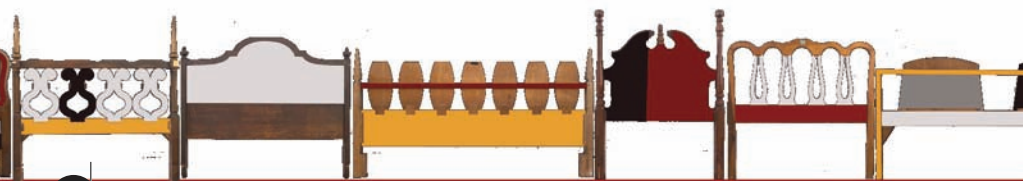


VALESKA SOARES
MATRIX 176
UNFOLD



FEBRUARY 2 – MAY 7, 2017
WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART

UNHINGED

*In Valeska [Soares's] installations, 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

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."²

SPIRALING, 2014

7 ANTIQUE WOOD AND 1 CAST PLASTER LIBRARY STEPS

VARIABLE DIMENSIONS

COURTESY OF GALERIA FORTES VILAÇA, SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL





UN-REST, 2010

128 FOOTSTOOLS AND 1 GLASS CHAIR

INSTALLATION DIMENSIONS: 2 FT 10 IN X 39 FT 4 IN X 14 FT 6 IN (86.4 X 1198.9 X 442 CM);

CHAIR: 33 X 18 X 20 IN (83.3 X 45.7 X 50.8 CM.)

COURTESY OF GALERIA FORTES VILAÇA, SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL

PHOTO: RONALD AMSTUZ



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.”³ 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

FINALE, 2013 (DETAIL)
ANTIQUE WOOD TABLE, 151 ANTIQUE GLASSES, 5 PITCHERS, 3 DECANTERS,
LIQUOR, AND MIRROR; 31 X 132 X 36 1/4 IN.
COLLECTION OF CISNEROS FONTANALS ART FOUNDATION (CIFO), MIAMI, FLORIDA
PHOTO: ORIOL TARRIDAS



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.⁴ 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

FINALE, 2013 (DETAIL)
ANTIQUE WOOD TABLE, 151 ANTIQUE GLASSES, 5 PITCHERS, 3 DECANTERS, LIQUOR,
AND MIRROR; 31 X 132 X 36 1/4 IN.
COLLECTION OF CISNEROS FONTANALS ART FOUNDATION (CIFO), MIAMI, FLORIDA
PHOTO: ORIOL TARRIDAS



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.⁵ 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.

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.

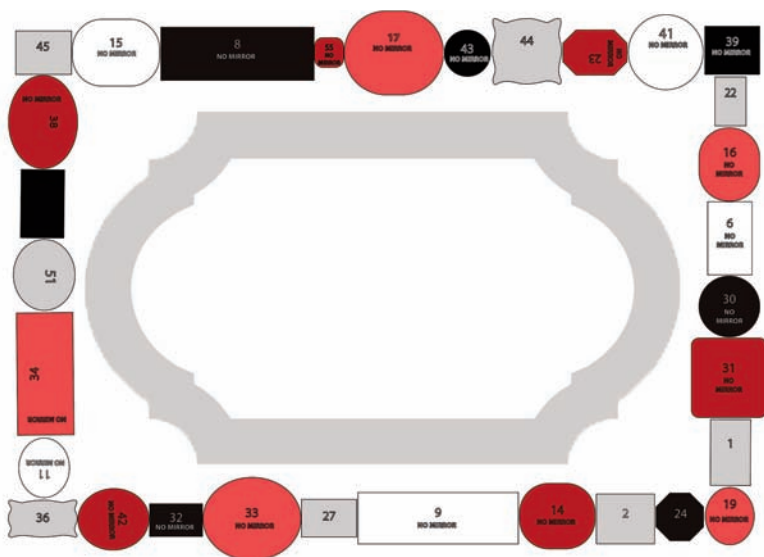
COURTESY OF GALERIA FORTES VILAÇA, SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL

PHOTO: EDUARDO ORTEGA



Like *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 like tilted grave-markers in an ancient burial ground. (Hartford has many, not least of which is located by the Center Church, diagonally across Main Street.) But the connected walls of headboards also become barriers, fences, and borders. Each visitor's experience will activate different memories and histories, positive and negative associations.

Like her Brazilian forebears of the neoconcrete art movement—Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, and Lygia Pape—Soares creates “open-ended propositions”⁶ 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.”⁷ Such experiences activate memories from which meaning unfolds.

PATRICIA HICKSON

Emily Hall Tremain Curator of Contemporary Art

VALESKA SOARES

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

2010–12

Educative Program, SOMA, Mexico City

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 Finep, Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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

¹ Vik Muniz in "Artists in Conversation: Valeska Soares by Vik Muniz" in *Bomb Magazine Quarterly*, No. 74, Winter 2001. www.bombmagazine.org, accessed on 30 December 2016.

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.

⁶ Marysol Nieves, "Creativity and Sin," *Follies: Valeska Soares*. Bronx, New York, and Monterrey, Mexico: The Bronx Museum of Art and Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey, 2005; 25.

⁷ *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
- 2010 *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
- 2007 *The Shapes of Space*, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York
- 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)
Greater New York, P. S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, New York
- 1998 *XXIV Bienal Internacional de São Paulo*, São Paulo, Brazil
- 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, 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



WADSWORTH ATHENEUM
MUSEUM OF ART

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