



Ernesto Neto/MATRIX 190

“My work speaks of the finite and the infinite, of the macroscopic and the microscopic, the internal and external, by the masculine and feminine powers, but sex is like a snake, it slithers through everything.”—Ernesto Neto¹

Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto was born, raised, and continues to live in Rio de Janeiro, a place commonly associated with pleasure. His installations are made of stretchy, stocking-like material and loose, transparent scrims and are often filled with aromatic spices or malleable Styrofoam pellets. Suspended from the ceiling or attached to the walls at acute angles, Neto's installations cry out like sirens to be stroked, caressed, and entered. Neto explains that he believes in a sensual body through whose movement we connect with the world. A fusion of the mind and the body occurs in his conceptually tight and aesthetically pleasurable sculpture.

Although Neto's work can be looked at as traditional sculpture, additional depth surfaces once it is interacted with by the viewer. The work is undeniably sexy. Neto makes objects that exist as sensual bodies rather than just as depictions. He says, *“there is a giant force in nature for love. I feel the body is sensuous, and sensuality is beautiful. So I don't want to discuss sexuality like a sociologist, but rather create a sensuous atmosphere in the work.”* His organic forms are anthropomorphic and inviting. Translucent beings, they reveal their own interior and exterior and satisfy voyeuristic tendencies. Neto's passion, for art, life, love, and knowledge is contagious. He explains, *“There is pleasure in being alive even in the most difficult moments. We are alive; there is no way out, so we have got to be alive in life.”* His sculptures pulsate with this intensity.

Most critics place Neto's work in the context of 1960s Brazilian sculpture, specifically that of Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark. And, yes, in its insistence on interactivity and the privileging of the corporeal and sensual realm of aesthetic experience, Neto's work updates that of Oiticica and Clark. But the artist himself cites European Modernism as having a prime influence, and also notes looking at the work of Alexander Calder, Constantine Brancusi, and Richard Serra. As for affinities with Brazilian artists, Neto mentions Tunga and Cildo Meireles. Like theirs, his work is monochromatic, minimal, and irreverent.

In early works such as *Piff, Paff, Poff, Puff; Piff Piff*; and *Puff Puff*, which comprised his 1997 exhibition at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery in New York, Neto filled small Lycra sacks with colorful and aromatic substances such as chili powder and coriander.



The sacks were dropped on the floor in strategic arrangements to form abstract compositions of color, form, and scent. The intensity arose from the powerful mix of scents and the evocative palette. The aroma of the installation greeted visitors upon the opening of the elevator and increased as they rounded the corners and neared the gallery. As in many of Neto's works, the viewer was drawn in through a sense not traditionally associated with art: smell. By giving equal importance to smell and touch, Neto's works challenge the traditional primacy of vision in 20th-century art.

In newer works, such as *Navedenga* [1998] and *Nude Plasmic* [1999], suspension and weightlessness replace impact and gravity, and penetration replaces spillage. The olfactory has given way to the tactile. Both works are room-size, floating membranes made from synthetic fabric. Ever-changing atmospheres, they are impacted by the barefoot visitors who enter and explore. Visitors experience a heightened sense of their environment while inside of the translucent installation. The forms are altered as visitors step on the fabric, extending the form to meet the floor, and push out on the walls as a way of maintaining balance. By inviting viewers into a world where the relationship between cause and effect is immediate and magnified, perhaps, as critic Dan Cameron posed, the artist is asking us to ponder the ramification our actions are having on our environment.

In these recent installations, each viewer simultaneously is engulfed by and impacts the shape. The effect recalls the movement of a baby in his mother's womb, with protruding elbows or knees temporarily manifesting as new lumps on her stomach. And, in fact, *Navedenga* is a word constructed by the artist from the Portuguese that references the internal female sexual space in which life is created and protected.

Like Neto's other room-sized installations, *Nhó Nhó Nave* [1999] is made of Lycra, the material of women's stockings. The intimate, feminine associations are intended to awaken a sense of sensuality in the viewer. Upon entering the form through a slit on the side, the viewer encounters sexual shapes throughout. Openings or “windows” become bodily orifices. Phallic forms are suspended all over, and an abundance of breast-like forms anchor the work to the ground. The title is an onomatopoeic phrase, a strategy Neto has employed in titling other works. In this case, *Nhó Nhó Nave* is a phrase used in Portuguese to imitate the sound of a worm channeling through the earth.

We fishing the line, 1999, lycra tulle, polyamide stockings, tumeric, powdered black pepper, powdered clove and curry, 177 x 787 ³/₄ x 393 ³/₄ inches. Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Arts, Tate Gallery—installation view. Courtesy of the artist and Galeria Camargo Vilaça, São Paulo.



In 1998 Neto began a series of “ovaloids,” “huggable” sculptural pieces made of white Lycra and stuffed with Styrofoam pellets that sit directly on the ground. Some, such as *Somnalonembulist* [1999], in which two oval shapes are connected via an “umbilical cord,” have orifices into which viewers can insert a hand or arm. Several feet high, they also permit viewers to lay their faces upon the top of the form. The effect is pleasant and relaxing, intimate and gentle—a welcome surprise for visitors expecting the hard edge often associated with conceptual art.

