

## REVIEWS

# Leonor Antunes “a thousand realities from an original mark” at Marian Goodman Gallery, London

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by Michele Robecchi

At the core of Leonor Antunes’s work there seems to be a desire to challenge two basic foundations of sculpture—the epic notion of the single object as an authoritarian entity capable of renegotiating the viewer’s spatial perception by standing in the middle of the room, and the negation of the floor as the most logical place on which to stage this process. The latter point is possibly the most intriguing as it shifts the focus to the one surface of the six that conventionally make up the sides of an exhibition space on which one would be least inclined to seek out the presentation of a three-dimensional piece: the ceiling. This is particularly evident with the *Alternate Knots* series on view on the ground floor of the Marian Goodman on the occasion of Antunes’s first outing with the London gallery.

The dangling brass tubes and bulbs elegantly filling the environment successfully create an explorative itinerary drawing on a relief by the late British artist Mary Martin, but a quick glance at the geometrical pattern of the ropes holding everything together—reminiscent of some of Anni Albers’s works—is sufficient to make us realize that such arrangement goes way beyond its functional role and it is, in fact, an intrinsic part of the project. Even when we are faced with works standing on the ground, such as *Alternate Climbing Forms*, the balance never leans towards the lower part. Their lightness makes them look more like fragments floating in the air than solid partitions, giving an

unexpected dynamism to what is already a sparse but organic composition. Shaped prior to their assembly, the screens in *Alternate Climbing Forms* introduce a more implicit common denominator in their reflecting the exact same size of the glass panels used by Alison Smithson and her husband Peter when they built the Upper Lawn Pavilion in Tisbury in the late 1950s: an example of “transparent architecture” and one of the early alternatives to the existing suburban model popular at the time that Antunes studied and researched extensively for this exhibition.

The presence of these three muses—Albers, Martin, and Smithson—is evidently not coincidental. Over the years, Antunes has often referred to female architects, artists and designers in her practice, both as a way to instigate a debate over gender issues as well as a reminder of how the present is often used as a smokescreen to cover up the mistakes of the past. Now universally acknowledged as leading figures in their respective fields, these women had in fact endured years of work in a state of almost total isolation.

This is especially true for Albers, who was forced to attend a weaving workshop instead of a design class due a policy of gender discrimination in vigor at the time even in an allegedly open-minded school like Walter Gropius’s Bauhaus. The fact that all three were also the better halves of equally creative partners (Josef Albers, Kenneth Martin, and Peter Smithson) is a further indicator of the necessity to attach themselves to their male counterparts in order to find more opportunities for their work to be made and viewed. The title of the exhibition,

*A Thousand Realities from an Original Work*, is a reference to Smithson’s interest in polythene, and leads to another significant aspect in Antunes’s work, namely the wide range of materials (brass, leather, and polycarbonate) she deploys and how she is an artist essentially enamored with her craft. Some modules and structures are repeated but never to the extent of coming across as impersonal or serialized. It is rather the idea expressed by Giulio Paolini in his *Mimesi* sculptures of duplication as a moment of temporary displacement and subsequent adjustment that comes into play, with the difference that while Paolini subscribes to the strategy of the *objet trouvé*, Antunes accomplishes this effect through the idea that construction and production are two sides of the same coin.



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 Courtesy: the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, Paris and London Photo: Nick Ash

In an interview with Maria Lind in 2015, Antunes stated how her choice of materials is determined by the need to establish a presence within the space as well as their ability to put across contents and uses. "I tend to think about materials the same way I think about people, how they age and tarnish." This exercise in animism is what ultimately accounts for the extraordinary degree of intimacy Antunes's work emanates, not just when in solo-show mode but also in a group setting, as seen recently with her participation in the exhibition *Machines à penser* at the Fondazione Prada in Venice, where her sculptures provided a welcome moment of warmth and self-reflection.

at Marian Goodman Gallery, London  
 until 20 July 2018