

nara roesler



angelo venosa

curated by vik muniz

nara roesler new york

opening march 19

exhibition mar 19 – apr 20

“The mind rules over the hand; hand rules over mind. The gesture that makes nothing, the gesture with no tomorrow, provokes and defines only the state of consciousness. The creative gesture exercises a continuous influence over the inner life. The hand wrenches the sense of touch away from its merely receptive passivity and organizes it for experiment and action. It teaches man to conquer space, weight, density and quantity. Because it fashions a new world, it leaves its imprint everywhere upon it. It struggles with the very substance it metamorphoses and with the very form it transfigures.

Trainer of man, the hand multiplies him in space and in time.”

— Henry Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Life*.

cover *Untitled*, 2017
right Angelo Venosa with his work
Untitled, 1987 (photo: Bienal de São Paulo)



caress, or when a hand touches the soul

In the work called “Caress”, made in 1932, the Swiss Sculptor Alberto Giacometti crafted an abstract organic form out of plaster and traced the shape of his two hands on its surface in bas relief. This work comes to mind because of the way it evokes the forbidden gesture of touching something that has become eternal. Although the drawn hands imply some sort of superficial contact, it is the object itself that shapes the gesture into a secret, permanent meaning. What would be the form of a caress? How would one shape the touched object into a structure that could incarnate its feeling?

Angelo Venosa’s studio in Rio was a short walk from my parents’ home. I remember thinking of this sculpture every time I visited him. In his workplace, densely inhabited by organic forms, one had a chance to experience not the idea or the form of a body, but the “feeling” of it. There, a deeply intuitive form of proprioception animated a wild variety of physical forms. It permeated them, making the inane material semantically porous to Angelo’s life-giving imagination. The hands Angelo Venosa inherited from his parents, a carpenter and a seamstress, gradually became a measuring device by which the gifted artist carefully gauged his presence in the physical

universe. His hands shaped these seemingly living forms symbiotically, as if the sculptures themselves were conferring his hands their genuine meaning. The somatic nature of his large-scale pieces, at first, seemed too extraneous to Angelo’s generally serene and soft-spoken demeanor, but in time, as we gradually adjust to their quiet presence, their scale too becomes abstract. Traditionally, the human body has been the main subject of devotion of sculptors from Phidias to Anthony Gormley. It has been used as an ideal, a marker, as movement in time and perpetuity, constantly challenging the perception of our own physical existence. I have argued that there’s no such thing as a sculpture that is not, at least marginally, about the body, for every tri-dimensional artwork is invariably designed to share space with a physical and conscious presence. We encounter these human creations within this mind-body paradigm and measure our interaction based on how much they challenge the relationship between our bodies and their surrounding context. Angelo’s work seemed to spring from a dream version of anatomy, chimeric, non-Vitruvian, but not entirely fictional as if it were fed by his voracious fascination with natural science and its myriad of structural schemes.

In a more private part of his studio, piles of transparent bins were filled with bones, stones, dry leaves, and twigs mixed with 3-D printed models and cast objects, a formidable cabinet of curiosities that seemed to have sprung right out of Darcy Wentworth Thompson’s “On Growth and Form.” I used to visit him, and we sat among these things. I remember telling him the perhaps fictional, but lovely story about how an assistant of Henry Moore scattered his aged master’s little sculptures in his garden for him to find and think they were beautiful natural stones. Angelo told me that he would love to one day be able to confuse his work

with natural things surrounding it. It is a pity he did not have time to do it. Angelo left us after a bout with ALS that did not keep him from creating until the very end of his abbreviated life. At his memorial, I asked Sara, his lifelong love, to visit his workspace once more and told her how much I enjoyed sitting there, immersed in Angelo’s mind and how important I thought it would be for me to be able to share that feeling.

