

SOMETHING FREE OF THINGS

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Is there anything more vague than the word “thing”? Is there any other term which is more often used on a daily basis than this? Looking up its meaning in the dictionary is almost like not reaching any conclusion. The Houaiss dictionary has made over 20 attempts to define it, but this has just confirmed what common usage already knows very well: this is a word that fits well in any phrase because, well, it does not carry just one meaning. A “thing” is everything that already exists or may exist one day in the future, whether of concrete or abstract nature. It is, at the same time, what is not known, like a mystery or an enigma, or something that is not wanted, or even that cannot be named. “Thing” is like a mirror word, which reflects the meanings of the other words in the world. So would it be possible for an object that we do not recognise, that we have just seen for the first time, to be recognised not as a consequence of existence of something that is already present in the world, but rather as existence in itself? Like something free of the concept of a thing. *Coisa livre da coisa* (Something free of things) is a series of unreleased sculptures by Claudio Cretti, with this name being extracted from the poem “Origem”, which opens the book *Lição de Coisas* (Lesson in Things), written in 1962 by Brazilian author Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1902-1987). So far, his sculptures had been more organic in form, appearing to possess a raw state, with the fits occurring in a more “natural” way – as if the parts were made to fit together. These were literally made by the artist, to be together in perfect harmony. This relationship starts to get strained in 2007, when these pieces are replaced by raw forms in marble from where come forth, strangely enough, cylinders in polished granite. Cretti’s sculptures, which have always faced difficulty to detach themselves from the ground, project themselves vertically. Here, the artist’s own work is made evident. It is not possible to look at these works and think they were found in the world. They are there because they were made, as if they had the shape of the artist’s hand. The artist’s act and decision to do something establishes sculpture as a form of construction. Now, the new series of sculptures is a consequence of this research. In *Coisa livre da coisa* there seems to be no space for the natural. Nothing was already like this, or has always been like this. Everything is constructed. After the work has been completed, items in black granite and white marble take a cylindrical shape, and start to be treated as articulable units by the artist. These are joined and remain together, almost as if by force. The fittings are possible with the use of components for fitting the tubing, made of rubber and stainless steel, and in some cases are placed at the limit of what they support in terms of weight and angulation, to keep the unit together. Angular, these pieces have adopted an anthropomorphic line of thought. The body, which already insinuated itself in the productions of Cláudio Cretti, now appear in a more definite form in these sculptures, not only in the way they are constructed (in this case, the body of the artist) but also in how they behave in space. They are like independent bodies, autonomous units, beings that spread both horizontally and vertically. Something we do not as yet know the name of, but whose presence is right

there, in front of us. At the same time, they also establish a different kind of relationship with architecture and the space around us, this being another interest of the production of Cláudio Cretti. Coming from drawing, the lines of the sculptures by Cláudio Cretti occupy space, taking on the challenge of constructing places. What until then had been considered empty and void, that which existed between one line and another, has now been activated. In *Sem título* (2009) we do not know if the lines of the wall have fallen to the floor and redefined the drawing area, or if, on the contrary, the stone invaded the well, thereby increasing the space taken up by the sculpture. The contours of the works seem to no longer be able to control the desire to spread through space, taking over almost everything that surrounds them, to become a part of the works. These can be considered akin to almost-shelters, almost places. The two series of drawings that complete the exhibition also seem to show interest for the same issues. The smaller drawings, of the Bombinhas series, are made with black oil paint and bring a new element: powdered graphite. The strokes drawn on parchment seem to be reminiscent of small cuttings in major architectural spaces, spaces which in part seem to be seen through small apertures. The powdered graphite adds to the mystery, appearing as something that remains not only from the process of construction of the drawing itself, but also of something else that almost comes from the realm of fantasy. It is as if someone or something that we can't identify had passed by and left its mark. In the case of the larger works, the black masses are once again produced with oil paint, albeit now on rice paper, and appear as places that oscillate between landscape and architecture. The thick black strokes, loaded with matter and gestures, come with a kind of edge made of oil, which the paper starts to absorb from the paint itself, over time. This halo imparts light and depth on the drawing, turning lines into paths, contours or places. Here, the body which seems to be present is that of the spectator, involved by the scale of the work. They are like large mirrors, reflecting parts of the world, fragments of things, small points of view regarding places that we see partly because we are inside them.