

June 2016

Artomity

"Joao Vasco Paiva, Benches, Ramps, Ledges, Ground"

# João Vasco Paiva

*Benches, Stairs, Ramps, Ledges, Ground*

Richard Lord

João Vasco Paiva

1

PASSAGEM/OBETO LIM  
Cured ink print on oak, 183 x 30 x 30 cm, 2016.

2

From left to right:  
PASSAGEM/OBETO ARC1  
Cured ink print on oak, left: 61 x 185 cm,  
centre: 193 x 122 cm, right: 193 x 122 cm, 2016.

3

PASSAGEM/OBETO LIBRARY  
Cured ink prints on oak, 60 x 122 cm, each, 2016.

PASSAGEM/OBETO ST  
Cured ink print on oak, 183 x 122 cm, 2016.

PASSAGEM/OBETO LIM  
Cured ink print on oak, 183 x 30 x 30 cm, 2016.

3

Left:  
PASSAGEM/OBETO WA  
Cured ink print on oak, left: 56 x 147 cm,  
centre: 122 x 152 cm, right: 56 x 147 cm, 2016.

Right

PASSAGEM/OBETO ARC1  
Cured ink print on oak, left: 61 x 185 cm,  
centre: 193 x 122 cm, right: 193 x 122 cm, 2016.

4

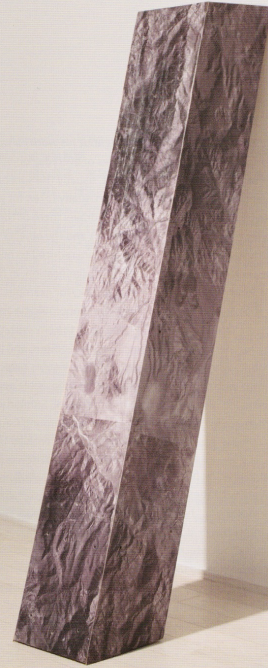
From left to right:  
PASSAGEM/OBETO AND  
Cured ink print on oak, 183 x 122 cm, 2016.  
PASSAGEM/OBETO AI  
Cured ink print on oak, 183 x 122 cm, 2016.  
PASSAGEM/OBETO BR/VCL  
Cured ink print on oak, two pieces: 183 x 30 x 30 cm and  
183 x 20 x 8 cm, 2016.

PASSAGEM/OBETO ARC2  
Cured ink print on oak, 122 x 122 x 30 cm, 2016.

PASSAGEM/OBETO WA  
Cured ink print on oak, left: 56 x 147 cm,  
centre: 122 x 152 cm, right: 56 x 147 cm, 2016.

Courtesy the artist and Jacob Lewis Gallery, New York.

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“I’m very interested in not controlling the final outcome, and so I wanted to work with these images but I wanted not to control them.”


The work of Hong Kong-based, Portuguese-born artist João Vasco Paiva represents a formal investigation of how urban environments are affected by human use – and how those environments in turn affect those humans. Even by his standards, however, his latest work, *Benches, Stairs, Ramps, Ledges, Ground*, shown after a three-month residency at Jacob Lewis Gallery in New York, is a particularly direct interpretation of this mission, with urban materials that depict aspects of urban environments subjected to the stresses and strains typical of those environments. While in New York Paiva contacted people who make skate ramps, covered those ramps with satellite images of urban areas, depicted in ink that would run readily, and got skateboarders to do their thing on them.

“I’m very interested in not controlling the final outcome, and so I wanted to work with these images but I wanted not to control them,” he says. “Street skateboarding is interesting – it’s a repurposing of urban space. It’s about which parts of structures they find interesting and use. It’s not about skateboarding – I’m interested in the product of their performance, not the performance itself.”

Throughout his work Paiva highlights the formal qualities of everyday objects – within the urban context, usually the sort of functional spaces that are usually taken for granted and ignored. He then drains them of their usual content, so that cities and the objects of the cultures that fill them are reduced to purely formal qualities, devoid of signification. In his 2011 show *Palimpseptic*, for example, what was once Hong Kong suddenly could be anywhere, with rendering of the city with the people abstracted into blocks of colour, and in *Counterpoints*, his set of MTR turnstiles responding to the movements of invisible people, abstracted to the point of removal. Similarly his video *Thresholds* (2013) is a tour around Causeway Bay, Sham Shui Po and Mongkok with all text removed, so advertising signs become ominously empty blocks of colour; we only become aware of how much these messages usually monopolise our attention through their absence.

But for an artist often characterised as primarily urban in his inspiration, many of Paiva’s works approach natural phenomena in much the same way. The same themes of containment and space, disguise and encryption also play out in





居於香港的葡萄牙藝術家 João Vasco Paiva 在其作品中深入探究了人類對城市環境的影響——以及環境反之對人類的影響。他在紐約雅各·路易斯畫廊 (Jacob Lewis Gallery) 駐地三個月後推出的最新作品《Benches, Stairs, Ramps, Ledges, Ground》，更是這一使命的直接體現。該作品採用了代表某些城市環境且受環境作用影響的介質。Paiva 聯繫了紐約的滑板坡道製造商，在這些坡道上以油印鋪上城市衛星圖以不妨礙滑行，然後讓滑板者在上面滑行。

「我非常喜歡讓最終成果自然成型，所以我用這些圖像來創作但不想對之加以控制」，他說。「街頭滑板很好玩——它改變了城市空間的原有意圖。他們找到一些有趣的地方，再派上用場。而這並不是關於滑板本身——我感興趣的是滑板行為的產物，而不是行為本身。」

