

The Color of Distance
Paulo Monteiro
Apr 24 — May 18, 2024

In pursuit of a formal language reduced to the minimum of elements, Paulo Monteiro has conceived *The Color of Distance*, his first individual exhibition at Mendes Wood DM in Brussels. Serving as a spatial meditation, the exhibition presents a subtle arrangement of recent works in which color and its atmospheric powers flow into the insistence of the body and its material presence.

What strikes at first is the materiality of the works on view, in which matter is made visible in different and ambivalent ways. A recurring and transforming oval shape structures the plane of linen canvases. The artist uses this shape to generate variations within the oil layers – by addition or erasure – revealing a kind of interior of the painting. The very substance of the sculptures is also revealed through simple, almost choreographic gestures: breaks, cuts, and piles of earth blocks appear to be simply posed on the ground, yet they are cast in aluminum. While this magnifying transformation creates a sort of perceptual surprise, the monochromatic metallic, black or white texture of the objects reinforces Monteiro's focus on the material.

A series of smaller painted works resemble tiny pieces of oil paint adorned with a few dots of color that mark their boundaries, directly hung on the wall. Also measuring a few centimeters, small sculptures coated in red, rose oil, are also presented on the walls. Their seemingly shapeless appearance could evoke the image of pure color emerging from the painter's tube and turning into a bronze piece. They also show how, in this exhibition, Monteiro uses matter as a catalyst, creating a frequency that makes works converge across categories and borders. These wall pieces are neither paintings nor sculptures. What we are seeing is the form of a lake, or a fish; a soft and malleable piece of clay; a portion of semi liquid color, or a bodily, organic abstract shape. Everything here is fluidity, life, and movement.

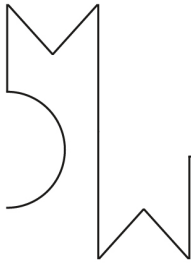
It has often been said that Monteiro's processual practice relies on a certain idea of non-finito. The paintings can sometimes, indeed, appear as if they have been stopped before a clear picture is formed, reflecting the emergence of a form. Similarly, sculptures evoke an arrested process, a sensual abandonment of the composition, as if they have fallen from the artist's table before undergoing formal transformation. But the kind of ever-unfinished aspect of these works could also arise from the opposite of a distant end put to a starting process: what if the paintings are, in fact, dissolving shapes into the transparent oil layers, or the sculptural images of ruined compositions, of gestures taken too far? There is nothing dramatic or romantic: in these works, no matter how they are envisioned – raw or transformed, composed or not, too much work, or not enough – substance seems to have a life of its own.

The silence of the pieces (almost all of them remain untitled) is evident in the way they signal that, even though they are still, they are potentially still in progress, they are kind of alive. Here, a double internal movement in the work is visible. The patient process of reduction and simplification engaged by Monteiro seems to have endowed his works with a singular agency. It looks like they could even condense, filter, dry on their own. Or the opposite again could be true: the way the artist arranges his exhibitions suggest that the works are possibly growing, blooming in the gallery space, turned into a synthetic garden, a place where each thing is at work – at its own pace.

Lying directly on the floor, Monteiro's sculptures draw an open form, a space one can walk through, an area that appears to be randomly organized, almost scattered, made of a series of curved lines, of organic shapes chaotically dispersed: once again, undefined, yet active – a way of being in the space that contrasts with the geometric grid of the gallery's architecture. Forms here have a latent, potential life, yet they also seem to be at rest, waiting for something, or just asleep. The horizontality, the apparent softness, the tactile relationship with the ground reveal a particular energy that is turned inward, inside the objects, under their skin. Just as in our sleep we are never passive but open to various changes, sensations, and alterations, the works here are quietly active. They exist in their own time

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and space. They uncenter. They are hiding in constant flux, heading beyond our realm, and perhaps even beyond the artist himself.

The Color of Distance stands as an outline of a progressive letting go in the form of a constellation of pieces that invite us to an open and intimate choreography. The wall pieces' variable sizes, from the very small to larger ones, never exceed mid-sized works. These objects attract the body, prompting movement in the space, so each wall piece is observed piece from the right distance. Distance here refers not only to the space between the works but also between us and the forms and colors on view. It is a sort of cosmic dance between fullness and emptiness, sharpness and blur. The recurring oval form in the paintings also looks like an eye. A motif that, in turn, changes each canvas from an object to be looked at into a window to look through. However, at times, eye-like shapes repeat, superimpose, and vibrate: the eye is moved, it sees double, even triple. Vision is affected, remains troubled, like when we squint to see better, sensing the landscape around us without trying to catch every detail: Monteiro's paintings open up colored spaces so we can mentally immerse into them.

In France, where I grew up, when springtime arrived, we children used to sit in circles among the grass and blooming flowers, playing a game. We picked dandelions and placed the flowers on someone's chin, saying: "if your chin turns yellow, you like butter!". Of course, every time the petals approached our skin, the sun's reflection cast a tiny yellow halo on our faces. I never questioned the meaning of this childhood tradition, but now I realize it revealed a form of invisible bond with the world. Through this sort of magic act of looking at a colored plant, that colored us in return, we materialized the impact of light waves on our bodies; we ritually communed with the renewal of vegetal life. We were mutually modified. That is, I suppose, the other meaning of Paulo Monteiro's beautiful exhibition title: when we touch the works with our eyes, we are colored by them from a distance. They stand still, but they are not inert. Let us come closer and stand at the right distance. We will see that they radiate, and so do we.

– Yann Chateigné Tytelman

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

His works have been featured prominently in exhibitions such as **Archipelago**, Germantown (2023); *Undefined Inclusions*, **Pace Gallery**, New York (2023); *Paulo Monteiro: Linha do Corpo*, **Instituto Ling**, São Paulo (2023); *Colors without a place*, **Tomio Koyama Gallery**, Tokyo (2022); *Paulo Monteiro: The Two Sides of An Empty Line*, **Lévy Gorvy**, New York (2021); *The Empty Side*, **Zeno X**, Antwerp (2018); *Coleção MAC Niterói: arte contemporânea no Brasil*, **MAC Niterói**, Rio de Janeiro (2017); *The outside of distance*, **MISAKO & ROSEN** and **Tomio Koyama Gallery**, Tokyo (2017); *Building Material: Process And Form In Brazilian Art*, **Hauser & Wirth**, Los Angeles (2017); *The inside of distance*, **Office Baroque**, Brussels (2016); *The inside of distance*, **Mendes Wood DM**, São Paulo (2015); *Casa 7, Pivô*, São Paulo (2015); *Empty House Casa Vazia*, **Luhring Augustine**, New York (2015); *Paintings on Paper*, **David Zwirner**, New York (2014); *Where Were You*, **Lisson Gallery**, London (2014); **22nd São Paulo Art Biennial** (1994) and **18th São Paulo Art Biennial** (1985).

His works are in numerous permanent collections, such as **The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)**, New York; **Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP)**, São Paulo; **Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo**, São Paulo; **Museu de Arte Contemporânea de São Paulo (MAC-SP)**, São Paulo; **Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM-RJ)**, Rio de Janeiro; **Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Niterói (MAC-Niterói)**, Rio de Janeiro; **Start Museum**, Shanghai.

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