

Matthew Lutz-Kinoy
PRESS



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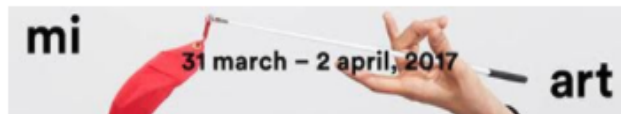
Matthew Lutz Kinoy "Fire Sale" at Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo

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Matthew Lutz-Kinoy interviewed by Tenzing Barshee

TB: How's the weather in São Paulo?

MLK: It was really sunny. But now it's raining every day.



TB: This is the third time you've traveled to Brazil to make art. What kind of work did you make the rest time?

MLK: One day, I was working on a painting and I had the canvas out on the terrace. It didn't take long until it was covered in black exhaust. To see this rampant pollution affected me quite a bit, and I responded by making charcoal drawings. In one of them, I merged a building with a human form—a high-heeled, skinny leg growing out of a wavy high-rise.

TB: Didn't you also make a drawing of a local nightclub?

MLK: There was this one club called Canthos where everyone was on GHB. Lots of plastic surgery. Many of the guys were super muscular, pumped-up gym queens who were passing out on top of one another, which triggered these thoughts on feminized bodies, curved architecture, and the merging of both. I noticed this binary gender reversal, a ip-hop of standard roles: the city is full of huge buildings that aren't masculine and the men, I saw, were buff but vulnerable, passing out in the nightclub, topless, lying around, bending.

TB: But you didn't approach the ideas about these bodies and buildings on a skin-oriented surface level. You considered how they come together structurally, how they're built.

MLK: Well, I went on an LSD walk around the city with two friends, which was somehow another reversal of one's basic social expectation. If you make yourself vulnerable, you can participate. I learned how the city is organized structurally through a series of hills and bridges. You don't really see these layers at first, but as you walk around, you notice how high you're standing on a hill or a bridge and how the city stretches out beneath and above you. These hills are quite gradual, they're not extreme. All of a sudden, you're much higher than you thought you were. It's very effective.

TB: To what effect?

MLK: Even though São Paulo is very dense, this gives you a liberating feeling because it allows you the illusion of having a vertical access into this vast metropolis.

TB: Is it too far-fetched to make a social comparison here?

MLK: It's a contradiction, of course. The distribution of wealth is so absurd here that most people are trapped in their social class and can only ever advance horizontally. This is one of the reasons why walking around as an outsider is quite interesting. You think that you're moving around these different social levels in a hyper-designed urban environment, surrounded by its epic high-rises that are dispersed as a complex landscape. But unlike other cities, the high-rises aren't a point of orientation. They're just everywhere. You don't necessarily see a building from many angles, as your view is mostly blocked by buildings and other construction. They're mostly hidden. It's about having all these different perspectives. That feeds into all kinds of metaphors that aren't really true to people who actually live here. Life is rough here.

TB: How did your interest in Brazilian and Japanese culture coincide?

MLK: After I left São Paulo the first time, I collaborated with Tobias Madison for a theater production based on the work of Shuji Terayama at Kunsthalle Zürich and went to Japan to do research. Right after the show in Zürich, I left for São Paulo, where I decided to make paintings titled *Princess PomPom in the Villa of Falling Flowers*, a character study of the protagonists of the classic piece of Japanese literature Genji Monogatari (*The Tale of Genji*).

TB: Can you give some background?

MLK: In São Paulo, I kept experiencing a vibrant attitude toward the body, an intense relationship to sex work for example, the ability to use pleasure as empowerment. The body becomes utilized as a space of social play and pleasure. I then participated in the gay pride parade, where you see so many people who are in the process of transition. People with small growing breasts. Three million people. It's a whole city. I felt very emotional to see that space of potential, a different kind of narrative. It felt less masculine than similar events in the US or Europe. You have to prevent yourself from projecting too much as you fantasize about this being a political group, and you don't understand why these people are marginalized. You want the whole parade to secede and create an alternative state filled with freaky topless glam.

TB: How did you bridge this experience to Japanese literature?

MLK: I'm generally interested in duration, which isn't a space of metaphor but projection. That's why it was interesting to use *The Tale of Genji* as a structure. Because it takes the form of a preexisting narrative that you don't have to take responsibility for, it exists outside of you and your own forming of meaning. So you can use it as a formal structure, which allows you to work more freely. It also felt appropriate to use *The Tale of Genji* because of the historic relationship of Japanese immigration in Brazil, which, as a visitor, I was somehow able to relate to. I wanted to create a bridge between the corporeal frivolity I experienced, and the heavy weight of a social narrative: from this life ark, a portrait of a person, a historic, epic novel. To create a play with a type of frivolity through an accessory, something super useful and decorative. The artworks needed something frivolous beyond the picture plane, while retaining a heavy atmosphere. That's how I came to sow the pompoms onto the paintings. I needed to push the subject.

TB: So, what works are you making now, your third time in Brazil?

MLK: I've been making ceramics with Silmara Watari, a Brazilian woman who studied Minguei, Chinese, and anagama pottery for thirteen years in Japan. To me, the interesting aspect of craft is the social fantasy that surrounds it. Not really how it's made. That's why I'm doing my ceramics here in Brazil and I'm not just nerding out on making a beautiful thing in my studio in Los Angeles.

TB: Do you treat the social narrative that surrounds ceramics as a cultural *readymade*?

MLK: Maybe, yes. I was already that in my *Fire Sale* dance in 2013, a performance that was one of my very first ceramic projects. It was already objectifying social interest in craft and ceramic work. Toying with that fetish.

at Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo
until 25 March 2017