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Paulo Monteiro

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Paulo Monteiro. Courtesy of Zeno X Gallery

Zeno X Gallery is pleased to present a first solo exhibition by the Brazilian artist Paulo Monteiro in Antwerp. The Empty Side brings together a new body of paintings and sculptures. Paulo Monteiro was born in 1961 in São Paulo, where he still lives and works. He grew up in a large family with parents who specialized in history and histology and in an environment bathed in music, literature and art. Politics were complex, especially after the military coup of 1964, which ushered in a dictatorial regime in Brazil that lasted until 1985. Monteiro first crossed the country's border in 1982 for a month-long trip to Europe, where he visited Paris and Düsseldorf, as well as several Italian cities.

Under the influence of Robert Crumb and Gilbert Shelton, who published comics in underground magazines in the 1960s in the US, Monteiro started drawing comics too. These would appear in magazines that did not have a license to exist and to be sold such as Boca, Papagaio, Almanak & Makongo. In this way he became part of an artistic underground scene in São Paulo. After graduating from the College of Fine Arts in São Paulo Monteiro co-founded Casa 7, a collective of artists that was based in a house with the number 7 in São Paulo. The house functioned as both a studio and exhibition platform from 1982 until 1985. They shared a mutual desire to paint with a focus on exploring the materiality of painting. Casa 7 connected a whole generation of writers, film-makers, musicians and other artists. This had a major impact on a new artistic generation in Brazil. In these years Paulo Monteiro made large paintings that were loaded by many layers of paint.

Towards the late 1980s Paulo Monteiro's interest shifted towards sculpture. He started collecting materials that had been rejected by their owners such as wooden planks, iron bars and ropes. Through a search for composition, he assembled parts into a harmonious unity. It was a process of cutting, bending, connecting, searching for balance and experimenting with gravity. The sculptures touched the floor or the wall without any intermediary. Soon a desire for liquidity, fluidity and movement entered his practice. He focused on drawing lines that travelled in their destined space with an attraction to the borders. The identity of the line was irregular, playful, elegant, soft, unique, personal and directed by the hand of the artist. The line could turn into a shape or three-dimensional form. Around 2005 he integrated colour in his gouaches and later in his sculptures. The space at borders, between layers or inside a mass is of great meaning to Paulo Monteiro. His works find their existence between painting and sculpture. Every element in his oeuvre is equally important to him no matter the size, the medium or the choice of display. There is no room for hierarchy.

Since 2014 twelve works by Paulo Monteiro have been acquired by MoMA in New York. More works can be found in public collections, among others in the Museu de Arte Moderna in São Paulo, The Museum of Fine Arts in Houston and the Museu de Arte Contemporanea Niteroi in Rio de Janeiro. His work has been included in group shows at the Pinacoteca do Estado in São Paulo, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in Paris and Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian in Lisbon, among many others. He has twice been invited to the Biennial of São Paulo, in 1985 and 1994.