

Caetano de Almeida

Recent Work

Opening, 9th March 2023, 6 – 8 pm
Exhibition, 10th March – 20th May 2023

Parakeets, honeycombs, chickens, New York City, and textiles: At first glance, these might all seem to be unrelated themes encountered in the latest works by Brazilian artist Caetano de Almeida – but indeed, only at first glance. This is because the works you see here in the Recent Work exhibition at Galerie Andres Thalmann are perhaps the most personal that the artist has created until now, being deeply intertwined with his own background whilst at the same time reflecting the complexity of his work.

In these new works, de Almeida – best known for his linear and geometric works – displays figurative natural motifs and installations closely linked to his Brazilian roots. Two of his works here, for example, share the title Colmeia, and as the Portuguese word suggests, they represent the beehives of a kind of bee of the Melipona family found in Brazil, which constructs teardrop-shaped honeycombs. The honey of these Melipona bees is known for its special spiciness and is considered a local delicacy.

But de Almeida's home country also comes in for some criticism in his work, as illustrated by the installation Engradados de galinhas / galinhas pretas, ruivas, brancas. The installation consists of three crates stuffed with chicken feathers in different colours, which in one sense could be interpreted as a boastful allusion to Brazil's position as the world's leading chicken producer. However, the abundant feathers filling each small crate could also be seen as a critical commentary on the agonising conditions experienced by both birds and humans involved in processing all that meat.

His work Periquitos australianos also focuses on the animal world, presenting iridescent parakeets that, though originally native to Australia, were imported to Europe by naturalists in the 19th century and since then have been widely cultivated. In short, de Almeida's works are not only an expression of precision and aesthetics thanks to their filigree craftsmanship, but they also serve as a silent reflection on the way humans interact with nature.

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Materiality always plays an important role in de Almeida's works, which the artist takes to the extreme in this exhibition. Inspired by stays in Paris and India, de Almeida has thematically dealt with the world of fashion, its materials and textiles in a variety of ways. This is reflected in his paintings through the depiction of thread-like structures reminiscent of weaving. In his series entitled Piscina, he simultaneously combines the textile theme with the natural motif of water, with blue lines oscillating between flowing threads of cloth and water shimmering in the sun, creating a fascinating play between figuration and abstraction. Coming back to his Periquitos, here the artist reverses this principle by not painting figurative representations of birds on canvas but immortalizing them instead as embroidery in fabric.

De Almeida's work always reflects an exacting precision; indeed, it is often described as 'mathematical.' Order and structure are evident not only in his depictions of fine lines, but also in his geometric works, such as Manhattan. Here, the image depicts the city from a bird's eye view, but the artist transforms this cityscape into abstract geometric patterns, his exploration and translation of Piet Mondrian's constructivism all too evident. The oscillation between figuration and abstraction, one of the main themes of de Almeida's oeuvre, is perfected in this exhibition.

Documenting various biographical stations in de Almeida's life, our exhibition represents his identity – human as well as artistic – right down to the smallest fibre.

Caetano de Almeida was born in 1964 in Campinas, Brazil. In 2005 he completed his formal education in the arts with a Master of Fine Arts from the University of São Paulo, and even while still in the midst of his studies, he had his first exhibitions. As early as 2003, for example, the Museu de Arte Moderna in São Paulo put on a comprehensive retrospective of his work. This was followed in 2007 by a retrospective at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro. Today, de Almeida is represented in numerous exhibitions in South America, the USA, and Europe. Of particular note is his presence in the exhibition Horizontes – A Paisagem Nas Coleções MAM at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro in 2018. Today, his works can be seen in major institutions such as the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh, the Peter Stuyvesant Foundation in Amsterdam, the Museu de Arte Moderna in São Paulo, the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro, or the Centro de Arte Contemporânea Inhotim in Brumadinho, to name just a few. Caetano de Almeida lives and works in São Paulo.

Justine Krämer

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