



Adriano Costa
Philosophy of the World
19/03 – 16/04 2022

Mendes Wood DM is proud to present its first solo show in Brussels by the Brazilian artist Adriano Costa. Comprised of drawing, sculpture and mixed media installations, the exhibition proposes to initiate visitors into the strange and wonderful universe of sign and signification that Costa inhabits – simultaneously outrageous, irreverent and funny, but also deeply moving, poetical and political.

The conceptual springboard for this exhibition is a cult 60s record by The Shaggs titled *Philosophy of the World*. Self-taught outsiders, the band was made up of three sisters who were reluctantly forced to play music by their father. By conventional standards, their record might be the worst record ever pressed on vinyl. With the sisters barely able to sing or play their instruments, the resulting group of songs is an out-of-time and out-of-tune cacophony. Mysteriously or perhaps miraculously, however, the sound is underpinned by lyrics whose raw, jittery simplicity and apparent childishness reveal strange and unexpected depths of feeling that slowly began to garner appreciation. Rockstar Frank Zappa had their music played on the radio, while legendary music critic and writer Lester Bangs called them “better than the Beatles”.

In many ways Adriano Costa’s work, which also conflates the ridiculous with the sublime, resonates with this bizarre story. He arranges together and transmutes jarring fragments of his own life, his own material and spiritual surroundings, everyday objects, into unexpectedly complex ideas and aesthetic combinations that follow a non-linear logic that is as unique to his own understanding of the world as The Shaggs’ approach to music-making was.

Despite the apparent chaos, the separate works and the show as a whole follow a coherent philosophy of the absurd. “Philosophy is traditionally rational but the works in the show are actually more dada than anything else. They are made from the most mundane and average things translated into sculpture. It’s contaminating high art with the mundane. It’s my own philosophy of the world. The rooms are filled with things that are useless,” the artist says. Indeed, there are machines that don’t work, underwear and bath towels stitched into wall-pieces, Cartier shoe bags stripped of meaning, and meat grinders blessed by South American shamans. “I always ping-pong between references, more than ever in this show,” claims Costa.

His work *THE ODDS* (2022), a silkscreen curtain emblazoned with the hyper-recognizable Balenciaga-font words “I WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED” reverses his approach to the artist-audience relationship. Usually, it is the hope of the audience to not be disappointed by an exhibition, and perhaps the Shaggs knew this when they innocently sang “You can never please anybody in this world.” Costa draws a parallel here: “I’m calling the audience to think with me. It’s like that song by the girls. It’s an invitation. I’m inviting them to my party.”

From the outrageous to the poetical, perhaps the breadth of feeling in Costa’s show can be summed up by two works in the exhibition that somehow bookend this carnival of oppositions. *I WATCH TV YOU WATCH TV WE WATCH TV* (2021) is a Minimalist-like

Mendes
Wood
DM

13 Rue des Sablons / Zavelstraat
1000 Brussels Belgium
+ 32 2 502 09 64
www.mendeswooddm.com
[@mendeswooddm](https://www.instagram.com/mendeswooddm)



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installation of a single length of elastic band, the kind generally used in men's underwear. Printed along its entirety is a series of seemingly disconnected words: COWBOY, PET LOVER, RAPPER, TESTICLE PHOTOGRAPHER, DELIGHTFUL ALCOHOLIC. Costa explains: "I was watching an 80s TV show in which one of the characters is asked what kind of 'fancy activity' they would like to do. I asked that same question to all my friends who work in the sex industry. Their answers are all on the tape. My favorite one is testicle photographer – it's a very nice activity." The humor in this work only temporarily conceals a more serious exercise that sees a marginalized, and certainly not-suitable-for-80s-television crowd, give their own ideas of what an ideal "fancy activity" might be.

VENTO (2022) is a sculpture made of fabric and straw that references Brazilian Orixá mythology. The figure of Obaluaê, a father-divinity within the Candomblé religious tradition, whose face was always hidden behind dense straw and fabric, was responsible for life and death. "Obaluaê was an old man who was shy because his face was full of scars. One day he was swimming in the lake and suddenly a woman called Iansã, the most beautiful woman of the Orixá pantheon, approaches. She looks at him and suddenly sees his true beauty for the first time, and sees behind the mask. If you want to understand beauty you have to unfold it. To understand power, beauty, life and death, you have to unfold it."

"When I make a show, I put myself in a fragile position, but I am also directing it. I think my work has this. Even when I'm working with metal or clothes etc. I am trying to mold something but at the same time putting all of my fragility in it," Costa says. "It is definitely a mind-fuck. At least I hope so."

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

His solo exhibitions include *Flowers and holes (glory)*, **Mendes Wood DM**, São Paulo (2021); *ROCKWHORESHOW*, **Nuno Centeno**, Porto (2019); *wet.ANDsomeOLDstuff-VANDALIZEDbyTHEartist*, **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). Additionally, his work has been included in institutional group exhibitions such as *Breaking The Waves*, **Chi K11 Art Museum**, Shanghai (2021); *Everyday Poetics*, **Seattle Art Museum**, Seattle (2017); *Frucht & Faulbeit*, **Lothringer13 Halle**, München (2017); *IMAGINE BRAZIL*, **Astrup Fearnley Museet**, Oslo & **Musee D'Art Contemporain de Lyon**, France (2014).

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