



bruno cançado

Bruno Cançado is an artist whose work intersects with architecture, archaeology, ecology, and epistemology, so it's difficult to pin him definitively to one tradition or another. He typically makes sculptures with an industrial edge, but I've also seen him produce videos of verdant Ithacan fields, seen him make process-based and procedural concept-art. His materials are generally natural in origin (clay, beeswax, wood, stone) and his process is generally that of an engineer (he recently made an I-beam out of dried manure). As a person, he is often in a Cheshire cat grin or laughing, but his work is solemn, often oddly haunting. The discomfort of his work is not so much in the objects themselves—they are often solid and structural, assured and astute—but in what they say about the precipitousness of form itself, the tension of making ostensibly durable materials bleed, break down, nearly teeter over.

Take, for example, "Ensaio sobre o sólido / Studies on the Solid," a series of works which reference classical vessel forms by drawing them in charcoal on a wall, then dripping beeswax down the image. The beeswax catches the charcoal pigment as it flows down the wall, finally cooling on the floor in a black puddle that makes me want to run for a paper towel. The resulting image is a black vase suspended in a honey-colored stream, like the art has been degraded by its own materials. And if the vessel silhouettes recall the archaeological antiquities, the pots and pitchers which are sometimes the sole survivors from a time we still struggle to understand, is this an audacious rebuke of sculpture's ancient roots? The process is a "study," and as such you have to wonder what is being studied? What happens when a "solid" material, like the carbon-black charcoal, is in fact subject to the chemistry of erosion? How does that alter our understanding of a solid's "meaning"?

As the King said in *Alice in Wonderland*, "If there's no meaning in it, that saves a world of trouble, you know, as we needn't try to find any." I don't mean to suggest Cançado's work is meaningless—far, far from it—but rather that they seem to prioritize a mode of communication perhaps more scientific than poetic. Of course, the binary between science and poetry is a false one, but I mean his work feels like stepping into a laboratory about his heart rather than into his heart. There is distance, remove, absence. And that perspective enhances the effect of the work while sublimating the "meaning," creating a truly compelling image that resists being named or simplified.

In a scientific process, the hypothesis is not proven by one's opinion of the experiment, but by the testing and re-testing of the conditions surrounding the hypothesis. So, too, are Cançado's artworks seemingly less about personal emotional subjectivity and more about testing the limits of his materials, a process born from his interest in vernacular architecture (see right for an example). As the English architectural historian Ronald Brunskill noted, in vernacular architecture "[t]he function of the building would be the dominant factor, aesthetic considerations, though present to some small degree, being quite minimal." But as in Cançado's piece "Doble/Double," our cover image for this issue, even minimal work can have a grand scope. The sculpture may be utilitarian in aspect—a blunt-cornered wooden chair with a cast shadow of the same chair sitting on top in reinforced concrete—but it's proof that the minimization of aesthetic is not at the expense of a beautiful body of work.

// Robert Whitehead

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