

# ARTFORUM

## Rodrigo Braga

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*During this year's edition of Nuit Blanche, Brazilian artist Rodrigo Braga inaugurated Inland Sea, 2016, an al fresco installation in Paris of forty-five stones carefully plucked from French quarries, weighing between 1,100 pounds and six tons apiece. The stones are placed in the shallow pool on the esplanade between the Palais de Tokyo and the Musée d'Art Moderne. With the Eiffel Tower looming nearby, Braga's selection of prehistoric boulders provides a counterpoint to the metropolitan environment, which is ordinarily smoothed of geological traces. The raw and the man-made constantly face off in the artist's work, from his project of excavating bones and objects found in the former Brooklyn horse rendering plant and landfill that is now Dead Horse Bay, to the arresting 2004 series "Fantasia de compensação" (Fantasy of Compensation), in which he surgically stitches a dead dog's facial features onto his own. Braga's work pulls from body art and Land art, always employing nature as a rudimentary yet limitlessly rich source of material. Inland Sea for the Palais de Tokyo is on view through December 18, 2016.*

**PARIS WAS LITERALLY MADE FROM LIMESTONE.** It was a sea forty-five million years ago. As a foreigner and an artist, I try to see something that interests me in the city related to nature. Brazilians in Paris recognize how nature is so obviously controlled here. We have a square in Rio de Janeiro, the city I live in, called Paris Square, and it's completely different from all the squares in Brazil. The trees are landscaped.

The sandy, monochromatic color of the limestone reminds me of the beach. I went to quarries in Chantilly and Nancy to choose the stones. Normally they cut them in cubes to sell, but I went there to choose raw stones with visible little fossils. Unique small shapes petrified from the sea are everywhere. There are billions, even when you go down to the Seine. Not everybody sees them. But nature is there—visible, tangible.

My work is not so conceptual—the start is very simple. The installation will change with sun and rain, dryness and wetness. Maybe things will grow on it—it becomes a living installation thanks to nature, and I would like it to be as organic as possible. I didn't want the wood platforms, but they were necessary to distribute the weight of the stones. Below the installation, there are 350 iron pillars propping them up. Because of this engineering aspect, I had to follow a pattern for arranging them. So that's an imposed order. But there's no real measuring—I just followed the distribution of the pillars.

My parents are biologists. I am very familiar with the natural sciences; I started looking at books on biology and archaeology at home, and drawing. The connections I draw between art and the environment are valuable. It's what I have in common with my parents. But they put another perspective on it, which is defending nature. I don't kill animals to do my work, it's the system—humans do it. I deal with animal rights, but from a different perspective than my mother and father.

I study how men deal with nature, and the systems that men create for controlling or using nature. I work a lot with my own body, and with animals—always found. I do not examine pure idyllic nature, but where people put their hands in nature and turn it into something else—it's this interface that intrigues me.

I started to introduce change to nature. I started fighting with nature, pushing and pulling between nature and man. Some works I make really bother people, get them angry, because I deal with expectations of life and death, and of the animality within ourselves. We are animals, yet we forget this.

Normally my work is image-based: photos and videos. I think like a painter; I did paintings and drawings in the past. Everything is composed visually—I cannot escape from this. This installation is very visual too. My preferred point of view is coming up from the street, from the "real world," not from the museums. I want people to find the stones, stop, and just see them.

I have never done a performance for an audience. I do it in nature, in the countryside, mostly alone with my camera, tripod, and timer. I take the picture, not entirely seeing what I'm doing. I dialogue with the material around me—stones, earth—by touching it. Because I tend to work with nature directly, this project was really a challenge, more so than I thought. But many forces came together to make to make it happen. Believing in art can be a crazy, empowering thing.

— *As told to [Sarah Moroz](#)*

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