

Sweet
Adriano Costa
Jun 28 — Aug 9, 2025

Adriano Costa: *Sweet*

There's something about receiving a WhatsApp message from Adriano Costa at 4 a.m. that makes perfect sense once you understand the temporal rebellion at the heart of his practice. While Europe begins its working day and New York still dreams, he's wide awake in his São Paulo studio, surrounded by materials most people would consider garbage, treating them like old friends with complicated histories. This isn't insomnia – it's resistance to the synchronized clocks of global capitalism, creating a temporal logic where a piece of cloth might sit in a suitcase for two years, slowly becoming something else entirely.

"I don't believe in materials because they don't exist. Everything is an animal," Costa tells you with the kind of serious expression that makes you realize he's not joking, even when it sounds like he is. Walk through his new exhibition *Sweet* at Mendes Wood DM's Place des Vosges, and you'll find bronze sculptures that might be farewells, stones treated like testing grounds, objects caught between protection and mind-alteration. Each piece seems to have found its exact right place against these centuries-old walls, as if the historic space had been waiting for precisely these assemblages.

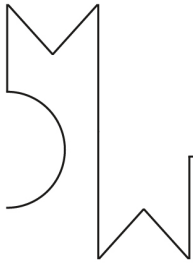
Consider *hat or umbrella or LSD (microdose)* (2025), where bronze mingles with marble and concrete in configurations that refuse easy categorization. The title performs the same kind of semantic slippage that psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva mapped in her work on melancholy – that fertile space where conventional meanings break down. Kristeva called this "chronic asymbolia," the breakdown of symbolic function that most people experience as loss but she recognized as unexpectedly creative. Costa's studio feels like the physical manifestation of this concept: objects existing in liminal states, refusing their original purposes, slowly transforming into something language hasn't caught up with yet.

Then there's *Be sweet – comment te dire adieu* (2025), a bronze work with variable dimensions that embodies Costa's approach to what might be called gentle vandalism. The piece expands and contracts like memory itself, its bilingual title hinting at all the goodbyes that never quite stick. French and Portuguese intertwine, suggesting multiple departures – from language, from fixed meaning, from the certainty that endings are actually final. The work demonstrates Kristeva's insight about how the melancholic's broken relationship to standard symbolic language becomes a source of entirely new expressive possibilities.

Meanwhile, *sampler* (2025) treats stone – the most permanent of materials – as a testing ground for acrylic and enamel, color and possibility. It's the kind of gesture that makes you rethink what materials are supposed to do, how they're supposed to behave. Costa's animistic understanding means objects possess spirits and moods, agency and resistance in equal measure. They collaborate in their own transformation, following rhythms that have nothing to do with production deadlines or market schedules.

Mendes
Wood
DM

25 Place des Vosges
75004 Paris France
+33 1 73 70 84 16
www.mendeswooddm.com
[@mendeswooddm](https://www.instagram.com/mendeswooddm)



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“Sometimes the breakdown is more interesting than the sense,” he explains, and this could be Kristeva talking about the creative potential hidden within melancholy’s apparent emptiness. Costa’s materials undergo the same process she described – developing alternative ways of making meaning when standard symbolic systems fail them. They exist in states of perpetual becoming, never quite settling into fixed identities, gathering new associations over months or years of studio life.

What emerges in *Sweet* is what Costa calls “nostalgia for meaning itself” – not mourning for any particular lost meaning, but a bittersweet recognition that meaning is always shifting, always becoming something else. Each work responds to the specific atmosphere of Place des Vosges while maintaining his commitment to transformation as resistance that somehow remains tender. The historic setting amplifies this dialogue between preservation and change, between what endures and what transforms.

“Everything is alive,” Costa insists, and spending time with these new works, you start to believe him. Following Kristeva’s insights about melancholic creativity, the exhibition demonstrates how breakdown becomes breakthrough, how the failure of conventional language opens space for new forms of expression that feel more honest about the instability of everything we think we know. In Costa’s hands, destruction becomes a form of love letter, endings become beginnings, and the discarded world reveals its hidden vitality.

— Fernanda Brenner

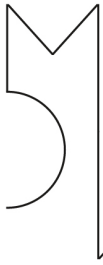
Adriano Costa (b. 1975, São Paulo, Brazil) lives and works in São Paulo.

His solo exhibitions include *1 metro de cabelo*, **Mendes Wood DM**, São Paulo (2025); *ax-d. us. t.*, **Emalin**, London (2024); *MILK OF SLUMS – RUA DOS CACIQUES*, **Mendes Wood DM**, New York (2023); *YOUR WORK AND ITS CONSEQUENCES*, **Emalin**, London (2022); *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); *Touch me I am geometrically sensitive*, **Sadie Coles HQ**, London (2014).

Additionally, his work has been included in institutional group exhibitions such as *Lygia Clark: The I and the You and Sonia Boyce: An Awkward Relation*, Limited Editions, **Whitechapel Gallery**, London, (2024); *Cruella De-vil*, **Galerie Sultana**, Paris (2024); *The*

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Rough Grace Of A Bard, **FLATS**, Brussels (2024); *118½*, **Emalin**, London, (2024); *Primary Forms: III edition*, **Museum of Modern Art**, Warsaw (2023); *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 and **Musee d'Art Contemporain de Lyon**, Lyon (2014); *Under the Same Sun: Art from Latin America Today*, **Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum**, New York (2014).

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