

Art Basel

My first Art Basel: Ernesto Neto

As told to Fernanda Brenner

11 November 2020



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The Brazilian artist on whispering sculptures and his first participation in the fair



Artist **Ernesto Neto** is known for his sprawling, biomorphic installations and sculptures, which often incorporate organic materials and draw from the culture of his native Brazil. Earlier this year, Neto sat down with curator and writer Fernanda Brenner to discuss his first Art Basel participation, for which he created one of his most important works to date.



Ernesto Neto, *Three Stops for an Animal Architecture under Gravity*, 2007. © Ernesto Neto. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin, Paris, and London.

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‘To talk about my longstanding relationship with Art Basel, we have to start from the beginning. In 1995, I participated in the Gwangju Biennial in South Korea. The show was in a large building with several stalls. When I installed my sculptures there, I had a feeling that the strength, the vital energy – the spirit, so to speak – of the sculptures was being sucked out into the void. I realized that the freestanding walls and the out-of-sight ceiling of the open space did not enclose the work in a way that would hold its full energy. A few years later, in 1998, Marcantonio Vilaça invited me to participate in the Statements sector of Art Basel. It was the first time that Camargo Vilaça [in São Paulo] – now **Fortes D’Aloia & Gabriel** – was participating in the fair and the first time I would attend one.



Installation view of a work by Ernesto Neto in Fortes D’Aloia & Gabriel’s booth at Art Basel in Basel, 2018.

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‘When I got the floor plans, I realized I was going to face the same issue I had in South Korea. If I didn’t master the situation, the energy of the piece would again be sucked out into the vastness of the convention center. But what I initially thought to be a problem ended up becoming the solution, a new seed – the work would encompass the space, creating a ceiling within its structure and bringing the energy back to Earth.



Ernesto Neto, A Gente se encontra aqui hoje, amanhã em outro lugar. Enquanto isso Deus é Deusa. Santa gravidade, 2003. Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection, Vienna. Installation view of 'Ernesto Neto and the Huni Kuin: Aru Kuxpia | Sacret Secret', TBA21-Augarten, Vienna, 2015. Photo © Jens Ziehe.

‘I remember traveling with the work I had planned for the booth – a large textile piece filled with about 40 kilograms of clove powder – which I packed inside two large cleaning containers that were screwed together. I still have a fond memory of that eerie, egg-like shape sliding around the baggage carousel at Basel airport. The installation situation I had envisioned required the space to have a sort of “fourth wall”, which we resolved by erecting a wooden beam in addition to the three drywall walls of the booth. We opened the “egg” over a table in the center of the booth and stretched the edges of the textile over the top of the walls, looping ribbon around wall hooks that had been carefully placed to hold it tight.

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Ernesto Neto, *in the corner of life*, 2013. © Ernesto Neto. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin, Paris, and London. Photo by def image.

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'The "bulb" with the clove powder in rested on a small table until we were done, then Marcantonio removed the table while I gently held and dropped the bulb on the floor, as though it were the roots of a tree. The clove powder spread around the bulb, making a beautiful, lovely-smelling ring, sending good vibrations out to the visitors of the fair. At some point, the sculpture whispered her name to me – *The sky is the anatomy of my body* [1988]. This turned out to be one of my most important works, one very dear to me, from which many important projects unfolded.'



Ernesto Neto, *My Love Topology*, 2007. © Ernesto Neto. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin, Paris, and London.

Ernesto Neto is represented by **Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel**, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro; **Galerie Max Hetzler**, Berlin, Paris, and London; **Tanya Bonakdar Gallery**, New York City and Los Angeles; **galería elba benítez**, Madrid; **i8 Gallery**, Reykjavík; and **Goodman Gallery**, Cape Town, Johannesburg, and London.

Top image: Ernesto Neto, *CanoeKeneJaguarPataLampLight (CanoaKeneOnçaPawLampadaLuz)* (detail), 2015. Courtesy of Ernesto Neto. Installation view of 'Ernesto Neto and the Huni Kuin: Aru Kuxpia | Sacret Secret', TBA21-Augarten, Vienna, 2015. Photo © Jens Ziehe.