This exhibition was born from that feeling. A feeling very similar to a caress, when one feels the soul touched by someone’s hands. An amazing amount of competent literature has been produced about Angelo Venosa’s work. A deservedly thorough retrospective is touring museums as we speak. Angelo was one of the greatest artists of his generation, although to him being an artist was never more important than making art. The richness of his inner practice sufficed him abundantly and his elegance and integrity kept him from performing a great deal of artworld courtly duties. As a result, much of his art is still to be discovered by a wider international audience. It would scare me to assume a project to showcase Angelo Venosa’s work in the scale and completeness the work deserves, but somehow, it also makes me think that no exhibition, no matter how large or scholarly, could ever translate the sentiment one felt while sitting among his things in the studio. This exhibition is about a different mark a great artist can leave indelibly on people’s consciousness. It is a modest attempt to illustrate the artist’s multiple creative narratives as well as the natural flow of his thinking processes. Ultimately, it celebrates Angelo as the eternal artists’ artist. An inspiring mind, whose hands caressed the matter of the world and the souls who were fortunate enough to feel it.

Vik Muniz

a sculptor among painters

Angelo Venosa emerged as an artist in the 1980s, having been part of the iconic exhibition *Como vai você, Geração 80?*, which took place at the Parque Lage School of Visual Arts in Rio de Janeiro and brought together a large number of young artists from across the country. Although there was no manifesto, common theme, or direct links between the poetics, most of the artists' output consisted of paintings. Since the mid-1960s, and for most of the 1970s, the practice of painting took a back seat in Brazilian art, which was largely marked by conceptualism. However, with the start of the 1980s, painting once again began gaining ground in the country's art scene (and on an international level as well), now discussed in a contemporary key. Although there were no elements that unified the poetics, there was a strong influence of Neo-Expressionism.

Among the many painters (including some of his very close friends, such as Daniel Senise, Luiz Zerbini, and Beatriz Milhazes), Angelo Venosa concentrated almost entirely on the sculptural practice, taking sculpture in a direction that was still little explored.

Angelo Venosa during
the setup of the exhibition
Panorama, 2012
Museu de Arte Moderna
do Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio),
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil





enclosures and skins

At the same time as his research began to explore the volumetric, interiors, and structures of bodies, he also maintained an interest in the wrappings and 'skins' that cover these structures. Venosa had already focused on this element from the beginning of his career, but in more recent years, new results emerged.

Among them, the fiberglass sculptures stand out. Sinuous and snaking, they're made of wooden structures coated with the material, which gives them the appearance of a shell, resembling cocoons or the eggs of strange beings that could burst out at any moment.

exhibition view
Quasi, 2021
Nara Roesler Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



Untitled, 2021
wood, fabric and fiber glass
edition of 3 + 2 AP
126 x 97 x 50 cm
49.6 x 38.2 x 19.7 in



Untitled, 2019/2022
wood, fabric, resin
and fiber glass
edition of 3 + 2 AP
180 x 100 x 99 cm
70.9 x 39.4 x 39 in





Untitled, 2022
wood, fabric, resin
and fiber glass
edition of 3 + 2 AP
100 x 173 x 83 cm
39.4 x 68.1 x 32.7 in





Untitled, 2019
wood, fabric
and fiber glass
unique + 2 AP
160 x 77 x 135 cm
63 x 30.3 x 53.1 in







exhibition view
Clareira Project, 2023
Museu de Arte Contemporânea
da Universidade de São Paulo
(MAC USP), São Paulo, Brazil



Untitled, 2018
wood, fabric, resin
and fiberglass
edition of 3 + 2 AP
310 x 90 x 65 cm
122 x 35.4 x 25.6 in





exhibition view
Panorama, 2013
Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo,
São Paulo, Brazil

Untitled, 2018
wood, fabric, resin
and fiberglass
edition of 3 + 2 AP
224 x 101 x 40 cm
88.2 x 39.8 x 15.7 in





Untitled, 2017
bamboo plywood
edition of 3 + 2 AP
80 x 50 x 75 cm
31.5 x 19.7 x 29.5 in





exhibition view
Penumbra, 2018
Museu Vale, Vila Velha, Brazil



‘His art does not refuse to imitate nature, like most of the aesthetics of this century, nor does it reduce nature to a system of signs, an image, or a perceptual stimulus, like the realist and neo-figurative currents. Simulating organic procedures, it repeats the relationship between skeleton and skin, bone and cartilage, and fluid and coagulated materials. Placing himself not in front of but behind nature, as if it were produced by his gesture, the artist assumes the role of creator’.

