

TALENT SPOT

Finding beauty in the broken Paulo Goldstein

The Brazilian designer discusses the nature of repair with Grant Gibson. Portrait by Tina Hillier

'That's the best work here,' says weaver Laura Ellen Bacon. She's nodding at Paulo Goldstein's extraordinary installation of repaired archetypes sitting in the middle of the Project Space at this year's COLLECT. Not everyone, however, appeared to agree. 'I think some people didn't quite understand what was going on,' laughs the Brazilian born artist, cum-designer-cum-maker, as we settle down to talk over a coffee, a week or so after the show. He cites a visitor who approached him and said in no uncertain terms that she didn't like his pieces. 'It's important feedback,' he says. 'Maybe the concepts are not there yet. Maybe I need a big body of work... I still have quite a lot of stuff to do in the communication aspect of the ideas.'

I reckon he's being a bit tough on himself. To my mind his *Repair is Beautiful* project makes perfect sense. It's timely too. Thanks to an apocalyptic combination of over-consumption, the iniquities inherent in our global economy, post-crash austerity and ecology, mending has been a subject in the wind for some time. His own interest in the topic, says Goldstein, was fuelled by a broken coffee machine at Central St Martins. No one knew how to fix it, and this brought into sharp relief the lack of control he had over the products he used. Running his own repairs became his minor act of protest at a flawed system.

Born and raised in São Paulo, Goldstein has a colourful history. His father was a doctor and made models in his spare time, while his mother was a biologist, and occasional sculptor. 'I grew up in a house that had a workshop - an improvised workshop - that was in the garage and started to grow,' he says. He initially aspired to be a dentist, but failed to get the required qualifications. 'I wasn't very good in maths and physics,' he tells me a little sheepishly.

A love of model-making led to an interest in stop-motion animation, and he enrolled on a four-year fine art course at FAAP before upping sticks and following his then-girlfriend to Europe, arriving in Manchester after a short stay in Italy. Desperate to get work experience at animator Mackinnon & Saunders, he ended up working as a maintenance assistant at a student halls for three

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months, until an opening emerged. 'I started repairing everything,' he remembers. 'Broken beds, broken chairs.'

Eventually Mackinnon & Saunders took him on for two weeks of work experience, which turned into four years of work, among other things on Wes Anderson's *The Fantastic Mr Fox*. A spell at Aardman followed, before he left abruptly to rejoin his former employers, only for recession to hit and his job to disappear. Now he was unemployed. 'I ended up thinking about industrial design because when I studied fine art, everything I produced was on a very thin line between art and something else.'

At first Central Saint Martins came as a shock to the system. But in the second year things dropped into place when he returned to his making roots. As part of a project he fashioned a dart from brass and steel, and (rather unusually) used an old broken Anglepoise lamp, as a target. Subsequently he set about repairing the lamp, and *Repair is Beautiful* was born. 'The way that I think when I'm making something is not involved in design specifically,' he explains. 'It's something

that came before. I take parts from everywhere. It's something that's very common in Brazil. It's something I grew up with - sort of reusing stuff that's around.' He started disassembling the desk light so he could understand what all the parts did, before putting it back together and finding his own repairs for the broken pieces. 'I was trying to communicate this idea of complexity and frustration and put those concepts into one object,' he says.

His choice of an Anglepoise is intriguing - it is an object that has long fascinated designers after all. But he puts it down to chance. 'I knew it was an archetype,' he says. 'I knew the relevance and importance of that piece, but I had the lamp already... It's simple. It's very honest. You can see all the parts, and it fits quite well with my project.' Other products he's repaired since include a director's chair, a garden chair and an iPod. His process relies on improvisation; he doesn't set out with a blueprint of how a product will develop. 'It's understanding what is broken; what this broken part does for the object; and trying to reproduce the same function as that part, but in a different way because I cannot just reproduce it.' As a result he uses materials ranging from rope to bone to fix his chosen objects, usually taking around three weeks to make.

There is an intriguing tension here, though. Is he happy that his work - which is, after all, concerned with consumption and his irritation at the capitalist system - should ultimately become art pieces sold to upmarket collectors at exhibitions like COLLECT? He thinks about this for a moment, before rather honestly answering: 'I don't know. It's a tricky question, because I don't know if people quite understand what is going on. I don't quite understand what is going on yet.'

The future, he says, might hold a PhD, but meanwhile he has a commission to be getting on with from Jeremy Till, head of Central St Martins, as well as a project for the National Centre for Crafts and Design in Sleaford. Goldstein might not quite know what he's got but, after his showing at COLLECT, my suspicion is you'll hear plenty more from him. Orthodoxy's loss is the craft world's gain.

www.paulogoldstein.com

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