

ANDERSON BORBA - ALEXANDRE CANONICO

Curated by Kiki Mazzucchelli

Kupfer is pleased to present a duo exhibition featuring London-based artists Anderson Borba and Alexandre Canonico. Bringing together a series of wall reliefs by Canonico and freestanding sculptures by Borba, the show has been conceived as a conversation between two artistic practices that make use of similar raw materials and procedures. In both cases, there is a strong sense of physicality and a keen interest in how materials behave and interact. Stylistically, the works are sometimes reminiscent of post-Minimalist or colour field abstraction (in the case of Canonico) and early 20th century sculpture or three-dimensional works by Brazilian self-taught artists such as [Zé Bezerra](#) or the figurehead carvers of the Lower São Francisco River (in Borba's case). Borba and Canonico are, of course, artists of their own time. Even if these works occasionally carry indicial traits of an art historical lexicon of forms, they are ultimately concerned with issues of the present. From a material perspective, both artists employ cheap, industrial-grade wood commonly found in DIY stores, manipulating this material through the use of methods and gestures that are also characteristic of a DIY universe.

The starting point for Canonico's wall pieces is the selection of unusually-shaped wooden off-cuts which he collects in his studio. Therefore, they initially emerge from a process that has been previously carried out in the making of other works. Leftover wood prompts new compositions in which oddly-shaped scraps are interlocked into a board like jigsaw pieces. Importantly, the interaction between the different parts is determined by what is possible to achieve with specific tools. For example, the straight line that runs vertically from the bottom edge in *Glow Hole* (2020) traces the path of a band saw across the plywood board - a necessary step that allows the saw to be moved in different directions to create the oval shapes in the centre of the composition. There is a self-explanatory frankness in Canonico's works insofar as the gestures behind their making are left exposed in a blatant rejection of any type of illusionism or deceptiveness, a characteristic that can be loosely described as a kind of visual rendition of Richard Serra's [Verblast](#) (1967-8).

And yet, despite their inherent candour, these wall reliefs are highly ambiguous: 'neither sculpture nor painting nor drawing, neither two or three dimensional, but a vivid and always changing combination of all of the above', to borrow a sentence used by Madeleine Grynsztejn to describe Richard Tuttle's work. The numerous holes on the surface of the small scale works included in this exhibition, which in previous works played a purely functional role - i.e. to make room to insert a jigsaw blade into the board - are used here to create drawings; the holes featuring more prominently as compositional elements and at the same time emphasising the thing-like quality of the pieces. These drawings are further complemented by lines that emerge from the narrow empty spaces in between each interlocked block of wood, adding another essentially three-dimensional element whose status constantly oscillates between representation (a line on a plane) and the thing itself (the block-object).

Although some of these works are small in scale, there is a lot going on. Beyond their slippery two-three dimensionality, they are unquestionably painterly; a painterly-ness that has its roots in the same DIY vocabulary as the sculptural gestures. Canonico borrows his bright palette from building sites and urban spaces: spray-painted road markings, scaffolding identification painting, road barriers; all rendered in vibrant colours that are meant to indicate a place or serve as a warning, thereby fulfilling a linguistic function in construction sites and the like. Applied onto the different parts that form these wall reliefs, these highly intense colours bring a sense of condensed, luminous energy that is reminiscent of Hélio Oiticica's 1960s [Bóides](#) (Fireballs), a

series of small scale participatory objects which the artist described as ‘possessed or inflamed by colour.’¹

Another prominent feature of Canonico’s wall reliefs is how they play with ideas around abstraction and figuration without ever settling to one or the other entirely. Although these works are formed through the articulation of lines, voids, shapes and colour which are distinctly abstract, the interplay between the different elements sometimes morphs into allusive forms. Added to this is the fact that all works have titles which are both suggestive and open-ended enough to conjure up a multiplicity of images in the viewers’ minds. The series of perforations in *Bang Bang* (2020) may be read as bullet holes, while the clumsy pink and yellow volume projecting itself beyond the bottom edge of the same picture may be seen as an explosion frozen in time, or perhaps a tumour. One may distinguish the image of a crucifix in *Nesting* (2020); or, alternatively, may be led to associate the phallic shape that penetrates the composition with erotic images.

