

Mendes Wood DM Paris announces its inaugural exhibition

Mendes Wood DM Paris is proud to announce its inaugural exhibition, "I see no difference between a handshake and a poem," a group show curated by Fernanda Brenner

Mendes Wood DM Paris

25 Place des Vosges

75003, Paris

Opening: 14 October 2023



Image: Marguerite Duras (Marguerite Donnadiou, dite) *Les mains négatives*, 1979.

Mendes Wood DM is proud to inaugurate its new gallery space at Place des Vosges in Paris with the exhibition entitled *I see no difference between a handshake and a poem*, curated by Fernanda Brenner. The collective show is a reflection on touching across time. Drawing on a wide range of theoretical debates and literary references, the exhibition considers the ways in which "hands," or the touch, have enacted conscious and unconscious gestures to reveal our psychological structure, weaknesses and obsessions, personal histories, and social conditionings.

Taking its title from a sentence in a letter by the poet **Paul Celan** in 1960, the exhibition brings together a wide range of artists from different contexts and career stages, while considering its distinctive location: the oldest planned square in Paris, the Place des Vosges. From artistic depictions of touch and hand imprints to gestures that changed and ushered things, the works on view do not respond to a theme but rather add a layer of meaning to a charged site.

Throughout history, civilizations have been defined by the work of human hands: painting caves, inventing tools, writing records, operating machinery, typing, texting, and sewing – to name a few activities of the hands. Brenner's show investigates what hands circumscribe or let slip away, overall, it attempts to grasp what happens through touch. In her words:

"The hand is one of the oldest symbols we can find; it has appeared in most cultures since time immemorial. The ancient handprints seen on cave walls worldwide were mostly formed by spitting pigment over or stamping hands against stonewalls, perhaps as a ritual or prehistoric declaration of self. Maybe our first ancestors left those marks because they wanted to reach towards us through time. We will never know. A handprint is evidence of physical existence. It is a mark of one's mortality—the foundational gesture of humankind."

Touching, or connecting, is essential in **Marguerite Duras'** 1978 short film *Les mains négatives* (The Negative Hands), a cornerstone work in the exhibition. Duras' film departs from the Magdalenian caves on Europe's Atlantic coast, where a profusion of handprints from the same person was found. Through a car window, Duras' camera films Paris through the break of dawn and captures some of the city's boulevards. Under a bottomless blue sky, we seem to witness the last passerby from yesterday greeting the first one from today, while a low disembodied voice describes the negative hands as a sort of petrified cry as when someone placed their palm and fingers against the cave wall some thirty-thousand years ago. Duras's gliding camera incidentally captures the presence of a certain section of humanity. Those who clean the streets, houses, and offices and will soon withdraw to leave the city for the ones who will come later in the working day. The images of the waking-up city and the voiceover are linked through an implicit analogy between the ancient man in the grotto, and those, mainly immigrant and racialized, workers of the early morning. Projecting this film today, in the same city once captured by Duras, invites a similar gesture: to touch another time without losing track of the present.



Image: Wilard Van Dyke & Ralph Steine*Hands*, 1934.

Fostering conversations over time and space is at the core of Mendes Wood DM's philosophy. The gallery

was founded in 2010 with the intent of exhibiting international and Brazilian artists in a context conducive to critical dialogue and the cross-pollination of ideas. *I see no difference between a handshake and a poem* takes forward this belief by presenting works by leading Brazilian and international artists, both from the gallery's program and the wider contemporary spectrum, in an exhibition that invites viewers to connect, both internally or intersubjectively, with other beings, other places and other times. The artists and works in the space will touch and add their imprint to walls which have been there since 1615.

Notable commissions include a new monochrome painting by Brazilian artist **Lucas Arruda**, and a hanging textile sculpture by **Sonia Gomes**. Artists from Brazil are represented elsewhere in a captivating image from **Marina Perez Simão**, a new work by **Paula Siebra** and pieces by **Paloma Bosquê** and **Leticia Ramos**. Contributions from Mendes Wood DM's roster of international artists include *Free-Space Path Lost* (2017) by **Nina Canell**, a fingerprint sculpture cast in copper; a site specific installation by Paris-based **Matthew Lutz-Kinoy**; and a new painting by Italian **Giangiaco Rossetti**.

Featured within the exhibition's international selection of invited artists are the photographic works by **Adrián Balseca**, a silkscreen and video piece by **Alejandro Cesarco**, installations by **Paul Maheke**, works on paper by **Tosh Basco**, alongside new project commissions by **Karim Aïnouz**, **Katinka Bock**, **Philip Fleischman**, **Hana Miletić**, **Charlotte Moth**, and **Jeremy Shaw** and works by leading Brazilian contemporary artists such as the photography of **Mauro Restiffe** and stoneware sculpture by **Erika Verzutti**.