Paiva 的所有作品都著重突出日常物品的外形特質——在城市語境下，那些功能性空間常常被人們理所當然的忽視，Paiva 決定倒空這些空間裡的慣常內容，除去填充其中的城市和文化載體，只留下毫無意義的外形特質。例如在2011年的個展「Palimpseptic」上，他將城市中的人們抽象成各種色塊，從而曾經的香港可以在突然之間變成任何地方。作品《Counterpoints》，他用一組港鐵入閘機專門對應隱形人的動作，抽象地表達消除的觀點。同樣，其錄影作品《Thresholds》(2013)記錄的是一次從銅

鑼灣、深水埗到旺角的環遊，錄影中所有文本均被移除，廣告板變成了空空的色塊；只有當這些廣告詞不復存在時我們才意識到往常自己的注意力竟全被它們壟斷。

雖然Paiva主要以城市為其創作靈感，但他在眾多作品中以上述同樣的手法來處理自然現象。在廣闊開放的空間裡同樣演繹著容納與空間、偽裝與加密等相同的主题。例如，作品《Unlimited》(2014)以一個裝置作品配合一段錄影和系列油畫構成，裝置作品的内容是數面掛在布里斯班海濱沿岸的海軍通信旗幟，這些旗幟代表的暗語是兩本以殖民地為主題的經典小說。錄影作品《Forced Empathy》(2011)中，一隻漂浮在香港海上的浮筒因背景中九龍地域在水面上的不斷浮沉而顯得靜止了，而平時本是物件浮動。

「我覺得人為和自然之間並沒有什麼差異」，Paiva說。「只是物質不同罷了。大家很容易將我界定成一個熱衷於城市環境的藝術家，但我正真感興趣的是人對環境的所作所為以及環境對人的所作所為——人的生活方式，以及隨著時間推移環境對人的反作用力。所有事物都屬於人；在香港大海也成了公路。關鍵都在於動作：洗衣店裡烘乾衣服，掛在牆上的海報。結果極具創造性：所有人都在創造產物，即便自己渾然不知。」

Paiva 出生於靜謐的文化之都科英布拉，2006年赴香港就學，並於2011年起住在鄉村城市南丫島。他表





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wide open spaces, for example, in *Unlimited* (2014), which complemented a video and a series of paintings with an installation of naval communication flags encoding messages from two classic colonially themed novels along the Brisbane waterfront. His video *Forced Empathy* (2011), meanwhile, shows a buoy floating in Hong Kong harbour that appears to remain still while the Kowloon landscape bobs up and down behind it, in the way you'd normally expect the floating object to.

"I'd say there's not really a difference between manmade and natural," says Paiva. "Just the materials are different. It's easy to frame me as someone interested in the urban environment, but really I'm interested in what people do to places and what places do to people – how people live and how their environment acts on them over time. And everything is human; in Hong Kong, even the sea is a highway. It's all about actions: the laundry drying, the posters on the wall. There's a huge creative outcome: all those people creating something, even if they don't know they're doing it."

Originally from the quiet cultural capital Coimbra, Paiva moved to Hong Kong in 2006, originally to study, and has lived on rural-urban Lamma island since 2011. He says his status as an outsider in Hong Kong, somewhat distant from the local culture, has shaped his work in its abstraction, its apparent vision of a universal visual language through which to interpret diverse environments.

Until the past couple of years he was more in demand outside Hong Kong, but local interest has picked up recently. Most notably he turned heads last year when his installation *Mausoleum*,

a hefty, rather mesmerising stack of styrofoam boxes cast in stone resin, was the star of the Encounters section at Art Basel Hong Kong. It revisits both the materials and the themes of *Untitled (from the Wanchai Market)* (2013), in which discarded styrofoam fish boxes were cast in resin to become something far more heavy, solid, permanent, transforming them from discarded material to cultural artefact.

"*Mausoleum* was all started by me looking for the debris of commercial neighbourhoods in Hong Kong, paying attention to how people organise styrofoam boxes," says Paiva. "The resin casting became interesting: I was working with a factory in China and I became interested in their mistakes."

Not that he wouldn't mind if the production process were a bit more straightforward in Hong Kong – something of which he was forcibly reminded during his recent New York sojourn. "To produce work in Hong Kong, you have to explain a lot, oversee closely, and be open to things going in another direction," he says. "In New York everyone was extremely professional; you have art students who've set up workshop and can explain materials to you. Most people in Hong Kong find my work ridiculous – which is the point of it."





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示自己香港外來者的身份在某種程度上遠離了當地文化，這種身份以抽象的方式塑造了他的作品並通過普世的視覺語言詮釋各種環境。

過於十幾年他在香港之外的市場更受青睞，直到最近開始逐漸受到香港市場的關注。特別是去年他在香港巴塞爾藝術展藝聚空間（Encounters）中所展出的裝置作品《Mausoleum》——一堆巨大而醒目以石脂鍍鑄的泡沫塑料盒子，吸引了不少眼球。作品重現了《無題（購自灣仔市集）》（2013）中的介質和主題，用石脂鍍鑄後原先廢棄的泡沫魚箱變得更重、更結實也更持久，從原先的廢棄物搖身變成了文化工藝品。

「我開始在香港商業街區裡尋找廢墟，關注泡沫盒的用途，然後才有了《Mausoleum》的創作，」Paiva 說。「鍍脂很有意思：我當時在一家中國工廠裡做工，對工人在澆灌中的失誤很感興趣。」

在香港的創作過程要更直截了當一點，他並非樂意這樣——而是最近他在紐約逗留期間的經歷讓他深刻明白了一點。「在香港創作時你不得不做一大堆解釋，當事情朝著反方向發展時也要樂於接受，」他說道。「在紐約每個人都非常專業；那裡的藝術生會組織討論會向你們做講解。而大部分香港人覺得我的作品很荒謬——而那恰恰是我的主旨。」