Figuration appears even more explicitly in Anderson Borba’s sculptures, although still retaining a great degree of ambiguity. Borba’s sculptures are assembled from various fragments of discarded wood found near construction sites and in urban skips which the artist collects in the streets, scraps which come already loaded with the marks of their previous life cycle. The artist is initially attracted to the specific shapes, colours, contours, and textures of these found objects, but once brought into the studio and grouped together they start to coalesce into images. According to the artist, the starting point for *The weeping white man* (2020), was ‘a media portrait of a sedentary white politician moaning about a recent defeat’. Borba responded to this image by ‘assembling the man’s portrait, working with fragments of wood in a kind of simulacra of a modernist aesthetic’. The upper part of this sculpture, where the figurative element is concentrated, is rendered almost like a *bas-relief*, with the image of a human head creating a distinct profile against the background and demanding a certain frontality that is counter-intuitive to this medium’s traditional principle of all around visibility.

Another remarkable characteristic of the group of works presented in this exhibition is their fragmentary nature. Each of these sculptures is assembled from numerous pieces of ordinary industrial wood which are put together and manipulated by the artist using different techniques, sometimes giving the material a nobler appearance while in other instances revealing their truly common essence. In works such as *Dear sir or madam* (2021), *Beastmode* [Jacaré] (2021), and *Shut Up!* [cords] (2021), these different approaches are made even more explicit with the clear distinction between carefully carved and moulded elements that constitute the more pictorial face of the work and a backside that reveals the bare materials and procedures used in their construction.

By combining together these two different viewpoints in a single sculptural work, Borba simultaneously evokes some iconic features of modernist or so-called primitive sculpture and

¹ The term ‘bolide’ is used in astronomy to refer to an extremely bright meteor that explodes in the atmosphere, thus resulting in a fireball. Oiticica discussed the title of the *Bólido* series in 1979, stating that it was inspired by Brazilian director Humberto Mauro’s 1933 film *Ganga Bruta* (*Brutal Gang*):

I was attempting to paint structures in which color was a physical part of the object, in which the objects would be possessed or inflamed by color ... That’s why I used the word “bolide” ... The idea came to me while I was watching Ganga Bruta, a film by Humberto Mauro in which the characters wear white and their white costumes catch and reflect the light. Mauro lit his actors ... and, as they rolled across a lawn, in this one scene, the effect was very much one of fireballs.

(Ivan Cardoso and Hélio Oiticica, ‘Ivan Cardoso Interviews Hélio Oiticica for the Film “HO”’, in Roesler 2008, p.33.)

quickly lays bare their artifice by exposing what is behind their making. In doing so, he demystifies ideas around cohesiveness, solidity, and unity that may be associated with sculptural practice. This doesn't mean that the artist sees what we understand as the field of traditional sculpture as a dead-end; on the contrary, he appears to find in it plenty of untrodden ground. Indeed, it is possible to speculate if the fragmentation and pictorialisation that characterises these works somehow embody the way in which image and information are mostly consumed and experienced nowadays through digital screens.

While sharing some ideas around materiality, workmanship and language, Anderson Borba and Alexandre Canonico make work that has very different intentions and outcomes. Above all, we can say that both artists make work by *thinking through materials* - in this particular case using the same ordinary material -, incorporating ideas from different artistic legacies to expand the possibilities of sculpture in the present.

Anderson Borba (Santos, 1972. Lives and works in London) completed the Alternative MFA program at The School of the Damned (2018) and is currently enrolled at the MFA Sculpture at Slade London (2019 - 2021). His work has recently featured in exhibitions at Set Gallery, Off Shoot Gallery and Assembly Point Gallery (London, 2019). He is the recipient of the Herbert Seaborn Memorial Scholarship Prize at Slade (2020) and the Gilbert Bayes Scholarship (2020).

Alexandre Canonico (Pirassununga, 1974. Lives and works in London) is currently completing the Postgraduate Programme at the Royal Academy of Arts (2017-21). Recent solo exhibitions include 'Buraco', at Galeria Marília Razuk, São Paulo (2019) and 'Standstill' at Kubik Gallery, Oporto (2019). Forthcoming shows include New Contemporaries, South London Gallery (2021).