As the curator puts it: "There is some touch in all writing and artmaking; reading and coming close to an artwork is a question of intimacy... This exhibition is foremost a collective attempt to grasp what happens in a touch: when an infinity of others — other beings, other spaces, other times— are aroused. I like to believe that the experience of an exhibition or cohabiting in a space or a city is also a matter of touch. It is an experience of touching and being touched, like the touch of hands and bodies. As Ocean Vuong writes, sometimes your hand is all you have to hold yourself to this world-. Touching is reassuring, and so is art".

Artists include **Adrián Balseca**, **Alejandro Cesarco**, **Charlotte Moth**, **Davide Stuchi**, **Erika Verzutti**, **Giangiaco Rossetti**, **Hana Miletić**, **Jeremy Shaw**, **Juan Perez Agirregoikoa**, **Karim Aïnouz**, **Katinka Bock**, **La Chola Poblete**, **Leticia Ramos**, **Lucas Arruda**, **Luiz Roque**, **Marguerite Duras**, **Marina Perez Simão**, **Matthew Lutz Kinoy**, **Mauro Restiffe**, **Nina Cannel**, **Paloma Bosquê**, **Patrícia Leite**, **Paul Maheke**, **Paula Siebra**, **Paulo Nazareth**, **Philipp Fleischmann**, **Ralph Steiner**, **Runo Lagomarsino**, **Sonia Gomes**, **Sophie Tun**, **Tosh Basco**, and **Willard Van Dyke**.

Mendes Wood DM Paris will be located on the first two levels of the Hôtel de l'Escalopier in the Place des Vosges in the Marais. The building dates to the early seventeenth century and stands at the northern entrance of the French capital's oldest square. The ongoing renovation is being overseen by the Parisian architecture firm NeM / Niney et Marca Architectes, in collaboration with architect Paul van Coudenhove.

The decision to open a gallery in the French capital is driven by a very personal connection. Pedro Mendes and Matthew Wood met in the city of Paris while studying Philosophy as undergraduates. They spent years in its galleries, museums and in the corridors of the Ecole des Beaux Arts. The ethos of the city would later inform the identity of the gallery that they founded together with Felipe Dmab in São Paulo, Brazil several years later. Gradually, Mendes Wood DM team expanded and today includes partners Magê Abàtayguara, Carolyn Drake Kandiyoti and Renato Silva, long-time collaborators of the gallery.

"Paris is extraordinary. It is not only an ancient cosmopolitan center but also a crucible of culture which has fostered singular legacies of artistic innovation, patronage, and collection-building. Coming from São Paulo, we recognize the twentieth century history of artistic exchange between France and Brazil. We are very excited for this new chapter of the gallery, and hope to make a meaningful contribution to the city."

— **Partner, Carolyn Drake Kandiyoti**

"These expansions mark the natural growth of the gallery's international presence, while underscoring a commitment to mounting significant exhibitions for an ever-wider audience. We remain inspired by a belief that artistic practices broaden the scope of human agency and have the power to change the world."

— **Founding Partner, Matthew Wood**

About Fernanda Brenner

Fernanda Brenner is the founding director of Pivô, in São Paulo, and the Latin American art advisor for Kadist Art Foundation. Since 2017 she is a contributing editor of Frieze Magazine. A long-standing collaborator with the gallery, Brenner curated the group show *Neither.*, which inaugurated Mendes Wood DM Brussels in 2017. Her recent and upcoming projects include the 24th Pernod Ricard Foundation Prize (2023, upcoming); *Peace or Never* at FHNW, Basel (2022) co-curated with Chus Martínez; and the solo

exhibitions Oriana, Beatriz Santiago Muñoz (2021/2023), at Pivô and Argos, Brussels; It's Night in America, Ana Vaz (2022); and Vuadora, Paulo Nazareth (2022) co-curated with Diane Lima.

About Mendes Wood DM

Mendes Wood DM was founded in São Paulo in 2010 by Pedro Mendes, Matthew Wood and Felipe Dmab with the intention of exhibiting international and Brazilian artists in a context conducive to critical dialogue and the cross-pollination of ideas. In 2017, the gallery opened its first European outpost in Brussels, established in partnership with longtime friend and collaborator Carolyn Drake Kandiyoti. In 2022, a new exhibition space opened in New York's Tribeca neighborhood.

These expansions highlight the natural growth of the gallery's international presence, while underscoring a commitment to mounting significant exhibitions for an ever-wider audience. We remain inspired by a belief that artistic practices broaden the scope of human agency and have the power to positively impact the world. Our program is premised on radical authentic practices, resistance, and intellectual rigor. Central to the program is a concern for the Global South, regional difference and individuation while fostering cosmopolitanism and collaboration.

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