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Author Georgia Low
Artist Rodrigo Matheus

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WHAT SEPARATES US || INTERVIEW WITH RODRIGO MATHEUS

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WHAT SEPARATES US

ARTIST PROFILE: RODRIGO MATHEUS

HS Projects presents *What Separates Us*, an exciting exhibition at the Brazilian Embassy. Beautifully curated, the exhibition showcases the works of four contemporary Brazilian artists

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using sculptures, photography and paintings. We sat down with artist Rodrigo Matheus, who is responsible for the cleverly placed objects that hang off the ceiling to form a stunning visual installation.

It must be quite amazing to exhibit at the embassy of Brazil as a Brazilian artist. Did this add more pressure when creating this body of work?

RM: The interesting aspect of showing at the Brazilian Embassy is that you are not exactly showing in a venue but you are showing in a “country” inside another country. In a moment of so much political turmoil, to set a work “in Brazil” is delicate due to the strong political content that arrives together and you cannot really control how far that goes. The president Dilma Roussef had been withdrawn from her post a few days before the opening of the show and in a point, neither did I want to sound as if I was a supporter nor that I ignored such an obscure impeachment process, by showing at the Embassy. Hopefully her portraits were still there.

Apart from that I don't really feel that the Embassy represents a tension rather I am glad to somehow be able to bring a positive agenda to the country out of Brazil.

Tell us more about the series, *A Tale in A Thousand*

RM: I like to see *A Tale in A Thousand* as an event, a performative installation that will temporarily bring together to that space a range of elements that will perform an absurd non linear narrative in response to that extravagant environment. It is the result of a sharp observation of Sala Brasil's architecture and its accessories, how they work together and what they could be turned into with the intervention. It is also a collage that unfolds unusual functions of everyday objects. The architecture is also a strong reference that embraces the various micro dialogues established by a precise combination of materials hanging from the in situ track lighting system.

What is your attraction to objects (with a particular emphasis on your work in this show, *What Separates Us*)

RM: We live in a world completely conceived, designed and determined from the smallest detail up to the biggest constructions. Behind each element I decide to include in my work there is a project whose first intention is to act in the world. I tend to be attracted to objects deprived of any aura, rare attribute or transcendental quality. Instead I look for ordinary objects that can be functional but are not endowed with more sophistication or symbolic values accumulated throughout history. The objects presented in *A Tale in A Thousand* are there together by opposition not by affinity, their dialogue is set in between the particular and the indiscriminate. They borrow each other's meanings only to have them immediately replaced by another signification in an ambiguous wording that gives complexity to their original banality.

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Separate, these objects might be nothing beyond their function; assembled, they gained an ambiguous sense of scale and significance given by the structure that keeps them together.

What attracts me to objects is their capacity, when appropriated by art, to be there not only representing themselves but a set of readings that triggers a critical aesthetic thought upon their form, function and impact on the world.

Are you particularly drawn to certain materials?

RM: No, I can do anything. I develop my work departing from ideas, not materials or medias, therefore these ideas can be manifested in many ways.

Your work often has re-occurring themes such as history, and culture. Is this the case in, *A Tale in A Thousand*?

RM: Well, the historical building and the features of Sala Brasil are paramount to the work and its content. I see the space as a historical story telling room, so I could not avoid that to happen even if I wanted. Also it is the way I work in many of my pieces, I overlap history and story, documents and fiction and of course such a manoeuvre cannot be perceived without exploring cultural references.

Your work is quite engaging with viewers staring up to the ceiling to a mix of paintings and random objects. What narrative are you sending to the audience?

RM: There is not a specific narrative, it is like a carrousel. If you get on a carrousel you might choose to sit inside a giant tea cup, you will then be followed by a dolphin that will be followed by a car and etc... In this position you are not in the beginning, in the end or in the middle but constantly spinning among the characters framed by that circumstance.

In an important group show such as this, how vital is it to maintain your identity?

RM: The work is so well integrated in relationship to the environment that in a point becomes part of the room and how to get to that from this situation has always been my biggest concern. Group shows if well done can be a great opportunity to create dialogues and content that a work by itself would not gain. In this case I knew very well the other artists' works and felt confident about the results. Also the display is done in a way that every work has its own space to develop their contents with integrity.

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20 May - 2 July'16

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Rodrigo Matheus || A Tale in a Thousand, 2016 || mixed media || dimensions variable || Photo credit:
Panayiotis Sinnos || Funded by Arts Council England

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Rodrigo Matheus, *Workers*, 2016 mixed media, dimensions variable || Photo credit: Panayiotis Sinn

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