

Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative
Under the Same Sun:
Adriano Costa on Fabrics, Gold, and Baroque Brazil

Adriano Costa: My name is Adriano Costa. I'm 39 years old. I'm an artist based in São Paulo, Brazil.

Pablo León de la Barra: I met him in London, where he lived for a while. We used to work in the same pub, at the George and Dragon, serving drinks behind the bar when we were younger immigrants, trying to make ends meet. And we've had a friendship and an artistic dialogue since.

Adriano Costa: The way I place the elements in my installations, I think they're very much about painting, the color, the space, the elements, and what exists between this stuff.

Pablo León de la Barra: He likes to talk about a work in that moment before it becomes a work—that kind of completeness of something that's not yet an installation, that's not yet a sculpture—that moment before things become frozen.

Adriano Costa: The fabric and the colors on the floor—it's like dance. It's like jazz. It's trying to understand the forms and the stuff.

Pablo León de la Barra: The work we have in the exhibition is a continuation of an earlier work that he did that won an award at the Video Brazil exhibition. That early work was more about personal items, pieces of cloth, scattered, or laid down in the ground, making a comment on critical issues—issues of identity—through the message that appeared in the pieces of cloth, or the way they were assembled.

Adriano Costa: People say I work with garbage, trash and stuff like that. But when I work with a piece of fabric, it's not garbage, it's the material I choose. That's a very precious thing.

Pablo León de la Barra: The work we acquired for the collection could be seen as kind of a next step here. He was already using a lot of cleaning material and found objects...

Adriano Costa: ...like bath towels that were used by my friends or my family. And I think it's about how to find the magic in it.

Pablo León de la Barra: Adriano works almost as an alchemist, transforming the found objects into, let's say, "gold." The title of the work is very revealing also—it's called *Ouro Velho*. Old Gold.

Adriano Costa: I think the work I'm showing here, there's something [about it that's] really close to the Brazilian baroque, because, you know, we were a colony. When I go to Minas Gerais, for example, a place that's four and a half hours from São Paulo, and I go to see the churches—Portuguese, and some Spanish as well. That's really beautiful, but it's a bit sad, you know? The color of the gold was always used in Latin America as something really related to domination—the power of the gold and things like that.

Pablo León de la Barra: The gold leaf that was used to cover the altars in the churches was one of the motors of colonialism—like how to get the people inside the church, and how to colonize them through religion, making them enter the churches where this golden presence was there, no?

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But in a way, it also relates to the creation of this new middle class, which hadn't existed in Brazil for a while—their access to the commodities of the first world, being able to buy all these kind of, let's say, “fake gold” instruments that one is supposed to have, from flat-screen televisions, to laundry machines, to everything that keeps the economy going.

Why does Latin America continue to have these almost pendulous movements between fantastic booms and deep economic and political crises? So I think in this way, the fragility of Adriano's work also reminds us of the fragility of this world in which we live and work.