatic variations of the region - from the earthy or grey tones that characterize the industrial areas to the shades of blue on the horizon. It was during these journeys that she collected materials and other detritus from industrial exploitation that could be transformed into fundamental elements for her repertoire. Iron has acquired a status beyond that of a mere compositional element in her work. She explains, “It is the matter that makes up the ground of the earth that I grew up in, it is the matter with which I feel a kinship.”

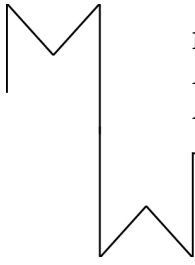
Iron guides and sustains her artistic practice. By manipulating it repeatedly, whether in its raw form or mixed with other materials, Vitra regains her complicity with the element. Conceptually, her interest in iron and more recently copper, is related to their conductivity. Vitra questions which other dimensions the conductivity of these materials could operate in. In other words, despite the importance of the physicality of the element itself, the artist increasingly alludes to the invisible, investigating whether these materials can also operate as conductors for less concrete and more ethereal dimensions. This more spiritual take on these elements is a consequence of her installation *Lung of the Mine*, presented during the São Paulo Biennial in 2023. Drawing from oral stories shared by her relatives about the work of enslaved people in mines, Vitra presented an installation composed of a series of talismanic iron arrows that symbolize the unlocking of paths, pointing to places of prosperity.

While her early works were grounded in the geography of Minas Gerais, the pieces featured in *Mineral Rising* are mostly the outcome of Vitra’s frequent travels to South Africa, between 2022 and 2024. She believes that growing up surrounded by the many mineral resources of the Brazilian landscape helped foster a strong connection with this far-away country. Living in Durban, on the southeast coast of South Africa, Vitra sought to explore the connections between manual labor and the act of praying, focusing on the notion that objects can act as protective talismans.

She witnessed the technical, aesthetic, and spiritual abilities of the Zulu and Xhosa peoples in crafting their necklaces and other protective objects, devoting much of her time to learning how to create the complex forms. The geometric patterns, the rhythm and the gestural repetition necessary

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to create each piece serve as a means of infusing enchantment into materials. In her words, “Sculpture is an enchantment of drawing in space. I grew up seeing hands passing through the beads of the rosary, endlessly repeating the same prayer. Spirituality is also the path that hands take on the beads; it is as if these points lead the body to the invisible, nurturing protection and a good path.”

However, despite her forays into the mineral realm, her human connections are firmly rooted in Minas Gerais. It was with her father, a carpenter, through whom Vitra had her first encounters with the processes of material transformation, while it was with her mother, a teacher and poet, that she developed a desire to find forms capable of mediating the different relationships between the materials and the ideas that flow around her.

Luana Vitra (b. 1995 Contagem, Minas Gerais, Brazil) lives and works in Contagem.

The artist’s solo exhibitions include: *Mineral Rising*, Mendes Wood DM, New York, NY, USA (2024); *Giro*, curated by Déri Andrade, Inhotim Museum, Brumadinho, Minas Gerais, Brazil (2023); *Viver e morrer pela boca*, curated by Germano Dushá, Bruno Múrias Gallery, Lisbon, Portugal (2023); *Três Guerras no peito*, curated by Hélio Menezes, Centro Cultural São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (2020); *Corp rasgado em estado de céu aberto*, curated by Rachel Costa, Mitre Gallery, Belo Horizonte, Brazil (2019); and *Carregar o poema nas costas*, curated by Esther Azevedo, Centro Cultural Sesiminas, Belo Horizonte, Brazil (2019).

Additionally, her works have been included in group exhibitions such as: *Delay and encounter and/or other proximate unknowns*, Foundation for Contemporary Art, Accra, Ghana (2023); *Coreografias do Impossível*, 35th São Paulo Biennial, São Paulo, Brazil (2023); *Direito à forma*, curated by Déri Andrade and Igor Simões, Inhotim Museum, Brumadinho, Minas Gerais, Brazil (2023); *Dos Brasís*, curated by Igor Simões and Lorraine Mende, Sesc Belenzinho, São Paulo, Brazil (2023); *Vida transbordante e os desejos do mundo*, Solar dos Abacaxis, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2023); *Pipa Prizze 2023*, Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2023); *Linhas Tortas*, curated by Diana Campbell, Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brazil (2023); *Esfíngico Frontal*, curated by Germano Dushá, Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brazil (2023); *Six artists*, curated by Lorraine Mendes, Mendes Wood DM, New York, NY, USA (2023); *Um século de agora*, curated by Júlia Rebouças, Itaú Cultural, São Paulo, Brazil (2022); *Atos de Revolta: outros imaginários sobre independência*, curated by Thiago de Paula, Keyna Eleison, Beatriz Lemos e Paulo Lafuente, Museum of Modern Art (MAM), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2022); *Histórias Brasileiras*, curated by Isabella Rjeille, MASP, São Paulo, Brazil (2022); *Scenorama*, curated by Gabi Ngcobo, Javett art centre, Pretoria, South Africa (2022-2023); *The show is over*, curated by Gabi Ngcobo, South London Gallery, London, UK (2022); *The silence of tired tongues*, curated by Raphael Fonseca, Framer Framed, Amsterdam, Netherlands (2022); Festival Toda la teoria del universe, curated by Juliana Gontijo, Concepción, Chile (2022); and more.

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