The experience of falling down the rabbit hole of Wonderland, in the work of Valeska Soares, has taken on a new meaning through the instilling of meaning in familiar objects. The artist’s chairs, tables, library ladders—things we recognize back, the curved white plaster, a floor allude to a new room rather than back. The curved white plaster, a floor is a puzzle of impossibility.

In Un-rest (2010) from the corner of a newly fabricated room, the color varies widely in design—painted wood, with velvet, and vinyl. In seeing it. There is a sense of anthropomorphizing things; I’m giving things their own being. The experience of falling down the rabbit hole of Wonderland, in the work of Valeska Soares, has taken on a new meaning through the instilling of meaning in familiar objects. The artist’s chairs, tables, library ladders—things we recognize back, the curved white plaster, a floor allude to a new room rather than back. The curved white plaster, a floor is a puzzle of impossibility.

**In Valeska (Soares)’s work, between real and imagined worlds, you can create your own daydream.**

—VIK MUNIZ
The experience of a Valeska Soares installation has been compared to that of Alice falling down the rabbit hole in Lewis Carroll’s 1865 novel *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, in that we land in the peculiar worlds she creates. For nearly thirty years, Soares has taken everyday objects—removing them from their historical settings and original functions—and transformed them into poetic sculptures and environments, instilling them with an entirely new life in surprising configurations and unexpected contexts. The artist often begins with old, familiar materials—books, glassware, chairs, tables, ladders, and rugs—that she adapts, manipulates, and reimagines with the addition of new elements. The resulting combinations inspire new symbolism and multiple meanings. For example, *Spiraling* (2014) consists of eight portable spiral library ladders—seven in wood and one of cast plaster—configured in the center of a room rather than against a wall of high book shelves. Placed face to face and back to back, the curved step ladders create a nonsensical up-and-down staircase that recalls Dutch artist M. C. Escher’s famous lithograph titled *Relativity* (1953), a surreal visual puzzle of impossibly connected staircases with climbers. Likewise, Soares’s group of stairs allude to a similar game-like predicament with the final step ladder made of white plaster, a fragile material that would surely crumble under the body’s weight.

In *Un-rest* (2010), a procession of 128 found footstools curves in a wavelike formation from the corner of the gallery coming to a halt in front of a larger, nearly invisible, newly fabricated, transparent glass chair. The motley group of well-worn footrests varies widely in date, size, style, and materials—including surfaces of carved and painted wood, wicker, and upholstered coverings in needlepoint, embroidery, velvet, and vinyl. Innumerable tales can unfold from the evocative configuration of anthropomorphic characters. The artist explains: “I’m fascinated by ephemeral things; I’m giving people triggers that activate memories and contexts, and they create their own narratives. Each piece has multiple readings depending on who is seeing it. There is no fixed meaning. What I want my pieces to be are triggers.”

In *Unhinged* (2017), the participant seems to experience a split between real and representational time; you become aware of the immensity of your own daydream.\(^1\)

—VIK MUNIZ

\(^1\)VIK MUNIZ

Cover: Design For Unhinged, 2017
Digital Rendering
Courtesy Of The Artist
SPIRALING, 2014
7 ANTIQUE WOOD AND 1 CAST PLASTER LIBRARY STEPS
VARIABLE DIMENSIONS
COURTESY OF GALERIA FORTES VILAÇA, SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL

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As an artist who twenty-five years and psychological states, “I’m interested and how illusory distortion, how you between those two work, as in Finale New York, a long remnants of different stemware, pitchers highlighting the art.

Soares incorporates MATRIX exhibition the Wadsworth, various collections. This
As an artist who has split her time between the United States and Brazil for the past twenty-five years, Soares also shows a longstanding interest in borders—physical and psychological—throughout her oeuvre, even though she is not political. She states, “I’m interested in subjective borders, the limits that you impose on yourself and how illusory they are. I’ve always been interested with ideas of reflection and distortion, how you think things are and how you see them and what gets distorted between those two perceptions.” Accordingly, the artist often utilizes mirrors in her work, as in Finale (2013). Presented at the international contemporary art fair Frieze New York, a long banquet table was topped with mirror, then covered in glassware with remnants of different liquors. Various metallic gold designs embellished the different stemware, pitchers, and decanters, doubly shimmering in the reflective surface, highlighting the art world’s lavish excesses in the aftermath.

Soares incorporates the idea of borders and the material of mirror in Unfold, her MATRIX exhibition. She has created two new installations developed specifically for the Wadsworth, which respond to her visit to the museum and considerations of its collections. This approach is typical. Having studied architecture, Soares takes great interest in situating the enduring presence of American decorative arts tables on view in the pool of the twentieth-century and everyday life through variation. A tip-top, gate-leg, positions the tabletop, design details of topographical language, piece of mirror or pool of billiard tables
il for the past physical. She e on yourself flection and sets distorted mirrors in her art fair Frieze glassware with the different surface, interest in situating her work within the specificity of the museum. In keeping with the enduring presence of furniture in her installations, Soares mined the Wadsworth’s American decorative arts collections, reacted to the proportionally small number of tables on view in the museum, and then requested to tap this underutilized collection for a site-specific installation. After all, the Wadsworth’s Nutting Collection is famed for its comprehensive view of colonial furniture and the state of Connecticut was a significant center for wood furniture production.