—Lorenzo Mammi

Angelo Venosa's studio
in the Lapa neighbourhood
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1985

Untitled, 2017
rubberized fabric
on wood
unique
180,3 x 99,1 x 15,2 cm
71 x 39 x 6 in





Untitled, 2017
bronze
edition of 3 + 2 AP
110,5 x 112 x 31 cm
43.5 x 44.1 x 12.2 in





Untitled, 1989/2017
brass
edition of 3 + 2 AP
220 x 12 x 20 cm
86.6 x 4.7 x 7.9 in







Untitled, 2022
bronze
edition of 12 + 2 AP
49 x 56 x 19 cm
19.3 x 22 x 7.5 in



'If, on the one hand, he presents us with near-dead bodies, which seem to be being calcined and fossilized, on the other he offers us near-living beings, who are perhaps timidly coming out of a state of coma to take heart, to sprout.'

—Daniela Name

Untitled, 1994
paraffin, pigment
and ox teeth
unique
23 x 23 x 4 cm
9.1 x 9.1 x 1.6 in







exhibition view
Panorama, 2013
Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo,
São Paulo, Brazil

o ritmo [untitled], 2000
corten (weathering steel)
ação particular (private collection)



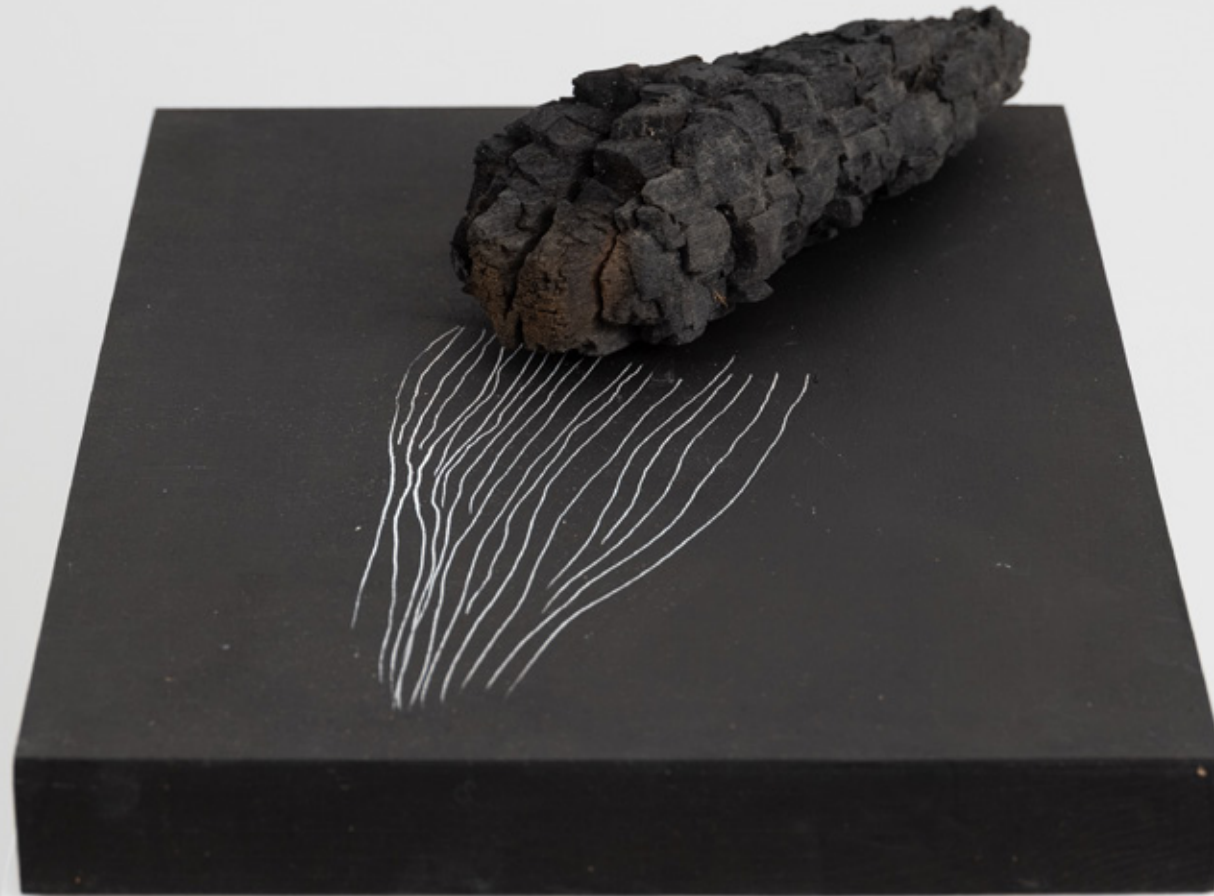
exhibition view
Angelo Venosa: *Escultor*, 2023
Casa Roberto Marinho,
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Untitled, 1987
bone, wood, fabric, resin,
pigment, tar and sand
unique
153 x 20 x 20 cm
60.2 x 7.9 x 7.9 in





