

Medium
Date
Web address

Web
09.10.2024
<https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/antonio-tarsis-carlos-ishikawa-london-2024/>

Publication
Author
Mousse Magazine

MOUSSE



Magazine > Exhibitions > Antonio Tarsis “Storm in a teacup” at Carlos/Ishikawa, London

Antonio Tarsis “Storm in a teacup” at Carlos/Ishikawa, London

09.10.2024

READING TIME 4'

SHARE



Antonio Tarsis, *Storm in a teacup*, 2024, Antonio Tarsis “Storm in a teacup” at Carlos/Ishikawa, London, 2024. © Antonio Tarsis 2024. Courtesy: the artist and Carlos/Ishikawa, London. Photo: Damian Griffiths

This show was selected as part of London Oomph—a curated roundup of the best contemporary art exhibitions and events held by galleries, museums, and institutions in town during Frieze Art Fair, October 2024.

“Storm in a teacup” is an English expression that means doing much ado about little. Antonio Tarsis (b. 1995, Salvador, Brazil), as a Brazilian immigrant artist in London, subverts the meanings by working with such a restricted and modest range of materials to create an inexhaustible poetic and aesthetic production. His artistic practice, however, arises from enduring storms of sociohistorical, racial, and xenophobic violence. By invoking the allegorical power of tea in the British Empire’s history and its colonies during the spice trade, Tarsis reclaims an imperialist motto for a production that denounces hegemonic dynamics in colonized countries as his homeland.

Medium Web
Date 09.10.2024
Web address <https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/antonio-tarsis-carlos-ishikawa-london-2024/>

Publication Mousse Magazine
Author

The artist explores the centrality of labor in the human condition—especially labor born from violence—by contrasting the rigorous processes of industrial science with traditional, modest manual craftsmanship. Industrial processes like standardizing matchbox sizes and mining for electronic devices are juxtaposed with manual actions: hand-cutting, folding, pasting, dyeing papers, and exposing labels to sunlight for natural fading. This approach recalls the scarcity of tools and materials in his early years—living in a favela at 12 after his mother's death, he dropped out of school, self-educated through public library books in Salvador, and began working with materials found on the streets. The emphasis on manual production in Tarsis' work also connects to the complex artistic traditions rooted in African heritage and the labor systems devastated since colonial enslavement: Salvador, the first capital of Brazil for two centuries during the colonial period, is home to one of the world's largest Afro-diasporic communities.

The characteristic repetition of sections of wooden matchboxes emphasizes the physical and epistemological fragility of a structure. In the exhibited works, Tarsis replaces the matchstick, the element that ignites the fire, with irregular pieces of charcoal, an aftermath of the burnt body and ready for a new combustion. A potential, flammable storm in a teacup, a given recipe for disaster. The pieces of charcoal refer to Black flesh seen as fuel, within an annihilating system of categorization that does not obey the individuality of the entities it houses, still partially or totally covered by a paper that gives them another color, another appearance.

Floating in space like an ambiguous open obstacle, the suspended grid matchbox walls perform as barriers that prevent the observer's body from crossing but are still visually penetrable by irregular passages, as if to allow viewing a place that cannot be easily reached. They critically address an architecture of violence, from surveillance mechanisms and fences that delimit public space from private property to curtains and structures that partition precarious housing. The entryways, created by the irregular destruction of the grid, evoke the doors of houses in Brazilian favelas riddled with rifle shots, replicating a labyrinthine and wounded environment shaped as intricate alleyways.

By addressing colonial and contemporary gold mining, as well as the generation of electronic waste—two phenomena that directly affect colonized countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, Tarsis buys old cell phones from Brazil, Mexico, India, and Nigeria and extracts small golden components from their boards. The artist transforms circuits initially designed using engineering and optimization parameters into aesthetic compositions. In this show, large quantities of electronic waste collected by Tarsis are recycled and produced gold nuggets using sustainable techniques. During the colonial period, these nuggets were used by black people who acquired their own freedom from slavery to produce jewelry that they wore as religious devotion and symbol of social ascension.

Comprising a flag over a loosely woven fabric with see-through wool, Tarsis composes a constellation with shiny electronic parts. Representing the fictitious sky of a non-place, he symbolizes all places in a network consisting of the most diverse countries that manufactured these parts—whether through mining, processing, design, or final production. The artist alludes to territories that cannot be seen, made invisible by mineral extraction processes, and to the set of stars that emblazon the Brazilian flag. By sticking it into a raw branch of the very wood that generates paper, coal, embers, matchsticks, and matchboxes—in opposition to the maximum level of processing of electronic parts in their final reduced state—Tarsis coins an anti-flag, questioning the relevance of national unity, the pertinence of a digital territory, and the relationship between sovereignty and colonial violence.

—*Mateus Nunes*

at Carlos/Ishikawa, London
until October 19, 2024