

Six of one and half a dozen of the other, 2019
Solo exhibition at Gallery Momo, Cape Town, South Africa.

Six of one and half a dozen of another:

This show is a continuation of Pires's ongoing research into migration, nationality, and identity construction. Pires's position as an Angolan-born, Portuguese-raised subject situates his national relationship in liminal space. 'Belonging' essentially to neither place raises questions that have to do with movement, history, and education.

What is nationality? What makes us belong to a place, a country, a space? What is it to be Angolan or Portuguese in a contemporary postcolonial (or neocolonial) context? To what extent are we shaped by our education, or our ability to transform ourselves?

Pires engages with these issues not just in a personal context. His work deals with issues that parallel other realities in a world marked by imperialism, migration, and change. The objects in this exhibition are thus seen as interventions into questions of identity. One of the central elements in the show is a set of jumpsuits, equipped with measurement and archival materials. One of the suits, for example, is built with eight microphones distributed at different points on the suit (hands, feet, head, body). When worn, the suit captures and records the soundscape of its location and moment. Another jumpsuit is equipped with cameras, one with pockets, one with mirrors, etc., each of them a site of engagement between artist and viewer. The costume highlights an identity which is worn or performed rather than solidified as figure or image. It's more about what subjects we assume, or are made to assume, rather than who we are in essence.

The artwork becomes not a representational object, but rather a means of translation, transforming when confronted with ever-unravelling contexts. These jumpsuits are also self-conscious of their association with the idea of the 'uniform' and working class labour politics, both in a Southern African context and elsewhere.

The drawings on show are the results of interventions on paper, where anthropomorphic shapes emerge from partially destroyed material, playing with concepts of destruction and re-construction. Bodies appear and disappear, paralleling the ways in which identity is fashioned, negotiated, and remade.

By Gallery Momo, 2019