—
Untitled, 2017
carbonized wood
and paint
unique
40,6 x 30,5 x 12,2 cm
16 x 12 x 4.8 in





Untitled, 2017
carbonized wood
and paint
unique
31 x 31 x 12 cm
12.2 x 12.2 x 4.7 in



Untitled, 2017
carbonized wood
and paint
unique
41 x 31 x 28 cm
16.1 x 12.2 x 11 in

Untitled, 2017
carbonized wood
and 3D printing
unique
42,9 x 9,9 x 6,9 cm
16.9 x 3.9 x 2.7 in



Untitled, 2017
carbonized wood
and 3D printing
unique
57,2 x 25,4 x 15,2 cm
22.5 x 10 x 6 in





virtual volumes

The tension between the constructive and the organic, the soft and the hard, the living and the dead, runs throughout Angelo Venosa's career and can be summed up as a clash between chaos and order, even when the artist talks about structure.

As a sculptor interested in the characteristic attributes of this language, volumetry has always been on his poetic horizon. Ever since he made the sculpture *Baleia* [Whale], made up of planes that evoke an imaginary volume (since it's not a body, but a structure that evokes it), he became interested in the idea of planes that define an imaginary solid.



Untitled (Baleia), 1990
corten steel
Praia do Leme,
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil





Untitled, 1997 [detail]
Parque do Ibirapuera,
Museu de Arte Moderna
de São Paulo (MAM-SP),
São Paulo, Brazil



This interest led to developments, especially from the late 1990s onwards. Based on CT scans, in which a human body is digitally represented and 'sliced' in such a way as to evoke volumetry, he began to use this "virtual" slicing on glass plates, using both moistened salt and wire to create these drawings.

installation view
Panorama, 2012, MAM Rio
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Later, successive acrylic sheets were also used to create the illusion of volumetry. In the work *Turdus* (2009), we see the simulation of a bird skull sliced into acrylic planes and suspended in the air. The identification of the figure, of the 'whole,' depends on the viewer's position, varying according to their movement.



installation view
Panorama, 2012, MAM Rio
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Untitled, 2021
corten steel
edition of 3 + 2 AP
103 x 100 x 0,3 cm
40.6 x 39.4 x 0.1 in





Untitled, 2016
corten steel
edition of 3 + 2 AP
240 x 117 x 0,3 cm
94.5 x 46.1 x 0.1 in



