

## THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Ioanit Behar, "No, there's not construction outside the MCA—those are sculptures by Alexandre da Cunha," *The Chicago Reader*, 17<sup>th</sup> July 2015



Alexandre da Cunha, *Mix (Americana)*, 2013.

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND CRG GALLERY, NEW YORK.

For the past five years, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) has installed public art projects outside, near the front steps of the building's main entrance, in order to enliven the city's landscape with contemporary art and to partially create a "museum without walls." This summer, the highly acclaimed Brazilian contemporary artist Alexandre da Cunha brings three interactive pieces to the plaza. One is a full-scale cement mixer titled *Mix (Americana)* (2013), cleaned up and freshly painted with red-white-and-blue stars and stripes. The other two are large-scale sculptures made from Chicago-produced concrete sewer pipes: a 30-foot-tall tower called *Figurehead* (2015), and *Biscuit* (2015), a freestanding disk-like piece. In conjunction with the outdoor sculptures, da Cunha presents a floor-to-ceiling indoor wallpaper installation in the museum's atrium with found images of Brazilian beach landscapes, flipped from a horizontal to a vertical orientation.

Da Cunha has made other similar public pieces with cement pipes in the past in places such as England

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and Brazil. "The interesting thing is that da Cunha finds different materials and forms in each country because of different engineering specifications and requirements," says MCA chief curator Michael Darling. While Da Cunha's Chicago pieces might share similar characteristics with his previous works, "they also have different regional inflections to them," Darling explains.

Da Cunha's practice involves appropriating and displacing ready-made-like objects and reorienting them as artworks. His sculptures take elements from spontaneous urban design in places like Brazil, where people do not have much choice but to repurpose found materials. Although his works have figurative elements, there is a minimalist aesthetic touch that reminds us of mass-produced objects. He repeatedly repurposes materials such as cement mixers, soda bottles, umbrellas, hats, kitchen utensils, towels, and skateboards, forcing viewers to answer the question, "What do these objects have in common?"

Darling understands the repurposing of materials in da Cunha's work as an "everyday minimalism," where the artist recognizes patterns in different objects and makes them "appear both strange and familiar at the same time." In da Cunha's *Nude VI*, for instance, he composes the painting with straw hats on top of a monochrome canvas, creating "an abstraction, a rigorous abstraction," says Darling.

Looking at da Cunha's sculptures, spectators might wonder, "Why is a cement mixer displayed in a museum?" (a reaction similar to the one viewers must have had upon seeing Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* 100 years ago). Da Cunha's sculptures force the viewer to find the beauty or interest in these objects. "He creates a sort of confusion," says Darling, "where people would drive or walk by the MCA Plaza and ask, "What is going on at the MCA; is there some kind of construction going on here?"

When planning da Cunha's Plaza Project, the MCA curator and the artist had in mind the Chicago Architectural Biennial, opening this October. Darling believes that "there are amazing architectural possibilities for these things." What will architects say when they see *Figurehead*—a tower made from three different pipes stacked together?

*The MCA Plaza Project opens on July 18 and will remain open for a year until July 24, 2016.*

<http://www.chicagoreader.com/Bleeder/archives/2015/07/17/no-theres-not-construction-outside-the-mcathouse-are-sculptures-by-alexandre-da-cunha>