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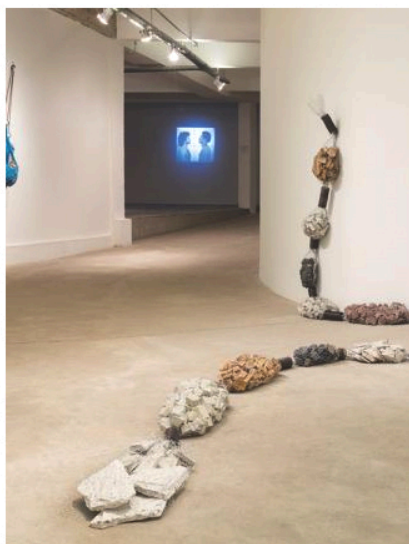
REVIEWS DEC. 15, 2016

Ivens Machado

SÃO PAULO,
at Pivô

by Alexandra Pechman

View of Ivens
Machado's exhibition
"O Cru do Mundo"
(Raw of the World),
2016, showing (from
left) Untitled, 1985,
Versus, 1974, and
Untitled, 2007, at Pivô.



This concentrated look at the first two decades of work by Ivens Machado (1942–2015), titled “O Cru do Mundo” (Raw of the World), opened with a re-creation of a destroyed, untitled 1982 sculpture that consists of a reinforced-concrete egg studded with shards of glass and resting on an armature of iron bars and concrete feet. The new version was produced for the exhibition by Machado’s former assistant, who provided crucial knowledge to curator Kiki Mazzucchelli in the organizing of the show, which comprised twenty-two pieces mostly from the 1970s and ’80s, many of them absent from institutional circulation since the time they first appeared. The sculpture refers to the concrete walls topped with glass shards that often secure the homes of the wealthy in Brazil. Here, as in other works, Machado used materials from barriers that perpetuate class conflict in Brazil—that manifest the decisive lines between private and public space and between rich and poor. By beginning the show with this sculpture, Mazzucchelli seemed to nod to the fact that the tensions that drove Machado have never really dimmed: his practice appears today just as relevant as it was then.

A sense of indignation ignites the pieces on view. Machado’s work celebrated interruption in institutional spaces; he rebelled against the formalism of Concretism and broke away from Neoconcretism, which began as a rejection of Concretism in the late 1950s by introducing more sensualized forms to abstraction. His drawings from the 1970s imitate ruled notebook paper, but their lines are jagged, cresting, or intersecting. Among the few late works in the show was an untitled installation from 2007, in which a net clamped into sacklike compartments holding different-colored rocks and minerals descends from a wall and curls across the floor.

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Machado's sculptures bring together natural materials and harsh man-made ones. For all their tactility, they can't be touched, because they are both dangerous (with their incorporation of items like broken glass) and fragile. Pivô's gallery space is stark, steely, and serpentine, much like the undulating exterior of the Copan building it is housed in. (Oscar Niemeyer designed the Copan in the 1950s as a building that could provide housing for all classes of Brazilian society.) It can be difficult for work to assert itself at Pivô, but Machado's mixture of monumental bravado and attention to bodily forms makes for an effective symbiosis with the Copan's architecture.

Reinforced-concrete phallic forms from the mid-1980s are dotted with spikes or iron and precariously balanced. They pointedly demonstrate the paradox of vulnerability masking strength, and vice versa, that animates Machado's practice. Fundamental forms—arches, ropes, pillars, cantilevers—pop up again and again in his work, but they are continually subverted by sensuality or brutality or both. By breaking the mold of the monument, they become more vulnerable and legible, and, therefore, more human.