Neto's site-specific MATRIX installation, *A Maximum Minimum Time Space Between Us and the Parsimonious Universe* [2001], deploys his traditional materials in a new way. Suspended from the ceiling, transparent panels form a labyrinth within the gallery. Constructing a honeycomb-like form, here again Neto creates a room within a room. Enter, and the viewer is separated from the normal realm of exteriority and encased within a softer space. In mystical traditions, labyrinths have been used to seek a transformation of human nature and make a connection to the Divine. As Neto has himself stated, the time that one spends in his installations is indeed transforming. Perhaps the transcendent quality of Neto's art is a reminder that life's vibrancy is available only to those willing to risk openness and vulnerability.

Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson
Phyllis Wattis MATRIX Curator

¹ Bill Arning, “Ernesto Neto,” *Bomb*, Winter 2000, p. 80.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Katya Garcia-Anton, “Ernesto Neto-Gramatica Jocosa,” in *Ernesto Neto*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, U.K., and Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee, Scotland, 2000, p. 27.

⁵ Sylvie Fortin, “Ernesto Neto,” *Parachute*, April/May/June 1999, no. 94, p. 58.

⁶ Dan Cameron, “Why we ask you not to touch,” in *Ernesto Neto*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, U.K., and Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee, Scotland, 2000, p. 15.

⁷ Fortin, p. 59.

⁸ Lynn Herbert, *Ernesto Neto: Nhó Nhó Nave*, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX, 2000, p. 5.

⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

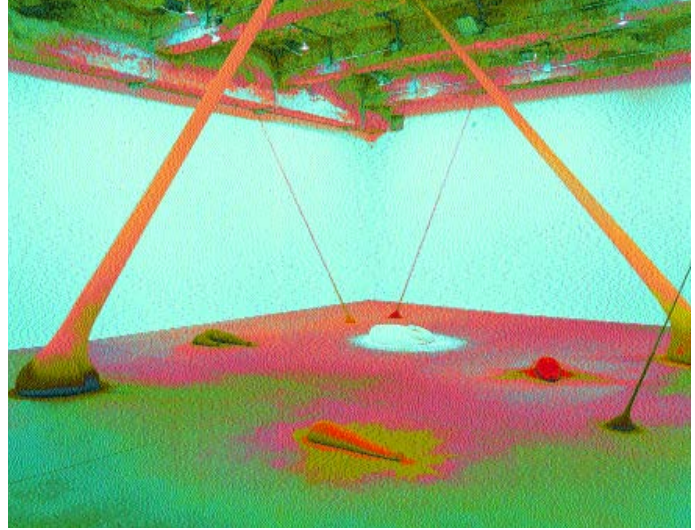
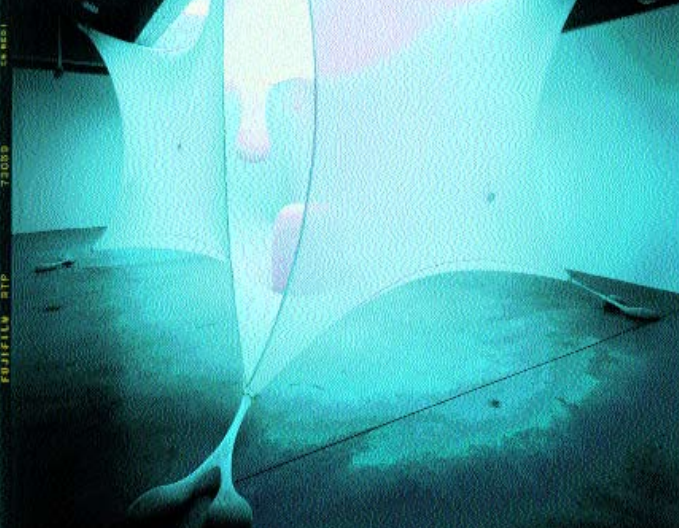
Nhó Nhó Nave, 1999, lycra, ribbon, sand, styrofoam and clove, dimensions variable. Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston—installation view. Courtesy of the artist, Bonakdar Jancou Gallery, New York, and Galeria Camargo Vilaça, São Paulo.

Ernesto Neto/MATRIX 190

A Maximum Minimum Time Space Between Us and the Parsimonious Universe

February 18 – April 15, 2001

University of California
Berkeley Art Museum



Ernesto Neto was born in 1964 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He attended the Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage and the Museu de Arte Moderna, both in Rio de Janeiro, where he continues to live and work.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2001
Centro Galego de Arte Contemporaneo, Santiago de Compostela, Spain

2000
Institute of Contemporary Art, London, U.K.
SITE Sante Fe, NM
Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH
Dundee Contemporary Art, Dundee, Scotland
Galeria Elba Benitez, Madrid, Spain

1999
Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX

1998
Museo de Arte Contemporano Carrilo Gil, Mexico DF, Mexico
Bonakdar Jancou Gallery, New York, NY

1997
Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, NY
Galeria Pedro Oliveira, Porto, Portugal
Christopher Grimes Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Galeria Camargo Vilaça, Sao Paulo, Brazil