In the aptly titled Tabled, Soares explores the intersection of abstraction, memory, and everyday life. Breathing new life into vernacular objects, Soares has placed thirty-one American tables from the collection edge-to-edge to create a barrier around the pool of the Venus fountain in Avery Court. The selection of seventeenth- to twentieth-century utilitarian, brown wood tables shows the diversity of the collection through variations in the number of legs, shapes of tabletops, and types of tables—tip-top, gate-leg, tea tables, dressing tables, tavern and dining tables. Soares positions the tables close together to accentuate the differences, drawing out the design details of the leg forms. The discrepancy in table heights creates a kind of topographical landscape around the pool. Highlighting each tabletop is a custom-cut piece of mirror or colored felt. Felt material has traditionally been used on the surface of billiard tables and game tables but felt has also served as a protective layer for fine
wood tables. But, here, Soares intentionally incorporates a palette of red, white, and black felt along with silver mirror to engage the colors associated with Constructivism. Historically, this art movement connects to the space’s three-story Bauhaus-inspired interior courtyard that features two levels cantilevered balconies from which the monochromatic tabletops can be viewed and appreciated as pure color and form. Simultaneously, the silver and gold mirrors reflect, distort, and fragment the Mannerist Venus sculpture and the rectilinear architectural space.

In the MATRIX Gallery, Soares presents her second installation, titled Unhinged, a word defined as mentally unbalanced or deranged. Acknowledging the correlation to language in the way she works, titles matter. Presented in a long, narrow gallery featuring a plush, crimson wall-to-wall carpeting, Unhinged comprises approximately twenty wood headboards hinged together, zig-zagging through the space. Again, a diverse assembly of bedroom furniture styles has been brought together by the artist. Single, double, and queen beds meet various styles from the early twentieth century to the 1970s.

Like Tabled, the collection of perceived lacunae in the arts collection at CIFO, Miami, Florida. Therefore, the artist single-handedly adheres this space during time periods in a fragmented fashion, linking them as connected through obstructions, thus immersed in the gothic nightmares, love... Unhinged resembles a grave, in gravestone manner...
Like Tabled, the core objects for Unhinged relate to the collection...this time by a perceived lacuna in the collection. Beds have not been a strength of the decorative arts collection at the Wadsworth in its 175-year history, which surprised Soares. Therefore, the artist offers a solution, setting out to amend this gap by single-handedly amassing a collection of beds, wide ranging and from different time periods in a variety of tastes and styles. All of the pieces are wood, materially linking them as counterpart to Tabled. The two installations are also visually connected through the Constructivist palette, which Soares repeats in the painted backs of the headboards and the red carpeting in the gallery.

Unhinged also serves as an interactive artwork in which the visitor is the performer, immersed in the gallery space and navigating through its familiar but disjunctive obstructions, thus encouraged to create their own narratives. Historically, beds are associated with the cycle of life with its highs and lows: birth, sleep, dreams, nightmares, lovemaking, sickness, and death. The physical forms of the headboards in Unhinged resemble tombstones, as in Soares’s Et Après (2011), a sculpture realized in gravestone marble. Unhinged presents the attached headboards twisting crookedly through the space in a way that has many, not least the visitor, obstructions. Each visitor becomes the performer by the artist. Again, a new narrative is written by the artist.

Like her Brazilian contemporaries, Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, and Lygia Clark, the artist explores the liminal spaces that exist between life and art, asserting the subjectivity present in each participant’s experience. “It is in these moments,” she asserts, “that I find my art.”

PATRICIA HICKS

Emily Hall Tremaine Curatorial Projects

DESIGN FOR TABBED, 2017
DIGITAL RENDERING
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

ET APRÈS, 2011
CARVED MARBLE
HEADBOARD : 34 5/8 X 39 X 1 1/2 IN.
FOOTBOARD: 25 5/8 X 39 X 1 1/2 IN.
COURTESY OF GALERIA FORTES VILAÇA, SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL
PHOTO: EDUARDO ORTEGA
Like her Brazilian forebears of the neoconcrete art movement—Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, and Lygia Pape—Soares creates “open-ended propositions” that require each participant’s presence, knowledge, and imagination to find personal significance. “It is in these moments of unsettling ambiguity and earnest possibility that Soares asserts the subjectivity and multiplicity of meaning.” Such experiences activate memories from which meaning unfolds.

