

Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel

Galpão

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Time Before Present

By Julie Boukobza

It is a *continuum*. There is no beginning or end and no defined space or temporality to hold onto. This could frighten us, distress us, like any endeavor related to infinity, but, strange as it may seem, this panoramic frieze that unravels like a long silk ribbon soothes us. This piece addresses only nature and a ruptureless world. "The illusion of an endless whole, of a wave with no horizon or shore," in Claude Monet's terms. The sumptuous water lily room in Paris' Musée de L'Orangerie is one of Brazilian artist Rodrigo Matheus' inspirations for his solo exhibition, titled *Time Before Present*, at Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel in São Paulo. Indeed, that unique pictorial experience is oddly similar to the artist's sculptural practice, where he attempts to approach painting obliquely to submerge or immerse the viewer. He is haunted by the idea of a world that is beginning and might end soon. The first Rodrigo Matheus I saw dates back to 2010. At the time, I was living in New York, and my friend Simon Castets introduced me to his work. It was a series of bronze plaques called *Hollywood*, *Forma* and *Landscape*. I particularly remember a black plaque with a golden, very art-déco sun, above which *Sunrise*, *sunset* was inscribed. In Rodrigo Matheus, there was already a desire to melt time, to drastically reduce the space separating the rising from the setting sun. In another register, the always enigmatic cave paintings, silent witnesses to the times before our own, have been part of the artist's imagination since childhood. The title of this exhibition refers to a still more recent time: Before the Present (BP) signifies a period that begins specifically with nuclear energy in the 1950s, as if the artist were operating an acceleration in his works, passing through these immemorial times to arrive at an apocalypse in the blink of an eye. To cite a few examples, the motifs in his pieces refer to the lily pads in homage to Monet and the Amazonian Victoria Régia, a gigantic aquatic plant from Brazil. We can identify a volcano, a bull or a Venus. Here, however, the canvas is substituted for steel spikes, over which float drawings made in colored acrylic fibers, all approaching impressionism or all-over abstraction. The lack of sharpness in his representations gives us the impression of diffuse smoke, of drawings that seem to ignite and, consequently, announce less commendable days. In these enormous panels that keep their distance from the gallery walls, Rodrigo Matheus admits he copied the drawing of a giraffe from the walls of a cave in the Sahara, a horse lifted from the caves of Chauvet, or those negatives of Indonesian hands in Kalimantan, Borneo, dating back over 45.000 years. Thus, the artist returns in his own way to the great tradition of archaeological plundering. A recurrent question in this exhibition is: how do we appropriate public space? Just forget for a second that we are in an exhibition environment, or even in the adjacent room of an archeology museum, and imagine that we are in São Paulo, that tentacular city, in the passenger seat of a car stuck in traffic. During these long moments of waiting, I remember contemplating like never before the graffiti that devoured the city's disparate buildings, from which, however, the forest is never far away. The signatures were like coded languages, hieroglyphics, transmitted from one gang of graffiti artists to another, with the prehistoric desire to leave a trace and at the same time remain anonymous, to explain to future generations our uses and customs, or perhaps simply the desire to impose oneself in a merciless world.