

SEANKELLY

Kotzé, Talitha. "EAF Host first UK Solo Show by Iran do Espírito Santo," *The List*, August 18, 2010.



EAF host first UK solo show by Iran do Espírito Santo

Brazilian-born artist exhibits at Edinburgh's Ingleby Gallery



A painter, sculptor and photographer who has exhibited in New York, Venice and his native Brazil, Iran do Espírito Santo is set to cause a splash at this year's Edinburgh Art Festival. Talitha Kotzé talks to him about the ideas behind his practice

The name Iran do Espírito Santo may not be a household word on these shores, but brace yourselves, the Brazilian-born artist is about to take the Edinburgh Art Festival by storm. Next month at the Ingleby Gallery, Scotland will have the opportunity to see his first solo exhibition in the UK. Viewers can expect sensuous sculptures, elegantly distilled photographs and meticulous site-specific wall drawings.

As an artist, do Espírito Santo is in it for the long haul. His sculptures, characterised by an exaggerated quest for the ideal form, are constructed, as if chiselled with the artist's mind, through a method of abstraction in order to strip the form down to its bare essentials, finally producing an object that appears solid and heavy again. 'Ultimately my aim is to balance the ethereal qualities of thought with concrete reality,' says the artist of his own practice. 'People do this subconsciously all the time, but when it is brought to artistic discourse, it acquires additional weight and poetic potential.'

Like many artists active in São Paulo, do Espírito Santo studied Fine Arts at the Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado. Reflecting on his training in the early 80s he recalls: 'In those days that school was suffering a transition from a more conceptual orientation to the "return of painting" trend, but right from the

start I was more attracted to analytical activities.' Today he is highly regarded at home and over the last decade has started to gain international recognition.

'It has been a long journey for me,' he says. 'For many years I worked in graphic design companies and also as a freelance illustrator. It took me a long time to have a show in a commercial gallery and even longer to start showing abroad. But I think in a way that delay was very positive because it allowed me to mature the work without the pressure of the art market, which I think can be very harmful when you are too young. Compared to many European and North American art schools, where students are sometimes trained to operate as real businessmen, ours was a very innocent start.'

Do Espírito Santo is concerned with the tactile qualities of his materials and often works with concrete materials such as glass, steel, copper, stone and granite, to give a timeless feel to recognisable domestic items like lamps, keyholes, bricks, boxes and tins. Similarly, his photographic work is concerned with a precision informed by the old fashioned techniques of the darkroom where light sensitive chemicals activate images on paper. Perhaps most intriguing of all are his painstaking wall drawings, which are fast becoming a signature feature in his shows. These are done in the old Renaissance technique of painting in pigment mixed with water on a thin layer of fresh wet plaster.

Usually covering an entire wall, they form sequential patterns of tonal gradations in linear shades of white, grey and black, bringing about an optical hypnosis. The execution of these drawings bares some resemblance to those of Glasgow artist Richard Wright, who won the Turner Prize last year for his intricately detailed gold leaf patterns on the wall of Tate Britain, and who has also made new work for the Edinburgh Festival. But where Wright is intrigued by producing short-lived works – often only surviving the duration of the exhibition and because of that allowing a heightened sensory experience in the viewer – do Espírito Santo produces a similar pattern each time. 'I have been fascinated by the frescoes since my childhood,' he says. 'The relationship between image and architecture, and then to the body's movement within it, is reliant on time, so despite its flat existence, it becomes an experience similar to sculpture.'

Do Espírito Santo believes that repetition creates a history for the work and this is very different from being executed only once. His wall drawings attempt a critical approach to its context and the work he is planning for the Ingleby Gallery will form part of a series called *En Passant* that has been exhibited in galleries, biennials and other institutional spaces around the world. It becomes a beautiful, ephemeral work that moves through these different spaces like a phantom, transforming them with modulations of light and shadow, re-addressing each space and creating a form that eventually dissolves into the space.

His practice ultimately aims to transform everyday manufactured items into icons of contemplation, as he explains. 'Many of the objects that we deal with in a domestic context have been a concept before their existence in the real world. Somehow what I try to do is to go back to their idealisation but in a very graspable way, often by using solid and heavy materials through very technical processes.' Together with a keen interest in current affairs and a psychoanalytical approach to his involvement with our fast-paced world, the artist reveals a process of quieting and purposefully paring down what he interacts with.

His persistence has generated international acclaim and today his works are included in the collections of many prominent museums. He has made substantial contributions to the São Paulo, Istanbul and Venice biennales, as well as other museums and galleries. However, he is yet to convince a Scottish audience: next month, viewers will be able to decide for themselves whether it has been worth the wait.

Iran do Espírito Santo, Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, Thu 29 Jul—Sat 25 Sep.