

By Katherine Sirois:

The Angolan born Portuguese artist, Pedro Pires is one of the most singular amongst the emerging figures on the international contemporary art scene. With a distinctive inventiveness and a remarkable experimental drive, whether building through the collection, use and assemblage of objects and materials of all sorts or performing disruptive actions with fire and brazing torch, his processes of creation reveal a certain connection with the ancient practice of alchemy. Focusing on phenomena such as transience, mutation, inscription, emanation and disintegration, the artist simultaneously composes with controlled parameters and chance, thus welcoming the accidental and the contingent within specific established frameworks. Working mainly across sculpture, installations and interventions on paper, he developed unique ways of shaping the human figure, which is at the very core of his whole oeuvre.

The works on paper, with their strongly personal style, feature anthropomorphic forms centred on the bare white or black background. The figures, in dark tones and appearing incomplete, fragmented or mutilated, emerge from the dynamic, abrasive and destructive actions performed onto the paper. While the artist guides drops and projections of metal in fusion within a formerly delimited and designed surface, the process results in burn marks, perforations, stains and rays. The directed yet unpredictable traces and scars draw the figures, giving them some sort of enigmatic and uncanny auratic presence, which seems suspended between their advent and dissipation. The representation of humans through those fortuitous scarifications conveys the idea of body pulverisation as if it was exposed to an invisible blast, rifle bullets or painful trauma, revealing the artist's concerns with issues such as wars and violence, migration, displacements and boundaries.

Most recently, Pedro Pires produces anthropomorphic sculptures made of plastic canisters that are widely used in Africa for cooking oil, water or gasoline. Along with the use of this common and daily worthless object, the artist integrates the colourful fabrics from the Vlisco and Wax traditions, braiding them in successive knots, which form hoods or long dresses covering both the heads of his metallic busts and the body of his standing human figures. Draping them from top of the head to knees, showing the sculpture's front legs and feet only, the display conjures up the mixed ideas of anonyma and hybridisation in the processes of cultural identity definitions.

In recent years, Pedro Pires has been part of several group shows including: Discourses of Decoloniality (Lisbon), Fucking Globo (Luanda), Intersections within the Global South (Luanda), (Im)materiality (Lisbon, Águeda), along with solo exhibitions at Luanda's Museum of Natural History, Paris AKA Art Fair, Momo Gallery in Johannesburg, This Is Not A White Cube in Lisbon or Galerie LouiSimone Guirandou in Abidjan.