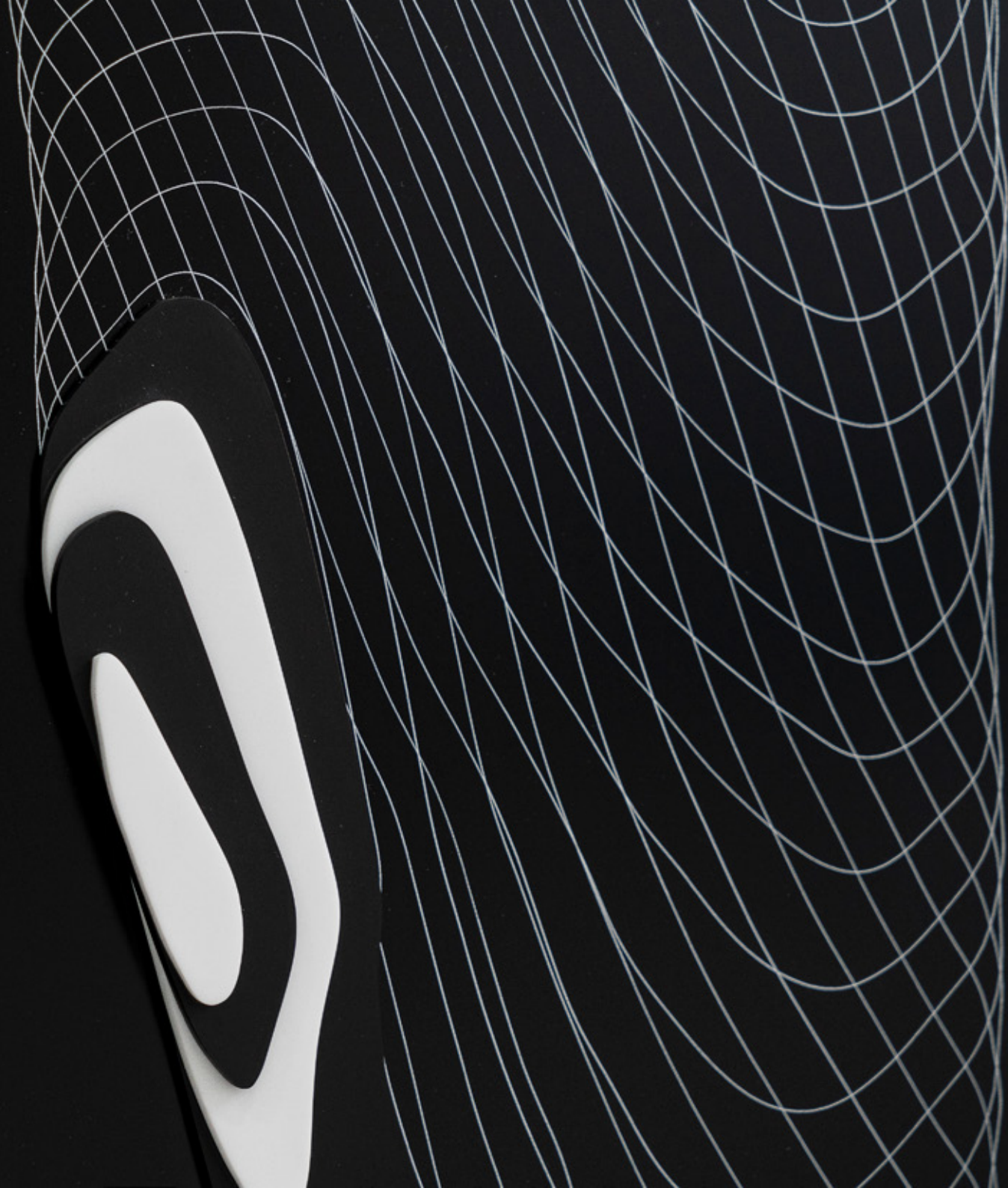


Untitled, 2015
methacrylate, aluminum
and UV printing
edition of 3 + 2 AP
200 x 40 x 19,5 cm
78.7 x 15.7 x 7.7 in

