

ArtReview

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**Leonor Antunes
Juan Araujo
Pedro Barateiro
Mariana Caló and
Francisco Queimadela
Hugo Canoilas
Mauro Cerqueira
Joana Escoval**

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**Carla Filipe
André Guedes
Luís Lázaro Matos
João Maria Gusmão
and Pedro Paiva
f.marquespenteado
Pedro Wirz**

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Guard'água (Mangueira), 2017, fired clay, plaster, acrylic paint, 45 × 5 cm.
Photo: Bruno Lopes. Courtesy the artist and Nuno Centeno, Porto

It's August, Pedro Wirz and I are halfway through a conversation about how the Brazilian artist was lured to Portugal, in 2016, when the doorbell rings. Attention switches from a discussion of friends of the artist who already lived in the country and the cheap rent they were paying to be there to the courier who has arrived at Wirz's Porto studio to pick up a package. It contains two of Wirz's ceramic sculptures, bound for a group exhibition at a commercial gallery in Cape Town. "I'm so excited my work is going to Africa," the artist says. And this not just because the show marks a career first, but also because Wirz's work engages with Brazil's cultural history and its legacies of colonialism – much of which, of course, connects historically to an African context – and how those narratives make themselves known through the vernacular materials and techniques Wirz deploys.

The artist's first studio (he's had many, having studied in Basel and Stuttgart, lived in New York, Paris and Berlin) – was in Pindamonhangaba, a rural municipality in the state of São Paulo. It was in the outhouse of a property owned by the artist's father. There Wirz junior talked with local people and learned their crafts. The two new sculptures, both titled *Guard'água (Mangueira)* (2017)

Pedro Wirz

is a Brazilian-born, Porto-based artist. He was recently a resident at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, and held exhibitions at Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo; Múrias Centeno Gallery, Porto; and David Dale Gallery, Glasgow. He is represented by Kai Matsumiya, New York, and Blank Projects, Cape Town.

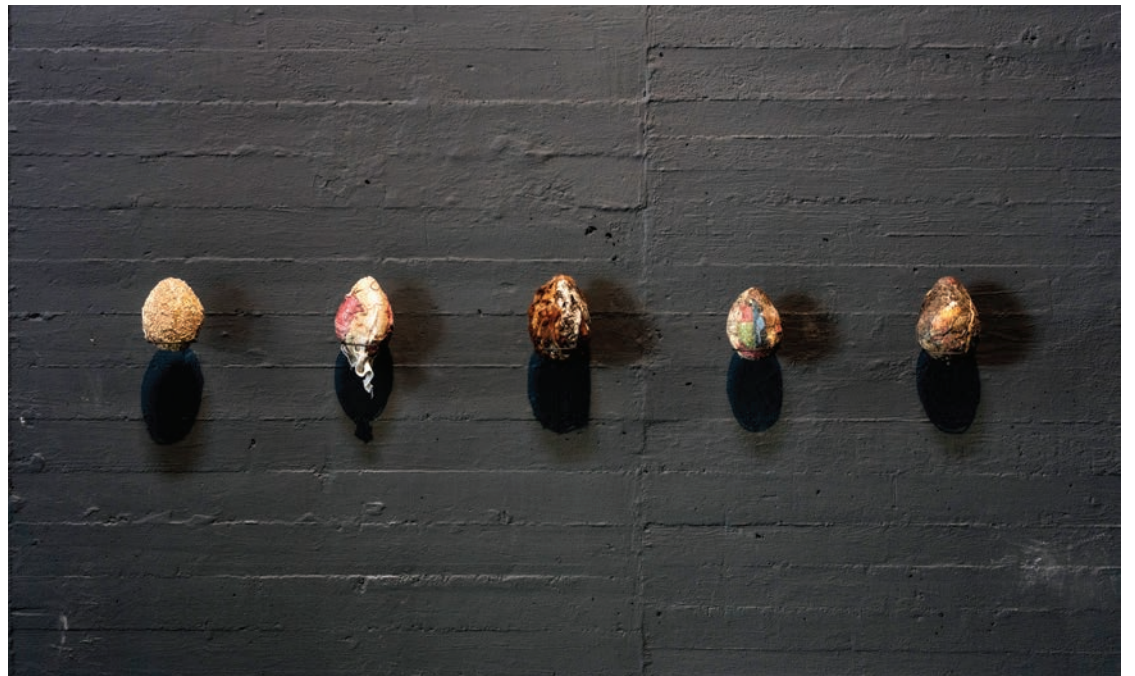
and now safely stowed in the back of a DHL van, are typical of how the artist has put those skills to use. Both works feature the traditional coiling technique of potmaking – sausage-like lengths of clay curled tightly to form a disc, which is then kiln-fired. One of the two sculptures is painted black, the other cream; both feature a plaster-cast egg cradled at their centres. There's a suggestion – in their invocation of nature and birth and life – that these forms might have symbolic or ceremonial value. Indeed, a sense of magic and masquerade are recurring features of Wirz's

output: among the artist's works included in *Ex Situ. Samples of Lifeforms*, a group show at Copenhagen Contemporary in 2017, was *Ovo por Olho (Egg by Eye)*, 2017, a line of five nestlike sculptures made from fabric, latex, acrylic paint and organic materials such as hair and dirt, hung on the wall. In Brazil, Wirz had come across a man who collected dead bugs and lined them up outside his house. This inspired a more macabre work featured in his 2016 exhibition at Kai Matsumiya, New York, in which what were apparently insects were attached to the inside surfaces of lightboxes, such that the viewer was left to confront their silhouettes.

Exchange between cultures has long been a feature of Wirz's work. In 2013, for a show at Dortmunder Kunstverein, Wirz engineered a more direct relationship with his native country. Having asked several curators (of various nationalities) to produce written descriptions of their own personalities and of a favourite sculpture, Wirz handed the translated texts to craftspeople and local artists in Pindamonhangaba and elsewhere, who were tasked with producing the works for the show. This is Wirz's way: combining a studio practice with a belief that art is a public-facing discipline, a space for communication. *Oliver Basciano*



The Horse Who Drank Beer, 2016 (installation view).
© the artist. Courtesy the artist and Kai Matsumiya, New York



Ovo por Olho, 2017, fabric, latex, acrylic paint, natural materials, 20 x 25 cm. © the artist.
Courtesy the artist and Kai Matsumiya, New York