PATRICIA HICKSON
Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art
VALESKA SOARES

1994–98
B.A., Visual Arts, Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas, U.N.A.M., Mexico City

2001
Interdisciplinary art course at Academie Minerva Faculteit der Kunsten, Groningen, Netherlands

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2017
MATRIX 176 / Unfold, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut

2015
Time Has No Shadows, The Jewish Museum, New York, New York

2006
Walk on by, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

2003
Follies, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, Bronx, New York

Caprichos, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey, (MARCO), Monterrey, Mexico

Dragão do Mar Centro de Arte e Cultura, Fortaleza, Brazil

2002
Puro Teatro, Museo Carillo Gil, Mexico City, Mexico

Puro Teatro, Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City, Mexico

Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, Recife, Brazil

Museu de Arte da Pampulha (MAP), Belo Horizonte, Brazil

1999
Pan American Series, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, La Jolla, California

Projeto Fínep, Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

1998
Vanity, Portland Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA), Portland, Oregon

hístorias, a project for The Public Art Fund, New York, New York

1996
Strangelove, Laumeier Sculpture Park, St. Louis, Missouri

1995
Discontinuous Teasers, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, New York

1992
Centro Cultural São Paulo, Brazil

1991
Espaço Cultural Sérgio Porto, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

EDUCATION

1994–98
B.A., Visual Arts, Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas, U.N.A.M., Mexico City

2001
Interdisciplinary art course at Academie Minerva Faculteit der Kunsten, Groningen, Netherlands

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2016
Brasil, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

2015
Gestos Icono, Heterodoxas

2014
Permission To Arts, Boston, Unbound: Creative, Chicago, Illinois

2013
The Storytelling Foundation, Oslo, Norway

2010
Model Kits, Museu de Castillo y Superficies de Arte Contemporáneo, Desire, Paint, Austin, Texas

Private University, Dallas, Texas

1999
Pan American Series, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, La Jolla, California

Projeto Fínep, Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

1998
Vanity, Portland Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA), Portland, Oregon

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Discontinuous Teasers, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, New York

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Centro Cultural São Paulo, Brazil

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Espaço Cultural Sérgio Porto, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil


2  Ibid.

3  Ibid.

4  The sculpture in the center of the fountain is Venus with Nymph and Satyr (1600) by Pietro Francavilla.

5  Originating in Russia in the early twentieth century, Constructivism was a socially engaged art and architectural movement. Here, Soares is interested in Constructivism for its graphic design palette as well as its influence on the Bauhaus movement, which connects to the architectural interior of the Avery building and courtyard.


7  Ibid., 27.


9  Ibid., 27.

Born in 1957, Belo Horizonte, Brazil
Lives and works in Brooklyn, New York
and São Paulo, Brazil

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2016 Brasil, Beleza?!, Beelden aan Zee, Museum of Modern Sculpture, The Netherlands
2015 Gestos Iconoclastas, Imágenes Heterodoxas, Caixa Forum, Barcelona, Spain
2014 Permission to Be Global, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts
Unbound: Contemporary Art After Frida Kahlo, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois
2013 Permission to Be Global, Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation, Miami, Florida
2012 The Storytellers, Stenersen Museum, Oslo, Norway
Model Kits, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castillo y León, Spain
Superficies del Deseo, Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City, Mexico
Desire, Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas
2009 Provisions for the Future, 9th Sharjah Biennial, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates
Private Universes, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas

2008 XXVIII Bienal Internacional de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil
2006 Dirty Yoga, Taipei Biennial 2006, Taipei, Taiwan
2005 Always a Little Further, 51st International Biennale of Venice, Venice, Italy
2004 Third Liverpool Biennial, Tate Liverpool, Liverpool, England
2000 Ultrabaroque: Aspects of Post-Latin American Art, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, California (traveled)
Great New York, P. S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, New York
XXIV Biennial Internacional de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil
1998
1994 XXII Bienal Internacional de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil
1991 IV Bienal de la Habana, Havana, Cuba

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Unhinged, 2017
Wood, paint, metal, n Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist. São Paulo, Brazil

Tabled, 2017
Wood, felt, mirror glass Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist. São Paulo, Brazil

GALLERY TALK

Valeska Soares, MATR Thursday, February 2
7 pm Free with museum admission
Patricia Hickson, Emi Contemporary Art Thursday, April 13
Noon Free with museum admission
Major support for MATRIX 176 has been provided by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Robert Lehman Foundation, Inc.

The MATRIX program is generously supported in part by Jeffrey G. Marsted and Marcia Reid Marsted as well as the current members of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art’s Contemporary Coalition and Galería Fortes Vilaça, São Paulo, Brazil.

In addition, MATRIX 176 has been supported by Consul General of Brazil Fernando de Mello Barreto and Deputy Consul General Maria Helena Pinheiro Penna. Support for the Wadsworth Atheneum is provided in part by the Greater Hartford Arts Council’s United Arts Campaign.

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WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Unhinged, 2017
Wood, paint, metal, nylon
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and Galeria Fortes Vilaça, São Paulo, Brazil

Tabled, 2017
Wood, felt, mirror glass
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and Galeria Fortes Vilaça, São Paulo, Brazil

GALLERY TALK

Valeska Soares, MATRIX artist
Thursday, February 2
7 pm
Free with museum admission

Patricia Hickson, Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art
Thursday, April 13
Noon
Free with museum admission