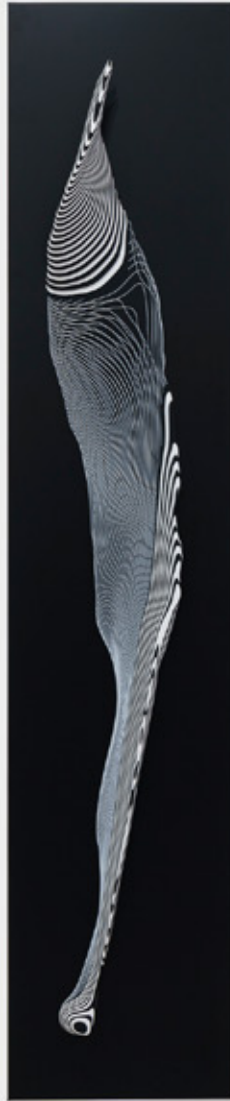


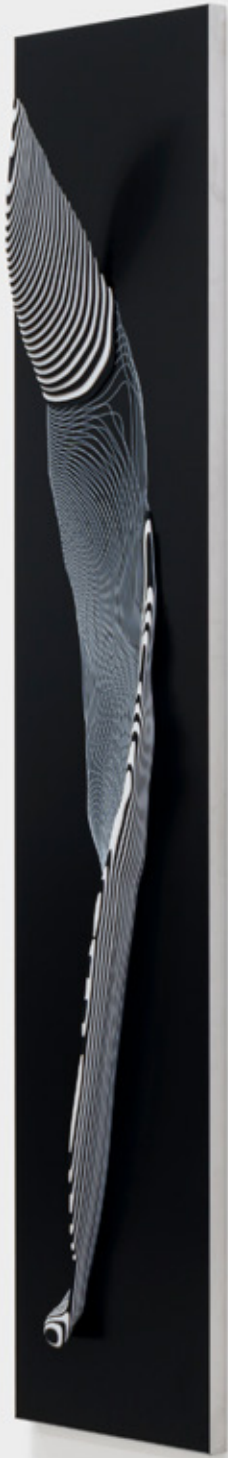
This interest in the virtual curves of bodies also led Venosa to explore various other materials, interspersing, for example, methacrylate with ultraviolet light prints, a procedure widely used in medicine and science for the internal mapping of bodies. Thus, these organic curves are distributed across different supports and materials, sometimes projecting themselves into space as tangible structures, sometimes as phantasmatic impressions.

In this sense, Venosa manages to combine sculptural practice with the most advanced technological and scientific procedures, breaking the boundary of the real and approaching the digital aspect.



Untitled, 2015
methacrylate, aluminum
and UV printing
edition of 3 + 2 AP
200 x 40 x 19 cm
78.7 x 15.7 x 7.5 in

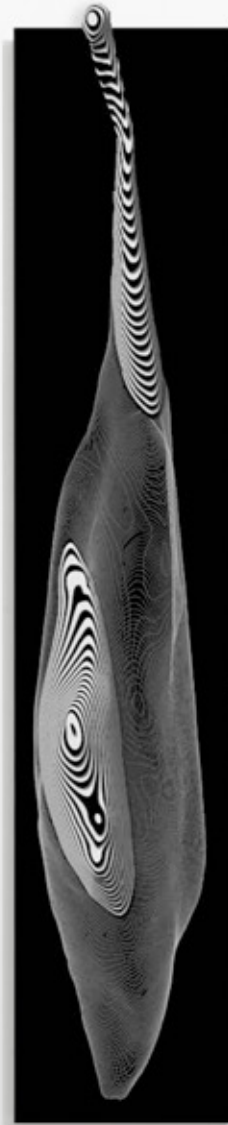




Untitled, 2015
methacrylate, aluminum
and UV printing
edition of 3 + 2 AP
200 x 40 x 17,5 cm
78.7 x 15.7 x 6.9 in







Untitled, 2015
methacrylate, aluminum
and UV printing
edition of 3 + 2 AP
200 x 40 x 21 cm
78.7 x 15.7 x 8.3 in

exhibition view
Giuse, 2016
Nara Roesler São Paulo
São Paulo, Brazil, 2016
photo © Everton Ballardin



3D prints

Another body of work developed over the last few years of Venosa's life was his 3D prints. Arranged in groups and reduced in scale, they resemble organic structures such as corals and echinoderms, forming a constellation of inanimate beings so representative of the artist's poetics and language that they look like seeds of the large-scale works for which Venosa is renowned.

