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## Ivens Machado

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MADE IN CHINA, printed on the cardboard boxes used for transporting bicycles Ivens Machado incorporated into his new sculptures (and used as the title of this show), evokes an obvious association: cheap goods mass-produced in the world's most populous country and sold globally. The Brazilian artist also utilized shipping boxes with different labeling—for example: CONTENTS MADE IN THE USA. FRAGILE FURNITURE. Such clearly visible, specific words might encourage the viewer to speculate about their significance for the overall meaning of Machado's works. Do they simply belong to the "found" qualities of the boxes, functioning predominantly as graphic ciphers? Or should they be read as markings that expose the uniformity of consumerism and its impact on countries such as Brazil? How do Machado's sculptures relate to other artists' works that incorporate materials with printed text? While the first two questions are difficult to answer unequivocally, the third one might be easier to address by comparing the works in this show to some of their historical predecessors.

One might associate this type of visual-verbal conflation with Pop art and its connections to advertising. But there is very little of Pop's razzle-dazzle about the light brown boxes in Machado's works, even if their uniformity belongs to the consumer-driven society Warhol acknowledged with his Brillo Boxes and Campbell's Soup Cans. The boxes' main appeal to Machado seems to come from their potential as malleable art materials, neither rarefied nor abject. In his new works he combines these mundane objects with clay, strips of newspapers, pieces of galvanized steel, and small stones, all (except the stones) "assisted" by cutting, molding, and folding and arranged in intricate patterns and shapes that are at once severely geometric and highly ornamental.

Rather than to Pop artists (whose works often carried political overtones in Brazil), Machado looks back to the Neo-concretists of the 1960s, who endowed geometric forms with intense textual sensuality and spatial fragility. His *Untitled* (all works 2010) consists of thirty identical boxes displayed as a grid on the wall, each one containing cracking red clay or curling strips of newspapers arranged in sinuous patterns. Hélio Oiticica had similarly placed loose pigments, earth, shells, and mirrors inside his plywood constructions *Bólides caixas* (Box Bolides) from the early '60s, but Machado's piece is closer in spirit to Oiticica's later works, in which geometry became extravagant and manneristic, yet also formally stable and sound, allowing the display of formal singularity while appealing to the senses. While Oiticica's constructions often encouraged interaction. Machado's *Untitled* appears made for contemplation only.

Another *Untitled* on display here was a freestanding sculpture made of three large cardboard boxes placed next to one another about four feet apart, each box cut in half at an angle and filled with small stones; the phrase MADE IN CHINA was visible on them, as were 2009-11, SODIBIKE, RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL, and other words and markings. The cargo was "useless" (compared with the bicycles that the boxes once held), its purpose limited to the aesthetic value of arrangements of stones according to size and color in cubic sections inside artistically altered containers that now resembled giant origami birds. The work looked surprisingly light and playful, its quiet presence inside the gallery suggesting a conceptual detachment from any specific criticality associated with the legend MADE IN CHINA.