

For the twelfth edition of the ongoing program of exhibitions dedicated to nature, Abreu Advogados, in partnership with Carpe Diem Arte e Pesquisa, presents a series of works by the Lisbon-based Brazilian artist, Cassio Markowski.

Cássio Markowski (Brasil 1972)

The Brazilian artist based in Lisbon works mainly between drawing and painting, as well as exploring video and installation as means of expanding his artistic practice. Cássio Markowski composes conceptual images that explore the poetics of visual language, creating a universe in which the oneiric relationship between human beings, fauna and flora predominates, the latter as re-signification and healing. The artist's production encompasses a process of documentation on different socio-cultural aspects of Afro-Brazilian history and the African diaspora. This approach is based on a constant search through archives, image databases or old family albums.

Markowski's visual universe, simultaneously autobiographical and fictional, political and poetic, fuses his own personal memories with collective experiences and traumas.

Concerned with questions of cultural identity and almost lost traditions, Markowski's work emphasises the tenuous remaining links between past and present, between history and fiction. In this context, the artist has a distinctive approach where the beauty, elegance and delicacy of his compositions intertwine with concerns linked to socio-political tensions and dynamics.

Graduated in Plastic Arts from the Arts Centre of the Santa Catarina State University (Brazil), he also concluded the masters in Research and Creation in Arts and Performing Arts and Sciences from the University of the Basque Country (Spain). After also having lived and worked as a set designer and teacher in the Basque Country and as an illustrator in Poland he is currently working and living in Almada Portugal, where he is represented by the gallery This Is Not a White Cube in Lisbon.

Mainly working across drawing and painting, Markowski's production encompasses a process of documentation focusing upon diverse socio-cultural aspects of Afro-Brazilian history. His approach relies on a constant search through archives, image databases and flea markets for ancient books, photographs, illustrations, newspapers and old family albums. Markowski's visual universe — simultaneously autobiographic and fictional, political and poetic — fuses personal memories with collective experiences and trauma, while often referencing religious iconography, especially the Brazilian syncretic version of Catholicism.

The pieces shown in this exhibition manifest a rigorous and sophisticated process that involves several layers of interventions. After preparing the raw linen canvas with a first stratum of acrylic plaster coating, Markowski draws the major lines of his preconceived compositions with graphite. The artist then applies a covering layer of vinyl paint on which he further intervenes with gouache for the non-human motifs, and with charcoal and graphite for the drawn figures.

Subtle yet effectively disarming, Markowski's images delve into political issues, exploring themes related to colonisation and slavery. His creative process both explores and deconstructs the past, shaping a sort of ideal world imbued with touches of serenity, nostalgia and mystery. The imaginary time and space comprising this world often refers back to childhood or to an unspoiled and peaceful Africa.

Depicted in a figurative and realistic manner, the characters are mostly children and women. In the artist's dream, they stand strong, in communion with nature, and bravely look the viewers in the eyes.

In his most recent series of works, Markowski mixes references to botanical and zoological illustrations with famous ethnographic representations produced in the context of the colonial exploration of Brazil by European painters such as Albert Eckhout (1610-1665) and Jean-Baptiste Debret (1768-1848). Markowski reproduces the outline of the selected portraits of native people and partially fills the empty shapes with a saturated black paint. The other part of the figures is filled with virtuoso depictions of plants, flowers, insect and bird specimens inspired by illustrations taken from classical scientific documents. The combination of the empty, flat, and softly coloured backdrops, the figures' deep-black areas, and the proliferating organic motifs, induces unexpected contrasting effects.

A key element of Markowski's work is the human alliance with nature. In this unreal world of his, the flora and fauna stand in their grace and beauty while gently fusing with the human characters. The dream-like atmosphere is enhanced by the unexpected juxtaposition of natural elements and motifs laden with symbolic meanings such as plants resting on majestic clouds, which evoke traditional iconography displayed in churches. The communion with a luxuriant and pristine environment is set in painful contrast with the civilised world's persistent state of estrangement and loss of connection to nature's cycles, forces, and frailties.

For the artist, the natural world is a favourable wellspring, a space for silence and contemplation, an ever-renewed source of inner strength that impels meaningful and benevolent actions. How to reconcile one's poetry, lust for freedom, justice and beauty with the world we live in? Markowski's drawings/paintings seem to suggest that such reconciliation is possible through an authentic reconnection of nature and selfhood.

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