Arquipélago, 2016
FDM print
60 x 60 x 72 cm
23.6 x 23.6 x 28.3 in



Untitled, 2017
3D printing
unique
30,5 x 30,5 x 19,8 cm
12 x 12 x 7.8 in



Untitled, 2017
3D printing
unique
15,8 x 12,4 x 17 cm
6.2 x 4.9 x 6.7 in



Untitled, 2017
3D printing
unique
49,5 x 16,5 x 16,25 cm
19.5 x 6.5 x 6.4 in



Untitled, 2017
3D printing
unique
31,2 x 40,9 x 29,2 cm
12.3 x 16.1 x 11.5 in





Ghabaah, 2016
Museu do Açude,
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



exhibition view
Panorama, 2012
Museu de Arte Moderna
do Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio),
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

angelo venosa

b. 1954, São Paulo, Brazil

d. 2022, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

At the beginning of the 1970s, Angelo Venosa started attending Escola Brasil, an experimental space for the study of art. In 1974, he moved to Rio de Janeiro, where he enrolled at Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial (ESDI). In the 1980s, Venosa attended open courses at the Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage, where the so-called 'Geração 80' began and developed in. While his generation was known for a return to painting, the artist dedicated his practice to sculpture. His work often evokes organic structures, which he builds using wood covered with textiles, resin, glass fiber or bones, beeswax and teeth.

In the words of critic Lorenzo Mammi: 'An even better commentary on these works may be a passage from *The Magic Mountain*, by Thomas Mann: 'What was life, really? It was... a fever of matter... It was not matter, it was not spirit. It was something between the two, a phenomenon borne by matter, like the rainbow above a waterfall, like a flame. But although it was not material, it was sensual to the point of lust and revulsion.'

'The technical precision of analysis and the artisanal pleasure of construction, always present in Venosa's work, contribute to construct not an object, but a body, with all the echoes of alienation and danger that that term can have. The fly ends up incorporating the machine, or vice versa; in the end, however, life remains as a dull noise, both irreducible and disturbing.'

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selected solo exhibitions

- *Angelo Venosa: Escultor*, Casa Roberto Marinho, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2023)
- *Clareira Project*, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo (MAC USP), São Paulo, Brazil (2021)
- *Catilina*, Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2019)
- *Penumbra*, Memorial Vale, Belo Horizonte, Brasil; Museu Vale, Vila Velha, Brazil (2018)
- *Angelo Venosa: Panorama*, Museu de Arte Moderna Aloisio Magalhães (MAMAM), Recife (2014); Palácio das Artes, Belo Horizonte, (2014); Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo (2013); Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2012)

selected group exhibitions

- *Em polvorosa – Um panorama das coleções do MAM Rio*, Museu de Arte de Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2016)
- *30 x Bienal: Transformações na arte brasileira da 1ª à 30ª edição*, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (2013)
- *From the Margin to the Edge: Brazilian Art and Design in the 21st Century*, Sommerset House, London, United Kingdom (2012)
- *MAM 60*, Oca, São Paulo, Brazil (2008)
- 5th Mercosul Biennial, Brazil (2005)
- 45th Venice Biennial, Italy (1993)
- 19th São Paulo Biennial, Brazil (1987)

selected collections

- Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS), Madrid, Spain
- Instituto Itaú Cultural, São Paulo, Brazil
- Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo (MAC USP), São Paulo, Brazil
- Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP), São Paulo, Brazil
- Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil

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