1996
Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Espacio 204, Caracas, Venezuela

Selected Group Exhibitions

2000
"Carnegie International 1999/2000," Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA
"00," Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York, NY
"Raumkörper, Netze und andere Gibilde," Basel Kunstverein, Basel, Switzerland
"SKIN," Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, MI
"Wonderland," Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO
"Versiones del Sur," Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain

1999
"Liverpool Biennial," Liverpool, U.K.
"Drawings," Bonakdar Jancou Gallery, New York, NY
"Best of the Season," The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT

1998
"XXIV Bienal Internacional de São Paulo," São Paulo, Brazil
"Sydney Biennial," Sydney, Australia
"Puntos Cardinales," Fundacion Museo Alejandro Otero, Caracas, Venezuela
"Loose Threads," Serpentine Gallery, London, U.K.

1997
"Material Immaterial," The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
"Esto es: Arte Objeto e Instalacion de Piberoamerica," Centro Cultural Arte Contemporano, Mexico DF, Mexico

"As Outras Modernidades," Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany

1996
"Transfomal," Wiener Secession, Vienna, Austria
"1996 Kunstbrau, Next," Internationales Projekt Für Bildende Kunst, Verin Für Bildende Kunst, Graz, Austria
"Transparencias," Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

1995
"Kwangju International Biennale," Kwangju, Korea
The Drawing Center, New York, NY
"The Five Senses," White Columns, New York, NY
"Entre o Desenho e a Escultura," Museu de Arte Moderne de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil

Nave Denga, 1998, lycra tulle, polyamide fabric, styrofoam balls, powdered clove and sand, 144 x 180 x 252 inches. Bonakdar Jancou Gallery, New York—installation view. Collection of Donald L. Bryant, Jr. Family Trust, St. Louis.

Selected Catalogues and Publications

Ernesto Neto: Nhó Nhó Nave, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX, 2000.
Ernesto Neto, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, U.K., and Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee, Scotland, 2000.
Wonderland, The Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO, 2000.
Ernesto Neto 1998—1999: Naves, Céus, Sonhos, Galeria Camargo Vilaça, São Paulo, Brazil, 1999.
Cream: Contemporary Art in Culture, Phaidon Press, London, U.K., 1998.

Selected Bibliography

Arning, Bill. "Ernesto Neto," *Bomb*, Winter 2000, pp. 78-84.
___, "Ernesto Neto," *Time Out New York*, November 19-26, 1998, no. 165, p. 64.
Basualdo, Carlos. "Ernesto Neto—Galeria Camargo Vilaça," *Artforum*, January 1995, p. 93.
___, "Studio Visit: Ernesto Neto," *TRANS>*, November 1995, pp. 137-42.
Fortin, Sylvie. "Ernesto Neto," *Parachute*, April/May/June 1999, no. 94, pp. 58-59.
Gallo, Rubén. "Ernesto Neto: voluptuous, sexy, and floating membranes," *Flash art (International)*, January-February 1999, vol. 32, no. 204, pp. 78-79.
Herkenhoff, Paulo. "Ernesto Neto: Entre el Nadir y la Nada," *Arte Internacional*, 1993, pp. 15-16.
Israel, Nico. "Ernesto Neto—Tanya Bonakdar Gallery," *Artforum*, October 1997, p. 101.
Pedrosa, Adriano. "Ernesto Neto—Galeria Camargo Vilaça," *Frieze*, March/April 1998, no. 39, p. 91.
___, "Ernesto Neto—Tanya Bonakdar Gallery," *Art/Text*, November 1997, pp. 87-88.
Smith, Roberta. "Safe Among Seamless Shadows," *The New York Times*, November 17, 1999, p. E1.
Williams, Gilda. "Ernesto Neto," *Art Monthly*, July-August 2000, pp. 46-47.

Somnalnembulist, 1999, polyamide fabric and styrofoam balls, 79 x 25 x 50 inches. Private collection, Paris.

Work in MATRIX

Ernesto Neto
A Maximum Minimum Time Space Between Us and the Parsimonious Universe
2000
Lycra tulle and sand
Courtesy of the artist, Bonakdar Jancou Gallery, New York, and Galeria Camargo Vilaça, São Paulo

Please note:
Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson will give a curator's walkthrough of the exhibition on Thursday, March 8, at 12:15 pm.

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Nude Plasmic, 1999, lycra tulle, polystyrene, clove, cumin, lavender and sand, 78²/₁₆ x 238¹/₁₆ inches. Carnegie International 1999/2000—installation view. Courtesy of the artist, Bonakdar Jancou Gallery, New York, and Galeria Camargo Vilaça, São Paulo.

cover: *Gloeiobabel* *Nudeliame Landmoonia*, 2000, polyamide stockings, styrofoam and sand, dimensions variable. Institute of Contemporary Arts, London—installation view. Collection of Daros Latin America, Zürich.

above: Ernesto Neto at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, 1997—installation view. Courtesy of the artist, Bonakdar Jancou Gallery, New York, and Galeria Camargo Vilaça, São Paulo.